

# Examination of the practices, policies, and systems in place in Canada to encourage French- Second-Language Learning by immigrants

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# EXAMINATION OF THE PRACTICES, POLICIES AND SYSTEMS IN PLACE IN CANADA TO ENCOURAGE FRENCH-SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING BY IMMIGRANTS

## IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND FSL EDUCATION – EQUITABLE ACCESS DENIED

Recent statistics indicate that one in five Canadians is an immigrant, and that immigration is and will continue to be the primary source of population growth in our country. Currently, 90 per cent of our immigration stream is comprised of those who speak neither English nor French at home.

Research shows that, despite immigrant parent support for linguistic duality and official language bilingualism and the impressive performance of their children in core and immersion programs, immigrant students are often overlooked in French-second-official language (FSL) promotional and advocacy initiatives. They are not encouraged, and are sometimes actively discouraged, from enrolling in FSL education despite the impressive performance of those who do. Most disturbingly, immigrant parents are often discouraged by educators themselves. Studies indicate that teachers and principals consistently counsel parents not to enroll their children in French immersion because it will interfere with their ability to learn English. They also tell parents bluntly that learning French will be tough for immigrant children.

An Ontario study found that educators felt it would be a burden for children in English-second-language (ESL) programs to learn French, despite fairly clear evidence that children whose mother tongue is neither English nor French can attain marks and proficiency levels that meet or exceed those of their Anglophone counterparts in both core French and in French immersion at the elementary and secondary level. These findings were consistent at the post-secondary level, even in instances where Anglophone students had had up to five years more French-language instruction than the immigrant students. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that immigrant children will acquire proficiency in English, provided they are in English-dominant communities.

A small study of immigrant parents and students showed that 80% of these parents received no information about French immersion options from the school system. Despite this, immigrant support for linguistic duality and FSL education remains high. Sixty per cent felt that learning both Canada’s official languages would benefit their children, and 40% had enrolled their children in French immersion despite discouragement from educators. This figure provides a striking contrast to national immersion enrolment, which hovers at about 8%, with provincial enrolment ranging from 6% to 26% outside Québec. Immigrant students, as well, demonstrated a strong commitment to mastering their second official language, with 50% of immigrant student respondents remaining in French beyond the compulsory period and completing the core French curriculum — an impressive rate compared with provincial completion rates ranging from 6% to 15%.

**Table 1: National Core French and French Immersion Enrolment Statistics 2010-2011**

Prov / Terr	% in FSL Programs	% in French Immersion	% in Core French	Total in FSL Programs	Total in French Immersion	Total in Core French	Total Eligible Students
AB	32	5.9	26.0	190,319	35,398	154,921	595,460
BC	41	8.3	32.7	235,588	47,624	187,964	574,645
MB	46.8	11.3	35.5	81,775	19,734	62,041	174,739
NB	64.7	23.4	41.3	48,249	17,454	30,795	74,579
NL	59.8	12.7	47.1	40,930	8,698	32,232	68,463
NS	52.5	12.1	40.4	64,893	14,948	49,945	123,497
NT	29.8	7.6	22.1	2,496	643	1,853	8,576
NU	2.2		2.2	183		183	8,435
ON	50.0	7.9	42.1	978,464	155,232	823,232	1,957,016
PE	56.9	21.3	35.6	11,583	4,333	7,250	20,342
QC	100.0	35.8	64.2	105,377	37,729	67,648	105,377

Prov / Terr	% in FSL Programs	% in French Immersion	% in Core French	Total in FSL Programs	Total in French Immersion	Total in Core French	Total Eligible Students
SK	39.5	6.5	32.9	62,417	10,306	52,111	158,172
YU	57.8	14.9	42.8	2,668	690	1,978	4,618
<b>National</b>	<b>48.7</b>	<b>14.0</b>	<b>35.8</b>	<b>1,824,942</b>	<b>352,789</b>	<b>1,472,153</b>	<b>3,873,919</b>

In Canada, the regulation and supervision of education resides with the provinces and territories, which carefully guard their constitutional jurisdiction over education. As it pertains to access to FSL education, however, they have not used their authority to create many formal policies. Such an absence of direction can give way to inconsistent and inequitable access to FSL education whereas formal policies may be the most effective starting point to achieving more equitable access. In fact some researchers suggest that the formal policy process is the most effective method by which to improve education.

