

140 Putney Avenue
St. Lambert, Que.

November 30th, 1963

Dear Dr. Lambert:

Two years ago I heard you describe to the Wellesley Club some of your findings on bilingualism. I enjoyed your lecture and retained a vivid impression of its content. When a group of St. Lambert parents, including myself, decided that we wanted to do something in the public school here to help our children become bilingual, I thought of you and your work and wondered if you could give us any assistance.

Briefly, I shall describe what we are doing: we have formed a committee of about 10 Protestant parents who are very keen on introducing experimental classes in the St. Lambert Elementary School with a view to making our children bilingual, on the assumption that the early years are the best for introducing a second language. We have put the cart slightly before the horse in that we have taken steps to bring about these classes without really knowing how they should best be set up.

The Supervisor of our county (Chambly County) is personally quite interested in trying out our ideas. The Central School Board, which decides on curriculum changes is very wary, even quite pessimistic, about the possibilities. However one ray of hope is that they have assigned Mr. Green, the Supervisor, three months (ending about January 20th) in which to prepare a brief showing the demand for French in St. Lambert and the possibilities for introducing these classes. At the present moment there are French classes in the county for French-speaking Protestants from Grades I to VII at Sir Vincent Massey School at Laflèche. Therefore the county does have experience in teaching in French, it has French textbooks and is employing two French-speaking teachers. Some of the practical groundwork has therefore been laid - adjustments must of course be made to accommodate these courses to the English-speaking children.

We hope to provide Mr. Green with as concrete a proposal as possible. On the basis of the experience of some members who have children in the French Catholic schools, we are asking for classes in French (by teachers whose mother tongue is French) in Kindergarten and Grades I, II, and III, starting in 1964. We want all subjects taught in French, with English being introduced in Grade III, or when a certain proficiency in reading and writing French is attained. We would like the French program to continue through Grade VII, with more English being added each year after Third so that when the children are ready for high school they will be capable of doing their course in English as easily, it is hoped, as those who did not take part in the experiment. Of course, we are not trying to force the bilingual classes on anyone.

We mailed out about 300 announcements of our plan (I'm enclosing a copy) to parents of children now in Kindergarten, Grades I and II.

The announcement is not a serious presentation of our aims, as you will see, but it is giving us a fair idea of the demand. Two weeks after mailing out the notices we had affirmative replies from 89 families offering their children to the projected classes, and more are still coming in. Only three letters came in lambasting the idea. There are enough children involved now, in theory, to fill classes of each of the grades mentioned, with a good reserve for future years. Therefore we have established that there is a demand, and a larger one than we anticipated.

Our next step is to meet with the interested parents, the School Board and our critics in the next month or two, ideally before the Supervisor's report is due. At this meeting we must try to make our case stronger with the Board, to answer the many doubts and questions which will undoubtedly be raised regarding the capacity of the children, the attitudes which would best contribute to the success of the program etc. It is in this latter sphere particularly that we are soliciting your assistance, for we find ourselves hardly competent in this field. Some of us are studying the 1963 UNESCO report on Foreign languages in Primary Education, which points out so many possible variations in teaching a second language that we are left a little out of breath.

We do feel, however, that bilingualism is an asset, ^(if not a necessity) in our particular society, that our schools are not producing bilingual people, and that in order to produce them a massive dose of the second language is necessary, preferably at a young age. I don't think our program is particularly radical, at least not in a world-wide context.

Would you be so kind as to share your ideas with us on this subject. Two of us would like to come and see you at your office, if convenient to you. Or, if not, could you write or phone me. My telephone number is OR. 1-3950. I realize how busy you must be, but I believe our subject is one that interests you. You would also be helping us to break new ice here in the public schools of the Montreal area. (We could also produce, in time, lots of subjects for your studies on bilingualism!)

Yours sincerely,

Olga Melikoff (Mrs. A.)

P. S. I neglected to say that the alternative of sending our children to French Catholic schools in pursuit of bilingualism has been closed to us this year in St. Lambert, due to overcrowding in the French schools. They are not accepting any more Protestants, as matters stand at present, so we must work through our own schools or appeal to higher educational authorities at Quebec.