

# French-language minority schools:

Resistance, resilience and growth!



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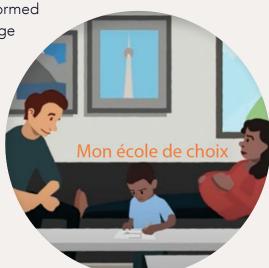


In Canada, minority French-language education is delivered from coast to coast in 9 provinces and 3 territories and is the cornerstone of Francophone and Acadian communities.

Their growth is closely linked to their ability to ensure their children receive a French-language education. This ability – severely tested historically – is rooted in a **national network** of elementary and secondary schools. Since its creation in the 90s, the network remains a focus of strong interest among Francophones and Francophiles, both in Canada and abroad.

French-language schools represent an informed choice for the transmission of the French language and culture, while allowing students to develop their English language skills. French-language schools educate citizens who are fluently bilingual in both official languages, thus embodying the linguistic duality at the heart of the Canadian identity.

Series available in French, English and Arabic. > https://fncsf.ca/education-en-langue-francaise-elf/ mon-ecole-de-choix/



# French-language schools in full swing

## 1.1. At a glance



What is the difference between French first-language education and French immersion programs?

French first-language education: in French-language schools, French is taught as a mother tongue in a Francophone cultural environment. Everything is conducted in French from Junior Kindergarten through secondary school, except for English and foreign language classes.

French immersion programs: in English-language schools, part of the teaching is conducted in French in an Anglophone environment. French is taught as a second language.

# Who can attend a French-language school?

A child is eligible if the parent is a Canadian citizen and meets at least ONE of the following criteria:

- French is the first language learned and still understood;
- has received his or her education at the elementary level in a French-language school in Canada;
- is the parent of a child who has received or receives education at the elementary or secondary level in a French-language school in Canada.

In addition, in most Canadian provinces and territories, the children of Francophile parents may be admitted subject to an admissions committee review. Once admission is granted, the parent becomes a "rights holder" and all of his or her children are entitled to a Frenchlanguage education throughout Canada. They, in turn, will be able to enroll their descendants in a French-language school.

In certain provinces and territories, Section 23 of the <u>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</u> contains a "grandfather" clause which allows grandchildren to attend a Frenchlanguage school provided they have or had a French-speaking grandparent (even if their parents were unable to go to a French-language school or no longer speak French).



French-language schools fall under the jurisdiction of French school boards, which are responsible for implementing the Education Act in their province or territory. They also ensure that schools provide a rich living and learning environment that fosters the transmission of the French language and culture.



There are French school boards in **all** Francophone minority settings, that is, in 9 provinces and 3 territories. All 28 of them offer free public education, be it Catholic or secular. Students achieve excellent academic results, as demonstrated by Ministry exam results.

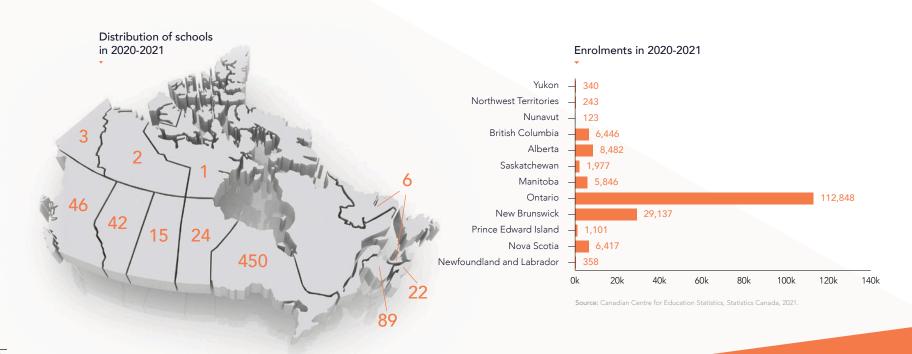


Since the creation of French school boards in the early 90s, enrolment in French-language schools has steadily increased, leading to the opening of new schools each year.



Minority French-language education is on the rise:

- Over 700 elementary and secondary schools;
- 60 new schools between 2016 and 2021;
- Approximately 174,000 students (an almost 20% rise in enrolments since 2010).