Some Ministries of Education have developed informal policies, described as *de facto* policies or practices that have become legitimized over time. Unfortunately, the ‘spirit’ of an informal policy may be interpreted differently from one school to the next creating further inconsistencies. As demonstrated by Figure 1, there are very few specific, formal policies at the provincial/territorial level to encourage enrolment and ensure that immigrant students have equitable access to FSL programming. Although absence of formal policies pertaining to access to FSL education does not necessarily equate to absence of commitment or equitable practices, their lack does provide more opportunities for inconsistency. Conversely, an increase in formal policies that specifically address the above influential factors of equitable access to FSL programming could provide a foundation grounded in research, where applicable, on which administrators could base their decisions.

At the same time, there are ministry-level policies that bolster exclusionary attitudes. For instance, a B.C. Ministry of Education policy states that all students must take a second language as part of the curriculum between grades 5 and 8, except where those students are identified as having special needs or are ESL students. Districts interpret this policy in different ways. In Victoria, for example, the language coordinator indicates that nearly every student taking ESL is exempt from taking French and that they take ESL while other students take FSL.

**Figure 1 Provincial/Territorial Policies Affecting Immigrant Students**

	AB	BC	MB	NB	NL	NT	NS	NU	ON	PEI	SK	YT
Provincial/territorial policies to ensure that immigrant students are encouraged and permitted to enrol in core/basic, alternate core, and French immersion programs	N	N	N	P	N	N	N	N	P	N	N	N

N = No policy  
P = Partial policy

Linguistic duality as rooted in our two official languages is an essential element to our Canadian identity, and the continued exclusion of this demographic group through policies and educational programs will ultimately pose a fundamental challenge to the notion of linguistic duality and thus to our very understanding of what it means to be a Canadian. Canadian Parents for French and its members believe that FSL education is an opportunity for every child. It benefits our children, our communities and our country. As Canadians, we have an obligation to ensure that every segment of our population has an equal opportunity to learn and to be proficient in their second official language, to be part of a workplace where bilingualism is demanded, and to experience or gain entry to the richness of the francophile and francophone culture. No child should be disenfranchised by not having access to the FSL program of their choice.

Canadian Parents for French and the federal government are long-standing allies in this struggle. We have the same vision of Canada’s linguistic duality, and must work together to promote this vision and eliminate the many obstacles faced by immigrant youth. We can do this by working together to build a comprehensive promotional program that speaks directly to all Canadians, to our immigrant families, to the educational community and to provincial ministerial staff more broadly. We

can collaborate with you and with our many francophone and research partners to help identify the critical areas of research that need to be conducted to support that awareness raising and our outreach efforts.

