

Because French is Our Language, Our Strength and Our Future

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**The Quebec Liberal Party's position
on the French language**

April 2021



Parti
Libéral
Québec

Background



**The French language
is at the very heart
of our specificity,
of our nation.**

It was inherited through ancestors who made Quebec into the cradle of Francophonie in North America, who cultivated and helped it to grow through thick and thin, and now as members of the only majority Francophone society on this continent, we have a historic and imperative duty to ensure both its promotion and its vitality.

Our official language is what drives our way of living together. It is a cornerstone and a meeting point around which Quebecers of all ages, origins and regions can come together to help maintain a just, prosperous and inclusive society.

It is also an intrinsic part of our history at the Quebec Liberal Party.



Recall that it was a Liberal government led by Robert Bourassa that in 1974 afforded the French language its legal status as Quebec's official language.

This major step forward for the nation of Quebec became the bedrock which would lead to the Charter of the French Language. Robert Bourassa's legacy remains etched in our party's DNA, in our values and it continues to inspire us today.

That being said, we must see things clearly: protecting our French language, which is only spoken by 2% of North American inhabitants, calls for constant vigilance as well as a robust and necessary language policy, of which the Charter of the French Language is one of the main components.

To preserve its relevance and allow it to provide the necessary safeguards, it must be maintained, revisited and periodically adapted to face society's new realities.



The Quebec Liberal Party is determined to actively contribute to the protection and promotion of our French language. With that in mind, we have developed 27 proposals which form our position on the French language.

Fundamental Principles

The proposals we are advancing are the result of thorough reflection following several consultations. In order to undertake this process, we first identified the fundamental principles that should guide us. It was important for us to identify the foundations upon which all Quebecers of all origins could readily unite and rally.

The first fundamental principle is the inalienable right to work in French. We have a historic responsibility to Quebecers to always ensure that the wealth of professional opportunities are made accessible to them in French. Of course, mastering several languages adds to our collective wealth, but it should not be required except in limited and justified situations. Recent reports from the *Office Québécois de la Langue Française* on businesses' language requirements on the workforce remind us of our duty to be vigilant so as to avoid the exception slowing becoming the rule.

The second principle is that of Quebecers' shared responsibility to ensure the vitality of French in Quebec. A society is made up of individuals and a language that lives through its speakers. Our collective responsibility regarding the status of French in Quebec must also be rooted in our individual actions. The government of Quebec is responsible for ensuring that the French language flourishes by providing Quebecers with the tools they need to master and showcase it, and ensure that it holds a central place in our collective life.

The quality of our language, both spoken and written, is the third principle for which no effort should be spared. We must collectively invest in our mastery of French. We are immersed in a world where English takes up so much space in several spheres of our daily lives, including through the multiplication of new technologies. It is paramount that we ensure that our collective vocabulary is enriched by French equivalents to the new realities that are emerging and that we cultivate pride in and the learning of a language that is well spoken and well written.



The fourth principle is that of partnering with English-speaking communities.

We must work hand in hand, not in opposition. The English-speaking communities have rights that need to be protected. Access to public services in English for those Quebec citizens cannot be a threat to the status of French in Quebec. Indeed, Quebec has English-speaking communities that are deep-rooted and that contribute to our collective wealth. Their attachment to this land of Quebec cannot be called into question, nor can the relevance of their presence here. They are Quebecers in their own right, and are marked by the same sense of collective pride that is shared by all those who call Quebec their home.

The fifth principle lies in students having the freedom to choose their institution of higher learning.

Attendance by Allophones at French language CEGEPs has increased steadily over the years, from 25.1% in 1985, to 57.9% in 2015. While Francophone college institutions remain very attractive due to the quality of their programs and their teaching, Anglophone institutions are attractive as well, in particular for their pre-university programs. We must preserve the balance between access to these institutions for the English-speaking community and the possibility of Francophones attending the establishment of their choosing, in compliance with admission requirements for the programs sought.

These five principles guide the Liberal Party's proposals on language. They are essential to rallying our society around the fundamental cause of preserving and promoting our French language. Together, let's take action for French so that we can hand future generations a society that beats to the rhythm of a strong, vigorous French language with an accent that is all our own.



A man and a young boy are sitting on a wooden pier, fishing. The man is wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, and the boy is wearing a striped shirt. They are both smiling and looking towards the right. The background shows a body of water and distant hills. The word "Proposals" is overlaid in white text in the center of the image.

Proposals

I An Exemplary State

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If we want society to truly feel compelled by the promotion and protection of the French language, it is imperative that it is able to follow the State's example. That is articulated in the measures that it advances, whether legislative, regulatory or otherwise, but it is also incarnated in its internal actions. It must demonstrate a firm commitment and have an exemplary approach and activities as regards the promotion and protection of the French language.

