

N.B. premier defends decision to abandon legal challenge on dual school busing

Description

Education and language are once again the focus in New Brunswick, following word on Wednesday that the provincial government is giving up on having the court rule on whether English and French students can travel on the same school buses.

“The court made it pretty clear that they shouldn’t be listening to this reference,” says Premier Brian Gallant.

Gallant says that is why his government is walking away from the constitutional question of whether Anglophone and Francophone students can sit together.

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Premier Gallant is defending his government’s decision to abandon the legal challenge on dual busing.

“It was already the districts that were in charge of the operations of that, for us it’s important to give as much power as we can to communities to make these kinds of decisions,” says Premier Gallant.

It’s a different tone from when the government first launched its legal action. Earlier this year, former Education Minister Serge Rouselle said the Supreme Court had been clear about having two separate bus systems.

On Thursday, the current education minister said school districts would make a better decision.

“We have to realize they have a lot of expertise, they’re on the ground locally. This is where we’ll allow

the parents and local leaders in the community to make their decisions on how to go forward,” says N.B. Education Minister Brian Kenny.

Members of the Francophone Teachers Association of New Brunswick say the debate has been both positive and negative.

“Positive in the sense that it allows us to educate people on the importance of having a dual system,” says Gilles Saulnier of the Francophone Teachers Association. “But at the same time, there are negative aspects because we see, for example in social media, where there’s a very negative debate.”

While one touchy language debate appears to be subsiding, another is emerging when it comes to French immersion. New Brunswick’s official opposition leader says the plan to start French immersion in grade one leaves little time for parents to make a decision.

“Let’s move beyond busses, let’s move into this entry point and say ‘when is the right time?’” says Progressive Conservative leader Blaine Higgs.

The Tories want the plan shelved; the Liberals say that won’t be happening.

Moving French immersion to begin in grade one was a Liberal campaign promise in 2014.

With files from CTV Atlantic’s Nick Moore

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