
## DURHAM DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD FRENCH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE REVIEW

## Objectives of the Review

Beginning in February 2020, the Durham District School Board (DDSB) undertook a review to gather, analyze and triangulate data from multiple sources in order to prepare a comprehensive report on French language programs within its jurisdiction.

The resulting report examines the following topics:

- Provincial trends and experiences
- Lived experiences of students, parents/guardians' interactions with FSL programs (Core and FI)
- Program viability
- Resource implications (staffing, facility and finance)
- Access to the Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF) exam
- Patterns and trends in enrolment, retention, attrition, student demographics
- Equity of programming

To capture representative feedback on DDSB French programming, multiple stakeholders have been given multiple opportunities to comment on DDSB programs. Sessions were geographically located for ease and equity of access and included

- Face-to-Face Forums with:
  - Parents/guardians
  - Community members
  - Staff
  - Students
- On-line surveys
- Crowdsourcing software for idea generation
- Dedicated phone line and email address to gather further input from the community

## Rationale for this review

Currently the DDSB offers French as a Second Language (FSL) programming to approximately 37,734 students. Students enroll in Core French or French Immersion (FI). (These programs are described in more detail below.) The two are not mutually exclusive; indeed, there is overlap between them in family membership and community engagement, and in dual track schools, they may share space such as the gym or a computer lab.

Implications resulting from rising enrolment in the FI program prompted DDSB to review FSL programming as a whole. The data obtained from this review will inform planning and decision-

making for the board and will provide community members with a big-picture context in which these decisions must be made.

The overarching question to be informed by the review is this: How should DDSB best move forward to meet the Ontario Ministry of Education goals of FSL programming while ensuring high quality inclusive education for all students?

This review is being released simultaneously to consultations in the interest of transparency. By providing the information we have examined thus far it provide the opportunity for feedback on other research sources that may be helpful in our deliberations, while also give equity of access to the research we have currently consulted.

## Literature review

This section presents an overview of trends and issues related to Canadian FSL programs, with emphasis on the Ontario context, and the place of DDSB within this landscape.

## English-French bilingualism in Canada

While local and national identities remain influential features of the 21st century, rapid technological developments have encouraged the emergence of global awareness and citizenship. Contemporary issues such as climate change, economic co-dependency, pandemics, and mass migration of people show us that the future of our students may be an uncertain one, but definitely it will be a global one. The ability to communicate in a global context is a significant advantage to individuals and to the societies in which they live.

Approximately 270 million people on Earth speak the French language. As one of the official languages of the United Nations, it is recognized as a language of international relations. English and French are Canada's two official languages. English-French bilingualism in Canada has grown steadily since the first Official Languages Act of 1969, reaching the highest peak so far (17.9%) in 2016. In 2016, 11.2% of Ontario's population was bilingual (Statistics Canada, https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/as-sa/98-200-x/2016009/98-200-x2016009-eng.cfm ).

## Benefits of second language learning

For the individual, the benefits of learning a second language have been well documented (See Cummins, 2007; Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009; Lazaruk, 2007; Netten & Germain, 2005; Leung, 2020; O'Brien, 2017). Ontario's Ministry of Education (2013a, 2013b, 2018) lists the following advantages:

- enhanced cognitive and academic performance, notably problem-solving, creativity and reasoning
- enhanced first language and literacy skills which support the acquisition of additional language proficiency
- enhanced interpersonal and social skills through an increase in confidence and self-esteem
- increased open-mindedness and an enhanced ability to appreciate diverse perspectives
- increased awareness of diverse cultures and global issues
- enhanced career opportunities in an increasingly global economy.

In surveys conducted by various school boards (e.g., Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), 2015), parents indicated that they chose FSL programs, particularly FI for these reasons.

Other provinces share Ontario's perspective. Here for example, is this statement from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2015):

> The aim of the Core French program is not to produce bilingual students. It does, however, provide a solid introduction and base upon which students can build second language skills. The program also provides many of the cognitive and other benefits that result from second language learning (p. 7).

Bilingual students enjoy enriching opportunities to participate in cultural events and exchange programs, and language studies in post-secondary education.
A society benefits from citizens who are interculturally competent and are able to participate effectively in an international context. Given Canada's multicultural character, bilingualism can strengthen national identity and cohesion.

Despite the acknowledged benefits of bilingualism, and particularly of English-French bilingualism in Canada, there is a disconnect between the professed ideal and the lived reality. Canada is officially bilingual, yet French is essentially absent in many parts of the country. This was expressed in a study with Core French students in British Columbia who recognized the advantages of speaking French for work and travel opportunities but did not find it useful in BC because they did not see, hear or experience life in French. Additionally, they were unaware of opportunities in government, service industries or education where French would be relevant (Desgroseilliers, 2017). The advocacy organization, Canadian Parents for French (CPF) has repeatedly called for increased support for the integration of French in Canadian society.

## French as a Second Language (FSL) Education in Canada

In 1970, the Official Languages Act included funding for mandatory second language instruction in provinces and territories. Initially, most programs were offered as 40-50-minute blocks in secondary schools, but today instruction is usually a 30-40-minute period two to five times weekly in elementary grades. St. Lambert, Quebec, was the first to experiment with a FI program in 1965. The immersion model grew in popularity and is now in place in all provinces and territories except Nunavut.

FSL programs are intended for the development of French language proficiency among non-francophones, the majority of whom are native English speakers. Generally, FSL education is a success story but with some caveats. In 2016-2017, 46% of Canadian students were enrolled in an FSL program, 11.3% in FI and 34.3% in Core French. Quebec is not included in these data.

Canadian jurisdictions offering FSL programs face common challenges:

- overwhelming French Immersion enrolment
- a lack of qualified FSL teachers in all programs
- inconsistent standards of language proficiency of students and teachers
- a scarcity of teaching tools and resources designed for diverse FSL learners

(Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals (CAIP), 2018; Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA), 2018, 2019). These issues are discussed more fully in this report.

## Models of FSL programs

This section outlines the models of FSL in Canada. Although these descriptions below refer to Ontario, the models are replicated in similar fashion across the nation. Ontario students commonly choose among three options: Core French, Extended French and FI. Not all boards offer all three options. For example, the DDSB does not offer Extended French. It is important to note that even in the FI program, English language curriculum policy documents determine the curriculum for any subject other than FSL, even though instruction is in French.

**a) Core French**

Core French enrolment is compulsory in elementary grades and is usually offered in Grades 4-8. Ontario students in Core French must have accumulated a minimum of 600 hours of French instruction by the end of Grade 8. One French credit for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) is mandatory. Students usually satisfy that requirement in Grade 9. Students can take French as a subject from Grades 9 - 12. Elementary school Core French enrolment remains steady but drops significantly between Grades 9 and 10.

| Core French Enrolment 2016-2017 | Canada | Ontario | Durham DSB |
|---|---|---|---|
| JK & SK | 8,456 | 6141 | NA |
| Grade 1 | 35,954 | 27,436 | NA |
| Grade 2 | 39,197 | 28,749 | NA |
| Grade 3 | 44,151 | 30,395 | NA |
| Grade 4 | 176,648 | 109,830 | 4297 |
| Grade 5 | 200,561 | 108.699 | 4531 |
| Grade 6 | 199,446 | 109,683 | 4404 |
| Grade 7 | 187,955 | 111,452 | 4534 |
| Grade 8 | 192,529 | 112, 861 | 4636 |
| Grade 9 | 111,875 | 68,369 | 1625 (Applied)<br>2608 (Academic) |
| Grade 10 | 43,652 | 21,247 | 1035 (Academic) |
| Grade 11 | 28,874 | 13,640 | 561 (University) |
| Grade 12 | 15,731 | 8,406 | 373 (University) |

Table 1 Enrolment in Core French 2016-2017 (Canadian Parents for French, 2018a, p. 4)

Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) (Upper Grand District School Board, 2017b) found that only one in four students continued in Core French beyond Grade 9. Female students and students in the Academic course-type were far more likely to remain in French courses until graduation (p.19-22). Student survey responses provided reasons for dropping French, the top ones being lack of interest, lower grades because French was too difficult, and timetable conflicts with other priority courses. The UGDSB recommended the strategies suggested in *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a) to increase student engagement (UGDSB 2017, p. 25-26). These include taking advantage of student interest in technology, connecting face to face and virtually with francophone communities, and participating in cultural and cross-disciplinary events in French (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 18-19). Student surveys conducted by the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB, 2015) expressed similar data.

