

*Including* **STUDENTS  
WITH SPECIAL  
EDUCATION NEEDS** *in*  
**FRENCH AS A SECOND  
LANGUAGE Programs**

A GUIDE FOR ONTARIO SCHOOLS

A Companion Resource to *A Framework for FSL, K–12*



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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant : *Inclure les élèves ayant des besoins particuliers dans les programmes de français langue seconde (FLS) : Guide à l'intention des écoles de l'Ontario, 2015.*

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education website at [www.ontario.ca/education](http://www.ontario.ca/education).









## Realizing the Promise of the FSL Framework

*Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL* complements *A Framework for FSL* and clarifies the foundational principle that FSL programs are for all students. The Ministry of Education is committed to including and supporting all students to ensure equitable access to FSL programs, whether Core French, Extended French, or French Immersion, and the revised curriculum policy documents for FSL released in 2013 (the elementary curriculum) and 2014 (the secondary curriculum) make specific reference to the importance of supporting all students in FSL programs.

The intended audience for *Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL* includes educators, resource staff, principals and vice-principals, system administrators, and parents. This document provides information intended to enhance the knowledge and understanding of all stakeholders about the social benefits of, and literacy supports associated with, the study of FSL. It also provides information about the options available to students with special education needs with regard to participation in FSL programs. In addition, it includes examples of actions taken by school boards to ensure that their FSL programs welcome and are respectful of all students. Greater understanding of inclusionary policies and insights into effective practices will enable educators, parents, and other decision makers to overcome incidences of exclusion and ensure that all students have the opportunity to experience the benefits of linguistic duality.

All stakeholders have a role to play in promoting inclusiveness in FSL programs. At the system level, school boards can collect data about participation and achievement in FSL; analyse trends in the participation of students, including students with special education needs, in FSL; ask questions about the inclusiveness of their policies and practices; and propose changes to address emerging areas of need. At the level of the school and the individual student, principals, teachers, parents, and students can all benefit from accurate information about programs, policies, and potential supports. This information, combined with knowledge about the strengths, needs, and pathway goals of individual students, can then be applied in order to make informed, case-by-case decisions that are in the best interests of students.

