



15 March 2009

Dear Superintendent of Schools:

We, the undersigned members of **Francophonie Rhode Island**, an alliance of diverse French-speaking groups in the state of Rhode Island, are concerned about the continued strength and vitality of **foreign language programs in French in Rhode Island schools**. As such, we are asking that you think about the invaluable advantages of a strong foreign language program in **French** for your students and the importance of **French studies** in Rhode Island schools.

The French language, not only the language of continental France, is an **international language** spoken in over **40** countries around the world, and is the only language along with English to be used culturally and commercially on all five continents. In fact, taking into account five linguistic factors (i.e., number of primary and secondary speakers, geographic distribution, international commerce, economic power, and social, cultural and literary prestige and influence), **French is rated number two as to the most influential world languages**.<sup>1</sup> With our world becoming evermore interdependent, we believe that it is necessary for American students to continue to be exposed in their formative years to the language, history, and community that French studies bring.

Another reason that French studies matter is the fact that learning French has been shown to help American students better understand, write, and speak the English language. This point is critical since the headlines in education media show that a significant amount of incoming freshman to colleges and universities lack good reading and writing proficiency in English. Why can French help? Over 50% of English vocabulary and much of the grammar derive from French. Students are able to quickly learn French and use the similarities to excel on standardized tests like the **SAT**, and use the **critical and creative thinking and problem solving skills** learned from their studies to help them with other subjects like math and science.

Beyond the practical, cultural, and possible economic benefits from studying French, one should not forget the influence of the French-speaking world on our region. From the American Revolutionary War to the Franco-Canadian migration of yesterday, to the Franco-African, Franco-Caribbean, and Franco-Middle Eastern influence of today, we believe that this experience brings an acute understanding of where we have been as Americans, as well as how we understand the rest of the world.

Thank you for your consideration and your support of French studies in Rhode Island schools.


Sincerely yours,

**Francophonie RI**

  
Dominique Grégoire  
President, Alliance Française de Providence


  
Magali Boutot  
Executive Director, Alliance Française de Providence

  
Roger Bégin  
Honorary Consul of France

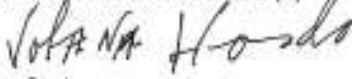
  
Jean Kinsele Nkusu  
Director, Congolese Community of Rhode Island

  
Anne D. Conway  
Co-Director, Museum of Work and Culture


  
Jacques Staelen  
Club Richelieu International

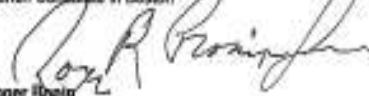
  
Simon Goudiaby  
African Alliance of Rhode Island

  
Michael Hébert  
President, American Association of Teachers of French (RI)

  
Kondo Fofana  
AMMC and African Parade

  
Marie Evangeline Goutier  
La Providence

  
Heidi Phelps  
French Consulate in Boston

  
Roger Ebert  
Le Foyer

<sup>1</sup> Comrie (1998), Weber (1997), and the Summer Institute for Linguistics (SIL) 1999 Ethnologue Survey