

I'm with you!

And so are we!
The benefits of French-language education

Updated version



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This handbook is an updated version of *I'm With You!: Exogamous Families' Guide to the World of Francophone Education* which was first published in 2003. Content in this latest version has been enhanced to include additional information on the topic.

This guide offers an overview of the basics of French-language education. For more information, we suggest you read the book titled *Fusion (I'm with you 2: Raising a bilingual child in a two-language household)* by Glen Taylor, which is a sequel to this handbook.

I'm with you! - Guide to the World of Francophone Education for Exogamous Families

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I'm With You!: Exogamous Families' Guide to the World of Francophone Education.

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Welcome to your guide!

This guide offers an overview of the basics of French-language education.

If you're the Anglophone half of a mixed French/English couple, this guide is for you. In the following pages, we'll look at the situation of mixed couples where one parent has the right to enroll his/her children in a French-language school.

Parents who exercise this right open the door to challenges and rewards. If you speak little or no French, some of the challenges are obvious from the outset. Yet they are not insurmountable! There are many ways you can help your children get the most out of their education and develop their full potential.

French-language education in Canada provides added value both to the learner and the learner's family.

French educational institutions in minority communities convey and promote Francophone culture. As a result, learners acquire skills and knowledge in French and are able to thrive in a French environment.

The impact of a learner's experience in a rich and diverse cultural environment carries beyond the confines of the day care centre, school, college or university attended. The impact is far-reaching and benefits the learner's immediate surrounding while contributing to the community's general success.

In Canada, French-language education produces high numbers of graduates who are bilingual for life, engaged in their community while being internationally minded, and who have excellent employment prospects.

See for yourself: experience French-language education in Canada!

The exogamous family

Exogamy

Exogamy is a fancy word that simply defines the union between two people with different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds. In French, the term is *exogamie*.

Some people prefer to use “mixed”, “linguistically mixed”, or “culturally mixed” when referring to these couples. Regardless of the expression one chooses, the fact remains that a lot of children in Canada’s Francophone education system come from this type of family.

About your family

If you and your spouse form an exogamous couple, how would you describe your family identity—especially its linguistic component—to a stranger? It’s a question people don’t generally dwell on. Rather, it’s a reality that evolves over time, and it takes on a new dimension when children appear on the scene. It can also cause concern among members of your respective families. For instance, how many grandparents worry that their grandchildren won’t be able to speak their language?

With some basic decisions and solidarity between the couple, building a harmonious family identity based on two or more languages and cultures can be very rewarding. Among other things, exogamous couples need to make decisions in the areas of language, culture, and education.

Exogamy... regardless of the expression one chooses, the fact remains that a lot of children in Canada’s Francophone education system come from this type of family

Children in culturally mixed families have the potential to become fluently bilingual and identify with Francophone and Anglophone culture. They can do this when both parents respect each other’s language and culture. Studies show that parents also help when they encourage the use of French at home and enroll their children in a Francophone school.

“What’s best for my child?”

It’s not always easy to be objective, especially when it comes to making important decisions for our children. We’re influenced by our own reality, which means our own successes, failures, hopes, fears, aspirations, apprehensions, and so on. This is only natural, but at the same time all those influences can make it difficult to answer a deceptively simple question: “What’s best for my child?”

Exogamous couples face some unique challenges brought about by the presence of two languages and cultures in their home. Consider just a few of the questions that need to be answered sooner or later: What language(s) should we speak to our children? Do we want our children to be bilingual? Bicultural? Anglophone? Francophone? What does it mean to be one or the other; are they mutually exclusive? What’s the best way for our

youngsters to develop their language skills? What does each of us want to pass on to our children more than anything else? And how does all this fit into their overall development?

Ultimately, the answers depend on each spouse's comfort level. Some parents are comfortable with the idea of their children becoming fluently bilingual and bicultural. Others would prefer that their youngsters become bilingual Anglophones, still others bilingual Francophones. Then there are those who'd rather see their children retain a single language and culture—inevitably that of the majority.

Some key benefits of studying in a French-language school

But comfort levels aren't set in stone: they evolve as people learn more about the issues.