**b) Extended French**

Ontario students in an Extended French program learn French as a subject and French serves as the language of instruction in at least one other subject. Entry into Extended French programs varies but is usually at the upper elementary school grades.

c) **French Immersion**

FI is more intense. In FI, students learn French as a subject and French serves as the language of instruction in two or more other subjects. Among elementary schools, French immersion programs vary by entry point and intensity. Early entry points could be JK, Grade 1 or Grade 2. Some schools offer later immersion starting around Grade 4 or 5. The proportion of English to French as the language of instruction varies by grade. In Ontario, FI students have accumulated a minimum of 3800 hours of French instruction by the end of Grade 8.

At the secondary level, French is the language of instruction in some courses. FI students will acquire 10 credits through instruction in French: four are for FSL (language) courses, six are for other subjects. The school grants a certificate in French Immersion to students who complete the program at graduation.

Entry into FI programs has been rising steadily over the decades in Canada and in Ontario, as Table 2 indicates. DDSB data is consistent with the provincial and national trends.

| | **Canada** | | **Ontario** | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Enrolment** | % in FI | % in Core | % in FI | % in Core |
| 2012-2013 | 9.9 | 37.2 | 9.1 | 41.3 |
| 2016-2017 | 11.3 | 34.3 | 12 | 39.8 |

Table 2 FI enrolment in Canada and Ontario (CPF, 2018a, p. 1)

Why is FI increasing so dramatically? The benefits of bilingualism have been outlined above and student proficiency levels are high in FI as evidenced in student success at the B1 and B2 levels of the DELF exam (Carr, 2019). Graduates of FI programs are now parents seeking advantages for their own children (CPF Ontario, 2019). Sometimes the advantages parents seek are not just second language skills but the byproducts of a parallel school-within-a school that has been described as a “private school within a public system” (Lewis, 2016). Hutchins, writing in *Maclean’s* (2015) described three-day lineups for FI registration and parents using FI to escape less desirable schools, all driven by the perception (and to some extent, the reality) that FI is a

gateway to a more upscale education. Many school boards struggle to implement fair, transparent, and acceptable ways to deal with wait lists for FI programs. The implications of rising FI enrolment are described in later sections of this report.

However, the initial enrolment uptake of FI is not maintained as grades progress. FI programs tend to have a single entry point. Although spaces open up in later grades, there are pre-requisites in terms of language knowledge and skill, making it unlikely that a Core French student would move successfully into a FI program. The greatest drop off occurs in the transition to high school between Grades 8 and 9.

| FI Enrolment 2016-2017 | Canada | Ontario | Durham DSB |
|---|---|---|---|
| JK & SK | 48,858 | 32, 428 | NA |
| Grade 1 | 43,138 | 26,234 | 1068 |
| Grade 2 | 42,283 | 24,080 | 1041 |
| Grade 3 | 38,680 | 21,560 | 987 |
| Grade 4 | 37,799 | 22,289 | 954 |
| Grade 5 | 35,742 | 20,654 | 869 |
| Grade 6 | 33,883 | 18,666 | 843 |
| Grade 7 | 33,951 | 17,308 | 804 |
| Grade 8 | 30,863 | 15,566 | 733 |
| Grade 9 | 23,050 | 9,650 | 477 |
| Grade 10 | 19,932 | 8,673 | 426 |
| Grade 11 | 16,506 | 6,563 | 383 |
| Grade 12 | 13,337 | 5,391 | 324 |

Table 3 Enrolment in French Immersion 2016-2017 by grade (CPF, 2018a, p. 4)

The TVDSB (2015) data showed that there was a slight fluctuation in FI enrolment from SK to Grade 4. From Grades 5 to 8, enrolment remained steady, even slightly increasing with the influx of Extended Immersion students in Grade 7. (The Extended Immersion has since been dropped at TVDSB.) However, roughly 32% of enrolled students dropped FI after Grade 8. Those who remained in the program in Grade 9 tended to stay with it to the end of Grade 12 (TVDSB, 2015, p. 24).

The pattern was similar in the UGDSB (2009). Of the 372 FI students who started in JK, 191 remained by Grade 8 (UGDSB, 2009, p. 2). The DDSB data also shows this pattern.

Why do students withdraw from FI? For its review, the TVDSB (2015, p. 30-37) conducted an extensive survey of students, parents and staff. The list of reasons below is a composite of

findings from the TVDSB as well as from research conducted by the Peel District School Board (PDSB) (Bennett & Brown, 2017, p. 24-25) and the UGDSB (2017a, b):

- Academic challenges in the program
  - difficulties learning French and/or English
  - heavier workload
  - a need to improve English language skills
  - a desire to improve grades (English program is considered less challenging)
  - a need for additional support (additional tutoring more expensive, parents/guardians do not speak French)
  - special education and English Language Learner (ELL) supports are not as easily available
  - feeling additional pressure to succeed
  - teacher suggested it

- Characteristics of the program
  - disappointed with the quality of instruction (not engaging pedagogy, lack of differentiated instruction)
  - outdated materials/lack of resources
  - too much homework

- Reasons behind parents'/guardians' decision to withdraw
  - support learning, development, social, and emotional needs
  - opinion about the French Immersion program has changed
  - transportation issues (transportation not provided, unsafe public transit, lack of public transit, long "commute" for children, inconsistent schedules)
  - child struggling socially
  - siblings/ friends at different schools
  - childcare issues

- Reasons behind students' decision to withdraw
  - no longer interested in the French Immersion program
  - want to be with siblings, friends

- Pursuing other programs
  - chose to attend regional or gifted programs

- Relocation
  - moving outside the district/board
  - FI not offered at home (middle) school
  - complicated transportation issues

- Teachers
  - teachers' lack of French language skills - inability to speak French well
  - high teacher turnover
  - English speakers used as supply teachers, EAs and RCEs

- Class Composition
  - Potential for limited social opportunities given their classmates are consistent year-after-year

**d) Extended French**

Extended French programs are less common. They are usually offered in secondary school. To enrol in an Extended French program in Ontario, a student must have accumulated 1260 hours of French instruction by the end of Grade 8. A student in an Extended French program accumulates seven high school credits in courses in which the language of instruction is French. Four of these credits are for FSL (language) courses and three are for other subjects. The school grants a certificate in Extended French when these requirements are met.

## Alternative models of FSL

Lewis (2016) has wrote that "In the global village of today, and in the bilingual, plurilingual, pluricultural, forward-thinking country of Canada, it is the role of the Canadian school system to seek out more pathways to develop students' competencies in multiple languages." She argued that Canadian school boards should offer a wider range of models such as those described below.

**a) Intensive French and Intensive French with Intensive or Immersion follow-up**

Lewis (2016) described Intensive French as a mini-immersion for half a year, an enrichment of the Core French program. Students remain in their neighborhood schools – an obvious advantage. They spend three to four times the number of hours regularly scheduled for FSL in a concentrated period of time (five months) at the end of the elementary school cycle (in Grade 5 or 6). Other subjects are compressed to accommodate this in the rest of the year.

Lewis claimed that students who begin with Intensive French in Grades 5 or 6 and follow through in Post-Intensive French until at least Grade 10 arrive at an intermediate level of competence. As a variation, students have the option to move from Intensive French into Late Immersion in Grade 6 or 7.

**b) Late late Intensive French**

Intensive FSL is offered in concentrated blocks such as an entire immersion semester in Grade 9 or 10.

## Distribution of Models

In preparing its *Report of the Secondary FSL Review Committee*, the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB, 2017b) surveyed 32 Ontario school boards, 23 of which responded. The responses indicated the following:

- 78% of school boards offered French Immersion as the most common optional program. Extended French was offered in 66% of school boards and 50% of all boards contacted offered both FI and Extended French. Three school boards (9%) did not offer either French immersion or Extended French.
- Course offerings varied from site to site based on staff availability and qualifications. The most consistently offered optional courses in both the FI and EF programs are Geographie & Histoire in Grade 9 and 10 (82%) and Civics/Careers (63%) in Grade 10.
- Boards consistently expressed the efforts underway to shift the culture away from exemption for Grade 9 French and toward supporting special needs and English language learners to attract and retain students in FSL programs.

(UGDSB, 2017b, p. 4)

Currently, the DDSB offers Core and Immersion FSL programs.

The distribution of Canadian students in FSL programs is of some concern. The Lang Committee Report (2013) lauded the success of FI programs but regretted the decline of Core French.

> The number of youth enrolled in a regular French as a second language program fell from 1.8 million to 1.36 million, a 24% decrease. In short, despite the rise in immersion program enrolment, the proportion of youth outside Quebec who have received French as a second language instruction in the last 20 years has fallen from 53.3% to 43.9%. (Section 2.2.2)

The Lang Committee put forward several recommendations in hopes of bolstering enrolment and retention in Core French. These recommendations mirror those in the Ministry of Ontario's *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a)*, document.

