



CANADIAN
PARENTS
FOR FRENCH

cpf.ca



ADVOCACY *'avec élan'*

A CPF Network Guide to Making Our Voices Heard

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is fortunate in having a positive message to take to the broad community – enhanced French as a second language (FSL) education and learning opportunities for all those who call Canada home.

For CPF members and volunteers, advocacy simply means applying structure and focus to what comes naturally.

- If you've recommended FSL education to friends or neighbours, you've "advocated".
- If you've raised a concern with the principal at your school, you've "advocated".
- If you've spoken at a community or education meeting, you've "advocated".

Advocacy allows you to raise and resolve problems, clarify issues, to inform and influence, to seek allies and exert pressure: To reach the people who matter. To establish issue competency. To build a profile in your community. And, most importantly, to get results.

ESTABLISHING AN ADVOCACY TEAM

The personalities, competencies and contacts of your CPF Chapter or Branch membership are a rich resource. Mine that resource to establish a formal CPF Advocacy Team. Two or three core members will suffice. However, even one person can be an effective "advocate"!

Choose Advocacy Team members who have a pleasant demeanor and persuasive communication skills. Include your CPF Chapter President or CPF Branch Board President or designate who has the recognized status and authority to speak for CPF in your community.

Other CPF members who have something in common with your 'advocacy target' should be added to your Team on an ad hoc basis. For example, when asking for a meeting with a member of parliament, does anyone live in their constituency? Or when planning a meeting with a school trustee, does anyone on your Advocacy Team actually live in the trustee's ward? Or know them socially or have a family connection with kids in the same school?



DETERMINING YOUR OBJECTIVES

The largest advocacy pitfall you will face is trying to do too much, too quickly. Your educational community or jurisdiction doubtless faces a number of pressing French as a second language equity of access and quality of program issues. As difficult as it might be, try to prioritize the best issue to tackle at this point in time, matching your time, energy and abilities to what is most critical in the immediate term.

The CPF Network position papers state our stance on priority issues related to FSL education practice,

policy and professional development and can guide any advocacy interventions helping authorities to make informed decisions.

Human nature plays a large role in advocacy. No matter who we are or what we do, we like to feel validated... to feel important... to feel liked.

Successful advocacy understands and takes full advantage of these "facts of life" and builds a case from evidence-based research to influence decision makers.



IDENTIFYING ADVOCACY “TARGETS”

Ideally, we would like everybody to be aware of Canadian Parents for French and its concerns. However, grassroots organizations such as ours have limited human and financial resources. There are nonetheless four key advocacy “targets”:



The Education Community

Advocacy work begins within our own schools: the school principal, the teachers and the parent council. At the community-wide level, education authorities include: Directors of Education, Superintendents and Administrators; district level language consultants or coordinators, guidance counsellors and the local Branches of teachers’ unions. At the CPF Branch level, advocacy includes meetings with Department of Education staff all the way up to the Minister.

Don’t limit advocacy efforts to Board administrators responsible for French as a second language programs. Administrators dealing with English programs, facilities and transportation issues can all influence FSL program outcomes, including equitable access. They can become valuable allies and important sources of information if we tailor our message to take their challenges into account.



The Media

French as a second language learning is an obscure issue for most English speaking media. So, you’ll have to be proactive in making contact and helping them tell the story. Call local media outlets in your community and ask if anyone has a special interest in education issues. Newspapers may have an “education beat” journalist or ask to speak to the “news editor” who crafts the editorials that set out the publication’s stand on the issues of the day.

Request an opportunity to meet and brief this person at their convenience to introduce Canadian Parents for French and explain FSL issues in your community. Journalists appreciate receiving some background information; a media kit is available on the CPF National website.

Most importantly, these first meetings establish a relationship with the journalist, how we can help with story ideas and meet their deadlines.



Community Allies

Reaching out to other community-based groups can show education administrators, the media and politicians that Canadian Parents for French is not a narrow, special interest group. Any organization having a vested interest in education and French language learning - whether direct or indirect - is a potential ally. School-based parent councils, language teacher associations, francophone community groups, family resource centres or youth clubs come to mind.

Strange bedfellows make for effective coalitions. A Chamber of Commerce or Board of Trade may see additional FSL resources as a way to attract new businesses or families to your community. Realtors and their associations understand the impact on property values and ratepayer associations may see expanded FSL programs as a way of revitalizing a neighbourhood or stopping a school closure. Childcare centres or special interest groups such as Junior Achievement or Toastmasters may see expanding programs as a new source of revenue.



