

PREMIERS' CONFERENCE

Statement by the Honourable William G. Davis

Premier of Ontario

on the occasion of the Premiers' Conference

February 23, 1978

Montreal

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At St. Andrew's-by-the-Sea the Provincial Premiers undertook their first major examination of Minority language education and asked for a report. Today we have discussed that report and have reached a consensus on certain principles.

Ontario has particularly strong reasons to be interested in the current national debate on the rights of official language minority groups. There are more French-speaking Canadians living in Ontario than in all other provinces combined, with the exception of Québec. Statistics Canada 1976 Census - French as a mother tongue: Ontario 462,075; 8 other provinces: 434,275.

Ontario recognizes that its role in respect of the rights of its official minority community has important national connotations. Whether or not it is possible for the French-speaking community outside Quebec, not only to survive but to grow and prosper depends very much on the attitude that prevails in our province.

In the report on The State of Minority Language Education in the Ten Provinces of Canada, a description was given of Ontario's extensive efforts that are being made to

ensure that Franco-Ontarians receive a first rate education in their mother tongue. Since the preparation of this report, I am happy to say that Ontario has undertaken a number of other initiatives in the area of French language education such as the establishment of teams of French-speaking specialists located in our regional offices to provide additional educational services to French language schools and the provision of \$2,500,000 for the development of textbooks for use in schools attended by French-speaking pupils.

There is now increasing acceptance among the people of Ontario of the principle that, where practicable, English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians have the right to be educated in their own language. In fact, such rights are entrenched in our legislation. While Ontario continues to find merit in a constitutional change to enshrine those rights on a national basis we shall not let differences in opinion on this point become a stumbling block in our continuing efforts to bring minority language education to all members of the community in Ontario.

There is no doubt in my mind that all Ontarians must become more aware of their responsibility to help their French-speaking fellow citizens maintain their linguistic and cultural identity. They must also become more actively involved in helping the French-speaking community develop.

Ontario was indeed pleased to support the resolution adopted at the 18th annual conference of Provincial Premiers in St. Andrew's, New Brunswick last August and to participate in the preparation of a report on the state of minority language education in each province. The discussions initiated at St. Andrew's were continued on a very positive and receptive basis at the meeting of the Council of Ministers of Education held in Victoria last month.

I believe that the report we have received today makes it clear that there is a strong foundation on which new developments in the area of minority language education can take place.

As an indication of Ontario's sincere and on-going efforts to increase its services to meet the needs of its French-speaking minority, I would like to quote extensively from the speech from the Throne on the opening of the new session of the Ontario Legislature on Tuesday of this week:

"The fundamental rights of Franco-Ontarians to education in the French language have long been recognized in Ontario. Franco-Ontarians also have a commitment from the Government for the expansion of Government services in the French language in accordance with need and population distribution.

We shall continue to build upon the strong foundation already laid in the field of education to ensure that French-language programs are available at all levels, where practicable, to French-speaking Ontarians. At the same time, the expansion of opportunities for English-speaking pupils to develop French-language capacity remains a priority.

During this session, there will be legislation to increase the availability of French-language court trials in areas of the province where this

service is needed. Amendments to The Judicature Act and The Juries Act will guarantee the steps taken in this direction. As well, the Government will review proposals related to the use of French in regulatory and other administrative tribunals.

Present Government translation services will be augmented to make more public documents, publications and forms available in both French and English. Of particular importance, a special section will be established to begin work on translating Ontario's statutes into French.

All Ministries will undertake a program to identify Government buildings and give highway directions in both English and French in predominantly Francophone areas.

The appointment of full-time co-ordinators of French-language services in an additional number of Ministries will enhance the capability of the Government in responding to the community."

In addition to these measures, the Minister of Education is now considering further steps which will enable us to make continued progress in living up to the spirit of

Ontario's minority language education legislation which was first introduced in 1968 and which has been progressively improved since that date.