Thus, we are proposing to:

- 1- Update the *Politique linguistique du Gouvernement du Québec* (Government of Quebec's language policy) for ministries and organizations. This new policy will require mandatory training for all affected employees;
- 2- Modify article 88.3 of the Charter of the French Language to include an obligation for higher education establishments to provide the National Assembly with a triennial report on the application of their linguistic policies and provide a statistical portrait of the use of French within their institutions;
- 3- To apply article 1 of Bill 104, which seeks to set out the conditions and circumstances under which a language other than French could be used for communications with corporations and other governments.



II Governance

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To ensure that government actions are more cohesive, we believe that it is high time that we modernize the governance of the organizations responsible for applying the Charter of the French Language and for monitoring the linguistic situation.

Implemented in 2002, the current structure has significant shortcomings. The *Office Québécois de la Langue Française* (OQLF) has become a superstructure with sometimes contradictory roles of monitoring the language situation and sometimes monitoring the law's application, in addition to processing complaints. For its part, the *Conseil Supérieur de la Langue Française* has been stripped of its essence and its resources, and can no longer adequately play the role for which it was created, that of advising the Minister.

To ensure better organization as well a more efficiency among institutions, we propose abolishing these organizations and replacing them by:

- 4- The creation of the position of an independent French Language Commissioner appointed by the National Assembly. The Commissioner's mandate would be to annually report on the status of the French language with the help of studies and analyses, as well as report on public language policies, including those of ministries and organizations;
- 5- The establishment of the *Office de Protection et de Valorisation de la Langue Française* (Office for the Protection and Promotion of the French Language) would have a clearer, more coherent role. It would take the existing OQLF resources, including the regional satellite offices, under its wing, but would also have a more proactive presence in the field. In collaboration with partners, it would need to intensify and diversify its actions to promote and protect the French language. Toponymy, officializing terminology and applying the law, which includes processing complaints, would all fall under its purview. For this vision to be carried out, the Office would be endowed with a Board of Directors to ensure renewed, more transparent governance.

III Montreal and the French Language

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The vitality of the French language in Montreal has been making headlines for months now, mainly in regards to the language in which people are welcomed and served. The statistics prove it; it is in Montreal that the French language is most significantly undermined. An OQLF study revealed that close to a quarter of the population mainly uses English in public and that the proportion of businesses that welcome their clientele in French has gone from 84.2% in 2010, to 74.6% in 2017.

The City of Montreal in fact launched its very first *Plan en matière de la valorisation de la langue française*, to address this issue and bolster francization efforts. A broad consensus for taking action is emerging in economic, social and political sectors. All agree on the necessity of working in collaboration with socio-economic partners in order to generalize the presence and use of French, in particular in Montreal's tourism and commercial downtown area, and to more effectively support francization efforts.

We therefore propose to:

- 6- **Ensure the vitality of French, by giving Montreal's tourism and commercial downtown area back its strength, image and French accent, including through supporting specific measures to welcome and serve in French;**
- 7- **Create a team dedicated to the promotion, support and francization of businesses in Montreal's downtown area, in collaboration with the city and the business sector;**
- 8- **To support and further encourage initiatives like the *J'apprends le français*, *Le français, ça compte!* and *Réussir le virage numérique de ma petite entreprise* programs in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal, which aims to support French-language learning in small businesses.**



By deploying efforts of this nature, we believe that we can change the image of the downtown area and, at the same time, support our metropolis' economic vitality.

Moreover, given that Montreal is world renowned as one of the best student cities on the planet, it attracts an enormous number of students from all across the globe. This pool of international students offers a unique opportunity for Quebec to position itself as a welcoming, French-speaking land, but also satisfy our significant workforce needs. However, if we hope to increase retention among these students at the end of their studies, we have to allow them to master the French language and work in French. Currently, students who want to further their knowledge of the French language have to study independently and at their own cost at the campus they attend, or take classes that are less adapted to their pedagogical or geographic situation.

We therefore propose to:

- 9- Deploy satellites of the Ministry of Immigration, Francization and Integration on each of Montreal's university campuses. With free service that is readily available at their place of study, we will be promoting international students' efforts in francization and integration, as well as their socio-cultural knowledge of Quebec.**



IV Francization for Newcomers

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Immigrants' ability to fully participate within Quebec society is directly linked to the language issue. On the one hand, Quebec expects immigration to contribute to the vitality of French, regardless of the mother tongue of those who choose to settle here. On the other hand, immigrants' contributions to economic prosperity depend on a command of the common working language in a context where the job market often puts French and English in competition with one another. It is therefore imperative to ensure that these two objectives meet and reinforce each other through effective, diversified and accessible francization services throughout Quebec.

