

POSITION #1 - Universal Access

In Canada, all students have the opportunity to learn French and to access the French as a second language program that meets their needs and aspirations.

Issue

Access for all

Currently, about 1,321,000 students are enrolled in core French programs in Canada outside of Quebec – about 37% of eligible students – while French immersion enrolments account for another 10%. French as a second language program entry points differ from one province to the next and even within each province / territory by school jurisdiction – For example, core French is compulsory from Grades 4 to 9 in Ontario and Nova Scotia, while Manitoba students must study French from Grades 4 to 6. Recent data show that students with special education needs and English Language Learners are frequently exempted from mandatory core French. Many secondary schools do not offer core French past the mandatory grades.

Access to French immersion programs is limited across the country in various, on-going ways including the practice of capping programs and use of lotteries, lack of expansion to underserved and often disadvantaged areas, explicitly excluding Allophones through English-only communication to parents, excluding students with special education needs at registration or through the process of ‘counselling out’, excluding students who need transportation to get to school and students who cannot access before and after school care that works in conjunction with the French immersion program schedules.

Call to Action

Ensure that all learners have access to quality French as a second language programs

- Open enrolment with no admission criteria or enrolment caps so that no child is turned away.
- Inclusive policies and practices where boys, Allophones and students with special education needs are welcomed and supported in the FSL program they choose.
- Students in small, rural, remote and specialized programs are able to access summer programs, online studies, experiential opportunities and distance learning programs offered outside of the school jurisdiction.
- Include access goals in Federal-Provincial/Territorial Official Languages Agreements and Action Plans.

Issue

French immersion growth is being contained, not promoted and encouraged

- Perhaps the biggest challenge to increasing the proportion of bilingual Canadians is the failure of many school jurisdictions to increase French immersion programming in anticipation of increased parental demand.
- Until immersion program supply catches up with demand, students will continue to be denied access to this effective program.

Call to Action

Support growth in enrolment in French immersion programs

- Remove enrolment caps and create additional French immersion programs and classes to meet the growing demand for French immersion programs.
- Increase the number of early immersion classes programs, the optimal program for developing language proficiency and inclusion of diverse learners.
- Maintain a range of entry points to facilitate student mobility and participation of more students.
- Offer on-line and experiential French immersion courses to increase access.
- Develop educational materials to enable parents and students to make informed French as a second official language education decisions and to address common misperceptions; such as, student/parental concerns that second language learning will have a negative impact on first language acquisition, that math results suffer in French immersion and studying senior courses in French will handicap students who pursue post-secondary studies in English.
- Provide students with the information they need to make decisions about continuing to learn French and in French at the secondary and post-secondary levels as well as outside of the education system.
- Conduct a public education campaign to encourage French second official language learning.

Issue

Students face barriers to participation resulting in programs that do not reflect the diversity of the community

- Widely-held myths persist about French immersion despite the fact that it is one of the most researched and evaluated educational programs in history. Common misunderstandings such that
 - it interferes with students' English-language development;
 - is suitable only for students with above-average academic and communication skills, often to the exclusion of boys;
 - school-based FSL programs cannot graduate bilingual students;
 - studying high school subjects in French precludes post-secondary success in the same subjects studied in English.
- Despite extensive research which demonstrates that students in French immersion with diverse learning needs achieve at the same rate as their peers with diverse learning needs in the regular program, many educators continue to assume that French immersion or FSL programs would over-burden these students and still disallow, discourage and counsel out such students.
- School jurisdictions often fail to offer appropriate special education services to French immersion students.
- Many educators are unaware that English Language Learners, many of whom have already mastered more than one language, are well motivated and highly skilled language learners who match and often surpass their Canadian-born core and immersion peers. This group of students is unnecessarily denied opportunities to make a real contribution to Canada's social, economic, cultural and political development.

- In some jurisdictions, French immersion enrolment entails additional fees and transportation costs; in others, no transportation is provided at all, thus limiting the ability of many parents to enroll their children in French immersion programs.
- In some jurisdictions, French immersion students are restricted from accessing before and after school care on the same basis as the regular English program students because they use board-provided transportation.

Call to Action

Promote the benefits of bilingualism and achieve equity and inclusion in all French as a second language programs

- Promote the academic, cognitive and employment benefits of second language learning and official language bilingualism for ALL students, including boys, Allophones and students with diverse learning needs.
- Provide parents and students with information about the proficiency expectations associated with all FSL programs using the Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR) as the reference.
- Demonstrate the value of completing secondary French as a second language programs by school jurisdictions providing French-language diplomas to students who complete core and immersion programs.
- Educate students, parents, educators, and decision makers that core and French immersion classrooms can and should reflect the diversity of our schools and communities.
- Provide FSL and French immersion students with the support needed to meet their needs.
- Provide transportation services to students attending their designated French immersion school at no cost; and the same level of service for before and after school care as that accorded students in the regular English program.

Definitions

Capping: The practice of limiting enrolment in a school program, may be achieved by adopting a first-come, first-served policy or by running lotteries to determine which students may enroll.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): This language proficiency framework provides a transparent, coherent and comprehensive basis for the development of language curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment materials. Language proficiency is defined by six global levels of performance.

Diverse Learner / Student with Diverse Learning Needs: Describes learners whose learning needs present challenges to their performance in school.

English Language Learner (ELL): Students in English-language schools whose first language is other than English. Includes newcomers from other countries, as well as children born in Canada and raised in families or communities where languages other than English are spoken.

Official Languages in Education Programs (OLEP): A federally funded set of programs administered by the federal government and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to assist provinces and territories in providing second-official-language education programs as well as official minority-language education.