## Models: Single and dual track

Single-track elementary schools offer instruction in one language - either English or French. Dual-track elementary schools offer instruction in English and French in various configurations. Despite its goal of a 60/40 balance, FI was growing in many dual track schools in the PDSB. The board established threshold criteria where consideration of converting a school to single-track would be necessary: when the English track would require triple-grade classes and/or when the English program dropped below 40% of the school enrolment. Community response and availability of space would then be taken into account (Brown & Bennett, 2017).

The tables below outline the advantages and disadvantages of single- and dual- track models. The tables draw upon the research conducted by the PDSB (PDSB, 2012, p. 9-11; Brown & Bennett, 2017, p. 17-20), the Ottawa-Carlton District School Board (OCDSB), 2019), the UGDSB, 2009, Appendix C) and School District 68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith in British Columbia (Ladyman Consulting, 2011).

| Topic | Single track advantages | Dual track advantages |
|---|---|---|
| Culture | • more opportunities for French language/culture to be displayed around the school (e.g., posters, displays)<br>• more likely for extra-curricular activities, assemblies, etc. to be in French | • more exposure to Canada's two official languages<br>• foster a greater understanding of Canadian identity and multiculturalism (are examples of a bilingual Canada) |
| Language | • immersed in one language – full immersion<br>• more informal opportunities to use French (e.g., playground, hallways)<br>• elective courses taught in French | • exposing students at an early age to both languages can enable them to recognize similarities between words and increase competencies in both languages |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • non-immersion students have more opportunities to be exposed to French |
| Community | • one school fosters its own community environment | • Students attend the neighborhood school<br>• smaller community schools stay open due to higher enrollment at the school because of the FI program |
| Classes | • fewer combined grades | • FI and non-immersion students may take some courses/subjects together |
| Resources | • resources and funds for only one program at the school (may be cheaper)<br>• easier for the administration to manage the budget | • more accessibility of resources for both languages (e.g., in the library, in classrooms) |
| Students | • less likely to succumb to peer pressure to speak English | • both FI and non-immersion students interact with each other, thus promoting tolerance and understanding |
| Demission | • no advantages found | • students are able to stay in the same school (if it's their home school) if they choose to withdraw from the FI program; less disruptive for the students |
| Staff | • more staff who speak French increases the likelihood that students use French outside the classroom (e.g., at recess, in the hallways)<br>• more likely to have support staff (SERTs, supply teachers) who speak French<br>• more likely that the administrator speaks French<br>• teacher satisfaction is reported to be higher | • teachers of both the FI and non-immersion programs benefit from each other's expertise<br>• more opportunities for staff collaboration and professional development together<br>• CF teacher could do FI coverage<br>• both FI and non-immersion staff interact with each other, thus being role models for students |
| Parent/Guardian Involvement | • more commitment from parents/guardians (e.g., willing to drive to FI school, become | • more involvement of parents/guardians if school is in local/neighborhood area |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | involved in the School Advisory Council [SAC] | |

Table 4: Advantages and disadvantages of the dual-track model

| Topic | Single track disadvantages | Dual track disadvantages |
|---|---|---|
| Culture | • less exposure to Canada's two official languages<br>• less understanding of Canadian identity and multiculturalism | • less opportunities for French language/culture to be displayed around the school (e.g., posters, displays)<br>• less likely for extra-curricular activities, assemblies, etc. to be in French |
| Language | • students may exhibit delays in learning English oral and written language | • students are less likely to speak French outside the classroom |
| Community | • local non-immersion students travel further<br>• English-only schools are perceived as<br>o less academically rigorous<br>o more likely to have populations that are new to Canada and from low SES backgrounds<br>o more likely to have more students with special needs<br>o more likely to accommodate specialized learning-needs programs<br>• distances to a school with an English program<br>o students may have to be bussed or walk further distances to an English single track school | • disappearance of the English program at the school<br>• English track can be perceived as second best |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Classes | • increasing demand for FI may lead to overcrowding in FI schools while space is available in English track schools<br>• possible boundary reviews required | • more combined/triple grades |
| Resources | • fewer English resources | • fewer French resources<br>• harder for the administration to manage the budget and allocate resources to two programs |
| Students | • students may consider themselves to be in a better program/school | • division between FI and non-immersion students |
| Demission | • students who withdraw from the FI program have to attend another school; more disruptive for the students | • negative perception from peers for not continuing in the FI program |
| Staff | • difficult to find/hire fully bilingual staff | • less likely to have support staff (SERTs, supply teachers) who speak French<br>• support staff are divided between the FI program and non-immersion program<br>• typically one teacher teaches two classes (English/French) so there are two primary teachers<br>• limited opportunities for staff collaboration and team teaching<br>• dichotomy between FI and non-immersion teachers |
| Parent/Guardian Involvement | • less involvement if school is not in the local/neighborhood area | • may not want to be involved because they feel overshadowed by the non-immersion parents/guardians |

Table 5: Advantages and disadvantages of the single-track model

The information in the tables above is supported by abundant research: Adams, Oracheski, & MacDonald, 2007; Alberta Education, 2014; Bennett, Favaro, & Lam, 2014; Crawford, 1978; Cummins, 1979; Doell, 2011a, 2011b; Hamiton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), 2009; Kissau, 2003; Ladyman Consulting Inc., 2011; Lapkin, Andrew, Harley, Swain, & Kamin, 1981; Manitoba Education, Citizen and Youth, 2007; PDSB, 2012; UGDSB, 2017a, 2017b; York Region District School Board (YRDSB), 2012.

## Models: Start Point, time and intensity

The literature is plentiful but inconclusive as to the optimum age/grade at which to offer FSL (Netten, 2007). Murphy (2001) wrote that empirical evidence does not support the popular belief that proficiency is correlated to an earlier starting time. Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart and Swain (1998) found that oral fluency tends to be better among students who begin at a younger age but in comparing early, middle, and late immersion students, there were no statistical differences on the listening, written, and reading test scores in French. Some brain research suggests the age of 7 and under is an optimal window of opportunity for language learning (Ladyman Consulting, 2011). Other studies present contradictory findings and support an early start point (Edwards, McCarrey, & Fu, 1980; Krashen, 1981; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1992).

Benefits of early introduction to FSL are transferable literacy skills across languages, stronger oral fluency, availability of more resources appropriate for younger learners, and a more inclusive class cohort (Baker, 2006; Cummins, 1979; Lepage & Corbeil, 2013; Swain & Lapkin, 2000; Turnbull et al., 1998; Willms, 2008). A drawback is that special learning difficulties may be less noticeable (Arnett & Mady, 2010), resulting in a delay of remediation.

There are advantages to delaying FSL until the middle grades and even later. Later entry into FI increases the likelihood of remaining in the program (Ladyman Consulting, 2011). However, enrolment in later FSL programs, especially when students are more participatory in the choice, is more influenced by student friendships and logistical considerations such as transportation.

The bottom line seems to be that proficiency can be achieved through multiple entry points. The Ottawa Carlton District School Board (OCDSB) found that all their immersion programs, early, middle, and later, supported success on the DELF exam. “Recent past analysis of the results showed no statistically-significant difference in success rates at the B2 level for students enrolled in EFI, MFI in grade 8 or in extended/immersion French in grade 12” (OCDSB, 2019, p. 9).

More influential than start point seem to be time and pedagogical approach. The amount of time a student spends in a francophone instructional context correlates positively on language proficiency (Lazaruk, 2007; Smyth, Stennett, & Gardner, 1974). Engagement surfaces as an influential factor in retaining students, which in turn influences proficiency. The optimal level of intensity is debateable.

Neither time nor intensity means much without effective teaching and learning strategies, which is why considerable research has been directed at pedagogy. Arnott and Lapkin (2019) have observed that

> Instruction in core French has advanced from its grammar-translation roots to ‘newer’ approaches, emphasizing oral communication, interaction, and reconsideration of CF learners as social agents (i.e., action-oriented approach) (p. 8).

Lyster (2019) described the current pedagogy that emphasizes a more holistic, active, student-centred approach. Arnott and Masson (2019) extended this in advocating a multidisciplinary approach such as arts-based instruction.

However, Core FSL teachers continue to face undermining challenges related to the chronic marginalization of Core French in schools, less than ideal teaching spaces, less support for resources, and insufficient professional learning. Arnott and Lapkin (2019) lamented that "Overall, what should have been an exciting evolution [in pedagogy] has become an institutionalization of core French, which has hampered the potential impact of positive instructional change. Consequently, innovative thinking has been stifled regarding ways to revolutionize core French" (p. 8). Respondents to the OPSBA survey (2018) corroborate Arnott's and Lapkin's disappointment.

