

FSL POLICY AND CO-CONSULTATION

The Role of Parent Participation in Facilitating Change

By Maryanne Bright, CPF, Communications Officer

There are no greater advocates for change in the lives of youth than parents, and this rings especially true for the current state of French Second-Language (FSL) education in Canada. Time and again we're amazed at the commitment to advocacy and outreach of FSL training by parents of school children across the country. Parents continue to be a driving force in ensuring the implementation of FSL programming remains a top priority in school board jurisdictions nationwide.

Few parents may be aware of the important role they can play in the implementation of such policies. However, as demand grows for FSL education to be made available at all levels, Canadian parents are recognizing their own agency and how their collected efforts can make an impact. Co-consultation, or the act of "co-constructing policy," means that school jurisdictions and boards acknowledge the importance of community engagement in passing policy that is, in effect, for the community. This new way of collaborating towards a common goal means that parents work alongside staff and trustees to draft policy documents. They are given fair representation in pushing forward agendas that ensure

FSL is, and remains, a priority in Canada's education system.

The Toronto District School Board serves as the first and best example of how co-consultation can result in success for all parties involved. In June 2013 a precedent was set that saw participants drawn from the parent-run French as a Second Language Advisory Committee (FSLAC) together with staff and trustees draft, review and finalize TDSB's new French as a Second-Language policy. The draft went before a board of voting trustees and was passed unanimously. Yet, while some school boards like TDSB are looking to establish greater parent participation in policy-making decisions, fewer still are looking to bridge the gap. If TDSB's recent victory is any indication of change, however, the future of FSL and parent consultation looks bright.

It goes without saying that 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. The reluctance of school boards and school authorities to adapt to the increasing demand for FSL in schools across the country remains a detriment to this achievement.

While it may sometimes be difficult to realize where one fits into the discussion, it is important that as parents we recognize our role in advocating for the inclusion of French Immersion and other FSL programming in our children's curriculum. The prospect may seem overwhelming but by simply meeting teachers, principals and school district decision-makers we can assist in changing policies and practices which exclude or fail to provide appropriate academic support for immersion and core French students. We can help to change educators' beliefs about the importance of FSL programs by challenging myths with factual information and advocating for FSL in our community at home. ■



To learn more about TDSB's new French as a Second Language policy or to review the committee's (FSLAC) work please visit:

www.tdsb.on.ca/fslac