They can also change when parents focus on what's best for their children. It's something we have to ask ourselves over and over—and over!—again when making decisions about our children's future. This may seem obvious, but it isn't. It takes a constant effort to look beyond our own influences in order to see things from our children's point of view in the short, medium, and long term.

Keep in mind that your children have a unique potential to gain two languages and cultures from the moment they're born. How you help them develop this potential is up to you.

Some key benefits of studying in a French-language school:

- High-level bilingualism and long-term proficiency in both official languages.
- Success and well-being.
- Increased likelihood of pursuing post-secondary training or academic studies of their choice in a French-language, English-language or bilingual institution.
- A rich and diversified cultural environment that is reflective of the Francophone community.
- Excellent prospects for employment at local, provincial, national and international levels.

2



Heading out

The preschool years

Children learn a phenomenal amount before they set foot in a school. During their preschool years, youngsters begin to develop their creativity, self-confidence, language skills, cultural identity, decision-making abilities, independence, spirit of initiative, and capacity to make connections with their environment. They also start learning how to learn—a process that can take a variety of forms. As if that's not enough, research has shown that the physical structure of infants' brains can actually be affected by the quality of the stimuli they're exposed to during this critical time.

At the end of this guide you'll find some suggestions on educational activities that you can do with your child (3 to 6 years old) to improve his or her reading, expression and counting skills in French.



It's hard to overstate the importance of children's preschool years. Among other things, this is when they begin to make sense of the world around them through language, which enables them to understand others and make themselves understood. Children build much of their language foundation before the age of six.

Preschoolers develop linguistic skills not only in terms of vocabulary and grammar, but in more complex and abstract ways as well. From using simple words to express their most basic needs, they go on to create imaginary worlds, describe situations, and convey information. Their progress is perhaps most evident on the phone—especially in conversations with distant relatives—when they have to rely solely on their ability to use words. Communicating in this way is central to developing youngsters' reading and writing skills.

During their preschool years, children are also busy developing two other vital elements of their identity: intelligence and literacy. Infants observe the world around them and combine all this input to build an understanding. By observing their behaviour, parents can get an idea of how their little ones perceive their environment.

While their infants are busy learning, parents' changing priorities and choice of daycare, preschool, and kindergarten bring them into contact with a community of like-minded individuals. Parents who choose Francophone institutions join the home-school-community partnership that creates a relevant educational experience for their children. That's because Canada's French-language educational system is built around the idea of civic community school¹. Civic community schools aim to redefine the relationship between school and community in order to foster engagement by all members of the community and improve learners' chances of success at all ages.

Parents who choose Francophone institutions join the home-school-community partnership that creates a relevant educational experience for their children

The home-school-community partnership

Parents who choose a Francophone daycare, preschool, or kindergarten are about to connect with a community that understands them better than any other. Such institutions exist to fill a need among Francophone and exogamous families for services tailored to their situation. By assisting these families, they also serve the minority community. The result: children find themselves at the heart of a three-way educational partnership that accompanies them from their preschool years until they graduate from high school.

The home-school-community partnership makes children's education meaningful. Parents play a central role at home as primary educators, addressing children's diverse needs and helping them explore their bilingual and bicultural potential. The school helps children develop various forms of literacy by teaching the provincial or territorial curriculum, which is designed to form educated, well-rounded citizens. In Francophone schools, there's also a focus on the specific needs of children with Francophone roots. Finally, the community provides real-life experiences through activities and services that validate children's home and school education.



1 <http://ECC-Canada.ca/about/>.

The synergy of the home-school-community partnership fosters a positive, balanced identity among children whose family heritage makes them part of a minority Francophone community.

Three types of French education

Do your friends and relatives persist in believing that your children are taking an immersion program when in fact they attend a French-language school? Even after you patiently explain the difference between immersion and Francophone education, do half of them walk away still convinced your youngsters are in immersion? Probably. Yet there are fundamental distinctions between the two, as there are between immersion and “core” or “basic” French. The three types of education serve three different purposes; parents’ choice depends on their options, priorities, goals, and Charter rights.