Economic contribution of French school boards

French school boards and their network of 700 schools participate in the cultural and social development of Francophone and Acadian communities and contribute to their respective region's economic prosperity through:



An annual budget totalling over \$2.8 billion



Some 25,000 employees, including over 13,000 teachers

The French-language education network: driver of vitality for Francophone and Acadian communities

Between 2015-2016 and 2020-2021, the number of students jumped by 8.72% (+13,889) students). It is estimated that by 2030, there will be 200,000 students in the network.



## 1.2. The specificity of French-language schools

### A unique model

Schools educate children in French and help them strengthen their Francophone identity. Today's schools are integrated into everyday life. Indeed, French-language schools are animated by the concept of the <u>civic community school</u> wherein the classroom is in the community and the community is in the classroom! This fosters the development of a sense of belonging to a welcoming and caring community among youth.

The civic community school is a community that has class!

#### The four added values of French first-language education



#### Success and well-being

Schools focus on student success and well-being. They offer quality learning spaces; organize activities that allow students to engage in cultural, social, artistic and sport experiences in French; and value cultural diversity by fostering integration and inclusion. The result? An excellent graduation rate in the network of French-language schools!

L'ÉCOLE COMMUNAUTAIRE CITOYENNE







Schools offer a unique framework to foster lifelong bilingualism in Francophone students, who learn and live in French at school as they evolve in a predominantly Anglophone society. In addition, English is taught from elementary school through to Grade 12 and, at the secondary level, English courses are taught with the same rigour and the same requirements as in English-language schools. Hence, the students learn English without detrimental effects on their French and develop an additive bilingualism. Those who obtain their secondary school diploma are thus guaranteed to master Canada's two official languages.

### **Employability**

Being bilingual, engaged in their Francophone community and connected to the majority Anglophone environment, graduates become assets on the job market in Canada and abroad. Indeed, bilingualism and multilingualism meet employers' needs. In Canada, the salary of a bilingual employee is 18 to 20% higher than the average.

#### Enriched cultural environment

Rooted across the country, the Canadian Francophonie is enriched each year by immigrant Francophones. French-language schools build on this diversity to offer a rich and engaging education. They are a vehicle for rallying together, and for exchange and understanding between, people from all walks of life for whom French is the common denominator.

Francophones from here or from abroad, but above all with soul, we are our past conjugated in the present in a multitude of accents!



## 1.3. 400 years of resistance and marginal gains

The existence of French-language schools in Canada and the constitutional right of Francophones to have their children educated in French outside Québec are the result of numerous milestones that have shaped our country's history.

#### 1840

#### The difficult beginnings of French-language education (1840-1963)

Under British rule, an English-only public education system is created. In French Canada (Lower Canada), the Catholic Church provides French-language education without state support. As of 1867, when provinces start putting public education systems in place, several schools are prohibited from teaching in French, giving rise to crises that mobilize Franco-phone communities.



## The emergence of French-language schools(1963-1982)

In the early 60s, through resistance and modest gains, various communities obtain bilingual elementary schools and private French colleges. While a few French-only schools appear in the 70s, a large number of young people must enrol in English-language schools, which contributes to their linguistic assimilation.

1963 1982







Although the right is acquired, provinces are slow in applying it, such that it takes court proceedings and the Supreme Court of Canada's *Mahé decision* in 1990 to compel them to create French-only schools that are managed by French school boards.

Finally, contesting the lack of resources allocated to their schools that would allow them to offer an education of equivalent quality throughout their network, Francophone communities secure the right to an education of equal quality for both official language communities from the Supreme Court in 2020. Thousands of future Francophone students could benefit from the application of this decision, which breathes new life into Section 23 of the Canadian Charter.

Many gains, hard-won by previous generations, are acquired but vigilance is essential to preserve, consolidate and grow the Franco-Canadian education network!



# **Pressing issues**

### Did you know?

Education comes under provincial jurisdiction. Canada's Constitution Act of 1867 states that "in each province, the Legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to education". In the 10 provinces and 3 territories, Ministers of Education are responsible for organizing, delivering and assessing elementary and secondary education.





