



IMPROVEMENTS AND BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO FSL PROGRAMS

BRITISH COLUMBIA:

Improvement

The Ministry of Education will establish an ad hoc multi-stakeholder FSL committee in order to discuss a range of issues related to French learning in BC. This committee will comprise representatives from the Ministry of Education, Canadian Parents for French, Standing Committee on Language Articulation, universities, BC Association of Teachers of Modern Languages, Association of French Immersion and *Français langue première* teachers, BC Language Coordinators Association, and BC School Superintendents Association. The Ministry will convene a minimum of two meetings per year where issues such as input on the new BC Action Plan on Official Languages in Education Protocol, second-languages curriculum, and learning resources might be discussed. Travel expenses associated with the meetings will be reimbursed by the Ministry in accordance with government policy. The president or executive director will represent CPF-BC and Yukon on the committee.

Barriers that remain

Access to secondary FSL programs is threatened in some communities. The high school in Nanaimo that currently houses English, French immersion, and francophone (French-first-language) programs is closing and is being rebuilt on the same site. The location is excellent: it is well served by public transportation, it is close to the highway so that immersion students from the satellite community of Ladysmith will be able to access the school relatively easily when their students reach secondary grades, and it is located close to other amenities such as an athletic complex and a community college. Because the district views French immersion as a district-wide program of choice and there is only one secondary location, it thinks the program can be housed anywhere there is space. Furthermore,

the francophone program rents space at the school slated for closure and again, the district believes that program is not a priority. Nanaimo's French immersion program is growing. The district is proposing to house it in an area of the city that is not large enough to sustain a full secondary program over the long term (five years) and that is not well served by public transportation, which could serve as a death knell to the secondary program. It is also not considering the location of the francophone program. We believe the two French programs should be housed in the new school to offer combined resources and the vibrant synergy that students currently experience, and that the location should be close to public transportation. (Note: no school busing is provided to students in immersion but the francophone district does provide busing to its students.)

YUKON:

Improvement

Yukon is experiencing tremendous growth in its FSL programs. In 2007-2008, French immersion enrolment in public schools jumped by 17% from 463 students in 2006-2007 to 540.* This occurred while overall enrolment has been dropping. The increase in interest is due mostly to word-of-mouth endorsements from students and parents and good promotion from the schools.

Barriers that remain

Access to French immersion programming continues to be inequitable, due to the geographic and population characteristics of the Yukon. Access to French immersion is limited to only one elementary and one secondary immersion program in one urban community.

* Note that the analysis of FSL Enrolment Trends in *The State of French-Second-Language Education in Canada 2008* is based on 2006-2007 statistics.

ALBERTA:

Improvement

The province's Languages Initiative has had a positive impact on the availability of core French, despite the fact that Alberta Education has put on hold a plan to make second-language learning mandatory in Grades 4-9. Between the 2004-05 and 2007-08 school years there was a 42% increase in the number of core French students in Grade 4, which is the common starting grade for the program. During the same period the number of public schools in which core French is taught increased from 897 to 1,120.



IMPROVEMENTS AND BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO FSL PROGRAMS

continued

Barriers that remain

A significant amount of work remains to be done to support French immersion students experiencing difficulty in the province, despite recent improvements.

Gifted students often have to give up the goal of fluency in French in order to access gifted-and-talented programming or to take International Baccalaureate courses. Learning disabled students often find their immersion teachers have little experience working with such needs (this is especially the case at the secondary level, as in the past almost all such students left the program in the early grades).

There are a number of challenges to overcome on the road to equitable access for special needs students. For example, bilingual teaching assistants are very difficult to find. Too few psychologists, speech pathologists, reading clinicians, etc. are familiar with the research or fully understand the immersion approach to second-language learning within a majority community. And there are implications for the schools' provincial achievement test scores, which are published in the newspapers each year.

SASKATCHEWAN:

Improvement

The 2007-08 school year saw a substantial increase in the number of intensive and enriched French programs offered in Saskatchewan. Six schools offered intensive French programs (up from four schools in 2006-07) and eight schools offered enriched French programs (up from five schools in 2006-07). Student participation in intensive French increased from 98 students in 2006-07 to 141 students in 2007-08, and, in enriched French, increased from 177 students in 2006-07 to 221 students in 2007-08. The numbers reflect steady and positive growth in these alternative FSL entry point programs.