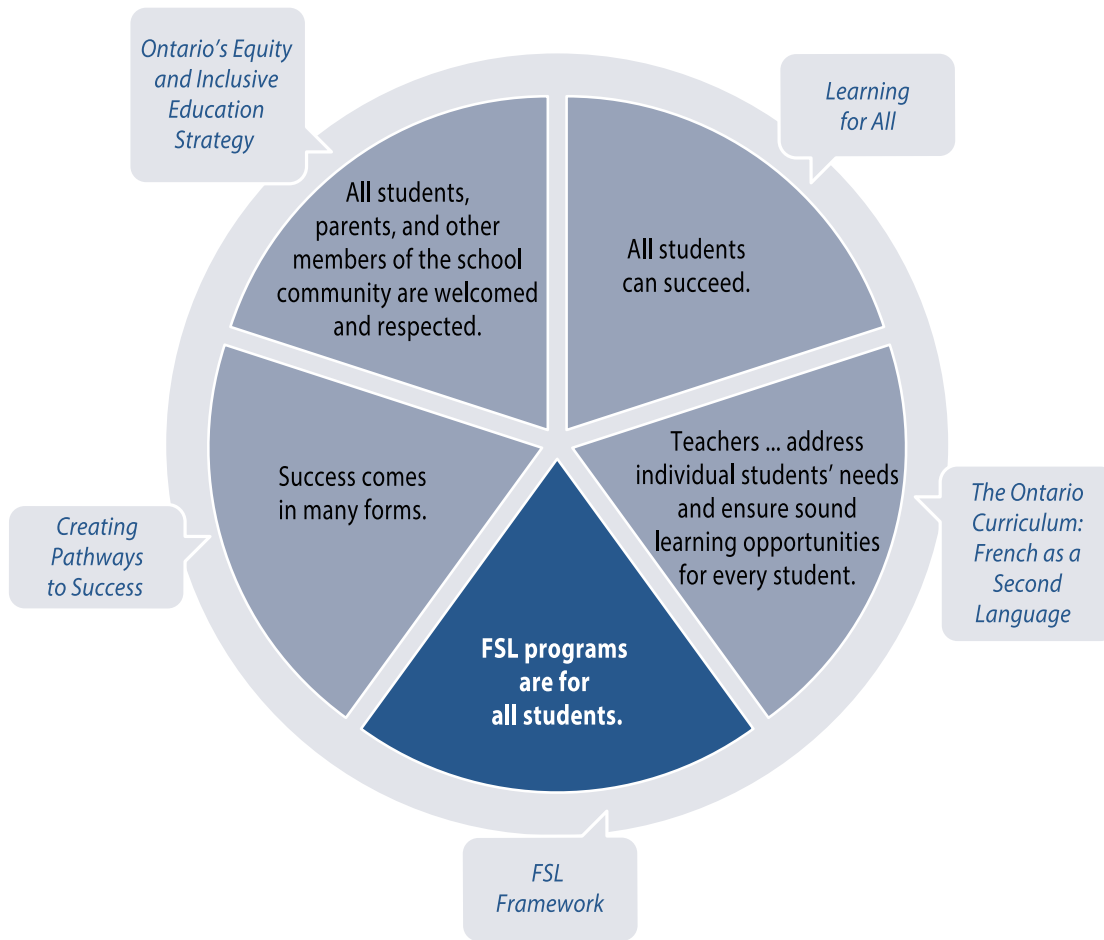


## Alignment with Ministry Policies and Initiatives

The beliefs and principles articulated in *Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL* and in *A Framework for FSL* have strong connections to those in several other ministry initiatives. The following documents endorse principles of diversity and inclusiveness and highlight the importance of supporting all students so that they can succeed:

- *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013*, available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frameworkFLS.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frameworkFLS.pdf)
- *Learning for All: A Guide to Effective Assessment and Instruction for All Students, Kindergarten to Grade 12, 2013*, available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/LearningforAll2013.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/LearningforAll2013.pdf)
- *The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language – Core, Grades 4–8; Extended, Grades 4–8; Immersion, Grades 1–8, 2013*, available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl18-2013curr.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/fsl18-2013curr.pdf)
- *The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language – Core, Extended, and Immersion French, Grades 9 to 12, 2014*, available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/fsl912curr2014.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/fsl912curr2014.pdf)
- *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009*, available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/equity.pdf)
- *Creating Pathways to Success: An Education and Career/Life Planning Program for Ontario Schools, 2013*, available at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/CreatingPathwaysSuccess.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/CreatingPathwaysSuccess.pdf)

The following figure highlights ways in which the preceding documents align with the core beliefs and principles underpinning *Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL*. Each segment features a key quotation relevant to the fundamental principle of supporting all students in their unique education journeys.



## The Organization of This Document

*Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL* is organized into three sections. Section 1 presents an analysis of research and specific data relevant to the participation in FSL of students with special education needs. Section 2 provides information about relevant legislation and policies, clarifying the basic requirements in Ontario with respect to both FSL education and students with special education needs. Section 3 discusses new ways of thinking about diversity, participation, and engagement, and suggests strategies for aligning educational practices with emerging values to create inclusive environments for all students, including students with special education needs.









Research also points to the need to provide supports and professional development opportunities for classroom teachers. Professional learning opportunities can enhance the awareness of resource teachers and FSL teachers of the practical applications of research findings related to supporting all students in FSL programs. Moreover, classroom FSL teachers benefit from support and professional development focused on meeting the diverse needs of their students and providing appropriate accommodations for students with special education needs (Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009; Lapkin, MacFarlane, & Vandergrift, 2006).

More information on strategies and practices that can support all students in FSL classrooms can be found in Section 3 and Appendix A.

