



Consultation Report

Bilingual First-Year University Program

February 2020

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Introduction

Collège nordique francophone (CNF) wanted to gauge the level of interest among Francophile and Francophone youth currently in Grades 10 to 12 in the Northwest Territories in taking their first year of post-secondary studies in a bilingual program in Yellowknife.

CNF commissioned Ayni Conceptions to consult with Francophile and Francophone students and their parents.



Methodology

The consultation project was divided into two components: discussion groups with students and an online survey of their parents.

Discussion groups

An activity plan was developed for each group (see Appendix 1). The questions were validated by two students to ensure clarity. Contacts were made and invitations were sent to the following schools:

- École St. Patrick High School, Yellowknife
- École Sir John Franklin High School, Yellowknife
- École Allain St-Cyr, Yellowknife
- École Boréale, Hay River.

Two discussion groups were set up following e-mails and telephone calls with staff at St. Patrick. The first group consisted of Grade 10 students exclusively. The second consisted of Grade 11 and 12 students who were willing to take time out of class in order to participate in the group.

Meetings were held with secondary students at École Allain St-Cyr and École Boréale in March and April 2019— or more specifically, with those students who were present at school on the day the consultations took place.

In February 2020, we finally managed to meet with three groups at École Sir John Franklin High School: Grade 9, Grade 10 and a combined group of Grade 11/12 students.

Survey

A survey was then designed, translated and tested in both languages to obtain feedback from parents about post-secondary education for their children. The principals of the four schools concerned agreed to promote the survey to parents. The survey was open from October 25 to November 24, 2019. Unfortunately, we were not able to confirm that parents of students attending École Saint-Patrick High School received it. CNF also promoted the survey by placing a notice in *L'Aquilon* and by using its various communication tools. The survey was hosted at no charge on [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). That limited the number of questions to 10, as well as our ability to cross-reference the data.

Results of discussion groups

Participating schools

Eight sessions were held with a total of 105 students at the four main schools in the Northwest Territories. Attempts were made to contact students in immersion programs in Inuvik and Fort Smith, to no avail. Table 1 provides a breakdown of participation at these sessions.

Table 1: Student/School Participation

School	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12	TOTAL
École St-Patrick High School	23	8	4	35
École Sir John Franklin High School	32	4	7	43
École Alain St-Cyr	3	5	2	10
École Boréale	10	3	4	17
TOTAL	68	20	17	105

Almost all of the sessions took place in late March 2019 in Yellowknife, where a CNF employee was responsible for note-taking; and in early April in Hay River. The sessions at École Sir John could not be held until February 2020.

We had planned to develop and distribute a survey to students. However, the teachers we contacted said it would be pointless, as the students would not fill it out. In their view, the students would be too busy to find the motivation for it. There was also the risk that they would give any old answer.

Programs contemplated by students

Most (81%) of the students we spoke with were contemplating enrolling in either a college or university program. While the students had their sights set on a range of programs, only those that were mentioned by more than one of the discussion groups are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Programs Contemplated by Students Consulted

• Science	6 individuals
• Medicine	7 individuals
• Business Administration	3 individuals
• Education - Teaching	2 individuals
• Criminology	2 individuals
• Nursing	2 individuals
• Arts	2 individuals
• Engineering	2 individuals

Maintaining proficiency in French at the post-secondary level

Most (78%) of the participants said it was important for them to continue using French after secondary school. Respondents from École Boréale were the exception, with only 40% seeing French as important in their further education.

A total of 36% of the participants in the discussion groups said they were planning to take post-secondary programs in French. Students from École St-Patrick High School were the most keen, followed by respondents from École Allain St-Cyr. Table 3 presents the results by school.

Table 3: Proportion of students planning on taking post-secondary programs in French, by school

School	TOTAL
École St-Patrick High School	59 %
École Alain St-Cyr	40 %
École Boréale	12 %
École Sir John Franklin High School	9 %

Subject to certain conditions, 41.5%¹ of students would consider enrolling in a bilingual post-secondary program offering a variety of courses taught in English and in French. Many conditions were given, but the following were mentioned by more than one group:

- If the bilingual program makes it easier to find a job (three groups);
- If the program is top-notch or better than programs offered in English only (three groups);
- If the program is related to my chosen area of study (two groups).



¹ The responses from the second discussion group at École St-Patrick are not available for this question.

Motivation in taking first year of university in Yellowknife

Most students want to leave Yellowknife to continue their education. However, they would be willing to do their first year of university in Yellowknife under the following conditions:

- Financial reasons:
 - If it were less costly;
 - If there were bursaries, such as those offered under the Government of the Northwest Territories' financial assistance program;
 - If they could find a well-paying job while they were at school;
 - If they offered perks such as free Internet, sports clubs and trips;
 - If they were paid to attend school.
- Social reasons:
 - To be closer to friends and family;
 - If a lot of their friends or a lot of other students were there.
- Academic reasons:
 - If it were a high-quality program, with a variety of courses;
 - If the teachers were competent;
 - If there were high-quality facilities (library, classrooms, gym, etc.).

Success factors proposed by students

We then wanted to know what things would help make the students' first year in a post-secondary program a success. We received many responses:

- Financial security (good job, scholarships, etc.);
- Variety of competent instructors;
- Academic help, mental health supports, quality discussion time with instructors;
- Positive learning atmosphere (comfortable, appealing facility, etc.);
- Study-friendly areas (quiet and pleasant library, technology resources);
- Support from family and friends;
- Classes taught exclusively in person, not online;
- Cafeteria access and option to purchase a meal plan.

Generally speaking, the idea of taking a bilingual program appealed to the students. This was especially true of École St. Patrick High School students. They also asked questions about the kind of program CNF had in mind and whether it would happen soon.