With the amalgamation of school boards from 86 to 28 in 2006, there was a huge question mark as to how this change would affect French immersion numbers. There were the dreaded school closures as well. The 65 immersion schools in the province fell to 61. Yet, surprisingly, enrolments went up 2.89%, from 8,858 students in 2006-07 to 9114 in 2007-08.

Barriers that remain

For a number of years, Saskatchewan has experienced a decline in student population and this trend is expected to continue. Within this decrease in overall numbers is an increase in the First Nations student population. The province's education system must ensure that the unique needs of First Nations learners are met, while also offering other quality and fully accessible second-language programs.

In addition, the number of immigrant and refugee families in Saskatchewan is growing steadily. The policy of the government

is to attract up to 5,000 immigrants annually. Many of these families have unique needs and require special attention in areas of language acquisition.

Furthermore, the education system is challenged with providing adequate learning opportunities for children dealing with diverse and profound social, economic, emotional and physical needs that are not being met elsewhere. There is no doubt that the education community faces daunting and pressing challenges in the years ahead.

MANITOBA:

Improvement

A positive change for Manitoba has been the development and incorporation of distance learning. This is a result of financial support provided by the *French Second Language Revitalization Program* (FSLRP).

This mode of learning and communication was introduced in response to students in more remote and rural areas of the province not having equitable access to FSL programming due to issues such as a lack of teachers willing to relocate to remote and rural areas, an inadequate number of courses available in French, and an insufficient number of students to justify offering a variety of courses in French.

The northern communities of Flin Flon, The Pas, Dauphin, and Swan River have all benefited from the implementation, maintenance, and expansion of a video-conferencing network. It provides access to a public data network that promotes conferencing between communities, enables schools to share French immersion and basic French courses, and provides teachers with access to in-servicing and students with access to cultural experiences. There are plans to further expand distance learning within Manitoba by including the community of Thompson.

Statistics demonstrate that as a result of distance learning, students in some communities are now able to take more options in French. For example, in The Pas in 2005, French immersion students had access to five courses in French at the high school level. In 2006-07, this increased to 7.5 credits. However, the number of credits decreased to seven in 2007-08, indicating certain "growing pains" and a need for further teacher training to better make use of the technology.

Barriers that remain

A barrier to equitable access in Manitoba is the shortage of qualified FSL teachers with appropriate pedagogical skills and French-language proficiency who are willing to relocate to remote and rural areas.

Because of their remoteness and the higher cost of living and travel, smaller and more remote communities have difficulty attracting and retaining teachers – regardless of linguistic compe-

tence. This applies to teachers of both basic (core) French and French. French immersion secondary schools are most affected by this issue as course selection depends on the availability of teachers with subject matter expertise. It is also a problem to find competent home room teachers whether it be in urban or rural/remote regions.

Both the FSLRP and the Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface have been proactively supporting teachers of French in the province. More information on supported projects is available at <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/languages/projects.html> or <http://www.ustboniface.mb.ca/>.

ONTARIO:

Improvement

This past year, Ontario experienced a shift toward a more inclusive consultation process at both the Ministry of Education and school board levels.

At the Ministry level, FSL stakeholders provided valuable information to help foster a stronger decision-making capability. In February 2008, the Minister of Education met with CPF-Ontario and committed to holding a Round Table Forum with FSL stakeholders in fall 2008. The Minister has spoken openly at school and school board functions about her commitment to FSL programs and has reorganized the FSL portfolio within the Ministry to allow for increased capacity.

Many school boards in Ontario are planning FSL reviews (e.g., Grand Erie District School Board, Thames Valley District School Board, Toronto District School Board). Seventeen school boards now have French Second Language Advisory Committees (FSLAC) (some under different names), all of which include members of the parent community, school board staff and trustees, and there is a growing trend to establish more.

This positive change is expected to foster more equitable access to FSL programs by providing a mechanism for FSL issues to be brought forward and reviewed thoroughly from many perspectives. The Toronto District School Board FSLAC, as an example, is proposing that the school board develop FSL policy that includes a commitment to having a range of programs open to all applicants; providing learning materials, special education, and literacy support; and ensuring that professional development for FSL teachers is equal to that of the regular program.

