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English father angry his son denied French school

Noah Genn has been schooled in French immersion since Kindergarten so his father says he should get to go to French School in Iqaluit. Not so fast, says French school board.

SEAN McKIBBON
Nunatsiaq News

IQALUIT — An Iqaluit father says his son is being denied his rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms because the *Conseil Scolaire Francophone d'Iqaluit* will not let his son attend French school.

Steven Genn, who recently moved to Iqaluit with his wife and two children, says his 11 year-old son, Noah, should be allowed into Iqaluit's French-language school program because he was schooled in French immersion in British Columbia.

"He's already taken his education in French and the charter says once you've had an official education in the French language you are guaranteed access to this program," Genn said.

Noah is being kept out of the program because the *Conseil* draws a distinction between the French first language education it provides and the French immersion course that Noah attended, Genn said.

Does French immersion count?

The application form that Genn had to fill out to enroll Noah in Iqaluit's French school required that Genn or his wife be French speaking or that one of them had had primary school instruction in French, or that at least one of their children "has received or is receiving instruction in a

French minorities, doesn't say "French first language program or school," says Genn. What the charter does say on the subject is this:

"Citizens of Canada of whom any child has received or is receiving primary or secondary school instruction in English or French in Canada, have the right to have all their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in the same language."

Genn says his son qualifies under this definition because Noah has received French immersion instruction in British Columbia from the time he was in Kindergarten.

But Daniel Cuerrier, the president of the *Conseil Scolaire* and the executive director of the Nunavut Francophone Association says Noah Genn simply doesn't speak French well enough to attend French school.

"He's at least two years behind," said Cuerrier, referring to a test given to Noah by the *conseil*. He said the test was one used in the class Noah would have been placed in had he passed.

Cuerrier said the *conseil* has not in fact closed the door to Genn's son, and is willing to let Noah into the course as long as Noah is able to keep up with the other students.

But he said there is indeed a difference between a first language program and an immersion program.

French first language program tries to develop the cultural identity and works on the enhancement of the language the child already possesses," Cuerrier said.

Ottawa makes distinction

Cuerrier acknowledged that the charter is different in its wording than the enrollment form, but he said that funding programs from the federal government's heritage department make a distinction between French first language and French immersion programs.

Lorne Levy, the assistant director of the Baffin Divisional Education Council also, said that federal funding programs through the Heritage department make a distinction between French immersion and French first language programs. And he said that a number of court decisions also support the idea that the two types of programs cannot be equated.

But Genn said the only thing that matters is what the charter says and that the education authorities in Iqaluit have a responsibility to provide Noah with a French education.

He said that if Noah can't keep up with his current Grade 5 class, the program should be changed to make sure his son can succeed. And he said a recent court decision in Quebec regarding a French child schooled in English immersion supports the principle of allowing Noah into the French course.

"I know his father is frustrated with the situation and it may be that he feels, 'just put my son in anyway,' but we cannot let the father be the judge. You know how it is in the class room, the slower the students, the slower the program," said Cuerrier.

With a student population of 35 and a pupil-teacher ratio of about eight to one, the French education system in Iqaluit ought to be able to make accommodations for Noah, Genn said.

He said that this principle is no different than helping children with disabilities or people from foreign countries learn English as a second language.

French immersion for Iqaluit

Cuerrier said that the dispute highlights a problem that has existed in Iqaluit for many years—the lack of a French immersion program. He said that if English parents in Iqaluit want to lobby the government for such a program, the francophone association would be more than happy to help.

Last week, Cuerrier said he was waiting to get report cards from Noah's schools in British Columbia before making a final decision.

As of Wednesday this week, Genn said he had heard nothing more from the *conseil* regarding his son.

Does French immersion count?

The application form that Genn had to fill out to enroll Noah in Iqaluit's French school required that Genn or his wife be French-speaking or that one of them had had primary school instruction in French, or that at least one of their children "has received or is receiving instruction in a French first language program or school."

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placed in had he passed.

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But he said there is indeed a difference between a first language program and an immersion program.

"The goals and objectives are completely different. Immersion focuses on the acquisition of a second language. A

French education.

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Cuerrier said putting Noah in the class despite his difficulty would only slow down the other students.

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He said that he has asked Iqaluit's Fair Practices Officer, Bill Riddell, to look into the disagreement.

What the charter says about language education

Newstar News

23. (1) Citizens of Canada

(a) whose first language (learned and still understood) is that of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province in which they reside, or

(b) who have received their primary school instruction in Canada in English or French and reside in a province where the language in which they received that instruction is the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of the province have the right to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in that language in that province.

(2) Citizens of Canada of whom any child has received or is receiving primary or secondary school instruction in English or French in Canada have the

right to have all their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in the same language.

(3) The right of citizens of Canada under subsections (1) and (2) to have their children receive primary and secondary school instruction in the language of the English or French linguistic minority population of a province

(a) applies wherever in the province the number of children of citizens who have such a right is sufficient to warrant the provision to them out of public funds of minority language instruction; and

(b) includes where the number of these children so warrants the right to have them receive that instruction in minority language educational facilities provided out of public funds.



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