French first language

As its name implies, French first language education is tailor-made for children with Francophone roots. The French-language school is a facility designed for living, learning, and integrating the French language, culture and community. In other words, it exists not only to address students’ academic needs, but to help them explore and develop their Francophone heritage. It also provides a unique setting for children with Francophone roots to become bilingual for life.

Difference between immersion and Francophone education

French first language education is intended for children who are eligible under *section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Francophone schooling takes place entirely in French from Kindergarten to the end of high school; the French language and Francophone culture in the classroom are a natural extension of children’s family and community life. In addition, English is taught throughout elementary and high school levels with the same curriculum as in English-language schools.

Francophone education : unique setting for children to become bilingual for life

Upon graduation, students can expect to be highly proficient in French and identify with and be part of the diversified Francophone culture and community. They’ll also be highly proficient in English, and be able to pursue postsecondary studies and work in French, English, or both official languages.

French immersion

French immersion is a program offered by Anglophone school boards. It is designed for children whose family heritage is other than French. The goal is to learn French as a second language. French is the language of instruction for a significant portion of each school day, although the amount varies from one program to another. Immersion begins with a focus on language development so that students can learn to speak and read French well enough to study other subjects in that language. They also take the English-language curriculum and other courses in English.

When they complete an immersion program, students can expect to be functionally fluent in French (able to live, work, and pursue postsecondary studies in French). In addition, they’ll have gained an understanding and appreciation of Francophone culture.



Core French

Like immersion, “core” or “basic” French instruction is designed for children with a family heritage other than French. In this program, however, French is taught as a subject, like math, social studies, English, and science. French is the language of communication during that class, and children’s knowledge and skills are developed through the use of themes and projects.

When they complete a core French program, students can expect to have a good basis in French from which to pursue fluency. They’ll also have gained insights into and an appreciation of Francophone culture.

Both immersion and core programs provide students with the opportunity to learn French as a second language, with all the benefits that brings in Canada and on the international scene.

Children who receive any of the three types of French-language education will be able to appreciate other languages, cultures, and communities throughout Canada and around the world. Their horizons truly will be broadened by the experience, no matter which path they have taken.

Who can attend a French-language school?

French-language schools across Canada (outside Quebec) are intended for Canadian citizens who qualify under *section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

According to section 23, the following people are eligible:

1. All children of a parent whose first language learned and still understood is French;
2. All children of a parent who received his or her primary school instruction in Canada in French*;
3. All children whose sibling has received or is receiving primary or secondary school instruction in Canada in French*.

** Instruction must take place in French first language; French immersion does not confer section 23 rights.*

Moreover, any parent can submit an application for admission to the French-language school of his or her choice. The child’s eligibility is determined by the admissions committee within the designated school board. Once the child’s admission to a French-language school is granted, the parent becomes a “rights-holder”, and all his or her children become entitled to a French-language education (FLE) anywhere in Canada. They in turn will be able to register their own children at a French-language school.

Many parents in Canada are unaware that they are rights-holders. However, a rights-holder who chooses not to register his or her child in a French-language school risks depriving his or her descendants of the right to French-language education. To regain their right to FLE, his or her grandchildren may have to submit an application to the admissions committee of the designated school board.

Many parents in Canada are unaware that they are rights-holders



In 2008, the Federal Government created the Language Rights Support Program (LRSP) financed by Canadian Heritage. It replaces the dismantled Court Challenges Program of Canada. One of the LRSP's purposes is to promote awareness of constitutional language rights, especially in education.²

To register your child at an elementary or secondary school, you must contact the school of your choice. Simply use the search engine located at www.FLE-Canada.ca.

Who exactly does this include?

The first category of parents whose children qualify for Francophone education consists of Canadians whose first language learned and still understood is French.

The second group are Canadians who, while not necessarily of Francophone origin, received their primary school instruction in French. This clause respects the choice of parents who wish to offer their children the same opportunities they enjoyed to learn French and integrate into Francophone culture.

The third group are children in a family where one child has received or is receiving school instruction in Canada in French. This provision supports the family unit by offering all children of the same family the opportunity to receive a similar education. Examples of persons who could qualify include blended families and families who have lived somewhere in Canada where the language of instruction was French.

In the spirit of section 23, other categories of parents may be allowed to enroll their children in a French-language school while respecting the mission of Francophone education.

