

The Scope of the New Definition of the Francophone Population

By François Boileau, Ontario's French Language Services Commissioner
Published in *Le Droit* on June 6, 2009.

The Ontario government now has a more inclusive definition of the province's Francophone community. With this excellent news, the very first recommendation that I made in my first annual report as Ontario's French Language Services Commissioner has been implemented. Because of the significance of this announcement, I believe that it would be a good idea to describe it in greater detail.

The new definition applies to newcomers who know French and who speak French in the home, even though it is not their mother tongue. Take, for example, a family from Algeria. This family may be more likely to speak Arabic in the home and may also know English; however, the second language spoken in this family's home is French. For this reason, this family is considered a Francophone family.

I sincerely believe that this important new definition will create and strengthen a sense of belonging to Ontario's Francophone community. It is a powerful symbol in many regards. Whether they hail from Haiti, Romania, Senegal or even Quebec, newcomers to Ontario must become full members of the Francophone community and have access to Franco-Ontarian schools. We are building on the heritage and history of the Franco-Ontarian community and this diversity is making the community richer still.

The contribution that newcomers are making to Ontario needed to be taken into consideration.

This new definition also applies to exogamous families, with one Anglophone parent and one Francophone parent. In Ontario, exogamous couples now represent close to 65% of Francophone families. Unlike the method of calculation that is based on the language spoken most often in the home, which is often English, the method of calculation used by the Ontario government means that families that also speak French in the home are considered Francophone. Many children from exogamous families attend a French-language school.

These children needed to be taken into consideration as well, and recognized as Francophones.

Interestingly, more and more young people are identifying themselves as "bilingual" or as "Canadians", that is to say, people who are bilingual. This is the important issue of identity. Most of the time, these young people are from exogamous families; they live in French and participate in activities in the community.

.../2



2.

These young people also needed to be included in the definition of Francophone and that is exactly what the new definition does.

It is important to note that, although it is more inclusive, the new definition does not change the rights of *Charter* rights-holders. I hope that the adoption of this new definition will lead to a re-examination of the eligibility criteria that apply to new students who are not *Charter* rights-holders in Franco-Ontarian schools. I trust that the adoption of the new definition will provide an opportunity for us to reflect on these criteria collectively. And with the working group piloted by the Ministry of Education that is examining this issue, I am expecting major progress in this area.

Lastly, Ontario's new definition is much more representative and inclusive than the definition currently used by the federal government. The method of calculation used by the federal government does not take into account the changing face of Canada's Francophone communities.

One of the great advantages of the Ontario government's definition is that it reflects our diverse community. This is something that we can be proud of.

François Boileau
French Language Services Commissioner of Ontario