## Learner Proficiency

One challenge to measuring and comparing proficiency is the lack of a consistent cross-Canada standard. According to long-past studies (Cummings & Swain, 1986; Genesee, 1987), FI students outperform students from regular FSL programs in all types of French-language tests, approaching native French students in reading and listening comprehension. However, conceptions of second language success have changed since the 1980s (Arnett, 2013). While some educators still cherish the ideal of native-like proficiency, a shift is occurring towards a broader multidimensional definition of success that is focused on progression and real-life application. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) supports this shift.

More school boards are learning about the CEFR (Council of Europe, n.d.). CEFR can be applied to student competency at all levels including university. Thus, it provides a goal-oriented roadmap for progressive attainment. Lewis (2016) described a "fine example" of the application of CEFR in the Edmonton Public School Board which has "implemented bilingual programs in six languages and has been working for years with the CEFR-inspired "student language passport": a digital portfolio of language experiences, and related benchmarks and credentials." The CEFR also contributes to fair, transparent hiring of FSL educators. In Europe, job postings indicate the level of proficiency required.

More school boards are encouraging students to voluntarily "challenge" the Diplome d'études en langue Française (DELF). The DELF is used by the French National Education to certify French language skills internationally. The CEFR and the DELF build greater clarity and consistency of expectations based on globally accepted descriptions of competency levels among jurisdictions (Carr, 2019; Lewis, 2016). The UGDSB (2015) reported that offering the DELF deepened student and teacher capacity and engagement. From 2014 to 2017, UGDSB students achieved 96% to 100% success rate on the DELF and 87 teachers had been trained as correcteurs.

The popularity of the DELF continues to grow. In the OCDSB, participation rose to over 1500 students (87% of all eligible), with 94% success rate in 2018-2019. In 2020, 350 students in the TVDSB applied to take the DELF, and 70 TVDSB educators have been trained to act as scorers (Jennifer Moodie, personal communication, March 3, 2020). In 2016, 79 DDSB students participated in the DELF. By 2019, 303 DDSB students took the exam, and 70 teachers were trained in September 2019, to be scorers. The DDSB anticipated that 400-450 students would apply to write the exam in 2020.

The DELF is an excellent opportunity for students to capstone their FSL journey. The number of DDSB students challenging the exam, and their success rates suggest that they are confident in their proficiency in French.

| DELF Exam in DDSB | 2018 | 2019 | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Exam level | # students who wrote | # students who wrote | Pass rate |
| A2 | 13 | 41 | 93% |
| B1 | 96 | 151 | 90% |
| B2 | 99 | 111 | 89% |

Table 6 DDSB DELF results

The rising popularity of the DELF presents challenges for school boards attempting to accommodate the growing number of students wishing to write. Finding adequate rental space and completing the scoring within the 10-day window can be difficult, as is scheduling the oral component. In order to qualify as markers, teachers must complete a four-day specialized training session at about $1000 per teacher – a cost that comes out of the French budget. Retraining every five years and upgrading to qualify to score the higher levels of the exam are necessary. Some school boards have applied a student fee, which offsets costs and discourages an impulsive application. However, a fee may act as a barrier to access, as does a policy of capping the number of applicants through a first-come first-served application process. In total, the DDSB spent $49,459.60 on administering and scoring the DELF exam in 2019, up from $24,263.05 in 2018.

## Access & equity

Equity across FSL programs has emerged as a compelling concern across Canada (Sinay, et al., 2018, p. 27), so much so that the UGDSB requested that the OPSBA advocate for a provincial review of FSL education with a consideration of the impact of FI in Ontario.

In 2016, Steven Hurley's (2016) article in *EdCanada* used the example of FI to tackle the issue of school choice in public education and its adjacent issue of equity, especially regarding access and support. He wondered "what pressures and concomitant effects does [broad inclusion] place on the system in terms of being able to support all who choose the program? And what commitment is there to the success of all who enroll in an FI program?"

Hurley's questions are prescient. Schools struggle to ensure adequate support to students with learning challenges given the scarcity of qualified FSL teachers, education assistants and RCEs, and the scarcity of diverse French instructional materials (Genesee, 2007; Joy & Murphy, 2012; Mady & Arnett, 2009). Arnett (2013) summed up the problem:

> …there are not always a lot of resources to help FSL teachers learn how to be more inclusive. It is not just a matter of having resource teachers who can provide support to particular students in the classroom…there is a limit to how much individual teachers can reasonably do on their own to facilitate an inclusive, academically beneficial learning

> experience within the classroom. I have known teachers who have metaphorically moved mountains to help all students in their classes find success in French, but I also know the toll it has taken on them. The "system" has got to do more to support FSL teachers in making their classrooms inclusive.

In her observation of FSL education across Canada, Lewis (2016) observed that "despite increased efforts to promote differentiation of instruction and inclusionary practices, French Immersion does not historically retain anywhere near the same percentages of special education students as the rest of the system, especially at the intermediate and secondary grades". Mulhing and Mady (2017) noted that policy and curriculum documents in 80% of provincial and territorial jurisdictions refer to inclusion of students with special education needs, yet actual application is inconsistent, and exclusionary practices, often informal, are widespread. For example, a perception that FI is an enrichment program may discourage enrolment. Because the exclusion of such students raises an ethical and legal issue in a publicly funded system, Mulhing and Mady (2017), along with Arnett (2013) caution against the use of exemptions to divert English Language Learners (ELL) and students with special needs away from French programs in general, and especially FI. "Exemptions are problematic because they perpetuate the idea that FSL study is not for all, and particularly that exceptionalities and FSL cannot coexist" (Arnett 2013). Furthermore, exemptions, which are not applied to other subjects such as math, imply that FSL is less important.

While school boards express commitment to choice among and inclusivity for all FSL programs, practical conundrums complicate implementation, with implications for access and equity. The surging enrolment in FI is forcing school boards to assess FI's hollowing out effect on regular English programs.

One option is limiting access to FI through capping and lotteries – strategies that advocacy groups such as Canadian Parents for French have strenuously opposed, and one that clearly restricts access.

Transportation is another practical consideration related to equity. Families in economically challenged circumstances cannot afford to pay the additional transportation costs when transportation to French Immersion schools is not provided by a school board. Likewise, school boards facing extensive budget pressures are concerned about diverting funds into more bussing, in addition to the environmental impact of such transportation plans.

Having single set entry points (e.g., Grade 1) for FI and Extended or Intensive FSL (e.g., Grade 5) programs mitigate against equity and choice. This policy contributes to the perception that certain FSL programs, particularly FI, become an exclusive school within a school.

Renown researcher Douglas Willms (2008) has made the case that FI in New Brunswick contributed to significant inequity (Cooke, 2010). His research showed that FI classes were smaller than Core English class (19.5 vs 21.3) and included fewer students with special education plans. The OCDSB review in 2019 includes data that corroborate Wilms' research. Compared to single-track FI schools, single-track English schools had a higher proportion of English Language Learners, students with special learning needs, students who live in lower income neighborhoods, and more multi-grade classes (Miller, 2019a; OCDSB, 2019, p. 7-8).

Wilms' research found that students from the highest socioeconomic group were nearly twice as likely to enroll in early FI while those in the lowest socioeconomic group were half as likely to

enroll. In his words, “When one compares socioeconomic status of those in EFI to those in CE, the divide is comparable to or larger than the divide between non-Hispanic whites and African-Americans in the US” (p.93). Data from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) (Sinay et al., 2018) support Willms’ findings:

> In Grades K-6, students whose family income was at the professional/senior management level ($100,000+) had much higher representation in the French Immersion program (63%), in comparison to the Extended French (38%) and TDSB baseline (35%). In contrast, students with a family SES of the unskilled clerical/trades work ($30,000–$49,999) tended to be underrepresented in the French Immersion program (3%), compared to the Extended French (6%) and TDSB (10%) representation at the Grade 7–8 level.
>
> Students whose family SES is non-remunerative (less than $30,000) tended to be underrepresented—especially in Grades K–6—in French Immersion (7%), as well as slightly underrepresented in Extended French (16%), compared to the TDSB baseline (23%). (Sinay et al., 2018, p. 86)

These findings are not universal, however. The TVDSB (2015) found that “FI and non FI families did not differ for any of the socio-economic variables” (p. 30) nor did families differ regarding languages spoken at home, early childhood experiences, or parents’ perceptions of their children’s literacy skills (p. 31).

In FI programs, females outnumber males (TVDSB, 2015). The gender imbalance is intensified by the predominance of female FSL teachers – 86% in elementary grades (CAIP, 2018, p.13).

In addition, FI programs can segregate by ability (based on Early Years Evaluation scores), which grows with advancing grades. As early as SK, children enrolled in FI are already ahead of their peers, most likely a result of higher socioeconomic status. This feature intensifies over time. Although students can transition *out* of set-entry FSL programs, movement cannot go the opposite way. Students who do well in FI tend to remain there while those who struggle often move to the English Core program, thereby accentuating the FI exclusiveness. The attrition of FI students means that the program caters to a more and more select group (Sinay et al., 2018, p. 32-33).