**CPF and its members encourage the Government of Canada:**

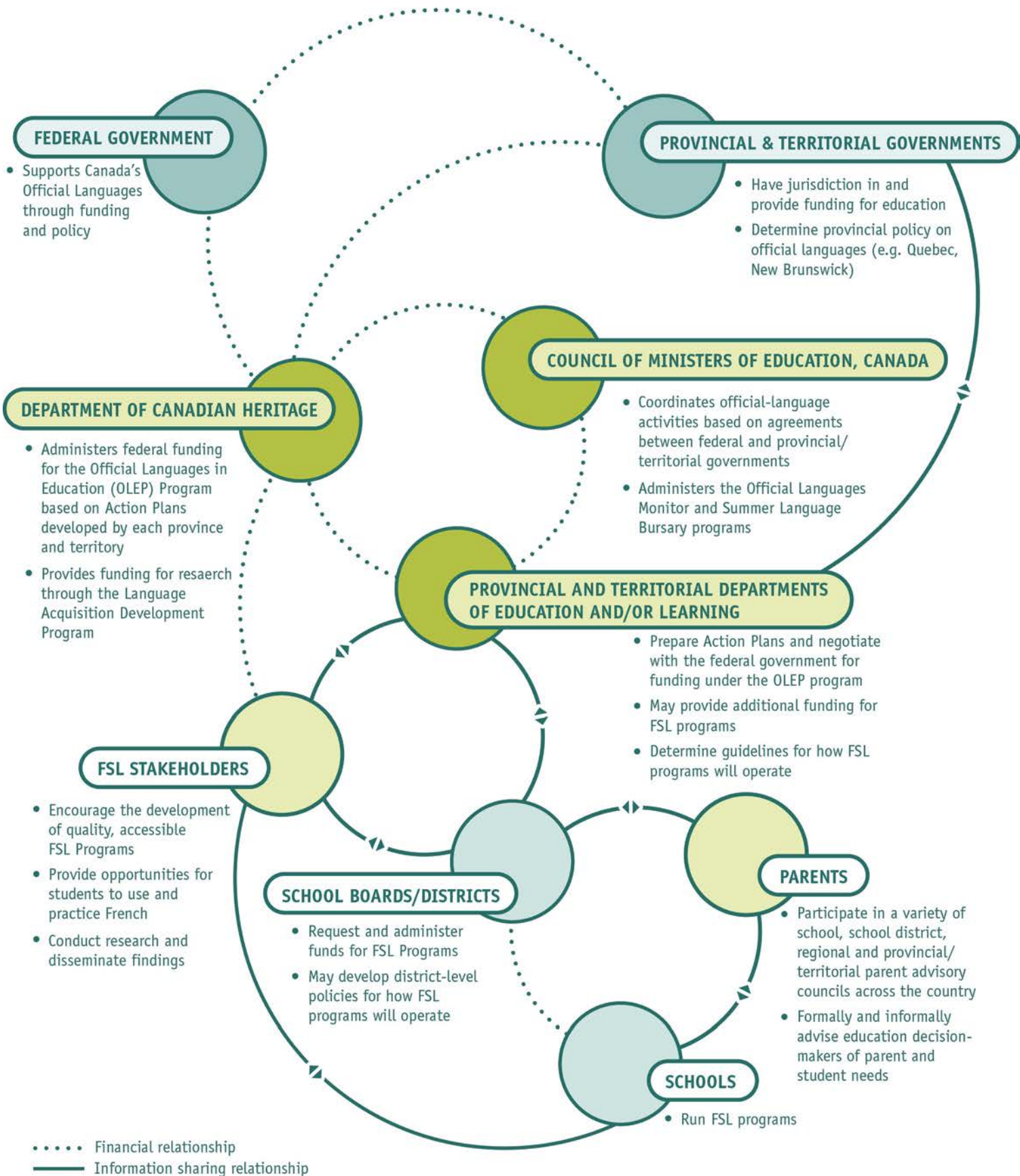
- a) To ensure that all immigration officers and immigrant settlement services provide every immigrant with information about school-based French-second-language education;
- b) To establishing policies ensuring equitable access to FSL education for immigrant students;
- c) To fund a major study comparing the English and French proficiency achievement of immigrant French immersion students with Canadian-born immersion students and with their immigrant peers in the regular English program; and
- d) To collaborate with FSL stakeholders in the development of a promotional campaign targeted to immigrant parents and students, to educators and to educational decision-makers.

### **CPF Position Statement on Equitable Access to French-Second-Language Programs**

The members of Canadian Parents for French believe that every child should have equitable access to the French-second-language program of their choice. French-second-language programs are accessible to all students when:

- There is open enrolment with no admission criteria or enrolment caps so that no child is turned away;
- Transportation is provided at no cost for both urban and rural students;
- Distance learning is available to provide French-second-language learning for students in small and remote communities;
- No additional fees are charged for French-second-language programs;
- Programming and specialist services are provided for gifted, special need and Allophone students;
- Every parent is regularly informed about French-second-language options and entry points, as well as the French-language proficiency levels which can be expected from each option;
- All students receive the information they need to make decisions about continuing to learn French at the secondary and post-secondary levels as well as outside of the education system.

# A CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR FRENCH SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAMS



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