Although provinces and territories have exclusive jurisdiction over education, the federal government has a constitutional duty towards official language minority education. Pursuant to Part VII of the Official Languages Act, it must, together with the provinces and territories, take the necessary measures to enhance the development and vitality of linguistic minorities.

#### 2.1. The right to school governance: beyond the turmoil

The Official Languages Act has not been updated since its creation in 1969. A reform of the law should take into account the special status of French as a vulnerable language which, like all of its institutions, requires specific protection and promotion measures. A range of changes was proposed in 2021, including among others:

- The recognition of the linguistic minority's right to school governance;
- The recognition of the right of equal access to quality instruction in the minority language from preschool through to the postsecondary level;
- Statistics Canada's obligation to enumerate, through censuses, individuals who have the right to enrol their children in French-language schools, pursuant to Section 23 of the Charter.

Enshrining these measures in the Act, should they be adopted, would:

- Reaffirm the education rights of Francophones in minority settings;
- Provide a tool allowing for enhanced planning of the network's growth, in particular as regards the construction of new schools.



#### "Let's seek out the children who are entitled to be educated in French!"

Following recommendations from the French-language school network and Francophone and Acadian communities, Statistics Canada modified the Canada census form in order to better track the number of eligible children in French school boards in minority settings. Questions were added that will allow for an improved documentation of Francophones' education requirements, thus facilitating the approval of requests for new schools.

## 2.2. Lifelong learning!

Early childhood, the foundation for the continuum of education

Early childhood services are the gateway to elementary and secondary education and, therefore, to postsecondary education.

# Early recruitment of clients: the success of Nova Scotia's preschool program *Grandir en français*.

The Provincial Acadian School Board offers the *Grandir en français*. francisation program in each of its regions. The program is geared to 4-year-old children and aims to better prepare them to start school.

Mélissa Aucoin is the mother of Isaac Teakles, who benefited from the program.

When she enrolled him, his knowledge of French was limited: he knew how to say "dog" and "cat", and could count to 20. Within only three months, he was conversing in French with his mother.

She explains: "The hardest thing for Isaac was overcoming his shyness, as he had never been to an early childhood program. He learned French quite naturally. My mother is Acadian and I am a product of French immersion. But I lost my French. Thanks to Isaac, my French improved and I reconnected with my culture and my language much to the pleasure of my mother and my husband, a unilingual Anglophone, who both see the benefits of being bilingual."



#### Demand outstrips the supply

In 2019, over 9,000 youngsters were on a waiting list for a spot in an early childhood program in Canada (outside Québec). For lack of spaces, parents enrol their children in bilingual or English services, which hastens the children's linguistic assimilation. That is why francisation programs for 3- to 5-year-olds should be protected by Section 23 of the <u>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms</u> Intersectoral collaboration among stakeholders at the national level – including members of the Alliance stratégique en petite enfance – is key to increasing the number of spaces in French early childhood programs. Raising the profile of the educator profession and more competitive salaries are also required to improve access.



#### The demographic reality for Francophones

Despite the demographic decline of Francophones and Acadians in minority settings, enrolment in French-language schools increases year after year. The French-language education network has the wind in its sails thanks in part to the definition of "Francophone", which includes Francophiles, and the contribution of exogamous and immigrant families.

#### The inclusive definition of "Francophone" in Ontario

Since 2009, the Ontario government has adopted an expanded definition of the Francophone population, which also includes individuals whose mother tongue is not French but who know French and speak it at home.

#### Exogamous and immigrant families

Exogamy, a couple composed of a Francophone parent and one who speaks another language, now accounts for 3 out of 4 households. In an effort to help parents and children, many French school boards offer support and francisation programs. Furthermore, the growth of the French-language school network is increasingly driven by immigration. Over the next few years, the government of Canada hopes the demographic weight of minority Francophones will exceed 4% of the population.



#### Fostering linguistic security

Linguistic security is about providing students with the means to feel confident about their language skills when they use French. It is understanding that all types of French, with their own accents and expressions, nurture culture and identity. Several national groups that are committed to the Canadian Francophonie have contributed to the Linguistic Security Taskforce and distributed the National Strategy for Linguistic Security. The Strategy offers potential solutions to alleviate the insecurity by building a Francophone identity among youth.