### ***Including All Students in FSL Programs***

A review of documents from ministries of education across Canada indicates that they all contain general policies that ensure access to education for students with special education needs. However, it would appear that, in practice, such broad policies are not necessarily being applied in FSL education. In light of this finding, it is important to note that current legislation and policies in Ontario do not endorse exemptions for students with special education needs from FSL programs – it is expected that all students in English-language publicly funded schools will have access to FSL programs.

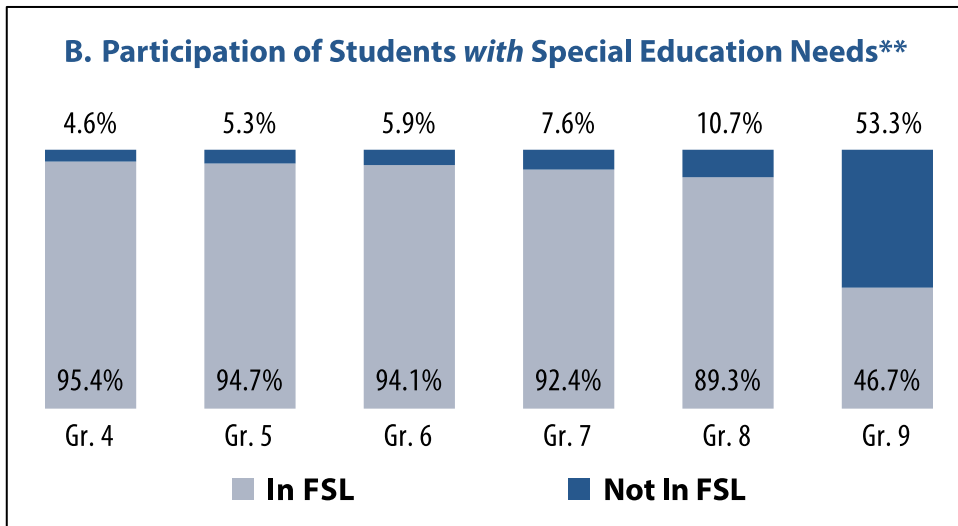
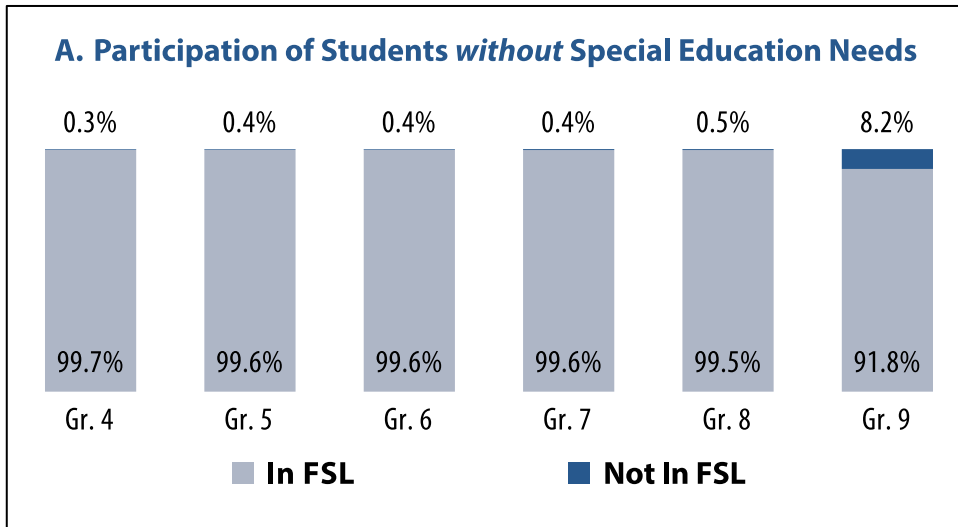
The issue of access is addressed in various policy documents. As we have noted, one of the principles of *A Framework for FSL* is that “FSL programs are for all students” (Ontario, 2013b, p. 9); this document also explicitly deals with access for students with special education needs. In addition, *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (Ontario, 2009) calls for each school to create and support a positive school climate that fosters and promotes equity, inclusive education, and diversity. The principles identified in this strategy can support crucial conversations about fostering greater engagement and participation in FSL, as stakeholders collaborate to identify and address discriminatory biases and systemic barriers in order to support the achievement and well-being of all students.





