

Canadian Parents for French (Ontario)

Preliminary Review of Findings:

**Transportation of French Immersion and
Extended French Students in Ontario**

**Heather Stauble and Antoine Goulem, PhD
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Introduction

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is the national network of volunteers that values French as an integral part of Canada and is dedicated to the promotion and creation of French second language learning opportunities for young Canadians.

Canadian Parents for French (Ontario) is the provincial Branch of the national organization and has over 30 local Chapters throughout the province supporting the needs of children and parents who want their children to learn both of Canada's official languages.

We participate in a collaborative capacity with our partners and other stakeholders in French as a second language education and in a consultative capacity using evidence-based research and data acquisition.

Background

In 2001, CPF Ontario undertook a survey of all English school boards in Ontario to determine the level of transportation available to students enrolled in French Immersion and Extended French programs across Ontario.

At that time, it was clear that lower levels of service made access difficult if not impossible to attend some of these programs. One study showed a dramatic drop of 40% in enrolment over 6 years, when service was reduced. Subsequent data reported showed that improved transportation to the same program had a positive impact on enrolment. The CPF Ontario Study was presented to then Minister of Education, Dr. Rozanski, The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Canadian Heritage.

Shortly afterwards, *The Discussion Paper on Equity in Transportation* was released along with the SB 14 Memo and Attachment, which is attached, stating that data should be submitted on all students, including French Immersion students, from home to the school of attendance.

Methodology

This year, CPF Ontario undertook to update this information. We reviewed Ministry allocations, E & E reports, surveyed CPF Chapter Contacts, compared data obtained on enrolment with data collected by CPF Ontario from school boards across Ontario and the *CPF (Ontario) Study on Transportation to French Immersion and Extended French Programs in Ontario School Boards, 2001, The State of FSL Report 2006, Bus Them and They Will Come*, presentations made to Ontario School Boards and information received from parents of students in these programs. A summary of resources used is listed in Appendix A.

This report is a summary of our findings as they relate to French as second language education transportation in Ontario along with recommendations for the Ontario Minister of Education's consideration as a step in the on-going consultation process identified in the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Minority Language Education and Second Official Language Instruction (2005-06 to 2008-09). The findings are detailed in Appendix B.

FSL enrolment in Ontario

The Federal Action Plan set an objective of doubling the number of functionally bilingual high school graduates by 2013. Subsequently, the *Ontario Ministry of Education's Action Plan: Regular Programs and Additional Strategies (2005-06 to 2008-09)* to a provincial goal to increase student participation and retention in FSL programs. The Ministry also outlined the expected outcomes of improved access to all FSL programs and increased capacity of English-language school boards to deliver French Immersion programs.

Listed below are the latest student enrolment figures available from the Ministry which serve as an early indicator of progress made to date and identify current trends in enrolment in the French Second Language (FSL) programs presently offered in the province.

Student enrolment in FSL programs in Ontario
(Source: Ministry of Education Ontario)

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004 - 2005	2005-2006
CORE French	871,280	861,251	852,723	841,033
EXTENDED French	32,140	33,720	34,697	31,064
French IMMERSION (FI)	115,652	114,792	115,770	121,659
TOTAL FSL Enrolment	1,019,072	1,009,763	1,003,190	993,756
ELIGIBLE enrolment	2,072,589	2,039,586	2,034,065	2,028,469
FI as a % of Eligible Enrolment	5.6%	5.6%	5.7%	6.0%

Number of School Sites Offering French Immersion/Extended French in Ontario

(Source: CPF Ontario data collection)

	2005-2006	% increase	2006-2007	% increase	2007-2008
Elementary sites	631	1.6%	641	4.4%	669
Secondary sites	231	1.7%	235	1.3%	238
TOTAL number of sites	862	1.6%	876	3.5%	907

Overall French immersion or Extended French programs have been expanded to 45 additional sites since 2005-2006 representing an average rate of annual increase of 2.6%.

While the increase in the number of sites and the increase in enrolment in FI/EF are encouraging, we know that the demand for these programs and potential enrolment is much higher. According to the *Canadian Council on Learning 2007 Survey of Canadian Attitudes Toward Learning* 25% of parents surveyed said they did not enroll their children in French Immersion because they did not have access.

Access and Transportation

In Ontario, 62,000 out of 121,659 (51%) of French Immersion students are transported daily. This number does *not* include Secondary French Immersion students. In some boards, rural and northern, almost all FI students depend upon transportation to access French Immersion. The reality for most students in rural and northern Ontario is that without transportation, they would not be able to attend school. The situation is no different for French Immersion.

In our review of the boards, it was clear that some boards understand this clearly and provide this service. However, this is not the case in every board. Currently, school boards set their own transportation policies. There are no provincial guidelines with respect to who is eligible for transportation, walking distances, transfers, maximum ride times, or maximum length of time a child may be expected to ride a bus. The lack of Provincial transportation policy means that there is inequity from board to board and real obstacles to enrolment for many students who would otherwise be enrolled in these programs.