Mother tongue and the language spoken at home are imperfect indicators of the vitality of the French language, as they do not take into consideration francization among immigrants who, without abandoning their mother tongue, learn French and use it fluently. A recent study by the OQLF on projections of certain linguistic characteristics of Quebec reveals that the mastery of French among all Quebecers should continue to remain at 90% in 2036. While this number is encouraging, we believe that there is reason to continue efforts to propose new measures, in particular to ensure better francization for newcomers.

Since 2018, the funds transferred by the federal government as part of the Canada-Quebec Accord on immigration and the admission of temporary workers and students have increased by more than 90 million dollars, and currently total \$650 million dollars annually. These significant investments, which are earmarked for immigrants' linguistic and professional integration, provide Quebec with all the room for manoeuvring they need to be able to support a vast and ambitious francization effort.

Furthermore, we know that francization is considerably hampered by a lack of qualified teachers. Francization institutions are therefore no longer able to meet demands and a significant portion of their clientele finds itself on a waiting list, and their integration slows. We believe that we must also consider access to training and the working conditions of teachers who are too often subject to a temporary and precarious status. Given current and future needs, including the efforts that must be deployed to meet the workforce shortages and with our proposal to offer free French courses to all who need or want to better master the French language, the demand for these teachers will only continue to grow, thus creating permanent status for them is necessary.



We therefore propose to:

- 10- Enhance and strengthen the use of the *Programme Accompagnement Québec*, whose mandate is to coordinate the reception, francization and the professional, social and cultural integration of immigrants in synergy with the vast network of community organizations in this sector, particularly with the objective of providing a global linguistic and cultural offer to newcomers;
- 11- Increase investments in francization, including by encouraging the development of francization initiatives in the workplace;
- 12- Undertake the necessary steps to address the shortage of French second language teachers.



V French in the Regions

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The situation of the French language outside of the greater metropolitan area is characterized by a strong predominance of French. That makes our regions important allies, especially when it comes to French language training for immigrants. Those who decide to settle in Quebec's regions will live in an environment that is almost exclusively Francophone, which significantly facilitates their integration and the development of their French language skills.

Our regions are experiencing major workforce shortages for which immigration can be part of the solution. Numerous temporary foreign workers are already working within businesses in our regions, which contributes to our collective prosperity. While these workers live and work in a totally Francophone environment, and there is no doubt that they will eventually become French speakers, the current requirements regarding knowledge of French to obtain a *Certificat de sélection du Québec* (CSQ) represent an obstacle for a number of them.

Likewise, several immigration candidates from all over the world have the skills that companies, especially those in our regions, are searching for, without having a command of French. There is reason to encourage these workers to come to our regions and to offer a personalized approach to their francization.

It is a vision that allows us to use our regions' potential to encourage immigrants' francization, while ensuring a wider regionalization of immigration outside of the metropolitan area, thus meeting workforce needs and supporting our regions' social, economic and cultural development.

We therefore propose to:

- 13- Study the possibility of modulating language requirements in order to hasten the process of obtaining a *Certificat de Sélection du Québec* when the region in which the immigration candidate intends to settle is outside of the metropolitan region and, at the same time, offer a personalized francization program for these people;**
- 14- Promote initiatives emanating from our regions aimed at increasing the share of immigration that settles there.**



VI Mobilize Higher Education Establishments

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Higher education establishments, whether Francophone or Anglophone, are one of the pillars of our social and economic development. We firmly believe that these institutions' vitality is beneficial to Quebec as a whole and that they have an essential role to play in the promotion and protection of our official language.

The presence of the English language, particularly in terms of academic publications, must be balanced with our responsibility to ensure that Quebecers can undertake higher studies in French, including by prioritizing access to French-language learning materials.

We believe that higher learning establishments, Francophone and Anglophone alike, need to be active partners in the promotion and protection of the French language. It is important to give them all the room they need to manoeuvre in this regard. Our approach reflects the importance of these institutions' contributions to the vitality of our common language.

We therefore propose to:

- 15- Financially support CEGEPs and universities to allow them to offer free French courses on campus to all students who want to perfect their command of the language;**
- 16- Enhance the number of courses offered in French at Anglophone colleges. This course offer should not be limited to second language French classes, but be encouraged through offering at least three courses in French within each program of study;**
- 17- Offer students enrolled in Anglophone establishments the opportunity of developing French immersion cultural exchange programs or internships in Francophone communities;**
- 18- Ensure that Quebecers from English-speaking communities have access to Anglophone CEGEPs;**
- 19- Maintain the current number of full-time equivalent students in English-language CEGEPs.**



VII French in the Workplace

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Two recent studies from the *Office Québécois de la Langue Française* have shown that English is becoming more and more present in Quebec's workplaces. Indeed, 53.3% of workers now exclusively use French on the Island of Montreal, this proportion is 75.7% on the North and South Shores and 85.6% in the rest of Quebec.