Hurley (2016) went further to highlight a troublesome philosophical, perhaps ethical problem that FI brings to the forefront - the tension between the individual (the success of *my* child) and the greater society (the success of *all* children).

> Refreshed narratives around personalization, the development of individual potential and the desire to have our children maintain a competitive edge appear, in some ways, to be diametrically opposed to a vision of systems that are committed to social justice, equity and the success of all. (Hurley, 2016)

This tension is evident elsewhere, including in Durham. FI enrolment at a DDSB school (Maple Ridge) grew from 263 in 2014 to 456 by 2019-20 while the regular English program enrolment rose only marginally (188 to 220) and was expected to drop. A plan to turn Maple Ridge school into a single-track FI school upset the community. One concerned parent expressed it this way: “They are bussing students from eight other schools into our school and claiming enrolment is exploding.” There was a sense of division growing within the school community of those who lived within the English catchment area and those who lived within the FI boundary.

Coming back to the tension between individual advantage versus collective good, Willms (2008) pointed out that early FI benefitted a few but negatively affected the majority in the English Core:

> The most fundamental choice of parents in a public-school system is the right to enroll their children in a school where they can learn with their peers. But school choice is not a right when it has a negative effect on the educational choice for other children, especially those who are most vulnerable. And this is the perverse effect that early French immersion is having in New Brunswick (p. 95).

Countering Willms, Joseph Dicks maintained that eliminating or limiting early FI would deprive children of opportunity and that what was needed were broader accessibility and more support so that all students could have expectations of success (Cooke, 2010).

The New Brunswick conflict more than a decade ago has played out many times since in jurisdictions across Canada. On the one hand, FI offers the ideal of choice and advantages. On the other, its actual implementation can accentuate inequity and undermine the vision of universality of public education.

**FSL in Ontario**

The Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) (2013a) expressed its vision for French education in this province: "Students in English-language school boards have the confidence and ability to use French effectively in their daily lives" (p. 8). Three main goals support this vision:

1. Increase student confidence, proficiency, and achievement in French as a second language (FSL).
2. Increase the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation.
3. Increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL. (p. 9)

All school board decisions should be filtered through these three goals.

Underpinning the goals are guiding principles for FSL in Ontario:

- *FSL programs are for all students. A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a) emphasizes that the benefits of second language learning should be open to *all* students. FLS educators should apply differentiated instruction, accommodations and modifications to meet the needs of diverse students, including students with special needs and English language learners. This principle has significant implications for access and equity, as well as for the resources of staffing and learning materials needed to implement effective FSL programming.

- *Teaching and learning French, as one of Canada's two official languages, is recognized and valued as an integral component of Ontario's education system.*

- *FSL education serves as a bridge between languages and cultures.* FSL promotes intercultural competency and acceptance of diversity.

- *Learning FSL strengthens literacy skills as well as cognitive and metacognitive development.* The Ministry attempts to dispel the misconception that learners should master their first language before learning a second. It references studies showing that students who participate in FSL education develop strong English-language literacy skills

(Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009; Netten & Germain, 2005) and improved memory and creativity (Lazaruk, 2007). The Ministry encourages FSL teachers to "collaborate with teachers of all subjects to help students make connections between French and English, and when possible, between French and the students' other languages. By making these connections, FSL students can develop a strong understanding of how languages work and which language-learning strategies are most effective for them" (p. 11).

- *Research informs decision making by all stakeholders***.** Some policy decisions related to FSL education can arouse strong emotions among stakeholders. The Ministry appeals for decision-making based on "research that reflects current thinking and effective practices in FSL education" (p. 11).

- *Learning FSL is a lifelong journey*. An awareness that the benefits of FSL accrue over time should encourage the long-range pursuit of FSL education into adulthood. This principle has implications for the retention of students in FSL programs.

The graphic image on page 12 of the *Framework* document (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a) shows how the vision, goals, guiding principles, and strategic focus areas are nested together in a coherent framework.

While there are considerable local differences among English school boards in Ontario, they share many common successes and challenges when it comes to FSL education. This next section summarizes them.

## Successes of FSL in Ontario

### a) FSL is growing

FSL education in Ontario could be called a success story albeit with caveats.

The Education Act makes French language instruction mandatory in Ontario schools. Ontario students study French from Grades 4 to 9. One secondary school credit in French is required for graduation although students can be exempted under certain conditions. School boards have the option to offer additional FSL programming such as French Immersion and Extended French based on resources and demand.

In Ontario in 2016-2017, 51.9% students were enrolled in an FSL program – roughly 12 % in a French Immersion program, 39.8% in Core French (Canadian Parents for French, 2018a). Canadian Parents for French Ontario (2019) reported that "284,448 students were doing more French than the Ministry of Education requires and are enrolled in French Immersion, Extended French or Core French from Grades 10 to 12."

Enrolment in FI is exploding. Enrolment in FI grew 5.7% annually over 11 consecutive years, making Ontario 7$^{th}$ in FI participation among the predominantly English provinces/territories. The success of FI in Canada has led to inter-related challenges that are being experienced in Ontario, and in jurisdictions across Canada.

### b) FSL is becoming more inclusive

A positive chicken-and-egg situation has developed in which school boards are adopting more inclusive practices, encouraging greater instructional differentiation, and attempting to provide more support for English language learners and students with special needs. There has been an increase of allophone enrolment in FSL programs, particularly in districts of high immigrant arrivals (CPF Ontario, 2018).

These practices reflect Ontario's Ministry of Education directives expressed in *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a), and supporting documents: *Learning for all: A guide to effective assessment and instruction for all students, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (Ontario Ministry of Education,2013c); *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014a); *A Parent Guide on Supporting your Child's Success in French Immersion and Extended French* and *Kindergarten in a French Immersion Setting* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014b)*; Including Students with Special Needs in FSL Programs* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2015)*; and Welcoming English Language Learners into French as a Second Language Programs* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016).

The Ministry's message is clear: all FSL programs should be available to all students, and all students should be supported in achieving success in them.

### c) FSL pedagogy is becoming more relevant and engaging

A revised Ontario FSL curriculum came into play for elementary students in 2014 and for secondary students in 2015. These curricula emphasize authentic and spontaneous communication and encourage innovative pedagogy as opposed to more traditional grammar and translation (although accuracy remains important) (Arnott & Lapkin, 2019). Cross-transfer language-to-language, across programs (Core and FI), and across disciplines provides a variety of situations in which to apply language skills (Arnott & Masson, 2019; Lyster, 2019).

The use of technology (e.g., Skype conversation with francophones anywhere in the world) and access to over 8000 electronic resources through IDELLO and TFO have brought FSL into the real world of the 21st century (CPF Ontario, 2019).

Partnerships between the Ministry of Education and French-supporting organizations are building networks and creating experiential opportunities beyond the classroom for students to use their French. One example is FrenchStreet.ca, developed by CPF Ontario and the Ministry in 2015. Others include the French public speaking contest Le Concours d'art oratoire.

### d) Assessing FSL student proficiency is becoming more consistent and accurate

As mentioned above, more students are testing their French language skills by voluntarily challenging the DELF. The CERF is providing clear and consistent standards of achievement. FSL teachers across Canada are learning more about CERF and participating as markers in the program. However, countering its benefits, the DELF, which was affordable at a lower demand, is becoming increasingly costly for school boards. When boards charge exam fees and/or limit participation, the DELF becomes an example of inequity.

## Challenges related to FSL education in Ontario

School boards across Ontario and indeed, across the country, are facing similar challenges when it comes to FSL programming. These challenges are inter-related and are discussed in this section.

### a) Funding

School boards receive federal funding to support FSL education. Each board can allocate that money as it sees fit, with minimal accountability and no guarantee that the money will be spent on programming needs (e.g., reading materials as opposed to transportation).

CPF applauds the continuation of the per FSL student amount funding related to the delivery of Core, Extended, and Immersion French programs but states that school boards continue to use FSL grants to pay for other priorities. Because boards are not required to report on FSL expenditures, there is a lack of transparency and accountability which can undermine FSL programing (CPF Ontario, 2019). In its submission to the Lang Committee (Lang Report, 2013), CPF requested greater transparency in the disbursement of funds to ensure that they are directed to FSL use.

### b) Proficiency of Ontario FSL students

The proficiency of students in FI programs is considered generally high by contemporary standards (CPF, 2017). Core French proficiency, while acceptable, lags behind that of FI students. The PDSB found that while French language proficiency of both English program and FI groups improved over a five-year period, achievement for students in the FI program was higher in both report card and EQAO scores (PDSB, 2012, p. 8).