Good transportation contributes to strong enrolment; keeps class sizes healthy and means there are enough high school students in FI to ensure adequate course selection. Boards with poor transportation or a complete lack of it contribute to low enrolment at the Elementary and at the Secondary level in FI programs and Core French.

"Since they operate only in selected centres, French Immersion programs are wholly dependent on the ability of students to get to the sites. The argument for providing transportation to such programs in most school boards is based on program viability and program equity. Without transportation, programs are threatened or become the preserve of the privileged." Norbert Hartmann, Chairperson of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board Co-management Team, January 30, 2007 report

For the past few years funding has been based on the amount that they received in the previous year plus a % increase. An additional increase is allocated if there has been a rise in enrolment; however, in a time of declining enrollment this has not been significant.

The current provincial funding policy is that the transportation allocations to the school boards will not be reduced even if enrollment drops. As a result, in school boards where FI/Extended French students have not traditionally been bussed, there is little financial incentive to introduce transportation for FI/EF students because these additional enrolments will not make up the shortfall in general enrolment and therefore no additional transportation funding will be forthcoming. Therefore, students who would otherwise enroll in FI are not doing so.

Summary of Findings

Despite additional funding for transportation in recent years, service for all students has declined in many school boards in Ontario. Although many boards share common practices when it comes to their English program students such as walking distances and the length of bus rides, this is not the case for the French Immersion and Extended French students. However, it appears that there have been very few improvements when it comes to the level of service for the students despite the increase in funding from the Ministry.

In general, bus rides are longer. Pick up points are further away and earlier. JK students are expected to walk out to highways, stand in unsheltered areas and wait on dark, unlit highway shoulders for buses.

The situation for French Immersion and Extended French students is even more pronounced. In our survey, 13 out of 15 chapter contacts reported no change or a decline in the level of service. Policies differ widely from board to board and even within boards. Many do not include French Immersion students in their policies, while in others, urban and rural students do not have the same access to transportation. Some urban students are reliant on public transit at their own expense to access a program. Many rural students are dependent on a "Piggy Back" system which means that their spot is only available until an English program student is allotted that seat. "Collective pick-up points" is another system where parents/guardians drive to a central location to meet a bus.

Ride times differ significantly: 8 out of 15 chapters reported 2 - 3 hours a day on the bus, with three of those reporting 3 hours a day, while the remaining 7 chapters reported 15-30 minutes each way. In order to accommodate busing schedules, start times, lunch hours and dismissal times are all compromised and students often miss a portion of their instructional time. They often arrive two and half hours after waking; hungry, tired and unable to concentrate. This is disruptive to the classroom environment and causes learning and behavioral issues. For many parents of young children this length of bus ride is simply too long to expect of any child. With other children, work and daycare commitments, they either do not enroll or they find themselves having to drive.

Access to secondary programs is clearly a problem. All 15 chapters reported access, while not perfect, to elementary FI programs. Only 8 reported access to secondary programs. Some indicated that the access to secondary was dependent on whether or not the students lived on a public transit route.

It is worth noting that two boards that offered FI in 2001 now report that there is no program available.

Transportation systems differ widely from board to board. In the best cases, Board provided access is the same for FI/Ext as it is for English. The remainder falls under one of the following:

- "Piggy Back" Service was mentioned in a number of boards. This is a system where boards will let FI students ride the bus if there is space available. It is uncertain and unpredictable and space can be forfeited if another student from the English program is put on the route.
- "Collective pick up points" require parents to drive to a central location to meet a bus. Boards provided Public Transit tickets in many cases, but not always and not consistently across the board
- Shared busing is between boards.
- Surplus Busing is similar to Piggy Back Service.
- Surplus Funding means that there will be transportation if the board is in a surplus position with respect to transportation funding. This service could be withdrawn on short notice.
- Shuttles are often used. Regular routes bring students to their home school. They then take a shuttle from that school to the FI/Ext school. Multiple transfers from one bus to another within route present security risks. Most of these systems require timetabling adjustments to accommodate bus schedules.

In the best cases, boards allowed JK and SK students who would be attending FI in grade 1 to enroll and access transportation to the FI school so they would not have to change schools between SK and Gr 1. This is very reassuring for both students and parents. In other cases, students could be enrolled, but parents had to drive. In other cases, they had to enroll in their local school in English, and could then access transportation. In the best cases, (50%) boards now start FI in either JK or SK as a best practice model for FI which address the transportation and eliminates the need to change schools.

Loss of instructional time: Many of these longer routes are late, arriving after the bell. In the secondary panel, students are required to take a shuttle from one school to another in order to take French beyond grade 9. This requires travel time and results in lost instructional time.

Early pick up and late drop offs: Students get picked as early as 6:30 am and get dropped off as late as 5:30 pm.

Conclusion

There have been two boards that have shown improvements in transportation but in both cases, there are still challenges. Two boards have dropped their FI programs since 2001. Most boards (40) in Ontario recognize the need to provide equitable transportation to this program at the elementary level. The remaining boards either provide partial service or no transportation. Access is uneven and a significant problem at the secondary level. In order to be fully equitable, inclusive and accessible transportation to these programs must be reliable, stable and predictable. The level of service needs to be the same as the level offered to students in the English program. The absence of guidelines has resulted in very different policies across the province. As such we offer the following recommendations to the Ministry of Education with respect to the Transportation of FSL students.