If you are interested in registering your child but don't know if you're entitled to do so, we suggest you contact your nearest French-language school for guidance.

To register your child at an elementary or secondary school, you must contact the school of your choice. Simply use the search engine located at www.FLE-Canada.ca

What is section 23 intended to do?

Section 23 of the Charter is intended to help protect Canada's two official languages by providing minority groups of both languages with education in their mother tongue, thereby enhancing the vitality of their communities. In its 1990 Mahé decision, the Supreme Court ruled that legislators had given section 23 a three-part role in protecting the language and culture of the country's linguistic minorities:

- ***Flourishing of Canada's two official languages***

First, the general purpose of section 23 is "to preserve and promote the two official languages of Canada, and their respective cultures, by ensuring that each language flourishes, as far as possible, in provinces where it is not spoken by the majority of the population." (Judgment, p. 13)

- ***Correcting the erosion of minorities***

Section 23 is also intended "to correct, on a national scale, the progressive erosion of minority official language groups and to give effect to the concept of 'equal partnership' of the two official language groups in the context of education." (Judgment, p. 15)

2 <https://padl-lrsp.uottawa.ca/?q=en/node/167>.



- *Creating major institutional structures*

Finally, section 23 introduces a new kind of guarantee. In order to be effective, it “confers upon a group a right which places positive obligations on government to alter or develop major institutional structures” (Judgment, p. 16). The Francophone school board is one example of a major institutional structure.

3

The world of Francophone education

A brief history

Francophones outside Quebec had very few opportunities to be educated in their mother tongue, let alone in French-language facilities, until only recently. That’s because most provinces and territories had a restrictive—and, in some cases, hostile—attitude toward French-language education within their borders.

Then came the *Constitution Act, 1982*, which included the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, and its constitutional guarantees for minority-language education rights. Under section 23 of the Charter, the provinces and territories became responsible for providing primary and secondary schooling to their official-language minorities in their mother tongue where numbers warranted. One of the goals of this provision was to strengthen the vitality of minority-language communities.

Despite the provisions of the Charter and the fact that the provinces couldn’t opt out of section 23, French-language schools didn’t suddenly spring up. Instead, groups of parents seeking to have their rights respected had to resort to the courts.

From 1983 to 2000, almost 20 court rulings were handed down in eight provinces. One of the most significant was the *1990 Mahé v. Alberta* case, where the Supreme Court ruled that Canada’s official-language minorities had the constitutional right to govern their children’s education and minority-language educational institutions. Other key decisions included the Reference re *Public Schools Act (Manitoba)* in 1993, *Arsenault-Cameron v. The Government of Prince Edward Island* in 2000 and *Doucet-Boudreau v. Nova-Scotia (Minister of Education)* in 2003. Other cases have also been heard since then by the Supreme Court of Canada.

What is Francophone education?

The main goal of any school system is to provide the basic educational experiences needed to ensure students’ intellectual, emotional, and social development. Minority language schools are no exception. However, they also have another, twofold objective: to develop, maintain, and enhance students’ French language skills and culture.³

Following talks at the 2005 Summit on Education, and later at the 2012 Summit, major players in the field of French-language education in Canada decided to take action

3 Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Pan-Canadian Framework for Cultural Appropriation in French-Language Schools. <http://approcheculturelle.ca/assets/pdf/Dec7-12-AnnexIII-Documentssyntheseanglais.pdf>.

to establish a joint plan⁴ in order to contribute to the vitality and sustainability of the Francophone and Acadian communities. Based on the idea of civic community school⁵, the plan aims to provide winning conditions for the overall success of students, their families, school staff and members of the community. This success results from a learning continuum and from social, cultural and community commitment. Those three targets are the backdrop for the implementation of the Strategic Plan for French-Language Education.

The French-language school

Under section 23 of the Charter, French-language schools and school boards are institutional structures that enable parents to exercise their Charter rights. In other words, the Francophone school is much more than four walls : it's an educational facility designed for living, learning, and integrating the French language, culture and community.⁶

Francophone schools aren't intended just for children, either. According to the Supreme Court of Canada, they "provide community centres where the promotion and preservation of minority language culture can occur; they provide needed locations where the minority community can meet and facilities which they can use to express their culture."⁷

The Francophone school is much more than four walls

Mandate and goals

Francophone education has a dual mandate: to provide schooling based on Francophone language, culture, and community, and to help correct assimilation individually and collectively. To accomplish this, classroom study is combined with cultural and community experiences.