Grade 8 but, most dramatically, between Grades 8 and 9: in Grade 8, over 89 per cent of students with special education needs participated in FSL; in Grade 9, that proportion fell to under 47 per cent.

**Participation of Students in FSL Programs, Grades 4–9, 2012–13\***

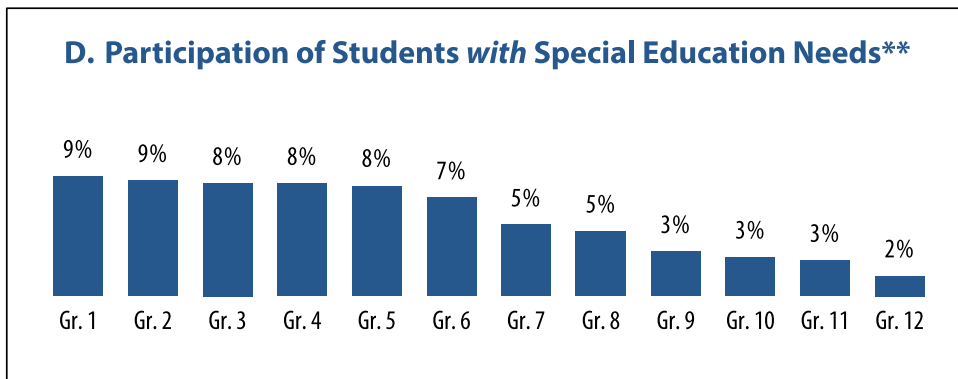
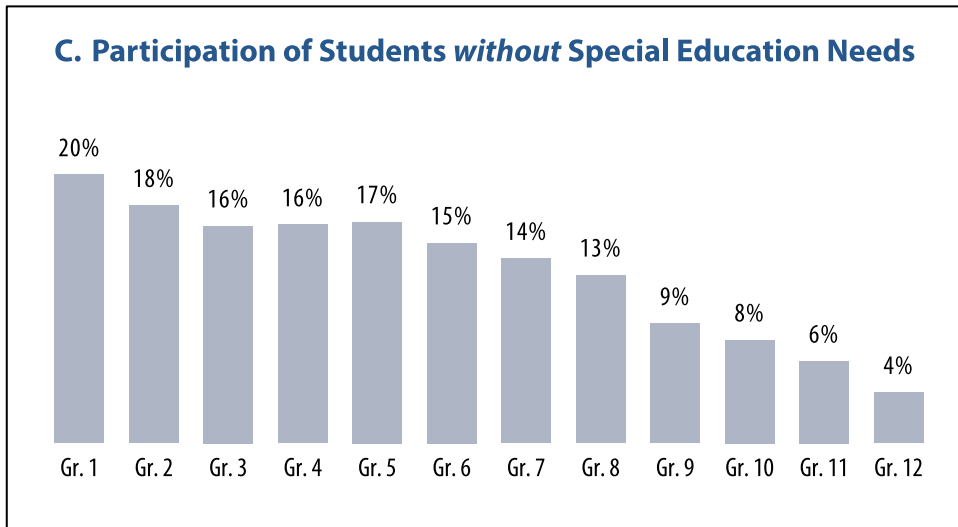


\* Data used in these graphs are specific to the purposes of *Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL* and are not strictly comparable to other figures published by the Ministry of Education.

\*\* Calculations related to “students with special education needs” in these graphs are based on the number of students who receive special education programs and/or services.



### Participation of Students in French Immersion and Extended French Programs, Grades 1–12, 2012–13\*



\* Data used in these graphs are specific to the purposes of *Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL* and are not strictly comparable to other figures published by the Ministry of Education.

\*\* Calculations related to “students with special education needs” in these graphs are based on the number of students who receive special education programs and/or services.