Results of parent survey

CNF wanted to know from parents what they thought about a bilingual post-secondary program possibly being offered in Yellowknife. CNF also wanted to know what factors would influence their choice of post-secondary institution. The survey was sent to 121² families. A total of 47 people responded: 38 took the survey in English, and nine in French. That is an excellent response rate. Table 4 presents a breakdown of the participating schools.

Table 4: Participating Schools - Parents

School	French	English	TOTAL
École St-Patrick High School	0	0	0
École Sir John Franklin High School	1	26	27
École Alain St-Cyr	6	3	9
École Boréale	0	5	5
Other	1	1	2
TOTAL	8	35	43

Among the respondents with children in the age group targeted by the survey, 91% said that their children were contemplating post-secondary education. The others said their children were undecided. When asked about their children's interest in continuing their education in French, just 26% answered in the affirmative. A total of 44% did not know, and the remaining 30% said that their children were planning on continuing their education in English. However, **86% of the parents felt that it is important that their children continue using French after secondary school**. The reasons given by the parents are presented in Table 5.

Tableau 5 : Raisons de maintenir l'usage du français

• Better job opportunities	13 individuals
• Student's first language	8 individuals
• Bilingualism an asset	6 individuals
• Would be a shame to lose what they have learned	6 individuals
• More choices for travel and relocation	5 individuals
• Part of the student's culture	3 individuals
• More opportunities	2 individuals

² We did not manage to find out the number of immersion students from the principal at École Saint-Patrick High School, which leads us to believe that the survey was not sent.



CNF also wanted to know how much influence parents have over the choice of post-secondary institution. Most parents (47%) said that while it was up to their children to decide, they wanted them to take their opinion into account. A total of 33% said that it would be a mutual decision. Only 12% said that while they were the ones who decided, they would take their children’s opinion into account.

We then wanted to know what the most important factors were in choosing a post-secondary institution. Those factors are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Factors in Choosing a Post-secondary Institution

• Quality of academic program	38 individuals
• Location	22 individuals
• Student services (mental health, tutoring, guidance, etc.)	17 individuals
• Activities (clubs, sports, social events, etc.)	15 individuals
• Cost	14 individuals
• Job placement rates	10 individuals
• Other (specify)	No response

We then asked the parents what they thought about the possibility of enrolling their children in a bilingual university program. A total of 83% of the respondents said they would encourage their children to consider it, and 67% said they would do so if the program were in Yellowknife. It is interesting to note that all of the eight people who took the survey in French answered these last two questions in the affirmative.





Conclusion

CNF is encouraged by the results of the consultations. Interest in continuing to use French after secondary school is high among parents (86%) and students (78%). Although interest in further education in French is nuanced, receptiveness to the possibility is high, especially among parents (87%) who have an influence over their children.

Convincing students to stay in Yellowknife for university is more challenging than persuading them to continue their education in French. Most of them want to leave the North. Such a program must therefore be unique. A Grade 12 student in the immersion program at École Sir John suggested that there be specialized northern courses that would not be available elsewhere. It could encourage students to stay in Yellowknife for one more year and—who knows—prompt people in other parts of Canada to move to Yellowknife for a year! The program would also have to meet young people's needs with high-quality university and social facilities and competent and qualified staff.

CNF could also join forces with a post-secondary institution south of the 60th parallel. In such a case, it would be wise to choose an institution that is popular among young people in the Northwest Territories. Interviews with their secondary school guidance counsellors could be held to determine which institutions young people prefer.

APPENDIX 1: Questions for Discussion Groups

(1) Interest in university studies:

- What grade are you in?
- Are you planning on going to college or university?
- Have you decided on an area of study or program?
- If so, which one?

(2) Interest in a bilingual program:

- Is continuing to use French after secondary school important to you?
- Have you considered post-secondary education in French?
- Would you consider enrolling in a bilingual program, for example, one where courses are offered in English and in French?
 - If so, under what conditions?

(3) Context: University programs are usually four years long. Would you be willing to do your first year of university in Yellowknife?

- If so, under what conditions?

(4) In your opinion, what factors would make your first year of college or university a success? (or, what do you need to succeed at university?)

(5) Do you have any other comments?

APPENDIX 2: Questions in Parent Survey

1. Are any of your children currently enrolled in a French immersion program or French first language program in Grade 9 or above? If your answer is no, skip to the end and press the “submit” button to complete the survey. Thank you for your participation!
2. At what school is your child enrolled (if you have more than one child enrolled in an immersion program or French first language program, answer for the eldest child only)?
3. Is at least one of your children planning to attend university after secondary school?
4. Is at least one of your children who is enrolled in an immersion program or French first language program considering enrolling in a French or bilingual post-secondary program?
5. Is it important to you that your children continue using French after secondary school?
6. If you answered yes to the previous question, why is it important to you that your children continue using French after secondary school? (If you answered no, skip to the next question.)
7. What degree of influence do you have over the final choice of post-secondary institution?
 - 100%
 - 75%
 - 50%
 - 25%
 - 0%
8. Choose the three most important factors to you in rating post-secondary institutions:
 - Location
 - Cost
 - Quality of academic program
 - Student services (mental health care, tutoring, guidance, etc.)
 - Job placement rates after graduation
 - Activities (clubs, sports, social events, etc.)
 - Other (specify).
9. Taking into account your answers to the previous question, if there were a bilingual university program in the area of study your child has chosen, would you encourage him or her to enrol?
10. Taking into account your answers to question 8 (factors in making a choice), if there were a bilingual first-year program in Yellowknife in your child’s preferred area of study, would you encourage him or her to enrol?