The mandate translates into several goals:

1. Students gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes prescribed in their provincial or territorial curriculum;
2. Students identify with and integrate the Francophone language, culture, and community;
3. Students acquire a sound knowledge of English;
4. The school serves as a focal point of French language and culture for students, families, and the Francophone community.

By understanding the mandate and goals of Francophone education in general and their children's school in particular, parents—Francophone and non-Francophone alike—can help shape the education their children receive. Indeed, the school's success depends on the participation of families, the school, and the community.

Over the years, different documents have been produced to help you foster your child's Francophone identity at home (see the end of this guide for details).

4 Strategic Plan for French-Language Education, <http://psself.ca/about/>.

5 <http://ecc-canada.ca/about/>.

6 Affirming Francophone Education – Foundations and Directions: A Framework for French First Language Education in Alberta. http://www.learning.gov.ab.ca/french/M_12/affirmer/CadreENG.pdf. (Edmonton: Alberta Learning, French Language Services Branch, 2001), p. 9.

7 Mahé v. Alberta, [1990] 1 S.C.R. 342



Espace institutionnel

The existence of a French-speaking *espace institutionnel*, or institutional sphere, is an important feature of the Francophone education system. It also represents a fundamental difference between Francophone and immersion schooling.

In immersion, a program offered by Anglophone school boards, French is taught in the classroom as a second language, while English is used elsewhere throughout the system (see p. 7). In a French-language school, the institutional sphere includes the classroom (along with the hallways and playground) and staff room. It applies as well to the school administration, school council, parent committees, and school board. The consistent use of French in all areas of the institutional sphere reflects the school's *raison d'être*: to serve a Francophone clientele.

A delicate balance

The challenge facing every French-language school, school council, and school board across the country is to strike the delicate balance between preserving a French institutional sphere, and enabling non-French-speaking parents to play a meaningful role within it.

It's a complex challenge for many reasons: first, because Francophone education is young, and many of the people who are involved in it are extremely wary of losing what they fought so long and hard to gain. They're dedicated to promoting a French-speaking institutional sphere not with the goal of excluding anyone, but in order to preserve a system created for all children with Francophone roots.

Complicating matters is the fact that bilingual Francophones often switch into English in the presence of a non-Francophone, even when he or she tries to converse in French.

Another complicating factor is parents and administrators who don't agree that the institutional sphere must retain its French identity. They know that most of their Francophone peers are bilingual, and see no reason why everyone on the school council doesn't speak English in order to get things done. They don't realize that this is the first step in creating an English-language body that will eventually lose its French character altogether.

In a French-language school, the institutional sphere includes the classroom (along with the hallways and playground)

Finally, operating in English can create significant language and psychological barriers for Francophone parents because it suggests their aspirations—and those of the minority community—are not being respected.

The influence of exogamy

A far-reaching personal choice

Forming a culturally mixed family is a personal choice made by two individuals to create their own family structure. When enough couples make this decision, however, exogamy becomes a social phenomenon as well.

The rate of exogamy in most of Canada is steadily rising, as is the number of children who are losing touch with the French side of their family heritage. That's why the social phenomenon of exogamy is often equated with assimilation, or the erosion of French language and culture— particularly outside Quebec.

However, exogamy as a family structure need not prevent children from developing the Francophone part of their family heritage. You and your spouse can decide to create the conditions for your children to become fluently bilingual by actively promoting the use of French.

It can actually be quite rewarding for all involved in promoting the use of French as you will participate in developing lifelong abilities for your children.

4



Getting involved in your children's education

At home

Language use

One of the most far-reaching decisions an exogamous couple can make concerns language use at home. If you want to promote French in an English setting, it's important that the language be spoken freely, and associated with enjoyable activities.

