

The State of French Second Language Education in Ontario

French Second Language (FSL) education in Ontario experienced new challenges during COVID-19 requiring continued support to grow FSL programs and strengthen student achievement. Parents continue to face enrolment barriers when trying to access French programs with the best possible proficiency outcomes for their children. Ontario ranks 6th in participation in French Immersion among the English provinces/territories (2020-2021*). School boards continue to use the per-pupil FSL allocation under the Languages Grant to pay for other priorities and are not required to report on FSL expenditures. A few school boards actively engage parents in setting FSL program priorities, policies, and procedures via standing FSL Advisory Committees, but most do not.

1,029,479 students were enrolled in Core, Extended, or French Immersion programs in publicly funded, English-language school boards in Ontario in 2021-2022, out of the total JK-12 English student population of 1,916,739.

318,858 students were doing more French than the Ministry of Education requires. These students are enrolled in French Immersion (all grades), Extended French (all grades), and Core French (grades 10 to 12).

Successes

Enrolment in the French Immersion (FI) program has enjoyed a 4.6 percent average annual growth rate over the past seventeen years.

Efforts to promote the cognitive, cultural, economic, and employment benefits of FSL education have contributed to the growth of FSL programs that deliver the best possible French proficiency. These FSL programs have higher intensity and an early start, i.e., 100 percent of the day in French in the early grades and start in kindergarten.

New in 2022-23 is the addition of a Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) in the non-profit sector. Secondary schools may offer a dedicated focus in a Non-profit SHSM program for FSL students interested in careers in education which includes 8-10 credit courses towards their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

In April 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools*, a document which presents the overarching principles of FSL education in the province and can best be summarized by its vision statement:

Students in English-language school boards have the confidence and ability to use French effectively in their daily lives.

In 2015, the Ministry released companion documents to the Framework, *Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs*, *A Parent Guide on Supporting your Child's Success in French Immersion and Extended French, Kindergarten to Grade 8*, and *Kindergarten in a French Immersion Setting*. In 2016, the Ministry released a second companion document to the Framework, *Welcoming English Language Learners into French as a Second Language Programs*. The



release of the Framework document was followed by a Ministry call to action for all 60 English school boards requiring the submission of three-year plans to support the identified provincial FSL goals. These plans are not available publicly through the Ministry of Education nor through the vast majority of school boards. Supporting resources for professional learning for teachers and administrators continue to be produced and posted on the website transformingfsl.ca.

Teachers began using the new FSL curriculum for elementary students in September 2014 and for secondary students in September 2015. These documents support the provincial FSL goals and include a greater emphasis on authentic communication, inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). FSL students, together with their teachers and parents, have access to thousands of electronic resources through IDÉLLO, part of Groupe Média TFO, our publicly-funded educational French broadcaster.

Official Languages in Education Program, Protocol for Agreements (OLEP) funding is being used to support professional learning for teachers and cultural enrichment for students aligned with the Framework, the curriculum, the CEFR, including providing the opportunity for a sample of Grade 12 students to participate in the Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF) annually. The DELF is an internationally recognized proficiency test that provides students with outside validation of and a credential for their French proficiency. It also provides a check on Ontario's success in meeting FSL Framework Goals and OLEP commitments. DELF examinations were suspended during the COVID-19 restrictions and some school boards began again in spring 2022. Information on the DELF for students and parents is available from the Ministry on destinationdelf.ca.

Recent and Ongoing Canadian Parents for French (CPF) Ontario Projects

CPF Ontario works in partnership with the Ministry of Education to create and deliver French Second Language learning initiatives in support of the FSL Framework goals and the FSL curriculum. These have included Frenchstreet.ca[®], Pathways to Bilingual Success Conferences, cultural performances and interactive workshops in French, the *Concours d'art oratoire* and most recently the CPF Virtual French Programs for FSL Learners.

CPF Ontario collaborates with school board staff to promote free enrolment in our virtual programs (*Vive la Parole!*, *Franco-Fun*, and *Reading Circle/Cercle de Lecture*) with a strategic effort to include students from identified marginalized schools and rural and remote school boards.

Our annual provincial French public-speaking contest, *Concours d'art oratoire*, is delivered in partnership with the Ontario Modern Language Teachers' Association (OMLTA) and York University's Glendon College. It is conducted as an in-class activity (grades 4-12) that can lead to a regional and school board competition with winners in Grades 9-12 participating at the provincial event held annually at York University, Glendon Campus, in Toronto.

CPF Ontario is helping to boost the supply of qualified FSL teachers through our SayOui.ca campaign through both traditional and youth-oriented advertising mediums. Careers as FSL educators are showcased at our Pathways to Bilingual Success Conferences and in classroom presentations.

