



Consultation Report

Bilingual First-Year University Program

June 2020





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Introduction

Collège nordique francophone (CNF) seeks to gauge the level of interest among Francophile and Francophone students currently enrolled in Grades 10 to 12 in the Northwest Territories concerning the possibility of undertaking their first year of post-secondary education in a bilingual program in Yellowknife.

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



Methodology

The consultation project was divided into two parts: discussion groups with the students and an online survey for their parents.

Discussion groups

A facilitation plan was drawn up for each group (see Appendix 1). The questions were validated with two students to ensure comprehensibility. 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 emails and telephone calls with staff at St. Patrick High School. The first group consisted of Grade 10 students exclusively. The second group was made up of Grade 11 and 12 students who were willing to take time out of class for the consultation.

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

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

Survey

A survey to obtain feedback from parents about their children's post-secondary education was then designed, translated and tested in both languages. The principals of the four schools concerned agreed to promote the survey to parents. The survey was open from October 25 to November 24, 2019.¹ CNF also advertised the survey in the *L'Aquilon* newspaper and through its own communication channels. The survey was hosted on the free version of surveymonkey.com, which limited the number of questions to 10 and made it impossible to cross-reference the data.

¹ The St. Patrick High School parent survey was conducted in spring 2020.

Interviews

CNF also interviewed guidance counsellors at the four participating schools. They first received an email invitation, followed by a phone call and a second email, if necessary. The interviews, lasting some 30 minutes each, were conducted in June 2020 in the participants' language of choice.

Results of discussion groups

Participating schools

Eight sessions were held in the four main schools in the Northwest Territories, with 105 students taking part in total. Unsuccessful attempts were made to contact immersion students in Inuvik and Fort Smith. Table 1 provides a breakdown of participation in the sessions.

Table 1: School participation - students

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 Allain St-Cyr	3	5	2	10
École Boréale	10	3	4	17
TOTAL	68	20	17	105

Almost all the sessions took place in late March 2019 in Yellowknife (a CNF employee took notes) and in early April 2019 in Hay River. The sessions at Sir John Franklin High School were not held until February 2020.

We had planned to design and administer a student survey. However, all of the teachers we contacted said it would be pointless because the students would not fill it out. In their view, the students would be too busy to be motivated to complete the survey. They were also very likely to put anything that came to mind.

Programs considered by students

Most (81%) of the students consulted were planning on enrolling in a post-secondary program at either a college or university. While many programs were mentioned, only those that came up in more than one discussion group are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Programs considered by the students who were consulted

• Science	6 persons
• Medicine	7 persons
• Business Administration	3 persons
• Teacher Education	2 persons
• Criminology	2 persons
• Nursing	2 persons
• Arts	2 persons
• Engineering	2 persons

Continuing to use French at the post-secondary level

Most (78%) of the students felt it was important to continue using French after secondary school. École Boréale was the exception, as only 40% of the respondents felt that studying in French was important.

A total of 36% of the participants in the discussion groups said they were planning on obtaining a post-secondary education 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 pursuing their post-secondary education in French, by school

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

41.5%² of students said that, subject to certain conditions, they would consider enrolling in a bilingual post-secondary program that offered a choice of courses in French and English. They gave several examples, but those mentioned by more than one group are as follows:

- If a bilingual program would make it easier to find a job (three groups)
- If the quality of the program is outstanding or better than the programs offered in English only (three groups)
- If the program is related to my area of study (two groups).

² The responses for the second discussion group at École St. Patrick High School are not available for this question.



Reasons for undertaking first year of university in Yellowknife

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

- Financial reasons:
 - If it were less costly;
 - If there were scholarships/bursaries, e.g., GNWT financial assistance program;
 - If they had a well-paying job while at school;
 - If perks such as free Internet, sports clubs and trips were included;
 - If they were paid to go to 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. There were many responses:

- Financial security (good jobs, scholarships/bursaries);
- Variety of competent teachers;
- Academic and mental health supports;
- Quality time and interactions with teachers;
- Positive learning atmosphere (comfortable, appealing institution, etc.);
- Spaces conducive to study (quiet, pleasant library, technology resources);
- Support from family and friends;
- Classes taught exclusively in person, not online;
- Cafeteria access and meal plan option.