Politicians

French as a second language education issues involve all three levels of government. For CPF advocacy purposes, “politician” is a broad term that includes all elected officials, from school board trustees, to municipal councillors, to provincial / territorial members of the legislature to federal members of parliament.

The more you can gently and persuasively show that FSL education, support for official languages and linguistic duality are (or can be made to be) a vote-determining issue, the more likely you are to find a political ally.

ARRANGING A MEETING

Don't wait until the eleventh hour to make arrangements for a meeting. A request to meet at the last minute can be easily, and justifiably, declined.

Telephone, don't write, to request a meeting. Follow up with an email. Ensure that you've reached the person responsible for scheduling. Briefly identify yourself, who you represent and why you want the meeting. Do not say the reason is to "advocate", instead, say it is to discuss a community or educational issue of common concern.

Remember that advocacy is about person-to-person contact. Regardless of your "target", a team of three will usually suffice. Large numbers are intimidating, and usually result in more formal meetings where neither side feels relaxed.

Arrange a mutually convenient date for the meeting, and a set amount of time. While you should suggest a meeting length based on your agenda, be prepared to negotiate. Provide the names of the CPF Advocacy Team members who will attend along with titles or positions (volunteer or staff) where appropriate. Offer to send background information on CPF and the issue at hand. Finally, ensure that you have exchanged contact information (cellular telephone and e-mail addresses), just in case circumstances change and one party has to reach the other at the last minute. Confirmation of the date, time, place of the meeting and issue to be discussed should be reconfirmed the day before the meeting by e-mail or by phone.



PREPARING FOR A MEETING

Your first step is to reach a consensus within your Advocacy Team on the desired outcomes for the meeting. Agree on the actions and commitments you will ask for. What is your bottom line? How flexible are you prepared to be? Discuss 'what if' scenarios.

Knowledge is indeed power. Do your best to understand the situation, interests, challenges and concerns of the "advocacy target". If you are meeting a politician, use the Internet to research past positions on the issue at hand. If you are meeting an education administrator, ask a sympathetic school Trustee for an opinion of that person's position, openness, biases and concerns.

Next, put together a succinct issue information package with key facts to support your case.

Briefing notes and background information are available on the CPF Branch and National websites. Your information kit should contain the following:

- > A point-form fact sheet on the issue;
- > A one-page overview on the impact the issue has on the wider community; and
- > Pertinent CPF National and Branch general brochures, position papers or support resources.

Gather your Advocacy Team together in the days leading up to your meeting to rehearse and go over the points to be made, to review your materials and to decide who will say what.



DURING THE MEETING

Your Team leader should thank the ‘target’ for the meeting, introduce the Advocacy Team, and briefly explain the role of Canadian Parents for French.

Using the point-form fact sheet as the focal point of discussion, lay out your presentation:

- The issue at hand;
- The problems the issue has created;
- The impact on the broader community;
- Your proposed alternative/solution;
- What reasonable actions should be taken by the other party (‘reasonable’ means what an objective person would find to be reasonable under the circumstances); and,
- A request for specific commitments/actions.

Other team members should contribute their comments as prearranged or required. As much as

possible, link your issue to the greater community. This will implicitly telegraph that other segments of the community share CPF’s concerns.

Be forceful but not argumentative in your presentation. Your job is to motivate, not alienate. Answer all questions, or commit to getting swift responses to those you cannot immediately respond to.

End your presentation and subsequent discussion by asking for your desired commitments or actions, as well as a reasonable timeframe for carrying them out. State CPF’s willingness to provide support, ongoing information and to meet again, if required.

Finally, be prepared to keep to the allotted time. The exception to this rule is when the ‘target’ you are meeting prolongs the meeting. In such a case, it’s up to the other party to end the meeting.



AFTER THE MEETING

Your Advocacy Team should have arranged in advance to meet immediately after the meeting to debrief. Make sure you agree on the outcome of the meeting, what commitments were made and what action steps are to be taken.

Within twenty-four hours, you should e-mail a follow-up letter that:

- Thanks both the individual you met with and anyone else who facilitated the meeting;
- Restates the issue that led to the meeting and Canadian Parents for French’s position on that issue;
- Confirms actions promised or commitments made to CPF;
- Indicates that CPF will be following progress on the issue and would be pleased to meet as often as wished.

This follow-up letter should be sent as a courtesy and should reiterate your willingness to assist in moving the issue forward. Where commitments are honoured, a letter should be sent recognizing and thanking the individual. In the case of politicians, you may wish to consider publicly commending the person for having met their commitments. This will ensure CPF a warm reception when we next need to make an approach.



Produced by Canadian Parents for French, National with financial assistance from the Department of Canadian Heritage.