#### Promoting French-language schools in Canada and abroad

Despite the steady increase in enrolment in French-language schools, 1 out of 2 rights holders does not pursue this avenue for his or her children's schooling. This is mainly due to the lack of neighbourhood schools and/or facilities that are of the same quality as those of the majority. Another reason cited by parents is their lack of knowledge about the French-language school network's performance, and about their right to a French-language education.

Recruitment: It is vital to raise awareness among rights holder, immigrant and exogamous families. Also, to maximize loyalty among their client base so that students choose to complete all of their schooling in French, French-language schools must be able to maintain and even expand their competitive range of education services (specialized sports-study programs, International Baccalaureate programs, etc.)

Welcome: Specific strategies for welcoming rights holder parents and children can facilitate families' integration into the French-language education system. For example, the <u>Coffee Community Program</u>, an initiative of the Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario, provides tools and resources for newcomers to the school community.

Retention: Students must be supported in their schooling to ensure their integration and success. For example, settlement workers in schools foster the integration and development of students and their families that have newly arrived in Canada.

#### Promoting post-secondary education in French

Schools encourage students to pursue post-secondary education in French, and work with the Francophonie's colleges and universities to promote the service offering. A survey of students graduating from French-language schools in 2009¹ revealed that 64% intended to pursue their post-secondary studies in French. However, provincial/territorial disparities in the provision of French-language programs often stop students in their tracks.



#### Strengthening adult education in French-language schools

Whether to improve or to acquire new skills, many adults now turn to French school boards that offer this type of training.

## 2.3. Qualified teaching staff: the pressures of a growing network

The need for reliable data to assess the qualified manpower shortage and plan for future needs

French school boards are the victims of their own success. The growth of the network, at the rate of 3,000 new students per year in the past 8 years, highlights the desperate need for qualified teaching staff in all provinces and territories. Conservative estimates suggest that 1,500 to 2,000 teachers are needed in the 28 French school boards. This acute shortage is exacerbated by the needs of the French second-language education system, which is also looking for Francophone teachers. The Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones and national partners are collaborating on the development of a living database in order to get a picture that supports local staff recruitment and retention strategies.



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#### Measures to support recruitment, retention and the promotion of the teaching profession

Staff recruitment and retention are a priority for all school boards, but even more so in isolated areas. Since the implementation of the **Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy** in 2019, the government of Canada has invested \$46.5 million in projects aimed at addressing the shortage of Francophone teachers. This investment is important for recruiting and retaining teachers: indeed, in addition to the shortage, statistics indicate a 20% dropout rate among new teachers.

School boards and a group of national partners are working together to find lasting solutions such as improving access to training for future teachers, promoting the profession, better equipping new teachers, fostering the recognition of foreign-trained teachers' professional qualifications, and interprovincial mobility. The shortage extends to all school staff where there is also a pressing need for specialists (speech-language pathologists, psychologists, occupational therapists, etc.) and others responsible for academic support. The certification of unqualified teachers is another network priority.

### 2.4. One community, one school!

#### Testimonial:

"In 1984, I was part of the first cohort of students who could attend a French-language school in Edmonton, Alberta. 30 years later, it was my children's turn to also be able to learn in their mother tongue. But this was not without trade-offs. They have a 90-minute round-trip school bus ride every day. We need more French-language neighbourhood schools to better serve Francophones. It's a matter of rights and of fairness.".

#### Tanya Saumure,

School Trustee and mother of Juliet, 14, and Alice, 11.



#### More schools required to serve Francophones

When schools are too far away, too small or appear to be of inferior quality compared to those of the surrounding majority, the network loses students to the English system, with the added consequence of hastening assimilation:

- Many schools occupy rented or inadequate buildings with outdated amenities;
- Many communities do not have a French-language school;
- The increasing number of students puts pressure on the infrastructure and schools are "overflowing".



#### A structural permanent solution

Given the 2020 Supreme Court of Canada decision on substantive equality and the funding of French-language education, Francophones clearly have a right to quality fixed assets.

