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PROVIDING DIVISIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR FRENCH IMMERSION



The success of any French Immersion Program is dependent upon strong leadership throughout the education system. Within a school jurisdiction, the necessary leadership begins with the Board and senior administration. It is important that the school community and its decision-makers value French language learning as part of a global education. It is also important that the strong support for the French Immersion Program be visible and integral to the structure and functions of the total school system, including the equitable allocation of resources.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Manitoba Association of Schools Trustees (MAST) is an organization of public school boards in Manitoba. The purpose of MAST is to provide leadership and service to boards, and to help preserve the public's voice in education through locally elected trustees.



School Boards

School trustees are elected by the voters of a school division or district to provide for the educational needs of the community's school-aged children. The school board's primary function is making policy. It does so through the decisions it makes at school board meetings, which are open to the public. The decisions made by a school board at its meetings set the direction for the school division or district. The school board employs administrators to see that this direction is implemented in an effective and efficient manner. The two most senior administrators of a school division or district are the superintendent and the secretary-treasurer. An effectively managed school division or district is one in which the senior administrators and school board work closely together, each respecting and drawing upon the other's areas of expertise.

By provincial law, there are certain things that every school board in Manitoba must do, and certain services they must provide. Taken together, these ensure a basic level of public education to which all Manitobans are entitled.

In addition, there is also a range of activities, programs and services which school boards may do or provide to reflect the values and concerns of the community they

serve. In this fashion, school boards together with their communities can ensure that local schools offer the specific programs and services which meet community needs. French immersion programming is one such program.

Manitoba public school boards, through their provincial organization, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees (MAST) have recognized the importance of culture and language in Manitoba public schools. According to their *Manual of Policies and Beliefs* (2007), collectively, they believe:

1. that Manitoba's public school system should reflect and respect the cultural diversity of Manitoba's citizens and communities in its philosophy and in its programming;
2. that the student population of Manitoba's faculties of education should reflect the ethno-cultural diversity of the province;
3. that a comprehensive strategy should be developed to support the identification, recruitment and certification of teachers for French Immersion, Français and other identified high-need subject areas; and
4. that increased funding should be provided for the development of distance education, technology and programs, with such programs to be available for delivery in both official languages.

Trustees

As elected individuals responsible to the community and to all constituents within that community, it is important that trustees:

- become informed about the French Immersion Program: benefits, funding, how it works and how it is best supported (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2);
- look for ways and means of responding positively to requests related to the French Immersion Program;
- ensure enabling policies that underscore the value and benefits of French immersion in the broadest sense of governance and set the stage for the successful establishment and ongoing support of the program;
- ensure long-term planning for French immersion in order to offer a full program from entry point to Grade 12 (see Chapter 1 and Chapter 2); and
- commit to offering the best French Immersion Program possible.

Superintendent and Senior Central Office Administrators

The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) provides leadership for public education by advocating in the best interests of learners and supporting their members through professional services.

MASS membership includes school division/district superintendents and assistant super-intendents as well as associate members across Manitoba who provide educational leadership. Here are excerpts from their 2006-2007 Strategic Plan document.

Statement of Beliefs in Public Education

Public School is the only societal institution where children from diverse backgrounds gather for a common purpose – to become educated. The challenge for educators is to define what we believe about education in a manner that encompasses the values of a democratic society, respects the inherent uniqueness of the individual student, and at the same time provides equity of opportunity for all.

A second challenge is to articulate the purposes and provision of education which will enable a clear understanding by parents and members of the community at large.

With this frame of reference the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents have developed this statement of beliefs about education.

We believe the purposes of public education to be:

1. To assist children to view themselves as capable of contributing to the public good and preparing them to do so.
2. To encourage in children a balance of intellectual and social development, social consciousness, and preparation for employment.
3. To provide each child access and opportunity to be educated in a manner consistent with justice, fairness and equity.
4. To foster in each child active participation in public service and to promote the development of each child as a lifelong contributing member of society.
5. To empower each child with the knowledge and skills to live a positive fulfilling life in a manner consistent with acceptance of others and respect for democratic values in a diverse society.
6. To develop the child's self perception as a lifelong learner.
7. To assist children to develop an optimistic view of the future and a confident awareness of their potential to be an active participant in that future.

To achieve these purposes, we must:

1. Provide safe and secure learning environments for all children.
2. Reach out to the community to build awareness and understanding of the purposes and value of public education.
3. Provide ways for the community of parents, seniors, businesses and taxpayers to have a respected voice and opportunity to develop and support education for the public good.
4. Be accountable to the community through clarity of vision, transparency of operation, and the sharing of educational outcomes.
5. Continue to manage and support education through publicly elected School Boards.
6. Strive to ensure that sufficient funding is provided to achieve the purposes of education.
7. Practise democracy in our school system.

(Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, 2006, 2-3)

Organizational Goals

- a. To promote and advance the cause of education provincially, nationally and internationally.
- b. To initiate, promote, and present professional development activities designed for the personal and professional growth and expertise of its members.
- c. To advance the status of the superintendency as a position of educational leadership.
- d. To promote a high standard of professional conduct among superintendents.
- e. To provide assistance and information in matters relating to the working conditions and welfare of its members.
- f. To facilitate communication among Manitoba school superintendents and Canadian school administrators at the divisional, district, provincial and federal levels so that information relating to supervision and the administration of education in Canada can be assembled and made available.
- g. To cooperate with the Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth and other governmental departments, the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, the Manitoba Association of School Business Officials and other educational and public bodies in the development of educational policy of Manitoba.
- h. To cooperate with other organizations having objectives similar to those of the corporation, in Canada and in other countries.
- i. To stimulate public awareness of educational issues and to inform the public of the point of view of the corporation.
- j. To take any measures, not inconsistent with these Articles or The Corporations Act of Manitoba or any other Act of the Legislature, or any regulations or rules made under the authority of an Act of the Legislature, that the corporation deems necessary or advisable to give effect to any policy adopted by it with respect to any question directly or indirectly affecting the purposes and objectives of the corporation.

(Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, 2006, 4-5)

It is important that the superintendent and other senior administrators in any school division/district consider what they will bring to their community through their role in the community's education system. They must be prepared to respond to inquiries about the scope and quality of the programming being offered and to address the demands of the community they serve. These leaders have several responsibilities.

- to inform themselves about second language learning (and specifically French second language learning) and the benefits for their students overall education and futures;
- to inform themselves about immersion as a means of delivering French second language learning and of the conditions under which the goals of the French Immersion Program can be achieved;

- to inform the Board of their findings and keep the Board informed of new information and developments;
- to identify potential issues and challenges related to the delivery of the French Immersion Program and strategies to address them;
- to ensure that policies are developed to provide the necessary framework for the program to succeed;
- to ensure that key stakeholders (which includes principals, school staff and parent advisory councils) are well informed and on side;
- to ensure that administrators assigned to schools with the French Immersion Program have values and beliefs which are supportive of the program;
- to ensure that the community is informed of the program options available and their respective benefits;
- to ensure that long-term plans support the interests of students involved in the French Immersion Program; and
- to ensure support from other divisional level staff, such as those responsible for space allocation, transportation, curriculum support, and staff and student recruitment.

Policy Matters

The Value of Second Language Learning in Education

It has long been recognized that learning a second language benefits students' overall education and personal development. Since French is one of Canada's official languages, many parents want their children to have opportunities to learn French as a second language. Not only does learning French foster a greater understanding among Canadians, it increases their children's opportunities for living and working within Canada and around the world.

The following are aspects to consider when developing divisional policies. Second language learning:

- fosters greater understanding between all Canadians;
- increases opportunities for living and working in Canada and other parts of the world;
- increases cognitive abilities, creating a more flexible thinker;
- enhances knowledge of one's first language;
- makes learning additional languages easier; and
- increases understanding of other peoples and cultures.



Access and Equity

The *Curriculum Policy for the French Immersion Program* provides guidelines to divisions/districts for establishing and maintaining the French Immersion Program. It is expected that any school division/district will respond to the needs of its community.

Divisional policies should allow all students reasonable access to the French Immersion Program. This involves considering matters such as:

- location of the French Immersion Program;
- transportation of students to the program;
- inclusiveness of the program through provision of support such as for special needs; and
- provision of information regarding the availability of the French Immersion Program.

The French Immersion Program should have access to all of the supports and services granted to other official programs. These may include:

- equivalent basic textual resources in French;
- access to technology to support the program, including French language keyboards and software;
- the same range of testing and student services as are available in other programs; and
- access to library materials and services that allow for reading and research in the French language.



Long-term Planning

The establishment of the French Immersion Program represents a long-term commitment. Any school division/district establishing the French Immersion Program will need to provide the necessary resources for the program from Kindergarten through Grade 12; otherwise, the objectives of the program are seriously compromised.

Stability and Growth

Program stability contributes to the overall credibility of the French Immersion Program, making it a viable choice for parents and students. The factors that make up a stable program include:

- a declared commitment to offer the French Immersion Program from Kindergarten or Grade 1 through Grade 12 or at one of the other entry points;

- visible support from key decision-makers in the school division/district. For example, the superintendent and trustees attend functions held in French immersion schools;
- initiatives that support the French Immersion Program, such as French public speaking competitions (e.g., *Concours d'art oratoire*) or festivals (e.g., *Festival du Voyageur*), and exchange programs, etc.; and
- a leadership group that specifically looks at French immersion issues and makes recommendations to senior central office administrators and school trustees. This group may include teachers, administrators, parents, trustees and students.

