

## Justin Trudeau apologizes over French school comment – REPRINT

### Description

Justin Trudeau has stepped into his first political minefield as a Liberal candidate, issuing an apology Monday for calling into question New Brunswick's separate French-language school system, one of his father's enduring legacies.

Mr. Trudeau made his verbal *faux-pas* last Friday when he told a group of New-Brunswick professors that a single, bilingual education system would be more cost-effective than the current separate systems for francophones and anglophones.

To make his point, he lamented the fact that francophone and anglophone children did not play together when he went to school as a youth in Montreal.

"The segregation of French and English in schools is something to be looked at seriously," Mr. Trudeau was quoted as saying in local papers. "It is dividing people and affixing labels to people."

The remarks irked many Acadians, who fought for decades to prevent the assimilation of their youth in bilingual schools. The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adopted in 1982 by late prime minister Pierre Trudeau, expressly guaranteed the right of francophones to separate schools.

"Mr. Trudeau's statement brought us back by 20 years," said Michel Doucet, a professor of law at the University of Moncton who fought for language rights before the Supreme Court of Canada.

"I'm surprised to see this from Mr. Trudeau, who is a descendant of the one who signed the Charter and defended this right to linguistic duality," Mr. Doucet said.

Mr. Trudeau, who will run for the Liberals in a Montreal riding in the next election, released a statement Monday afternoon to clarify his comments.

"The dualistic nature and the management of francophone schools in New Brunswick are entrenched in our Constitution. It is our Liberal heritage and I am proud of it," Mr. Trudeau said.

"If I offended Acadians and minority francophones, I would like to apologize publicly," Mr. Trudeau said.

At about the same time as the statement was issued, Liberal Leader Stéphane Dion distanced himself from his well-known candidate.

"He is new. He will likely have to explain his thoughts further," Mr. Dion said.

For some Liberals, the controversy proves that Mr. Trudeau still has much to learn about politics.

"The Liberal Party of Canada is the party of the Charter that allowed francophones all over the country to obtain their own schools and institutions," said a senior Liberal source. "What Justin said goes against the Liberal Party of Canada's historical position and shows a flagrant lack of knowledge of the

reality faced by francophones who live in minority situations in Canada.”

Liberal MP Denis Coderre added: “Justin is in a learning phase, but it’s clear that separate schools are essential.”

The director of New Brunswick’s association of francophone parents said she hopes that the province will keep its separate school systems, including distinct deputy ministers of education.

“The debate is closed,” said Josée Nadeau. “Should we reopen the debate? I don’t think so.”

The remarks were criticized by New Brunswick politicians of all stripes.

Former Conservative premier Bernard Lord noted the irony that it was his own father who extended the minority-language protection in Section 23 of the Charter.

“Maybe his name’s Trudeau but he doesn’t understand what’s in the Charter,” Mr. Lord told CTV.

“It’s a major mistake.”

New Brunswick’s Liberal education minister, Kelly Lamrock, said two separate school systems are the best way to deal with unique challenges faced in New Brunswick.

For example, Mr. Lamrock said, French is much more common in some parts of the province and students there would take intensive English classes early on.

Mr. Dion scoffed when asked whether off-the-cuff comments like the ones Mr. Trudeau made last weekend will hurt the party in Quebec, where the young candidate hopes to win a seat in the next election.

No province defends its jurisdictions more fiercely than Quebec and Section 93 of the 1867 Constitution Act clearly establishes education a provincial responsibility.

“No. Listen, he’s starting out,” Mr. Dion replied.

“It happens to everyone to make remarks they need to clarify later, and we shouldn’t judge him forever for one remark.”

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