To raise proficiency levels, Arnott and Lapkin (2019) have suggested a redistribution of Core French time:

> Rather than increasing the time for core French in a year, the time is distributed differently; think of semestering that occurs in many secondary schools so that instructional periods last for about 80 minutes as opposed to the 30- to 40- minute periods we associate with core French at the elementary level. (Arnott & Lapkin, 2019, p. 8)

Two Ontario studies show that proficiency and retention among Grade 7 Core French students improved under this model (Arnott & Lapkin, 2019).

### c) Rising enrolment in French Immersion

Consisitent with a national pattern, Ontario parents are increasingly choosing FI for their children. In 2018, 72% of Grade 1 OCDSB students were enrolled in FI (Miller, 2019b).

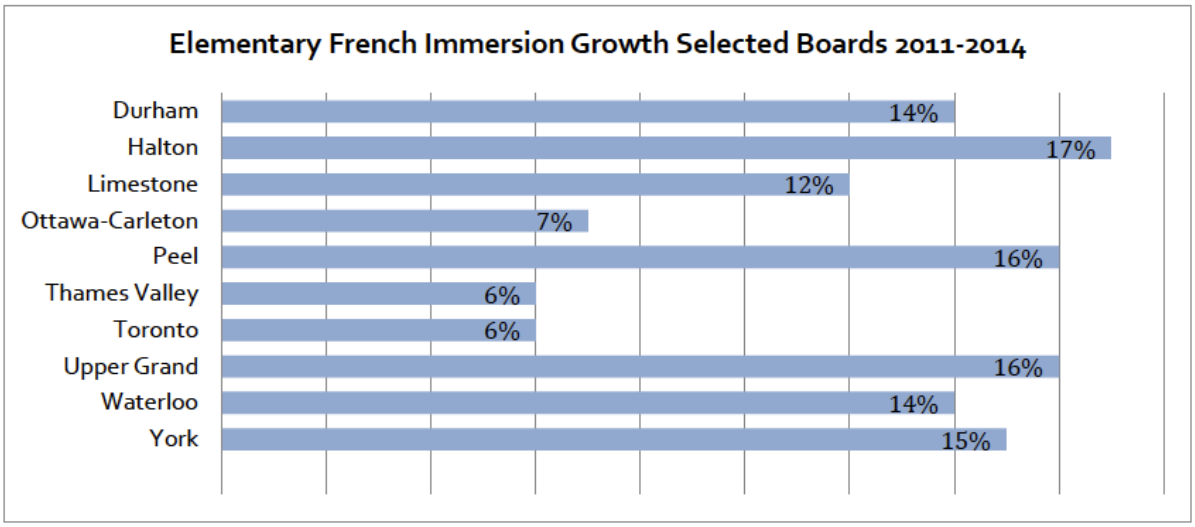



Figure 1 Elementary French Immersion Growth Selected Boards 2011-2014 (OPSBA, 2018, p. 8)

While the graph above accurately shows general trends, it may be misleading and somewhat out-dated. For example, a reason for the relatively low percentage growth for the OCDSB is because there was already a high proportion in FI prior to 2011. Many boards have experienced significant growth in FI enrolment since 2014, with an accompanying concern about the continuing viability of English programs. Over the last decade, FI enrolment in the OCDSB has increased by 10% while enrolment in English has declined by the same percentage (OCDSB, 2019). In 2018-2019, 48% of OCDSB elementary students were enrolled in FI and roughly 29% were in the English program – a seemingly lopsided imbalance.

At 14% growth, the DDSB has seen one of the greatest increases of FI enrolment in Ontario, and that was up to only 2014. Forecasting 10 years ahead, the UGDSB (2017) expected "a significant increase in secondary FI enrolment, which more than doubles by the year 2026" and predicted that English track enrolment "will drop from about 95% to about 88%. The key driver for increases in student enrolment is linked to FI, not RT [regular English track], which remains relatively static" (p. 7).

English track and all FSL programs are affected by English school boards' efforts to address the popularity of FI. Thus, it is impossible to disentangle a discussion of FI from the wider context of FSL education.

Difficulties develop when FI enrolment overwhelms English/French Core enrolment in a school. Small English/regular cohorts in dual-track schools make it difficult to create viable single-grade classes. Sometimes as many as three grades are combined to make one viable class, presenting a challenging teaching and learning situation (Halton Distrct School Board (HDSB), 2016). This is especially difficult in a split Grade 3 / 4 class when the Grade 4 students have Core French but the Grade 3 students do not. Even combined-grade classes can be too small.

The OCDSB report (2019) highlighted the comparison between English and FI class composition:

> In 2018-2019, there were 690 ENG classes. Of these classes, 59% (410) had straight grade levels, 40% (275) had split grades and 1% (5) had triple grades. This is in comparison to EFI [early French immersion] classes where 81% are straight grade and 19% were split grades. There were no triple EFI grades. (p. 4)

One criticism of FI programs is that the same students stay together year after year, but this is also a feature of classes in small-cohort English track programs.

When FI enrolment pressure becomes too great for a dual track-school, tough decisions about multiple boundary changes and conversions into single-track schools take place. Relocating English track students out of neighborhood schools to accommodate FI raises community protest. Families are disrupted. Separated siblings, transportation scheduling and pre-and post-school child-care are all affected.

Bussing scattered students to FI schools significantly increases transportation costs and carbon footprint – factors that some consider unwarranted for a discretionary program. Some boards do not cover transportation costs for students outside the walking zone of an FI school (e.g., the Toronto Catholic School Board.). Toronto District School Board (TDSB) has proposed the elimination of bussing for students in FI and Extended French Grades SK-8 and of tokens for secondary students in FI and Extended French in 2020.

While withdrawing transportation curtails costs, it raises the question of equity of access. As CPF put it, “Without access to free transportation, providing equal opportunity for student achievement through FI or Extended French education is impossible” (CPF Ontario, 2019). The TDSB subsidizes families who meet criteria through an equity fund but its own research showed that the majority of families with children in elementary FI had household incomes in the $100,000 range (Sinay, et al., 2018, p. 86).

Another budgetary complication arises when stakeholders do not recognize French Immersion as a rationale for capital projects.

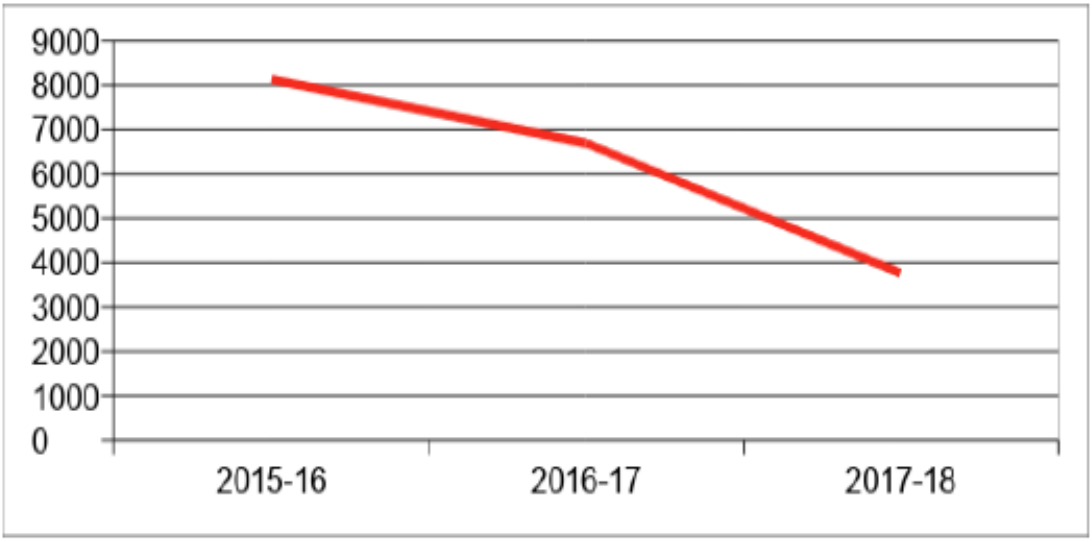
**d) Teacher “shortage” and work conditions**

Perhaps the most pressing and widespread challenge for FSL education is placing qualified FSL educators in permanent and occasional teacher, Education Assistant (EA) and Registered Early Childhood Educator (RECE) positions. Every school board report referenced in preparing this report identified this issue as a persistent problem. In 2016, there were approximately 17,200 FI teachers in Canada, which was a 21% increase in four years (OPSBA, 2109, p. 84), yet this increase was nowhere near enough to close the gap between supply and demand. The demand for FSL teachers continues to grow.