## 2. Policies That Inform Decision Making

This section of *Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL* provides information and links to relevant legislation and ministry policies related to FSL, transitions, education and career/life planning, and special education. By outlining actual requirements in these areas, we hope to encourage boards and schools to review their local practices and procedures to ensure that they promote the best possible outcomes for each individual student.

Like all students, students with special education needs have diverse strengths, interests, abilities, and challenges. Not all exceptional students face difficulties in learning a second language; others require specific interventions and supports to enable them to succeed in FSL programs. Because of this diversity, it is important that decisions regarding participation in FSL programs be made on a case-by-case basis, and it is essential that those involved in making these decisions have accurate and up-to-date information about relevant legislation, ministry policies, and related school board procedures. Research suggests that FSL program decisions are sometimes based on practices and traditions that boards and/or schools assume to be grounded in policy when, in fact, relevant policies may have changed over time or proposed policy may never have been formalized.

### FSL Policies and Practices

Until 2004, the ministry's Policy/Program Memorandum (PPM) No. 58 provided for the possibility of exemptions from the elementary Core French program. Since the revocation of PPM No. 58 in 2004, however, there is no ministry policy outlining exceptions to the inclusion of all students in FSL programs.

*The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language – Core, Grades 4–8; Extended, Grades 4–8; Immersion, Grades 1–8, 2013* and *The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language – Core, Extended, and Immersion French, Grades 9 to 12, 2014* are inclusive of all students. These documents state that, “to be effective, instruction must be based on the belief that all students can be successful and that learning French is important and valuable for all students” (Ontario, 2014b, p. 35).



with special education needs. Students and parents contemplating decisions about pathways, courses, and the transition between elementary and secondary school – including options for the study of FSL – may find it useful to review IPPs. In addition, the “All About Me” portfolios and IPPs can be used as a source of information when developing transition plans, which are required for all students with an IEP. (For further discussion of IEPs, see “Individual Needs and the IEP” below.) With respect to FSL, decisions can be further informed by access to current, reliable information about the cognitive, social, and academic benefits of second language learning, up-to-date information about FSL courses in different pathways, and information about the potential employment advantages associated with second language proficiency.

For more information about transitions and the education and career/life planning program, see *Creating Pathways to Success*, which can be found on the ministry’s website, at [www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/CreatingPathwaysSuccess.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/cps/CreatingPathwaysSuccess.pdf).

Information on the supports that will be available in the classroom to particular students can also inform decisions made during transition planning. It is important that students and parents are aware that all classrooms, including FSL classrooms, are required to provide appropriate supports for students who have special education needs. As noted earlier, to ensure that all students receive the support they need to be successful in FSL, both the elementary and secondary FSL curriculum documents include sections that are intended to support FSL teachers in planning for students who have special education needs, based on accommodations, modifications, or alternative expectations outlined in the IEP. As the curriculum documents also note, FSL teachers “have a responsibility to help all students learn, and they work collaboratively with special education teachers, where appropriate, to achieve this goal” (Ontario, 2013d, p. 35).

In order to support educators in continuing to develop the professional knowledge and skills needed to meet the needs of diverse learners in FSL, other Ministry of Education resources provide further information and strategies related to differentiated instruction, universal lesson design, and the integration of instruction and assessment practices. More information and examples of such strategies can be found on the following websites:

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/morestudentsuccess/instruction.html](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/morestudentsuccess/instruction.html)

[www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/asdsecond.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/asdsecond.pdf)

[www.curriculum.org/fsl](http://www.curriculum.org/fsl)

[www.edugains.ca/newsite/di/index.html](http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/di/index.html)

[www.edugains.ca/newsite/curriculum/index.html](http://www.edugains.ca/newsite/curriculum/index.html)

















# 3. Creating Inclusive Environments Together

This section begins with a discussion of mindsets and ways of thinking about inclusion, achievement, and success. We discuss the importance of open, progressive mindsets and the need to align practices with such beliefs. To support boards and schools in exploring their own practices and beliefs, we provide sample questions that can be used when assessing local practices and the values that underpin them. Finally, we outline a range of actions and strategies that schools and boards may wish to consider to help them create inclusive environments together.

