

# The State of French-Second-Language Education 2012

## FACTSHEET FOR MEDIA

Canadian Parents for French hosted a Roundtable on Academically Challenged Students in French Second Language (FSL) Programs in June 2012 to initiate a dialogue amongst stakeholders, educators and policy-makers, to develop joint recommendations for more inclusionary practices, and to move the issue of equitable access for all students in Canada from discussion to action.

**The challenge is not usually for the children, but rather for the adults around them.**

Genesee 2012

Approximately forty representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, ministries of education, school districts, faculties of education and researchers, as well as national associations active in the field of FSL education, attended the Roundtable and developed comprehensive recommendations and indicators of success. Participants outlined the need for policies, inclusionary practices and appropriate specialist support to enable equitable access and to meet the needs of academically challenged students.

### THE CONTEXT

Every Canadian child should have the opportunity to become bilingual so he or she can participate fully in this country's economy, governance and society. However, the reluctance of school boards and school authorities to adapt to the needs of students with learning disabilities in immersion has created an unfortunate dynamic. These children are often systematically weeded from immersion and placed in the English stream. For those who remain, little support is available in school and at home, and parents are left to find remediation and support on their own. [Graham Fraser, Opening Remarks, CPF Roundtable June 2012]

### MYTHS

- Children should master their first language before learning a second, [Bourgoin 2012]
- That learning a second language will jeopardize a child's first language, [Bourgoin 2012]
- Learning more than one language would be overtaxing for a struggling learner. [Bourgoin 2012]
- If a child has trouble learning their native language, they will have trouble learning two languages simultaneously because the neuromachinery responsible for language learning will break down or have further trouble learning a second language. [Genesee 2012]
- A child will be illiterate if not removed from French immersion.
- There are no effective interventions or resources for struggling students in FSL programs.

### REALITIES

- second-language learning does not negatively affect the first language;
- students rapidly catch up once English is introduced and that many students surpass their peers by Grades 5 or 6;
- skills in French can and do transfer to English;
- struggling learners are at no greater disadvantage in second-language programs and have the ability to learn two languages despite their difficulties;
- struggling readers experience similar problems if enrolled in English-only programs;
- existing standardized tests can identify students at risk for reading difficulties much earlier than grade 2 or 3; and
- there is notable improvement of special need student performance in French Immersion post-intervention [Bourgoin 2012, Genesee 2012]

### KEY POINTS OF THE STATE OF FSL REPORT 2012

- Stop the systemic streaming of children with special or different learning needs.
- Ensure teachers, parents and administrators understand that academically challenged students can be as successful in FSL as they would be in the English stream.
- Academically challenged students can be successful if FSL Programs are sufficiently resourced including French-speaking staff that are trained in working with kids with learning challenges.
- That FSL programs are accessible to all students when programming and specialist services are provided for gifted, special needs and Allophone students.