A firm commitment from the school board to ensure the best possible learning conditions for students will contribute to the quality of the French Immersion Program. Long-term growth may include:

- ensuring availability of the program from Kindergarten to Grade 12;
- locating the program in facilities that can accommodate both growth and expansion and that ensure access by the broadest population;
- ensuring that supports are in place to meet the needs of all students;
- ensuring parents make informed decisions by providing them with the information and support they need; and
- tracking enrolments, identifying reasons for changes in enrolments and addressing the issues.

Staffing

The following are suggestions for long-term planning for staffing needs:

- When hiring teaching staff, whether directly involved in the French Immersion Program or not, consider French language proficiency, understanding of immersion methodology and subject area specialties.
- When staffing leadership positions, attitudes toward French immersion and second language learning in general should be key considerations.
- Hiring of all staff, whether directly involved in the French Immersion Program or not, should take into consideration positive attitudes toward French immersion and second language learning – look for acceptance and inclusiveness.

Professional Development

Some suggestions for long-term planning for the professional development needs related to French immersion are as follows:

- Recognize the importance for French immersion teachers to have access to professional development opportunities in French.

- Plan the school year calendar so that professional development days are scheduled to permit French immersion teachers to participate in conferences and events such as:
 - **Manitoba Teachers’ Society Special Area Groups (SAG)**
The Special Area Groups affiliated with The Manitoba Teachers’ Society link a network of professional educators and offer professional learning opportunities in the form of conferences and workshops. *Éducatrices et éducateurs francophones du Manitoba* (EFM), an agency of The Manitoba Teachers’ Society, is responsible to provide services in French for this annual activity. The Web site for the EFM is <http://www.efm-mts.org>
 - **Symposium de l’immersion**
Éducatrices et éducateurs francophones du Manitoba (EFM) organizes a biennial one-day conference called *Symposium de l’immersion* for French immersion teachers and administrators where French is the language of communication. The Web site for the EFM is <http://www.efm-mts.org>
 - **French Immersion in Manitoba Conference**
The Bureau de l’éducation française Division (BEF) organizes conferences called French Immersion in Manitoba to provide learning opportunities to administrators, teachers, divisional coordinators, parents and trustees. The conference is held in English.
 - **National Conference**
The *Association canadienne des professeurs d’immersion/Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (ACPI/CAIT)* is another valuable professional development opportunity for educators. French is the language of communication, however, some workshops may be presented in English.
- Encourage teachers to use the **Workshop Registration System** (*Coup d’œil sur l’année*). The Workshop Registration System is a searchable schedule of regional inservice sessions offered by Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth for educators. French immersion teachers should attend workshops specific to immersion. These workshops are offered in French by the BEF. Teachers may consult the *Coup d’œil sur l’année* Web site for more specific details. Online registration is available for your convenience. <http://www.ateliers.mb.ca>
- Subscribe to **professional journals** related to French second language education and ensure access to these documents.
- Inform educators about the availability and scope of the bursaries for professional development of French immersion teachers and how to obtain these funds.
- Recognize that central office and school administrators also have professional development needs specific to French immersion. Opportunities may include:
 - **French immersion conferences** such as the annual ones offered by the ACPI/CAIT, Canadian Parents for French (CPF), and special initiatives

such as the French Immersion in Manitoba conference can offer valuable insights, learning and networking opportunities for administrators. *L'Association manitobaine des directrices et directeurs d'écoles d'immersion française* (AMDI) also organizes a biennial colloque for French immersion administrators where French is the language of communication.

- Divisional level **networking opportunities**.
- **Individual bursaries** provide educators with funding to attend French language courses that can provide them with enhanced language skills and the opportunity to experience second language learning personally.

Support Services

Typically, divisions/districts have support systems in place for programs offered. These may include centralized document production, student transportation, counselling and other student services, and divisional committees for such tasks as designing report cards. It is important that the needs of the French Immersion Program be considered when hiring staff and providing these services.

In addition, those professionals offering support services in the division/district are well served to have a basic understanding of immersion principles and practices and its implications within their own areas of expertise. For example, guidance counselors should be able to support the French immersion student in choosing appropriate secondary school courses or postsecondary opportunities in French or English as well as providing information about career opportunities.

Quality and Assessment

It is important that the division/district undertake regular program reviews to ensure that the three following elements are in place and working well:

- Curriculum and support documents are available and being used effectively.
- Adequate resources are available to administrators, teachers and students and are being used.
- Teachers are well supported.

The data collection methods listed below may help determine indicators of success:

- division wide surveys administered to teachers, parents and students over a period of time to measure satisfaction with the program;
- tracking of enrolments from grade to grade to monitor retention of students;
- student interest as demonstrated by enrolment in the program over time.

For more information on quality and assessment of the French Immersion Program, Canadian Parents for French has produced a self-assessment tool for use in helping schools assess and evaluate their French second language programs (both French

immersion and Basic French). The self-assessment tool is available on the CPF Web site at <http://www.cpf.ca/english/educators/SAT.pdf>

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Suggested Readings

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