We are therefore proposing to:

- 20- Apply the provisions of the Charter of the French Language to enterprises under federal jurisdiction;
- 21- Review article 46 of the Charter of the French Language to better define the requirements for hiring in a language other than French, in particular by specifying the principle of necessity;
- 22- Accompany companies with 25 to 49 employees in their francization with a streamlined, adapted approach to the application of the provisions of the Charter of the French Language in order to take into account the size and resources of these businesses.



VIII The Quality of Written and Spoken French

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Improving the quality of the French Language is an issue that should be of concern to all Quebecers, whether Francophone, Anglophone or Allophone. We must develop an attachment to French from a young age, as well as the desire to continue to improve our command of the language throughout our whole lives.

In a recent poll conducted by the *Conseil du Patronat du Québec* among its members, data revealed that it is becoming more and more difficult to recruit employees who have a solid command of the French language, regardless of their mother tongue and including Francophones. Given that the organization of work has significantly evolved over the past few decades, written internal and external official communications are now handled by several people and are no longer centralized, as was the case before the advent of email.

Moreover, the statistics show that a significant proportion of Quebec's Anglophone community is bilingual. Unfortunately, many members of the community do not feel confident enough in their use of the French language to be able to thrive and actively contribute to Quebec's social and economic development. This, among other things, explains why a proportion of young people from this community leave Quebec.

For our political party, the fundamental importance of the vitality of the French language for society's development requires that anyone who wishes to improve their oral or written French language skills should be able to do so through free courses for learning and improving French.

We therefore propose to:

23- Deploy free language learning and development courses for spoken and written French in all of Quebec's regions. Recall that we tabled a bill to that effect in the National Assembly, Bill 590.



IX Literacy

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Quebec ranks 10th among Canadian provinces in terms of literacy. We believe that the proportion of Quebecers who experience difficulties reaching a literacy level that would allow them to fully comprehend a text oscillates around 50%.

During the *AlphaRéussite* event, which was held last March, an update of the “*La littératie comme source de croissance économique*” study showed that illiteracy levels in Quebec improved from 53.2% to 47.7% between 2012 and 2020. This improvement can be explained by demography, by the decrease in drop out rates and by the increase in graduation rates in the CEGEP and university networks. While a progression can be observed over the past 8 years, it is undeniable that this statistic clearly illustrates the collective, social and economic challenge that Quebec must face.

As part of the context of the last election campaign, the *Réseau de Lutte à l'Analphabétisation* called on the four main parties, observing that they were quite timid in their proposals to fight this scourge, recalling that illiteracy renders a portion of the population vulnerable and calling for the development of a national strategy.

We therefore propose to:

- 24- Ask the government to hold a summit uniting socio-economic stakeholders and the Education and Higher Education networks in order to improve literacy rates in Quebec, and by doing so, improve the quality of Quebecers' written and spoken French.**



X Promoting French by Awakening an Interest in Francophone Culture Among Young People

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One of the measures to fight illiteracy is developing the reflex to read. The more we read, the better we are able to understand a text, the more we heighten our literacy skills. We could even add that this language learning cycle would develop an attraction for the French language from a young age.

We therefore propose to:

- 25- Continue and enhance access to Francophone cultural content, including through:**
 - a. Developing day camp type activities for reading and writing within the network of public libraries;**
 - b. Strengthening the culture in schools program by providing access to a range of cultural products, such as theatre, music and film;**
 - c. Promoting a tour by young authors in Quebec schools;**
- 26- Develop, in collaboration with Télé-Québec, multiplatform educational literacy content;**
- 27- Encourage the development of digital Francophone content and ensure that there is a preponderant offering of works in French on digital platforms such as Netflix and Spotify.**



A blue-tinted photograph of a man and a woman smiling and embracing outdoors. The man is in the foreground, wearing a checkered shirt, and the woman is behind him, wearing a light-colored top and a polka-dot skirt. The word "Conclusion" is overlaid in white text across the center of the image.

Conclusion

The vitality of the French language and its promotion must be at the heart of any Quebec government's action. The linguistic challenges we face are far from being inevitable. On the contrary, they call for all of Quebec's driving forces to mobilize to allow the beautiful French language to prosper; the language that we inherited from our ancestors and intend to leave to our children, thus perpetuating a rich French-speaking tradition in this North American land.

The proposals we have advanced show the Quebec Liberal Party's undeniable commitment to the protection and promotion of the French Language. Just like Robert Bourassa did 50 years ago, we want to breathe new life into our official language with strong, audacious measures while respecting the rights of the English-speaking community.





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