Recommendations

That the Ministry of Education Ontario:

1. Collect current data on all students, including French Immersion, from home to the school of attendance.
2. Collect current data on the bus routes including: walking distances, pick-up and drop off times on all students, including French Immersion and determine the maximum, minimum and average bus ride times for all students.
3. Develop a province wide transportation policy that gives clear guidelines as to walking distances, pick up locations, time limit and distance that any student may be expected to ride a bus.
4. Clearly state that this policy be inclusive of all FSL programs: FI/Extended and Core French.
5. Design a funding formula for transportation that reflects the total enrolment of the board and the needs of the students to access the programs.
6. Provide sufficient funding to transport all students safely and efficiently.
7. Require accountability and transparency of transportation allocations.

Appendix A

Resources:

Plan 2013, Government of Canada, Ottawa, 2003

Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction 2005-2009 between the Government of Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, , May 17, 2005 Canadian Heritage, Minister of Public Works and Government Services of Canada 2005 ISBN 0-662-40750-2

Canada-Ontario Agreement on Minority Language Education and Second Official Language Instruction 2005-06 to 2008-09, March 22, 2006 Ministry of Education of Ontario and Canadian Heritage

Action Plan: Canada-Ontario Agreement on Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction, 2005-2006 to 2008-2009, March 2006 Ministry of Education and Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Canadian Heritage

Action Plan: Regular Programs and Additional Strategies, Canada-Ontario Agreement on Minority -Language Education and Second -Language Instruction, 2005-2006 to 2008-2009, March 2006 Elementary/Secondary French Second Language Instruction, Ontario Ministry of Education, Canadian Heritage

Ontario Schools Offering French Immersion and Extended French Programs, Canadian Parents for French (Ontario), Toronto, Canada 2006-2007

State of FSL Report 2006, Canadian Parents for French, Ottawa, 2007

Ministry of Education, Effectiveness and Efficiency Review, Phase 1, Transportation Consortium #12, Peel District School Board and Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, Deloitte, Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto, May 2007

Ministry of Education, Effectiveness and Efficiency Review, Phase 1 Review, Rainy River Transportation Services, Deloitte, Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto, April 2007

Ministry of Education, Effectiveness and Efficiency Review, Phase 1 Review, Students Transportation Services of Central Ontario, Deloitte, Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto, April, 2007

Ministry of Education, Effectiveness and Efficiency Review, Phase 1 Review, Wellington-Dufferin Student Transportation Services, Deloitte, Ontario Ministry of Education, Toronto, April, 2007

Equitable Allocation through a New Funding Model for Student Transportation in Ontario. Discussion Paper. Consultation refining the Model introduced in 2004-2005, Ministry of Education, Ontario

CPF Ontario Transportation Study 2001, Fran Sutton, Canadian Parents for French (Ontario), York Region Chapter, Toronto, 2001

Bus Them and They will Come, By CPF Trillium Lakelands South Chapter, 2000

FI Enrolment as it Relates to Transportation, H. Stauble, CPF Trillium Lakelands South, Lindsay, 2007

Presentation to the Hamilton-Wentworth DSB, Hamilton-Wentworth CPF Chapter, Hamilton, Ontario 2005

CPF Ontario Survey of CPF Chapters, Canadian Parents for French (Ontario), November 2007
List of boards starting FI in JK/SK, Canadian Parents for French (Ontario), Toronto, 2006

CPF Ontario records from Chapters, Canadian Parents for French Ontario, Toronto, 2000-2008

SB 14 attached

SB 14 - attachment attached

Ministry of Education BxB Enrolment data attached

Ministry of Education BxB Transportation Allocations attached

Ministry of Education BxB FSL Allocations - attached

Ministry of Education FSL Enrolment Data - attached

Ministry of Education BxB Transportation - attached

Appendix B

Summary of CPF Ontario Survey of Chapter Contacts, November 2001

15 chapters responded to a series of questions on the following:

Level of Service:

- 2 reported improvements
- 13 reported no change or a decline in the level of service

Ride Times:

- 3 boards reported ride time of 1 ½ hrs each way for a total of 3 hrs per day
- 5 reported bus ride times of about 1 hr each way for a total of 2 hrs/day
- 7 reported ride times of 15 - 30 minutes each way for a total of 30-60 minutes.

Policies:

- Only 2 chapters reported that boards had policies that stated that FI/Ext French students were eligible for bussing.

Issues:

- Safety: lack of supervision at central pick-up points
- Transfers
-

JK/SK students not yet enrolled in FI eligible to be bussed to FI school:

- 8 yes
- 6 no
- 1 n/a
-

Transportation available:

To FI elementary program:

- 15 yes

To secondary FI:

- yes 8, 1 bus passes - not fully available
- no 6

To Ext elementary

- Yes 6
- no 2

To Ext secondary

- Yes 2
- no 4

It is worth noting as well that in two cases boards that reported FI programs in 2001 no longer offer their FI programs.