Barriers that remain

Students with special needs, learning challenges or lower academic ability are often discouraged from enrolling in French-second-language programs by teachers, administrators, and concerned parents. Some school board policies discourage students with learning difficulties from continuing in FSL programs, allowing students to opt out of French if personnel feel they are unable to meet the learning outcomes. Many parents are ad-

vised by school board personnel lacking knowledge or expertise in second-language learning that French immersion or core French is unsuitable for their child – sometimes even before the child is enrolled.

Support for struggling students in FSL programs is minimal in most communities, and is nowhere equal to the support – human and material – that students in the English program receive.

QUEBEC:

Improvement

The Minister of Education recently announced that 300 new resource staff are being hired across Quebec, some of whom will support FSL programs. This will give schools the support necessary to increase the amount of French being taught. French teachers will have access to better resources in their teaching, and the French-second-language consultants will be able to spend more time in schools supporting the teachers.

Barriers that remain

There are still some limitations in choice of FSL programs for some students. In the English Montreal School Board, about 20% of the students are in schools that offer only core French, and transportation is still an issue in rural Quebec where many areas offer little choice in programs.

NEW BRUNSWICK:

Improvement

The Minister of Education announced on March 14, 2008, that intensive French would be mandatory for all Grade 5 students.

Barriers

Middle immersion at Grade 3 will only be available in elementary schools where numbers warrant. This means that many students in small or rural schools will not have any access to French immersion programs in elementary school.

NOVA SCOTIA:

Improvement

The Halifax Regional School Board, in partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University, will train eight French resource teachers over the next two years. Teachers will have access to funds to upgrade their certifications.

Barriers that remain

Enrolment caps for French-second-language programs mean that students who wish to enter early immersion, late immersion, and extended core French programs continue to be turned away.

The Department of Education instituted enrolment caps of 25 in 2002 for grades Primary* - 2. This was extended to caps of 25 for grade 3 in 2006 and Grade 4 in 2007. The pre-primary pilot program was cancelled for the province and the Depart-

IMPROVEMENTS AND BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TO FSL PROGRAMS

continued

ment of Education has lowered the school age for entering Grade Primary. This has led to greater demand for early immersion places. Consequently, schools have held lotteries, placed more parents on waiting lists, and been unable to accommodate out-of-area parents. There is provision in the Department of Education's commitment to capping for funds available for a resource person if the class size is above the cap. However CPF-NS does not have any data available to find out if this funding is used.

Caps are also in place at the other FSL entry point – grade 7 – for extended core programs. The cap is higher, usually at 32 or 35, but there has been a lottery system to get in to the program.

For the late immersion program, there have been complaints that the Annapolis Valley Regional School Board has cancelled classes that had fewer than 25 students. A group of parents was told that the program would not go ahead with 23 students, as 25 students were needed for a LI class.

*In Nova Scotia "Grade Primary" is kindergarten.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND:

Improvement

Late French immersion is being introduced into a school that has not yet had this program in the area. It is also the first late immersion program for the school board.

Barriers that remain

French immersion programs need to have at least 25 students registered (and the same number of interested parents/students in prior school levels) before a FI program can be started. Since the rural areas have the highest need for FI programs and smallest enrolments, it is very difficult to introduce new FI programs into the school system.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR:

Improvement

Over the past several years, there has been an increase in the number of intensive core French programs as well as early and late French immersion programs. This has been instrumental in increasing the number of students enrolled in French programs, even while the total provincial enrolment continues to decrease.

This growth continues in the 2007-08 school year. Enrolment in French immersion programs (EFI and LFI) has increased dramatically over the last eight years, from approximately 4,800 students in 1999-2000 to 7,500 in 2007-08. Intensive core French has also grown from 1,018 students in 32 schools when it was introduced in 2003-04 to 1,310 students enrolled in 38 schools that deliver the program.

Barrier that remain

There is not a sufficient supply of qualified FSL teachers to support continued growth in FSL programs. As more French immersion and intensive French programs begin, staffing classrooms may become more difficult. The supply of qualified teachers needs to expand at a rate that will meet the needs of the expanding number of programs and enrolment. The Department of Education, school districts, Newfoundland and Labrador Teacher's Association, along with the Faculty of Education at Memorial University must remain vigilant regarding program growth and teacher retirement and continue to actively recruit students for the foreseeable future. These stakeholders should develop a program to attract more people to become French teachers and offer incentives such as grants and scholarships.