In general, the students, especially those from École St. Patrick High School, seemed very interested in the idea of a bilingual program. They also asked 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. It also wanted to know what factors would influence their choice of post-secondary institution. The survey was sent to 197 families, and 62 individuals responded, yielding a response rate of 31%. Fifty-one persons filled out the English-language survey, and 11, the French-language version. The response rate was therefore very good. Table 4 presents a breakdown of the participating schools.

Table 4: Participation of schools - parents

School	French	English	TOTAL
École St. Patrick High School	2	13	15
École Sir John Franklin High School	1	26	27
École Allain St-Cyr	6	3	9
École Boréale	0	5	5
Other	1	1	2
TOTAL	10	48	58

Of the respondents with children in the target age group, **93% said their children were considering post-secondary education**, while the remainder said they were undecided. When asked whether their children would be interested in continuing their education in French, only 23% answered in the affirmative, while 43% did not know. The remaining 34% said that their children planned to continue their education in English. However, **86% of parents felt that it is important for their children to keep using French after secondary school**. The reasons given by the parents are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Reasons for continuing to use French

• Better job opportunities	19 persons
• It's the student's first language	10 persons
• Bilingualism is an asset	7 persons
• It would be a shame to lose prior learning	7 persons
• More choices for travel and relocation	6 persons
• It's part of the student's/family's culture	4 persons
• More opportunities	2 persons



CNF also wanted to know how much influence parents have over the choice of post-secondary institution. Most parents (48%) said that it was up to their children to decide. At the same time, the parents also wanted their opinion to be considered by their children. Some 30% stated that it would be a mutual decision. A total of 13% of the respondents affirmed that the decision was up to their children. Only 9% stated that the decision was up to them, but 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	49 persons
• Location	27 persons
• Activities (clubs, sports, social events, etc.)	23 persons
• Student services (mental health, tutoring, guidance, etc.)	21 persons
• Cost	18 persons
• Job placement rate	13 persons
• Other (please specify)	9 persons (e.g., volleyball)

We then asked the parents what they thought about the possibility of enrolling their children in a bilingual university program. A total of 82% of the respondents said that they would encourage their children to consider it, and 65% affirmed that they would do so if the program were in Yellowknife. Interestingly, nine of the 10 persons who completed the questionnaire in French answered those last two questions in the affirmative.



Results of interviews with guidance counsellors

CNF wanted to know what guidance counsellors at the participating schools thought about their students' choices of post-secondary institutions. We managed to interview three out of the four counsellors, all women. Counselling accounted for between 10% and 50% of their duties. They were primarily responsible for teaching. None of them had any formal training in counselling. Instead, they drew on continuing education and their work experience.

They said that between 50 and 80% of their students go on to university. None of the schools kept statistics on the post-secondary studies undertaken by their students. However, the three counsellors who were interviewed said informally that their students favoured institutions in Alberta and British Columbia because of their proximity to Yellowknife. Students at the two French first-language schools seemed to prefer smaller institutions, especially colleges. The institutions that were familiar to the students, either because they had seen a dynamic presentation or because they knew students who were enrolled there, seemed to be the most popular. Proximity therefore appeared to be the deciding factor, followed by program quality.

The counsellors who were interviewed did not seem to think that the services offered by the institutions were an important factor in the final selection. One of them said that the residences seemed to be important to her students. Another commented that her students who spoke French at home were more likely to want to continue their education in French. The counsellors seemed to think that the institutions already offered services that were important, such as residences, food plans and even Indigenous programming (select institutions). However, two counsellors suggested the following:

- Simplified application procedures, or assistance with them. Those procedures seemed to be simpler at colleges.
- Support for students in their daily lives to help them cope with anxiety and succeed academically.

The counsellors said the following suggestions could help make the first year of a bilingual program in Yellowknife a success:

- Guarantee that students will be able to transfer to an institution in southern Canada after their first year.
- A unique program, including work experience.
- Opportunities to socialize, stimulating student life (different from secondary school).
- Option to take courses in French but submit assignments in English (like at the University of Ottawa).
- Simplified application procedure, affordable cost.