## Aligning Practices and Beliefs

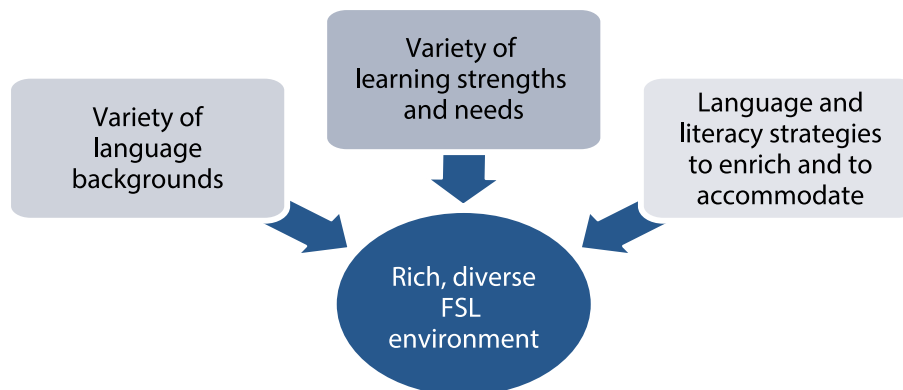
In the twenty-first century, educators and other stakeholders in the educational community have been moving away from “either/or” ways of thinking, which polarize program options, towards “both/and” ways of thinking, which promote diversity and positive learning environments. As an example of “either/or” thinking, French Immersion programs were sometimes considered to be “enrichment” programs and therefore unsuitable for, or unable to meet the needs of, some students. This sense of exclusivity distinguished optional Immersion programs from mandatory Core French programs and led to misleading comparisons between optional and mandatory FSL programs. Furthermore, the idea that FSL was not suitable for some students extended beyond the realm of optional programs, leading to practices that exempted students from even mandatory FSL.

In contrast, from a “both/and” perspective, all FSL programs are seen as offering *both* opportunities for enrichment *and* opportunities for support, based on individual students’ strengths and needs. Rather than focusing on a perceived need for exclusion, the “both/and” perspective promotes discussion of initiatives to support teachers and resource staff in providing high quality FSL education for all. From this perspective, FSL programs are enriched by including a diverse group of learners, and all students benefit from an explicit focus on second language and literacy strategies. The following diagram illustrates how FSL programs are viewed from a “both/and” perspective.



### “Both/And” Thinking

FSL programs are enriched by including a diverse group of learners.  
All students benefit from second language education  
and a focus on literacy strategies.



Other perspectives/mindsets can also affect decision making about inclusiveness in FSL programs. Based on many years of research on achievement and success, Carol Dweck (2006) has identified two kinds of mindsets – *fixed* and *growth*. In a fixed mindset, people believe that their basic qualities, such as intelligence or talents, are fixed traits. They believe that they are born with certain abilities and that, because of this, their success or failure is pre-determined (“*I can’t do French; I’m just not good at learning languages*”). She contrasts this with a growth mindset, in which people believe that their intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work – brains and talent are just the starting point (“*French was pretty hard for me at first, but the more I practise, the more I can communicate my ideas in French*”). Dweck and other researchers have applied this theory of mindsets in a variety of settings and have found that a growth mindset leads to a love of learning, a higher degree of perseverance in problem-solving situations, and a higher degree of resilience, as errors and challenges are seen as a natural part of learning.

This theory of mindsets provides a useful tool for examining beliefs about the participation in FSL of students with special education needs. It allows us to identify and analyse values and beliefs that may underlie local/district procedures and policies related to the inclusion of students with special education needs in FSL programs. In the following chart, the statements on the left reflect a fixed mindset. They might be considered “unproductive beliefs”, because they perpetuate the status quo, lead to the categorization of students, and may limit the inclusiveness of FSL programs. The statements on the right reframe these beliefs within a growth mindset. By moving towards these more “productive beliefs”, we are able to take actions on a case-by-case basis and develop evidence-based practices that reflect a commitment to equity and inclusiveness, that provide more opportunities for all students, and that continue to improve FSL teaching and learning.