In 2018, the Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals (CAIP) released its report on its cross-Canada investigation into FI teaching. Similarly, in 2017, OPSBA partnered with stakeholders to investigate and make recommendations in two reports (2018, 2019). The reports from both organizations are remarkably similar and provide a wealth of detailed information regarding three key areas: recruitment, hiring and retention of FSL educators. The recurrence of the word “collaborate” in the recommendations emphasizes the interwoven aspect of the problem, and its cross-Canada nature. For example, OPSBA recommended that school boards share successful recruitment, hiring, and retention strategies even though they are all competing to hire from a small pool. A report from the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (2019) echoed the findings and the recommendations expressed by OPSBA and CAIP.

***Recruitment of FSL educators***

When Ontario Faculties of Education introduced the two-year teacher education program in 2015, school boards saw a significant drop in applications received from teacher graduates. See Figure 2 below.




*Number of Job Applications* by FSL Teacher-Graduates*
**This number accounts for multiple job applications submitted by individual teacher-graduates across multiple school boards in a given year.*

Figure 2 Number of job applications by FSL teacher-graduates (OPSBA, 2018, p. 21)

By 2019, the gap between supply and demand persisted despite the fact that

> No Ontario-resident French-language-program graduates report unemployment for the third year in a row. FSL teachers are also all employed….one in three FSL-qualified graduates teaching in English district school boards land permanent contracts in the first year, and by year five, four out of five have full-time employment. (McIntyre, Tallo, & Malczak, 2020, p.17)

CAIP (2018) and OPSBA (2019) have urged Faculties of Education to vigorously encourage and make space for enrolment into FSL programs. In Faculties of Education, FSL has no preferential status despite desperate demand for FSL educators. Discussions are underway to possibly provide FSL teacher education spaces outside the regular funding parameters. In addition, Faculties could recruit from secondary school FSL programs, and through partnerships with French-supporting organizations (CAIP, 2018), and school boards could provide financial incentives to entice potential candidates (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. (2019).

In addition, OPSBA (2019) has encouraged the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) and the Ontario Ministry of Education to communicate FSL employment opportunities in Ontario more strenuously. Recruitment campaigns should target audiences beyond local jurisdictions and include international sources of labor to offset the tendency of applicants to focus primarily on familiar boards in their area of residence (CAIP, 2018; OPSBA, 2018). The CAIP (2018) report lists vigorous recruitment strategies on page 27-28. The OPSBA 2018 report does the same on page 24 and summarizes the factors influencing FSL teacher applications and hiring experiences on pages 29-31.

## *Hiring*

If a school board is fortunate to have an FSL educator applicant, its next challenge is to assess that applicant's proficiency in French. There is considerable variation among entrance and Additional Qualifications requirements for FSL teacher education programs at Faculties of Education – all the way from self-declaration up to DEFL B2 certification with 70% or higher. Thus, graduation from a faculty is not sufficiently informative as to proficiency. On average, approximately one quarter of FSL teacher applicants do not meet French language proficiency standards established by individual boards (OPSBA, 2018, p. 26). The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (2019) found the following in its investigation:

> Several school boards admitted to keeping language requirements low for fear of not being able to fill positions. Some felt that, in light of the lack of candidates, it was necessary to settle for teachers with only a slightly higher level of French than their students. (p. 8)

CAIP (2018), the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (2019) and OPSBA (2018, 2019) recommend that boards and Faculties of Education collaborate to develop a provincial framework based on the CEFR as British Columbia has done. A framework would give applicants and hiring committees consistent expectations of proficiency. Beyond initial hiring, CEFR could be used to upgrade status of progressively more qualified existing teachers in the system.

OPSBA iterates that shortages apply to all FSL education workers, not just teachers. Education workers in roles other than teaching report that they are often not asked about their French language proficiency at hiring, even when their potential placement is in a French-focused program (OPSBA, 2019). OPSBA notes this can be a missed opportunity to target hiring, to place education workers more effectively, and to target professional development. One third of the education workers surveyed (OPSBA, 2019) believed their limited ability in French did not impede their value in the classroom, yet 60% also said proficiency would have a positive impact and that they would welcome opportunities to improve their skills in French. Details about this topic can be found in the report (OPSBA, 2019, p. 49).

Language proficiency is not just an issue in new hires; it surfaces in a sort of trickle-down way as FSL teachers move within the system. When FI teachers opt to move into the regular English program, Core French teachers are asked to move in to fill the FI opening, or they voluntarily move in order to improve their working conditions. However, a level of proficiency considered acceptable for Core French may not be up to the demands of FI. Then to fill the now-vacant Core French positions, administrators are desperate and resort to Letters of Approval to hire an unqualified, less proficient candidate (Jennifer Moodie, personal communication, March 3, 2020).

## *Retention*

What has been described as a "shortage" of FSL-qualified teachers may well be more a question of retention. School boards may already have many more potential FSL teachers than they realize. One scenario has an FSL-qualified teacher getting hired readily, and once having gained permanent status, transitioning to the regular English program as soon as possible, and actively seeking jobs outside of FSL. In one example, the FSL teacher was the sixth in one year for a class. The PDSB (2012) noted that in 2014, 35% of its FSL teachers no longer taught French, 23% in 2015, 14% in 2016. Unsatisfactory working conditions play a role in encouraging the shift of teachers from the FSL to the English track (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019).

### e) Working conditions

Poor working conditions of various sorts discourage retention of FSL educators.

## *Lack of resources*

FSL teachers generally but emphatically FI teachers from across Canada, cite a lack of time (73%), a lack of resources (71%) and coping with growing demands of the work environment (57%) as their greatest challenges (CAIP, 2018, p. 16). FSL teachers in Ontario stated that their greatest challenges were the lack of suitable teaching resources followed by students' attitudes towards learning French (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019; OPSBA, 2018, p. 33-34). These challenges are interconnected.

Core French and FI programs may not receive sufficient funding to update resources. Out-dated textbooks that are not aligned with current pedagogical philosophy and strategies are commonly in use. FSL teachers create their own materials – an exhausting enterprise, and one that leads to inconsistency in quality and approach within a school and across a school board (OPSBA, 2018).

Teachers say they do not have enough time to participate in programs that would improve their language and teaching skills, partly because they spend considerable time translating teaching materials. They cite this as a blatant and unrecognized inequity (CAIP, 2018). School boards often have professional translation services, but these are not made available to teachers. In a pinch, FSL teachers revert to materials presented in English.

## *Lack of respect and a sense of isolation*

According to an Ontario College of Teachers 2008 report, "the conditions necessary to foster excellent second-language learning experiences are hindered by the school environment and the provincial policies that influence it." (Salvatori, 2008). More than a decade later, these conditions are unchanged.

In line with the 2008 study that Salvatori (2008) summarized, consultation with teachers' federations indicated to t OPSBA (2018) that two linked issues are predominant concerns: teacher workspaces and the status of the FSL Core teacher within a staff.

Core French teachers express a sense of isolation. Unlike other teachers in a school, they lack a home base. They often do not have their own classrooms in which to store resources, display learning materials and student work, or prepare technology. Instead, they teach as many as eight classes of different students a day, traveling from room to room, up and down stairs, teaching from a cart. Compounding the challenge is that some Core French teachers must travel to different schools daily.

These conditions, when present, create unique challenges for Core French teachers. Intentionally or not, a FSL teacher's experience is sometimes compounded by the homeroom teacher. Some FSL teachers report microaggressions such as treating the arrival of the FSL teacher as an interruption or turning off the classroom computers, thus delaying the start of the FSL class. There can also be challenges as far as having an appropriate workspace during preparation time or parental meetings.

Fewer than half the respondents in the CAIP investigation (2018) (except those in the Northwest Territories) said they felt supported by their administrators and managers and only 39% of the respondents felt supported by their colleagues (CAIP, 2018, p. 25). While both regular English and FSL teachers share much in common, FSL teachers face a host of issues specific to them. The cumulative impact is that many crave a stronger professional learning community (OPSBA, 2018), and look to the working conditions of their English colleagues as being superior.

### f) Professional development

FSL teachers have expressed a desire for professional development geared toward their specific FSL needs. However, they can have a dual identity in schools where the FSL teacher is also teaching subjects in English. That teacher will often opt for professional development in English, with the long-range plan to transition completely to the English program.

More committed FSL educators identified their professional need for improved proficiency in French and for more varied and engaging pedagogy (OPSBA, 2018). Their needs dovetail with the reasons for student attrition in FSL programs.