# 2.5. A funding formula adapted to the needs of French-language schools

By giving young Francophones roots and wings, French-language schools play a decisive role in the vitality of French in Canada. School boards must be able to obtain adequate funding to educate students in French and strengthen their Francophone identity.



#### Leadership Camp in Manitoba

The Franco-Manitoban School Division which operates the province's French-language schools bought a cottage in 2017 in order to host leadership camps for its students. Each year, together with Jeunes manitobains des communautés associées, over one hundred students share a unique experience aimed at strengthening their Francophone identity. The costs of the cottage, transportation, accommodation, meals, and of camp planning, coordination and facilitation, are borne by the school board which considers them as an investment in fostering a French future for its students.

# French first-language education must be at the heart of the federal Action Plan for Official Languages – 2023-2028

Through the five-year Official Languages in Education Program, the federal government transfers funds earmarked for minority language education to the provinces and territories, based on bilateral agreements that respect each province and territory's jurisdictions and needs. This funding envelope has not been significantly grossed-up in 10 years, during which time both the school population and the cost of living have increased. Catch-up funding is needed. An additional investment of 35% would allow for a modest catch-up and bring the envelope to just over \$1 billion. These funds are critical to enhance students' educational experience, as schooling Francophone students costs more.



# Continuing the dialogue with provinces and territories on bilateral agreements in education

The 2017 **Strategic Education Agreement**<sup>2</sup> marks a new era of cooperation between the provinces and territories, school boards and Francophone and Acadian Communities to support French first-language education in minority settings. The Agreement ensures:

- More effective consultation with school boards with regard to decisions on education expenditures and initiatives;
- Enhanced transparency and accountability for federal funds given to provinces and territories in support of French-language education. Funding allocated as part of the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction (OLEP) must be spent on cultural and Francophonie programs and services.



# 3

# What does the future hold for French-language schools?

#### Proximity governance

When it comes to effective governance, publicly elected school trustees are in the best position to respond to the interests of students, parents and communities. They have important responsibilities including the development and monitoring of the board's multi-year strategic plan, and the hiring and performance appraisal of the director of education.

Given Francophone minority communities' right to substantive equality, French-language schools need to rely on a legislative framework, such as the modernization of the *Official Languages Act*, or on full school governance in order to adequately meet their communities' needs.



#### In-person and distance learning

"Virtual schools" require improved access to technology, consolidation of the high-speed Internet network in remote areas, and the development of digital skills among staff and students. For communities without a school over a large geographic area, they are an alternate solution until a neighbourhood school is built.

#### Evolving education programs

Education programs must reflect the history of Francophones while raising students' awareness of Aboriginal culture by integrating both First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives and the principles of reconciliation.

#### Inclusive schools

In ethnoculturally diverse contexts, schools implement equity and inclusion practices in support of living together better. Education community stakeholders intend to continue developing an organizational structure that is based on equity, inclusion and social justice in order to foster healthy, respectful and safe environments.

#### Student mental health

Mental health support services must continue to be offered and indeed expanded for students who require them, so as to create school environments that promote the well-being of learners regardless of the teaching delivery or the attendance model (in-person or virtual).



# Taking action: Walking the talk!

French-language schools are a crucial link for the existence and vitality of Francophone minority communities: while growing in popularity, they must be strongly supported by provincial, territorial and the federal governments.

French school boards have identified six education priorities for consolidating the French-language school network:



- **1. Recognizing** school boards' right to school governance.
- 2. Adapting a funding formula that reflects the specificity of French-language schools.
- **3. Increasing** the federal government's financial support for official languages in education (OLEP).
- **4. Building** schools and upgrading existing ones.
- **5. Developing** the educational continuum from early childhood through to the postsecondary.
- **6. Addressing** the shortage of Francophone teachers and school staff.

The Centre scolaire secondaire communautaire Paul-Émile-Mercier in Whitehorse (Yukon): a model for the network.



Inaugurated in 2021, the architecturally sleek Centre aims to offer a multi-purpose space used for educational and cultural purposes. Since its creation, the number of enrolments has increased by 40% and it is estimated the Centre will have reached its capacity (150 students) by 2022.

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