This means encouraging French-language activities such as listening to French radio and music, watching TV and videos in French, playing French board games, and visiting French websites. Fortunately, technology has made it much easier to bring multilingual entertainment into Canadian homes: DVDs allow you to choose the language in which you want to watch a movie.

Reading is particularly important, which is why we've dedicated the following next section to it.

Mealtimes also provide opportunities to practice French. Some families alternate between English and French suppers, when all conversation takes place in one language, while others have a French meal on specific days.

Whenever you and your spouse go out for the evening, consider hiring a French-speaking babysitter to take care of your youngsters.

French-language educational and recreational resources may be available in your own community. Ask your French-language school board about these.

Homework

When asked about the challenges of sending their children to a French-language school, many non-French-speaking parents answer "*homework*".

Yet non-Francophone spouses can help with some homework, such as math and English for example. This may mean learning the French numbers and certain mathematical operations, but if you start early enough, it won't be that difficult, and you'll be able to

keep up as your children progress. But don't forget that the teacher is always available to meet and discuss any concerns you might have or encounter and provide an experienced feedback.

Even if you feel you can't help out with homework, ask your children to show you what they're doing. Get them to explain the nature of the tasks and their solutions. You can even do it speaking in English... Above all, demonstrate that you're interested in all their schoolwork and proud of what they can do! No matter what the situation might be, a stimulating learning environment will go a long way in helping your child.

Some schools have after-school homework clubs that allow students to do their homework under supervision. Depending on your family circumstances, this could be a valid option for your children. Older students often enjoy helping their younger sisters and brothers, especially if their efforts are recognized in some meaningful way. If there are no older siblings in your family, perhaps your friends (or "buddies", if your school has a buddy system) have older French-speaking children who would like to help.

Reading

A lifetime of benefits...

As primary educators, parents have an opportunity—and a responsibility—to cultivate attitudes and abilities that will benefit children all their lives. That's exactly what parents do when they sit down and read to their children. Literacy in the home helps lay the foundation for a lifelong love of reading and writing among youngsters. It's also strongly linked to scholastic achievement and gainful employment.

Literacy in the home strongly linked to scholastic achievement

Reading aloud has been championed by award-winning education author Jim Trelease for over 20 years. In his bestseller *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, he cites research that shows how reading to youngsters improves their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Most importantly, it enhances their attitude toward reading—and, as Trelease points out, reading lies at the very heart of education.⁸

How does this apply to you?

If you and your spouse have decided that French is important in your family, your children are or will be attending French-language school. Of course, you want them to get the most out of their schooling. One of the simplest and most effective ways to prepare them is to introduce them to reading. And since their schooling takes place in French, it's only natural that you read to them in French. This doesn't mean you shouldn't read in English, too, as long as they build a solid base in their language of study.

Community

Say the word community, and many of us immediately think of our part of the city, town, or countryside. It's an area we can more or less delimit. But if your children attend a Francophone school, your family belongs to a school community. And many people belong to a sports, arts or church community—or to several such communities.

8 Jim Trelease. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, 7th ed. Penguin, 2013. <http://www.trelease-on-reading.com/>.

Francophone communities are made up of people who share French language and culture, but who may be scattered over the city, countryside, province, or territory.

Francophone communities have much to offer those who wish to participate: there are as many avenues to explore as there are fields of interest. There are also special occasions when everyone in the community joins together for a celebration.

Francophone associations may invite Francophone musicians from Canada or abroad for concerts and workshops. They may hold annual film festivals, summer festivals, or winter carnivals. Maybe there's a local French-language theatre society that welcomes budding thespians. For infants, there might be a Francophone play group; for adults, lectures or courses in conversational French, wine tasting, history... The possibilities are endless!

The community also has a role to play in schools that goes beyond festivals and other cultural events. For example, teachers can expand the scope of class projects by having students visit French-speaking professionals, interview Francophone residents, and meet with government officials. The concept of "civic community school" (see p. 6) is a modern vision of French-language education. It's based on successful practices and a redefined relationship between schools and their communities in order to encourage all parties to commit to fostering success for learners of all ages and thus help our communities flourish. This kind of innovative approach to learning broadens students' horizons by providing meaningful French-language experiences outside the school setting.