## Asking Critical Questions: A Whole-System Approach

Engagement of and collaboration among all stakeholders are important elements of ensuring the provision of equitable and inclusive FSL programs. School boards engage in regular reviews of their FSL programs, policies, and procedures. Trustees, supervisory officers, and committees strive to offer the highest quality FSL programs and to meet the needs of their local community. School administrators, teachers, and guidance, Student Success, and special education staff frequently make decisions that affect the participation of individuals or groups in FSL programs. Parents, students, and other members of the school community communicate with each other to make decisions about programs and pathways, as they weigh options and make choices based on individual interests, strengths, and needs. The vision for inclusive education in Ontario welcomes and respects all of these stakeholders. All of these participants have an important voice in supporting the vision for inclusive education, that “every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning” (Ontario, 2009, p. 10).

Stakeholders at all levels are encouraged to consider ways to collaborate with each other and engage in conversations about inclusive education in FSL. The chart below includes examples of questions that tend to be posed, in a variety of situations, when decisions are being made about participation in FSL. The adjacent conversation points suggest ways of addressing these questions to eliminate or reduce barriers to inclusion that may be implied – however unintentionally – by them.







*Example of Practice:* When providing information about programs, focus on the programs themselves rather than on the abilities of the students, as shown in the following graphic.

### Providing Information about FSL Programs

**BEFORE**

Is my child a good candidate for French Immersion?

Good candidates for the program:

- Enjoy language
- Have strong listening and focusing skills
- Have strong communication skills in their mother tongue
- Enjoy new experiences

**AFTER**  
*We say oui!*

Embark on a pathway towards becoming bilingual:

<p><b>French Immersion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides English and French instruction in various subjects</li> <li>• Immerses students in language and cultural experiences</li> <li>• Provides opportunities to develop enhanced proficiency in French</li> </ul>	<p><b>Core French</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is offered daily as part of the regular English program</li> <li>• Provides valuable educational experience and builds intercultural understanding</li> <li>• Provides opportunities to develop functional communication skills in French</li> </ul>
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# Appendix A

## *Research-based Strategies to Support Students with Special Education Needs\**

### **Instructional Strategies**

- Differentiation of learning content, process, and/or product, depending on students' needs
- Use of memory aids (e.g., sentence starters, visual/auditory cues)
- Multi-sensory instruction and use of visual and manipulative supports
- Use of alternative learning resources (e.g., resources at different levels of complexity)
- Use of graphic organizers
- Teacher modelling
- Academic coaching (e.g., asking questions, scaffolding)
- Adding wait time
- Use of technology, including assistive technology
- Peer tutoring
- Reminding students of time remaining to complete an activity
- Minimizing distractions
- Providing positive reinforcement
- Providing social support

### **Assessment Strategies**

- Early identification of at-risk students
- Use of technology, including assistive technology
- Varying the assessment format (e.g., oral, written, visual)
- Allowing additional time
- Providing an alternative location with fewer distractions
- Providing opportunities for self-assessment and individual goal setting

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\* Adapted from a literature review conducted by Mady, Muhling, and Rose (2014).

### **Intervention Strategies**

- Explicit attention to strategies used by students
- Use of literacy strategies that transfer across languages
- Focus on metacognitive awareness
- Focus on phonological awareness
- Team teaching.

# Appendix B

## *Bridging the Gap from Policy to Practice*

The concept of inclusion can be examined from two points of reference: inclusive education as the removal of barriers or marginalization, and inclusive education based on key goals that build and sustain positive learning environments (Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth, 2013). In order to support multiple ways of thinking about inclusion, and to bridge the gap between inclusive policy and inclusive school practice, organizational support from a number of levels is needed.

The following chart outlines a possible approach to a gap analysis that might be conducted by a school board in relation to inclusive FSL programs. It outlines promising practices in five areas and provides key questions that can be used for reflection and discussion.



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