

MILESTONES IN FRENCH IMMERSION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF CANADA AND MANITOBA

CANADA

French immersion is a Canadian success story that has been widely studied and emulated. The first French immersion programs were offered in Québec in the 1960s. French immersion began in response to parental interest spurred by political, social, and economic changes happening in Québec and throughout Canada.

French Immersion Facts in Canada

1965

The first French immersion program started in Saint-Lambert, Québec with a Kindergarten class. This initiative was led by a parent study group who wanted their children to become bilingual.

1969

- The first federal Official Languages Act was adopted, and it declared English and French to be the two official languages of Canada.
- Following the success in Saint-Lambert, French immersion programs spread to other parts of Canada, particularly after the passing of the Official Languages Act.

1970

- The Official Languages in Education Program was established in Canada to provide federal funding to support minority-language education and second language instruction in all provinces and territories.
- The aim of this program was to increase bilingualism among Canadian students by ensuring that all students have access to education in both English and French.

1977

- 45,000 Canadian students were enrolled in French immersion programs.
- A national support group called Canadian Parents for French was formed.
- The Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion/ Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (ACPI/CAIT) was founded.

1998

- During the 1980's and 1990's, French immersion enrollments increased by more than 650 percent.
- 320,000 students were enrolled in French immersion programs, which were offered in all provinces and territories.

2024

480,000 students were enrolled in French immersion programs in Canada, representing 11.7% of students (Statistics Canada).

MANITOBA

French Immersion is an inclusive program intended for all students with various abilities and needs whose first language is not French and who have little or no knowledge of the French language. The first French immersion classes began in 1973 with 50 students at École Sacré-Cœur School in the Winnipeg School Division under the leadership of principal Sœur Dumesnil and the support of parents. Since then, the French Immersion Program in Manitoba has grown significantly with more than 28,828 students enrolled across urban, rural, and northern school divisions.

French Immersion Facts in Manitoba

1970

The Manitoba government passed Bill 113, which amends section 258 of the Manitoba Public Schools Act. This new legislation acknowledged English and French as the official languages of instruction in Manitoba schools.

1973

With the support of parents, the French Immersion Program started in the Winnipeg School Division with 50 students.

1974

- 652 students were enrolled in French immersion in Manitoba.
- The Manitoba government established the Bureau de l'éducation française (BEF), which is responsible for all French-language programming in Manitoba, and appointed its first Assistant Deputy Minister.
- The Institut pédagogique du Collège de Saint-Boniface was established for the purpose of training teachers to provide French-language instruction in Manitoba schools.

1991

19,751 students were enrolled in the French Immersion Program.

1995

The department recognized the French Immersion Program as one of the four official programs in Manitoba.

1996

The *Curriculum Policy for the French Immersion Program in Manitoba* was published.

2017

The *French Immersion Program in Manitoba: A Renewed Vision, Kindergarten to Grade 12* was released.

2023

The *French Immersion Policy in Manitoba* was renewed, providing a common framework on the foundational principles and effective implementation of the program.

2024

- 28,828 students were enrolled in 116 schools and 23 school divisions.
- Manitoba celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Bureau de l'éducation française Division.

The goal of the French Immersion Program is to develop proud, confident, engaged, plurilingual global citizens.

References

- Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. [The French Immersion Policy in Manitoba](#). 2023.
- Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning. [The French Immersion Program in Manitoba: A Renewed Vision, Kindergarten to Grade 12](#). 2017.
- Statistics Canada. ["Participation in French Immersion, Bilingualism and the Use of French in Adulthood,"](#) 2021/2024.