The community also has a role to play in schools that goes beyond cultural events

All these cultural and educational activities provide valuable opportunities to meet other French-speaking people. They also let youngsters see that Francophones can be found in places other than the desk next to theirs.

School

Supporting your school staff

How do you interact with the principal, teachers, and support staff at your children's French-language school if you speak little or no French? Some parents hesitate to say as much as "Hello" because they don't want to bring English into the school atmosphere. Others have no qualms about speaking Shakespeare's language with anyone and everyone they run into. The staff's approach may be equally varied for any number of reasons, including their own ability to speak English.

One of the easiest things for non-Francophone parents to do is to start by saying "*Bonjour*" whenever they meet someone—staff, other parents, their own and other children—in the school or on the school grounds. It's the most basic of gestures that conveys more than a simple greeting. Even if the rest of your conversation is in English, try to start with an acknowledgement that you're in a French-language school.

By using even a minimum of French whenever you're in the school, you show understanding, respect, and support for the staff's role in educating your youngsters. You acknowledge that their linguistic and cultural identity helps make your children's schooling relevant. So does maintaining a French-speaking atmosphere within the school boundaries.

Enrolling children in a Francophone school requires a commitment from parents. The school provides an integral Francophone educational, cultural, and life experience; it's up to parents to help create the conditions that make the experience meaningful.

Participation

Non-Francophone parents have many opportunities to get involved at the school level. Attending school functions, going to parent-teacher interviews, volunteering in the classroom, helping out elsewhere in the school, joining in class outings, participating in school decisions and on committees, actively supporting your Francophone spouse's involvement—these are just a few of the possibilities. It all depends on your personality, comfort in French, and schedule. Regardless of what you choose, you're showing your children that their education is important to you.

Volunteering in the classroom

As soon as you want to get involved in the classroom, arrange to meet with your children's teachers. The goal: to create a climate of confidence based on mutual interest in your children's Francophone education. Find out how comfortable the teachers are speaking English, and tell them how you feel about speaking both French and English in the school environment.

Once you've discussed these matters, it's up to the two of you to seek the common ground that will let you play a role that's both helpful to the teacher and fulfilling for you. Keep in mind that many variables come into play when trying to find that ideal role, and that there are no magical solutions! It's a matter of trying different approaches and checking back with each other regularly to make sure you're both satisfied.

The Francophone school board

Francophone school boards are responsible for applying the legislative and legal framework that governs minority-language education in their province or territory. They do this by adopting policies that determine how the schools in their jurisdiction will be run.

The school provides an integral Francophone educational, cultural, and life experience

Since school boards are public bodies whose decision-makers are elected representatives, parents owe it to themselves to ensure that those individuals understand and address their values, needs, and aspirations. School board policies should reflect and promote the vitality of their school communities.

It's important to keep one goal in mind: the Francophone school community should be as inclusive of non-Francophone parents as possible without compromising the French-speaking nature of the institutional sphere.

Benefits of French-language education

French-language education in Canada is available in every province and territory⁹. Services offered include daycare and early childhood education, kindergarten programs, as well as elementary, secondary and postsecondary education. Regardless of where you choose to settle in Canada, you're sure to find top-notch educational services in French.

Studying in a French-language school offers students key benefits. These benefits include proficiency for life in both of Canada's official languages leading to increased job opportunities later in life, and the opportunity to evolve in a rich cultural environment where the emphasis is put on the success and well-being of students.

*Lifelong bilingualism*¹⁰

Has the following question ever popped into your mind?

“If we send our kids to a Francophone school, will their English be good enough for them to work or pursue their studies in English?”

The answer is a resounding **Yes!**

The key to developing your children's bilingual potential lies in a concept known as additive bilingualism. First proposed in 1972 by McGill University professors Wallace Lambert and Richard Tucker, this concept has become a cornerstone for bilingual education in Canada, the United States, and many other countries around the world.¹¹ They defined additive bilingualism as a type of bilingualism where the acquisition of a second language does not lead to diminished or inadequate first-language development.

Additive bilingualism entails maintaining high proficiency in both languages, developing a strong ethnolinguistic identity, having a positive attitude toward both cultures, and conferring equal social status on both languages.

