EXAMINATION OF THE PRACTICES, POLICIES AND SYSTEMS IN PLACE IN CANADA TO ENCOURAGE FRENCH-SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING BY IMMIGRANTS

Canadian Parents for French submission to the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages
EXAMINATION OF THE PRACTICES, POLICIES AND SYSTEMS IN PLACE IN CANADA TO ENCOURAGE FRENCH-SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING BY IMMIGRANTS

IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND FSL EDUCATION – EQUITABLE ACCESS DENIED

Recent statistics indicate that one in five Canadians is an immigrant, and that immigration is and will continue to be the primary source of population growth in our country. Currently, 90 per cent of our immigration stream is comprised of those who speak neither English nor French at home.

Research shows that, despite immigrant parent support for linguistic duality and official language bilingualism and the impressive performance of their children in core and immersion programs, immigrant students are often overlooked in French-second-official language (FSL) promotional and advocacy initiatives. They are not encouraged, and are sometimes actively discouraged, from enrolling in FSL education despite the impressive performance of those who do. Most disturbingly, immigrant parents are often discouraged by educators themselves. Studies indicate that teachers and principals consistently counsel parents not to enroll their children in French immersion because it will interfere with their ability to learn English. They also tell parents bluntly that learning French will be tough for immigrant children.

An Ontario study found that educators felt it would be a burden for children in English-second-language (ESL) programs to learn French, despite fairly clear evidence that children whose mother tongue is neither English nor French can attain marks and proficiency levels that meet or exceed those of their Anglophone counterparts in both core French and in French immersion at the elementary and secondary level. These findings were consistent at the post-secondary level, even in instances where Anglophone students had had up to five years more French-language instruction than the immigrant students. Moreover, there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate that immigrant children will acquire proficiency in English, provided they are in English-dominant communities.

A small study of immigrant parents and students showed that 80% of these parents received no information about French immersion options from the school system. Despite this, immigrant support for linguistic duality and FSL education remains high. Sixty per cent felt that learning both Canada’s official languages would benefit their children, and 40% had enrolled their children in French immersion despite discouragement from educators. This figure provides a striking contrast to national immersion enrolment, which hovers at about 8%, with provincial enrolment ranging from 6% to 26% outside Québec. Immigrant students, as well, demonstrated a strong commitment to mastering their second official language, with 50% of immigrant student respondents remaining in French beyond the compulsory period and completing the core French curriculum — an impressive rate compared with provincial completion rates ranging from 6% to 15%.

Table 1: National Core French and French Immersion Enrolment Statistics 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prov / Terr</th>
<th>% in FSL Programs</th>
<th>% in French Immersion</th>
<th>% in Core French</th>
<th>Total in FSL Programs</th>
<th>Total in French Immersion</th>
<th>Total in Core French</th>
<th>Total Eligible Students</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>190,319</td>
<td>35,398</td>
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<td>BC</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8.3</td>
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<td>47,624</td>
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<tr>
<td>MB</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>81,775</td>
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<td>23.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>NL</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>47.1</td>
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<td>8,698</td>
<td>32,232</td>
<td>68,463</td>
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<tr>
<td>NS</td>
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<td>2.2</td>
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<td>183</td>
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<td>67,648</td>
<td>105,377</td>
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In Canada, the regulation and supervision of education resides with the provinces and territories, which carefully guard their constitutional jurisdiction over education. As it pertains to access to FSL education, however, they have not used their authority to create many formal policies. Such an absence of direction can give way to inconsistent and inequitable access to FSL education whereas formal policies may be the most effective starting point to achieving more equitable access. In fact some researchers suggest that the formal policy process is the most effective method by which to improve education.

Some Ministries of Education have developed informal policies, described as de facto policies or practices that have become legitimized over time. Unfortunately, the ‘spirit’ of an informal policy may be interpreted differently from one school to the next creating further inconsistencies. As demonstrated by Figure 1, there are very few specific, formal policies at the provincial/territorial level to encourage enrolment and ensure that immigrant students have equitable access to FSL programming. Although absence of formal policies pertaining to access to FSL education does not necessarily equate to absence of commitment or equitable practices, their lack does provide more opportunities for inconsistency. Conversely, an increase in formal policies that specifically address the above influential factors of equitable access to FSL programming could provide a foundation grounded in research, where applicable, on which administrators could base their decisions.

At the same time, there are ministry-level policies that bolster exclusionary attitudes. For instance, a B.C. Ministry of Education policy states that all students must take a second language as part of the curriculum between grades 5 and 8, except where those students are identified as having special needs or are ESL students. Districts interpret this policy in different ways. In Victoria, for example, the language coordinator indicates that nearly every student taking ESL is exempt from taking French and that they take ESL while other students take FSL.