Challenges

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on FSL Enrolment

Enrolment in French Immersion reached a peak in 2019-2020 just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021-2022, the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS*) reported a slower 1 % decline in enrolment in French Immersion (from 252,700 in 2019-2020 to 250,578 students in 2021-2022). The combined enrolment at the Early French Immersion entry points (JK-Grade 1), however, declined by 8.9% (from 58,959 in 2019-2020 to 53,705 students in 2021-2022) which will impact overall enrolment for many years to come. During the pandemic, parents/students who needed better support took a step back from French Immersion. Further investment and reassurance in communication with parents about French Immersion programs is needed to resume the longstanding pattern of year over year growth. During this period, enrolment in Core French increased by 1% (from 744,803 in 2019-2020 to 750,943 students in 2021-2022), helping to keep the total FSL enrolment on a positive trajectory.

Over the same two-year period, Extended French enrolment showed a 12.7% decline (32,021 in 2019-2020 to 27,958 students in 2021-22) in large part due to the TDSB phasing out their Extended programs which coincided with the pandemic.

Retention in FSL to Grade 12

In 2021-2022, 8,564 students were enrolled in Grade 12 French Immersion, representing 43.8% of the original Grade 1 cohort with a small influx of middle and late French Immersion students. Very few Core French students continue in Grades 10-12. Effective retention strategies are required to retain secondary students in all FSL programs. These could include supporting experiential learning, exchange opportunities, and finding new ways to expand the selection of credits.

Retention to Grade 12 by program:

- Core French: 7.9 percent
- Extended French: 44.9 percent
- French Immersion: 43.8 percent

(Retention percentages are based on Grade 12 students in 2021-2022 measured against the original cohort at the year of entry (FI Gr. 1; Ext Gr. 5; Core Gr. 4), without consideration for the migration of students from one jurisdiction to another or multiple entry points. A consistent methodology has been used to track annual comparisons.)

Barriers to Participation in FSL Programs

Despite the Framework and individual board policies that support equity and inclusion, we continue to hear from elementary parents who are being ‘counselled out’ of French either to access special education support or to be in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Reliable year-over-year school board data is not publicly available on this divergence of policy and practice. We are beginning to see some evidence of the impact of the Ministry’s new *Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs* in terms of program delivery and the refreshing of promotional materials prepared and distributed by school boards. We are also beginning to see ‘Right to Read’ findings applied to teaching reading in French in some school boards. However, continued effort and professional learning is needed to overcome long-held myths that limit FSL opportunities in school and beyond for students, particularly for those with special education needs and ESL students.

There has been a slight improvement in the number of school boards that impose barriers to access, such as lotteries and capping. Students are simply denied access, or families face impossible choices like French Immersion/Extended but without before and after school childcare or French Immersion

/Extended but without school board-provided transportation. The availability of transportation is dependent on individual board policies. Without access to childcare and free transportation, providing equal opportunity for student achievement through French Immersion or Extended French education is impossible.

Over the last few years, several Ontario school boards have conducted reviews of their FSL programs. The recommendations from these reviews often fail to meet parent expectations that French Immersion programs will expand to meet demand based on best practices identified for achieving the optimal outcome in French proficiency and their childcare and transportation needs.

French teacher supply, recruitment, and retention were identified as an emerging issue by the Ontario College of Teachers in 2015, following several years of oversupply. In particular, school boards report finding occasional teachers with FSL qualifications is difficult. The change to a two-year Bachelor of Education program, the impact of Regulation 274, the disconnect between school board needs and the number of FSL graduates from Faculties of Education, and the lack of effort to attract French-speaking teachers from other parts of Canada and the world to make up the supply gap are contributing factors. The problem has been examined by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) as a provincially funded Labour Market study, and Canadian Heritage is providing funding across Canada to support graduating more FSL qualified teachers. However, this shared responsibility continues to require leadership from the Ministries of Education and Francophone Affairs in collaboration with all stakeholders including the Ministries of Colleges and Universities and Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade (Ontario).

Achieving the Best Possible Proficiency Outcomes

The continued dependence on the base definition of French Immersion (FI) as a minimum of 50 percent of instructional time in French, which was set in the 1970s against the advice of the first expert panel, poses a challenge to student achievement in French, and to meeting our provincial and federal goals to increase proficiency outcomes and retention to Grade 12. Most jurisdictions across Canada and a majority of Ontario school boards offer much more than 50 percent French in a front-end loaded early Immersion program, an evidence-based optimal approach to French Immersion. However, decisions on French instructional time and starting grades are made by school boards, many of whom only provide the minimum required.

Moving from a 50 percent French Immersion program in one school board to a 100 percent FI program in another board is not necessarily allowed by the receiving board, which impacts retention. Parents complain that calling very different FSL programs by the same name is misleading and that the difference in instructional time in French means that achieving the best possible proficiency outcomes is dependent on local school board decisions on program design rather than a uniformly high standard for Ontario schools.

Canadian Parents for French has compiled existing research to assist in identifying best practices in the delivery of FSL programs with a view toward inclusivity and the best possible proficiency outcomes for all students. Materials are available upon request.