The consultants/teachers also gave CNF recommendations for communication with students. They suggested inviting Grade 11 and 12 students to dynamic presentations in November or early December each year, and to promote them to parents:

- École St. Patrick High School holds an evening info session for parents every February.
- French first-language schools do not hold formal events promoting post-secondary programs to parents, but CNF could suggest that it take part in the open houses held every September.
- CNF could offer to be present at report card meetings.
- CNF could send information kits on its programs to guidance counsellors.

CNF also wanted to know how it could better serve French teachers in the Northwest Territories. The counsellors said that the question was relevant, but that they did not have an answer. They unhesitatingly said "yes" to receiving CNF's newsletter. One counsellor suggested that CNF offer courses that secondary schools could not afford for want of resources. For example, a student wishing to take Social Studies 30 currently had to do so online via an institution in southern Canada, which CNF could replace with a support or tutoring service.

One counsellor said that CNF should offer a faster, simpler and more affordable admission service than the other institutions. It would then be able to respond quickly to students and let them know they have the option of staying in Yellowknife. She also suggested that CNF gather the names and email addresses of students (with their permission) attending its presentations at the secondary schools in order to promote its services to them. She also recommended that CNF use social media popular with young people (e.g. Snapchat) to remind them that CNF could be a relevant option.



Conclusion

CNF is encouraged by the results of the consultations. Interest in continuing to use French after secondary school was high among parents (86%) and students (78%). Furthermore, although the desire to study in French after secondary school was nuanced, openness to that option was high, especially among parents (87%) who had some influence over their children.

Convincing students to stay in Yellowknife for university seemed to be more difficult than persuading them to continue their education in French. Most of them want to leave the North. Any program will therefore have to be unique. A Grade 12 student enrolled in the immersion program at Sir John Franklin High School suggested that CNF offer courses specifically related to the North that would not be available elsewhere. That might encourage students to stay in Yellowknife for an additional year and—perhaps—even induce people from other parts of Canada to move to Yellowknife for a year. The program would also have to meet students' needs by offering high-quality academic and social infrastructure and competent, qualified staff.

CNF could partner with a post-secondary institution "south of 60." If it did, it should choose an institution that is popular among young people in the Northwest Territories. Based on the interviews with the guidance counsellors, it should be an institution in Alberta or even British Columbia, preferably one with a high-quality program and popular services, such as excellent student residences. To capture the students' interest, CNF should ensure its procedures (for enrolling in first year and transitioning to second year) are simple and affordable, and it should provide support for students.



APPENDIX 1: Discussion group questions

- (1) Interest in university studies:
 - What grade are you in?
 - Are you planning to go to university or college?
 - Have you decided on an area of study or program?
 - If so, which one?
- (2) Interest in a bilingual program:
 - How important is it for you to keep using French after secondary school?
 - 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) Note: University programs usually run for four years. Would you be willing to do your first year of university in Yellowknife?
 - If so, under what conditions?
- (4) In your opinion, what would make your first year of university or college a success (or what would be critical for you to succeed at university?)
- (5) Do you have any other comments?



APPENDIX 2: Parent survey questions

1. Do you currently have a child or children enrolled in a French immersion program or a French first-language program in Grade 9 or above? If your answer is “no,” you can skip to the end and click “submit” to finish 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 go to university after secondary school?
4. Is at least one of your children who is enrolled in a French immersion or French first-language program planning to pursue post-secondary education in French or in a bilingual 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 for your children to keep using French after secondary school? (If you answered “no,” go to the next question).
7. How much 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 choosing a post-secondary institution:
 - Location
 - Cost
 - Quality of academic program
 - Student services (mental health care, tutoring, guidance, etc.)
 - Job placement rate after graduation
 - Activities (clubs, sports, social events, etc.)
 - Other (please specify)
9. Considering your answers to the previous question, if a bilingual university program were available in your child’s chosen field of study, would you encourage them to enrol?
10. Considering your answers to question eight (decision-making factors), if the first year of a bilingual program were available in Yellowknife in your child’s chosen field of study, would you encourage them to enrol?

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