OPSBA (2018, 2019) made several recommendations to enhance professional development among FSL educators. As with recruitment, OPSBA recommended a coordinated provincial strategy that would cultivate a community of practice among FSL educators. Indeed, in 2013-2014, boards did just that in response to the release of *A Framework for French as a Second Language* (OME, 2013a). See pages 33-37 in the OPSBA Phase II document (2019) for a list of strategies intended to develop of a community of practice, French-language proficiency and pedagogical knowledge among FSL educators.

One suggestion is that the Ontario Ministry of Education offer financial subsidies for professional development such as Additional Qualifications courses. While the educators surveyed by the OPSBA responded positively to that idea, they preferred development in a more relevant and local context. FSL teachers in Ontario are relatively new to their positions. Of FSL- qualified teachers with permanent contracts with English district boards, 37% are in their first year, 72% are in their third year and 83% are in their fifth year of experience (McIntyre, Tallo, & Malczak, 2020, p. 38). Not surprisingly then, FSL educators expressed the desire and need for collaborative, non-evaluative professional learning environments that build skills, confidence and professional relationships, particularly in their first five years of practice (CAIP, 2018; OPSBA, 2019). Their wishes are aligned with Canadian studies into effective professional learning (Campbell, 2017; Karsenti & Collin, 2013).

### g) Unpredictable staffing

Ministry policies regarding class size and teacher qualifications make predicting staffing needs difficult (Salvatori, 2008; UGDSB, 2017). The UGDSB (2017) noted that class sizes in FSL (Core French and FI) varied widely, ranging from 10 or 12 to 31. Principals may allow smaller FSL classes to support the program, but this exerts pressure on other classes. Sometimes regular track classes are even cancelled to allow FI to run (UGDSB, 2017, p. 11). Smaller classes in rural areas still need teachers, yet potential teacher candidates express an unwillingness to relocate to more rural, northern and/or remote schools (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019). All boards need part time assignments to fill Core French and FI positions. Thus, a teacher may have a blend of Core French, FI, and regular track classes – a combination requiring various levels of proficiency and diverse pedagogical strategies. Split grades with different time and intensity for French instruction complicate teacher placement.

The UGDSB review (2015) identified administrators' biggest problems as hiring for single-section and part-time assignments, getting an adequate number of daily occasional FSL teachers, and qualified FSL teachers across the board.

In secondary schools, a consistent offering of content subjects in French is difficult because it depends on the subject specialties of current staff, which can vary from year to year (UGDSB, 2015, p. 12-13).

## Work arounds

This section outlines some of the ways Ontario boards are attempting to resolve the problems in their FSL programs, but the situation is dynamic and procedures set at one point in time do not always reflect a current situation.

- Improve Core French to make it more appealing to parents as an FSL option. This may relieve some pressure on FI enrolment (Sinay et al., 2018, p. 24;).

- Improve Core French to make it more engaging to students. This may improve proficiency levels and help retain enrolment (Sinay et al., 2018 p. 24-25).

- Ensure that before Grade 9, students in all FSL programs are aware of the benefits of being able to communicate in French.

- Encourage students to challenge the DELF by providing subsidies, although this practice requires an increase to current funding (UGDSB, 2015).

- Restrict enrolment in FI through caps and lotteries (UGDSB, 2015). HDSB (2015, 2016) considered and rejected capping because limiting choice would conflict with the board's mission statement. The decision was aligned with the results of its stakeholder survey summarized in the 2016 review. Respondents' open text comments stressed that they saw FI as a right because Canada is a bilingual country and that restrictions on FI enrolment was a violation of the right to choose and to have access to FI (HDSB, 2016, pp.63-68).

- Make FI available only in single-track schools. When the school reached capacity, there would be no further acceptance. This was another consideration for HDSB (2015, 2016). The HDSB stakeholder survey (2016) indicated that the majority of respondents (44.83%) preferred the dual-track model, 29% preferred a single-track model, 20% thought the board should have a mix of single- and dual-track models, and 5.37% were unsure of their preferences (HDSB, 2016, p. 5). Staff feedback showed a mix of opinions with a slight preference for single- track FI schools. At the time of the review, HDSB rejected the single- track option because it would restrict choice, it would increase competition for space, and it would require relocating English students and boundary reviews.

  In 2009, the UGDSB (2009) also rejected the single-track-only option. The board wished to maintain continued flexibility for movement between FI and regular track programs without excessive travel distance for students. It hoped that the dual-track model would allow schools that were vulnerable to closing to remain open.

- Set later entry points to FI. For example, the UGDSB (2015) considered delaying entry until Grade 1. The HDSB (2015, 2016) considered delaying entry to Grade 4 for dual-track schools thinking it would maintain viability of early elementary English classes. The HDSB Special Education Committee recommended a slightly later FI entry (around Grade 1 or 2) to give teachers and families more time to understand the children's learning profiles and to organize appropriate accommodations. HDSB's stakeholder survey (2016) found that 77% of respondents preferred early entry (K-Grade 3) for FI; 15.68% favored mid entry (Grade 4-6) and 7.5% favored a later entry (Grade 7-8). The preferences of the staff, the Halton School Council and the Student Senate mirrored those of the survey respondents. In 2016, HDSB agreed to a Grade 2 entry, a dual-track model with high intensity FSL instruction.

- Hold firm on one single entry point to FI (UGDSB, 2015). Apply strict criteria for exceptions (e.g., a newcomer to a board).

- Curtail FI enrolment by not providing transportation as the TDSB and the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB) have done.

- Integrate FI & Core with content subjects (CPF, 2019; Sinay et al., 2018, p. 23) to provide a more authentic context for language use and to promote transfer of skills.

- Allocate more support staff to support students with learning needs (UGDSB, 2015) and develop support services such as a homework helpline.

- Set higher and more consistent levels of proficiency for educators and students through the adoption of CEFR and DELF.

- Implement more aggressive recruitment strategies to attract FSL educators. Retain FSL educators by requiring a five-year commitment (PDSB, 2012; UGDSB, 2015, 2017).

- Look more closely at qualifications of existing staff members and encourage their shift into FSL programs (UGDSB, 2015, p. 14).

- Provide rich and relevant professional development opportunities to existing FSL educators and provide incentives for participation (UGDSB, 2015, p. 14). Most FSL teachers have only one to 10 years of experience and could benefit from capacity building opportunities.

- Direct funding towards pedagogical resources, technology and outside classroom support (e.g., homework helpline) for students and parents.

- Rather than having individual teachers or administrators purchase learning resources, have a well-informed francophone consultant purchase materials centrally. In addition, ensure that resources meet diverse student needs (Sinay et al., 2018).

- Encourage and subsidize authentic culturally-enriching experiences such as school exchanges and job fairs. The Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB)

offers Camp Tournesol. It is designed to enrich language skills for Core French students and/or to prepare them for entry into the Extended French program.

- Encourage greater community awareness of FSL programs and their attendant issues. ~~Encourage the formation of FSL committees~~ and provide more informational and pedagogical resources to parents.

## Conclusion

Many Ontario school boards are facing the challenges expressed by the OCDSB in its 2019 review of FSL programs: "There are persistent challenges tied to the growth of the FI programs and correlating decrease in ENG programs" (OCDSB, 2019, p. 9). The conclusion of the report summarized the dilemma of rising FI enrolment and its impact on equity and high quality education:

> To generate potential solutions associated with ENG programming and to plan the next steps, there must be some certainty in understanding the presenting problems: program viability; student success rates in some schools; inequity of program opportunities and a number of operational issues (staffing, timetabling) have been identified. While the quality of the ENG program and instruction is high, there exist structural impediments based on dwindling numbers of students in the program. (p. 9)

A key priority for the DDSB is student success (Durham District School Board, 2020). Given the results of the DELF exam, it seems clear that students in the board's FSL programs are achieving success in French. However, the DDSB may want to consider the discrepancy between FI and English-track students noted by other boards. For example, OCDSB students in English programs are less likely to take academic courses that lead to university compared to their FI counterparts (OCDSB, 2019).

> In 2017-18, 98 per cent of students in French immersion in Grade 8 took academic English in Grade 9, and 93 per cent took academic math. In contrast, among English-program students, 64 per cent took academic English in Grade 9 and only 50 per cent took academic math. (Miller, 2019a)

The report suggests possible reasons (e.g., parental and peer influence, teacher recommendation) but the statistical contrast implies a contrast in academic confidence and perhaps achievement.

Another key priority for DDSB (Durham District School Board, 2020) is the desire to "increase equitable outcomes for all by identifying and addressing barriers to success and engagement". A discretionary program, namely FI, may be undermining resource availability for mandatory English programs.

In company with other school boards across Canada, the DDSB must consider difficult options in planning in light of its strategic priorities. In returning to the overarching question of this review, how should DDSB best move forward to meet the Ontario Ministry of Education goals of FSL programming while ensuring high quality inclusive education for *all* students?

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## Tables and Figures