Figure 1 Provincial/Territorial Policies Affecting Immigrant Students

Linguistic duality as rooted in our two official languages is an essential element to our Canadian identity, and the continued exclusion of this demographic group through policies and educational programs will ultimately pose a fundamental challenge to the notion of linguistic duality and thus to our very understanding of what it means to be a Canadian. Canadian Parents for French and its members believe that FSL education is an opportunity for every child. It benefits our children, our communities and our country. As Canadians, we have an obligation to ensure that every segment of our population has an equal opportunity to learn and to be proficient in their second official language, to be part of a workplace where bilingualism is demanded, and to experience or gain entry to the richness of the francophile and francophone culture. No child should be disenfranchised by not having access to the FSL program of their choice.

Canadian Parents for French and the federal government are long-standing allies in this struggle. We have the same vision of Canada’s linguistic duality, and must work together to promote this vision and eliminate the many obstacles faced by immigrant youth. We can do this by working together to build a comprehensive promotional program that speaks directly to all Canadians, to our immigrant families, to the educational community and to provincial ministerial staff more broadly. We
can collaborate with you and with our many francophone and research partners to help identify the critical areas of research that need to be conducted to support that awareness raising and our outreach efforts.

CPF and its members encourage the Government of Canada:

a) To ensure that all immigration officers and immigrant settlement services provide every immigrant with information about school-based French-second-language education;

b) To establishing policies ensuring equitable access to FSL education for immigrant students;

c) To fund a major study comparing the English and French proficiency achievement of immigrant French immersion students with Canadian-born immersion students and with their immigrant peers in the regular English program; and

d) To collaborate with FSL stakeholders in the development of a promotional campaign targeted to immigrant parents and students, to educators and to educational decision-makers.

CPF Position Statement on Equitable Access to French-Second-Language Programs
The members of Canadian Parents for French believe that every child should have equitable access to the French-second-language program of their choice. French-second-language programs are accessible to all students when:

- There is open enrolment with no admission criteria or enrolment caps so that no child is turned away;
- Transportation is provided at no cost for both urban and rural students;
- Distance learning is available to provide French-second-language learning for students in small and remote communities;
- No additional fees are charged for French-second-language programs;
- Programming and specialist services are provided for gifted, special need and Allophone students;
- Every parent is regularly informed about French-second-language options and entry points, as well as the French-language proficiency levels which can be expected from each option;
- All students receive the information they need to make decisions about continuing to learn French at the secondary and post-secondary levels as well as outside of the education system.
A CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM OF INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT FOR FRENCH SECOND LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
- Supports Canada’s Official Languages through funding and policy

PROVINCIAL & TERRITORIAL GOVERNMENTS
- Have jurisdiction in and provide funding for education
- Determine provincial policy on official languages (e.g. Quebec, New Brunswick)

DEPARTMENT OF CANADIAN HERITAGE
- Administers federal funding for the Official Languages in Education (OLEP) Program based on Action Plans developed by each province and territory
- Provides funding for research through the Language Acquisition Development Program

COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION, CANADA
- Coordinates official-language activities based on agreements between federal and provincial/territorial governments
- Administers the Official Languages Monitor and Summer Language Bursary programs

PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION AND/OR LEARNING
- Prepare Action Plans and negotiate with the federal government for funding under the OLEP program
- May provide additional funding for FSL programs
- Determine guidelines for how FSL programs will operate

FSL STAKEHOLDERS
- Encourage the development of quality, accessible FSL Programs
- Provide opportunities for students to use and practice French
- Conduct research and disseminate findings

SCHOOL BOARDS/DISTRICTS
- Request and administer funds for FSL Programs
- May develop district-level policies for how FSL programs will operate

PARENTS
- Participate in a variety of school, school district, regional and provincial/territorial parent advisory councils across the country
- Formally and informally advise education decision-makers of parent and student needs

SCHOOLS
- Run FSL programs

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Financial relationship
Information sharing relationship
**Recommended Reading**

Canadian Labour and Business Centre, Trends in Immigration, Ottawa: Author
http://www.clbc.ca/files/reports/ihb_section_a.pdf


Sinay, E. (2012) Programs of Choice in the TDSB: Characteristics of Students in French Immersion, Alternative Schools, and Other Specialized Schools and Programs, Toronto District School Board, Toronto
http://www.tdsh.on.ca/wwwdocuments/about_us/external_research_application/docs/ProgramsOfChoiceStudentCharacteristics.pdf