Yet some exogamous (and some Francophone) couples are so preoccupied with English that they decide to send their children to an Anglophone school. These parents are actually sending their children down the slippery slope of subtractive bilingualism, where one language is learned at the expense of another.

Another Canadian expert in the field, Dr. Rodrigue Landry of the Université de Moncton, has researched extensively the bilingualism of minority-language children across Canada. In study after study, he has found that French-speaking children who attend French-language school are better able to gain additive bilingualism than their counterparts in immersion or Anglophone programs.

9 <http://elf-canada.ca/en/>.

10 <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2008004/article/10767-eng.htm>.

11 Lambert, Wallace E. and G. Richard Tucker. *Bilingual Education of Children: The St. Lambert Experiment*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1972.

It's also vital that parents use and encourage the use of French at home. This is clearly demonstrated in one of the most relevant studies on exogamy and language acquisition in the literature today.¹² The preschool years are especially significant, as children are better prepared to gain additive bilingualism in French-language school when they start with a solid foundation in French.

Anglophone—and many Francophone—parents often wonder how well their children will learn English in Francophone school. The answer is very well indeed!

Students' mastery of English depends on the nature, intensity, and frequency of their contacts with the language. In exogamous families, those contacts pose no difficulty whatsoever.

Students who receive a high school diploma from a French-language school are proficient in both Canada's official languages. They become perfectly bilingual citizens who throughout their lives remain comfortable in French and English.

Success and well-being

French-language schools support students in achieving excellence therefore producing graduates who are personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens.

Every student should have the same opportunity to succeed and graduate. That's why French-Language schools strive to create an engaging school experience for all students.

The students are also more likely to pursue post-secondary training or academic studies of their choice in a French-language, English-language or bilingual institution.

Rich cultural environment

The diversity that characterizes Canada's Francophonie enriches the cultural environment in French-language schools, colleges and universities belonging to Canada's French-language education network. In fact, immigration is a priority area in the Strategic Plan on French-language Education¹³.

Employability

French-language school graduates' high-level of bilingualism, as well as their sense of belonging to the Francophone community while remaining active and involved in the greater Anglophone community, often leads to excellent professional development and access to highly promising career opportunities in either official language, in Canada and abroad.

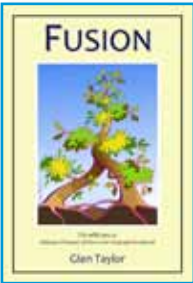
12 Landry, Rodrigue and Réal Allard. "L'exogamie et le maintien de deux langues et de deux cultures : le rôle de la francité familioscolaire." *Revue des sciences de l'éducation*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1997, pp. 561–592.

13 <http://elf-canada.ca/en/about/fle-benefits/>.



Ready to get involved?

Here are some suggestions:



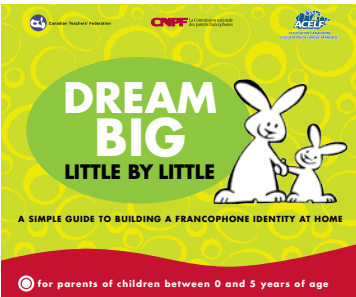
With over 50 illustrations and graphs, Fusion is entertaining and very user-friendly! It's divided into bite-sized sections filled with humour and down-to-earth tips.



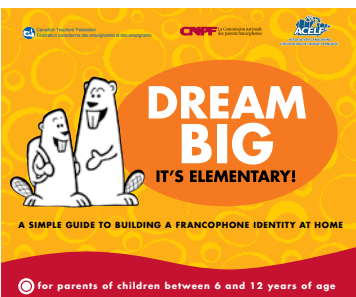
A free downloadable bilingual guide, published annually, containing several ideas for educational activities that you can do with your child (3 to 6 years old) to improve his or her French reading, expression and counting skills.

<http://www2.cforp.ca/outils/outils-pedagogiques/lire-et-compter-en-francais-a-la-maison/>

Simple guides to help you build a Francophone identity at home



For parents of children between 0 and 5 years of age



For parents of children between 6 and 12 years of age



For secondary school students and their parents



I'm with
you!

And so are we!
The benefits of French-language education

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