Funding and Accountability

In addition to the Pupil Foundation Grant (basic per-pupil funding), the Ministry of Education provides the French as a Second Language Allocation to school boards for additional costs related to the delivery of Core, Extended, and French Immersion programs. In 2023-24, this allocation is projected to be \$301.2 million with an estimated 97% from the *FSL Per-Pupil Component* and with an estimated 3% from the *Areas of Intervention Component*.

The *FSL Per-Pupil Component* was established in the 1970s and is essential to providing an incentive for school boards to provide additional instruction in French for more students. The *FSL Per-Pupil Component* flows into general school board revenues. There is no requirement that the funds be spent on FSL, and there is no requirement for reporting on the expenditure of the *FSL Per-Pupil Component*.

The *Areas of Intervention Component* supports FSL initiatives and activities undertaken within the following areas of intervention: learner participation, provision of programs, academic achievement of learners, enriched learning environments, support for educational staff and research. The *Areas of Intervention Component* is aligned by the Canada-Ontario Agreement for Minority Language Education and Second Official Language Instruction. This funding is enveloped, in that it can only be spent for its intended purpose based on the parameters set out by the Field Services Branch of the Ministry of Education each school year.

Facts and Figures -

Current State of French Second Language Education in Ontario English School Boards

Enrolment in French Second Language Programs

[Program/Grade - Enrolment Percentage per Program Pie Chart 2021-2022 and 2005-2006](#)

[Program/Grade - Provincial Enrolment by Grade and FSL Program Type 2021-2022](#)

[Immersion Across Canada - French Immersion Enrolment by Grade and Province/Territory 2020-2021](#)

NB: Ontario ranks 6th out of the 10 English provinces/territories that report participation in French Immersion.

Enrolment in French Second Language Programs by School Board

[School Boards - Elementary Enrolment in FSL programs by Board and Program Type 2021-2022](#)

- 54 of 60 boards offer French Immersion and/or Extended French;
- 36 of 60 boards start French Immersion in Junior or Senior Kindergarten.

[School Boards - Secondary Enrolment in FSL programs by Board and Program Type 2021-2022](#)

- 53 of 58 boards offer at least one secondary school with additional subjects taught in French.

[School Board French Immersion Enrolment by Grade, by Board 2021-2022](#)

Hours of Instruction in French

[Hours of French Instruction K-8 and Credits at Secondary Level 2023-2024](#)

[Early FI Percentage of French Daily by Board and JK-12 Total FI Enrolment by Board 2018-2019](#)

Funding:

[Language Grant - FSL Per-Pupil Allocation of Grants for Student Needs 2023-2024](#)

[Language Grant - FSL Allocation to School Boards 2022-2023](#)



[Per Student - Hours of French Instruction and Funding Graphs for Elementary Schools 2023-2024](#)

[Eligible Activities/Expenses 2023-24 - French as a Second Language Allocation](#)

[FSL Initiatives: Appendix 1 - Eligible Activities/Expenditures 2021-2022](#)

[FSL Initiatives: Appendix 2 – FSL \(OLE\) Projected School Board Funding Allocation 2021-2022](#)

[FSL Initiatives: Appendix 3 – Template for 3-Year FSL Plan \(2021-2022 to 2023-2024\)](#)

Ontario Ministry of Education

[FSL Programs in Ontario](#)

[Public Schools Offering FSL Programs](#)

[Transforming FSL](#)

Common European Framework of Reference

[CEFR](#)

[CEFR Self-Assessment Grid](#)

[Diplôme d'études en langue française \(DELF\)](#)

ONTARIO EDUCATION GOAL

To better prepare students with the skills, knowledge, and confidence they need to succeed in the future, whatever path they choose.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/preparing-students-future> (Retrieved September 2, 2021)

FSL FRAMEWORK GOALS

1. Increase student confidence, proficiency, and achievement in FSL.
2. Increase the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation.
3. Increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION PROTOCOL GOALS (2019-2023)

To help provide English majority learners with the opportunity to learn French as a Second Language and in so doing benefit from cultural enrichment.

Areas of intervention:

- **Learner Participation:** recruitment and retention of learners in second-language instruction programs and promotion of these programs
- **Provision of Programs:** access, maintenance, development, and/or enrichment of a variety of programs, approaches, and pedagogical resources for second-language learning and instruction
- **Academic Achievement of Learners:** demonstration of a positive impact on second-language competencies of learners
- **Enriched Learning Environments:** cultural enrichment of second-language learning programs
- **Support for Educational Staff:** development, provision and assessment of training (initial and continuous), and professional development programs for staff working in second-language



instruction; recruitment and retention of qualified or specialized staff

- **Research:** research related to second-language learning and instruction, and dissemination of knowledge in Canada

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* Source for all Ontario Statistics: Enrolment figures as reported by schools in the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS), Ministry of Education. Enrolment figures from other provinces/territories are reported by their Ministries or Statistics Canada.

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