

## Executive Summary – French (English Program)

### Building Capacity through Leadership and Professional Learning

This executive summary provides a synopsis of the provincial data from *The French Language Education Review* (The Review), an initiative of the Bureau de l'éducation française Division (BEF) regarding the delivery of French courses (English Program) in Manitoba for the 2013-14 school year. The data was obtained from the school division questionnaire with responses from 34 of the 36 school divisions offering French courses. The goal of the Review was to ascertain the extent to which school divisions have successfully delivered French courses. The analysis of the data provides insight regarding **how well students are doing, what factors influence student success and what should be prioritized going forward.**

#### How well students are doing?

The data from the school divisions' overall self assessment revealed that 38% of school divisions perceived themselves as being *successful or very successful* while 62% indicated that they were *somewhat successful or unsuccessful* in providing quality French instruction. School divisions also reported that 50% of students or less achieved an appropriate level of linguistic competency, valued the learning of French, integrated it into their lives and demonstrated openness and curiosity towards other cultures. However, it is encouraging that most school divisions reported that students are aware of Francophone cultures. Although some successes were identified, the provincial data is concerning as it clearly states that less than half of school divisions are successfully delivering French courses and achieving success with students.

#### What factors influence student success?

After analyzing the provincial data, it became apparent that a more concerted focus on building capacity through leadership and professional learning is essential to improve the success rate in the delivery of French courses. The overall analysis of the data revealed various successes and challenges in delivering French courses.

The two main **successes** of note are **professional support for teachers** and **providing enrichment opportunities for students**. In most school divisions, teachers are made aware of professional learning opportunities offered and are encouraged to attend. There is also recognition that student engagement is a key element to student success and retention in French courses. According to the data, teachers are integrating culture and providing opportunities for students to enrich and validate their language learning experience. It is in this area where school divisions report a large success rate as most students are perceived as being aware of Francophone cultures and are developing their knowledge. This enrichment also provides students with a context in which to develop their confidence and ease in speaking French, while developing their intercultural competencies.

Unfortunately, the challenges outweigh the successes. The **challenges** identified, which have an impact on student success are **teacher competency, student retention and limited student access to courses and enrichment activities**. The main challenge in the province with regards to the successful delivery of French courses is that teachers lack the necessary competencies (French language skills and/or methodology) which in turn, impact student achievement in French. Furthermore, administrators do not always consider the candidates' ability to teach French when hiring K-8 teachers. Although school divisions identify providing professional learning as a success, the survey results indicate that less than 50% of the K-8 teachers actually attended these sessions. It is also important to note that the majority of students learning French (approximately 60,000 or 90% of students) are in the Early and Middle Years and are taught by these teachers with limited competencies resulting in students not acquiring an

appropriate level of language skills. Consequently, this translates into a drastic drop in enrolment at the Senior Years because students are unable to communicate in French, are not engaged, and cannot see the value in continuing to learn the language.

Student retention therefore becomes another challenge and is directly influenced by student engagement and motivation. In fact, the data reveals that only a small proportion of students recognize the value of learning French and that a significantly smaller proportion integrates French into their lives. Results also show that many activities supporting and promoting French in school divisions are taking place for parents, students and staff. However, these efforts do not seem to translate into overall student success or retention at the Senior Years. This puts into question whether or not the message of valuing French is being addressed in meaningful ways and whether or not students are being asked to reflect on their learning through metacognitive strategies.

Limited student access to French courses and enrichment opportunities creates another challenge. The availability of French courses is often hindered by certain constraints such as not enough time in the school day (K-8), competition with other subject areas or options (9-12), small schools with low enrolment, lack of staff, and inconsistent awareness of funding from both categorical and revitalisation grants. Although opportunities for enrichment have been identified as a success in some divisions, they also present a challenge for others and especially for rural and remote areas where access to such activities is not always equitable. The data highlights the need to address this inequity throughout the province.

## What should be prioritized going forward?

Keeping in mind these factors from the 3 key areas and the goal of improving student success, one must continually reflect on how to improve student results by asking the question: **how do we sufficiently engage students in learning French so that they acquire language skills to communicate, value language learning as a key to global citizenship and wish to continue learning French when it becomes an option?**

**The answer lies in building capacity through leadership and professional learning.** Without teachers who have the necessary competencies; language skills, cultural knowledge and understanding of the balanced literacy approach, this goal cannot be met. The focus in classrooms needs to be on student engagement and ongoing assessment for learning so that students make personal connections to learning French and are able to communicate in French in real and meaningful ways. To accomplish this, we need strong leadership; leaders at the divisional and school levels, who make this a priority, develop concrete plans, policies and practices that ensure that teachers are supported; leaders who create a divisional culture and philosophy (e.g. hiring practices, roles and responsibilities and funding) which then becomes the foundation for the successful delivery of French courses; leaders who consider the impact that the unsuccessful delivery of K-8 French courses has on overall language acquisition and the retention of high school students.

It is important that the whole school community values language learning and intercultural competencies as useful tools in the lives of all students and that the appropriate strategies are in place in each school division throughout the province in order to make this a reality.