

## Final Observations

Since the 2013-2014 school year, the French Language Education Review has provided a means of measuring the degree of the full implementation of the French Immersion Program by collecting data and tracking progress. During the five-year period, French Immersion schools responded to three surveys pertaining to their Program for the 2013-2014, 2015-2016, 2016-2017 school years.

Survey questions were categorized in the four key areas that support the full implementation of the French Immersion Program:

- Creating a French Immersion Setting
- Validation of Students' Linguistic and Education Experience
- Educational Staff and Professional Learning
- Student Enrolment Trends

In addition, schools responded to questions regarding student experience and also identified initiatives undertaken to build on their successes and address challenges.

The common thread linking these initiatives is the commitment to move towards full implementation of the French Immersion Program in order to create the conditions for students to succeed. This third provincial report shares some comparative results of the data collected during this period, summarizes what has been learned, and presents the areas on which to focus going forward.

### How well are students doing?

French Immersion schools reported their perceptions of student experience in response to questions related to program-expected outcomes reflecting the vision of the French Immersion Program. Of survey respondents for the 2016-2017 report,

- 68% observed that “most” or “all” of the students in their school achieved an **appropriate level of linguistic competency in French**
- 39% observed that “most” or “all” of the students in their school were **proud of their linguistic competencies and confident in their ability to speak French**
- 51% observed that “most” or “all” of the students in their school were **aware of their cultural identity and open to other languages and cultures**
- 29% observed that “most” or “all” of the students in their school had the **confidence and interest to participate in activities in the Francophone community**
- 31% observed that “most” or “all” of the students in their school **valued the learning of languages and saw themselves as lifelong language learners**

Perceptions of student success regarding the program-expected outcomes have remained constant over the five-year period. Given that these questions help to gauge the degree of success in fully implementing the French Immersion Program, further exploration as to why there has been no significant change is needed.

### What factors influence student success?

The factors influencing student success are explained through the analysis of the four key areas of the survey. The schools' overall self-assessment in these areas in the 2016-2017 school year revealed that

- schools perceived their greatest successes (“successful” or “very successful”) in the areas of *Student Enrolment Trends* (83%) and *Educational Staff and Professional Learning* (75%)
- schools felt that they were relatively successful in the areas of *Validating Students' Linguistic and Educational Experience* (73%) and *Creating a French Immersion Setting* (70%), which represents a marked improvement in these two key areas since 2013-2014

To examine the progress over the five-year cycle, it is crucial to analyze the choices that schools have made in order to improve outcomes for French Immersion students.

- What progress have schools made over the past five years in each of the key areas?
- What initiatives have they selected to make that progress?
- To what extent have they focused on the department’s recommendations?

To better understand the progress made, the analysis below examines the successes and challenges in the four key areas and their corresponding subcategories (listed in tables below the key area section headings).

### Creating a French Immersion Setting

Exposure to the French Language	Educational Staff and Personnel	A Linguistically Rich Environment	Inclusion and Appropriate Support for all Students
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Given that the school setting is the foundation necessary to ensuring success for all students, the 2013-2014 report recommended that a more concerted effort be made to improve the French Immersion setting in all schools, particularly in dual-track schools. The department suggested that the subcategory *Linguistically Rich Environment* should be an area of specific focus.

The vast majority (42 of 54) of initiatives reported under *Creating a French Immersion Setting* in 2016-2017 were categorized in *Linguistically Rich Environment*. A smaller proportion, but still a majority of the 2015-2016 report’s *Creating a French Immersion Setting* initiatives fell into this subcategory.<sup>7</sup> The initiatives that schools took in order to create a linguistically rich environment included greater use of French in school activities like assemblies or announcements, French-language signage, and encouraging staff and student use of French during non-instructional time. School divisions have consistently selected initiatives focused on improving the linguistic environment of schools, as they recognize that this area requires continuous attention.

A French Immersion setting is one in which all students, regardless of background or academic inclination, feel welcome and included in a French learning environment. In recent years, a greater proportion of French Immersion students have been identified as English Additional Language learners, with over 1500 immersion students in the four-year EAL funding eligibility window in the 2016-2017 academic year. Large numbers of immersion students, between 9 and 12% (by grade), have declared Indigenous, and roughly 6% of students in schools reporting special needs students (funded or non-funded, but diagnosed) were enrolled in the French Immersion Program. In short, the French Immersion classroom is increasingly diverse. An inclusive setting with appropriate support is therefore required.

In order to support all students in a French Immersion setting, it is key to have the appropriate staff in place. Despite ongoing difficulties with recruitment of bilingual staff, especially in positions requiring teaching certification, immersion schools have maintained commendable proportions of bilingual staff in support, leadership, and teaching speciality roles. Roughly two-thirds of schools have bilingual resource teachers and roughly three-quarters have at least one bilingual educational assistant. Over three-quarters of schools report at least one bilingual principal or vice-principal. However, less than half of schools had French-speaking music teachers, guidance counsellors, custodians or librarians. For schools to successfully create a French Immersion setting, higher proportions of bilingual staff are needed, especially in support, leadership and teaching specialty roles, in order to normalize the use of French as an everyday language.

<sup>7</sup> In 2015-2016 report, schools reported on any number of initiatives, while in 2016-2017 report the number of initiatives reported on was limited. This limits the comparison that may be made between the years.

A key aspect in the creation of a French Immersion setting is the richness of the linguistic environment in which students and staff spend their days. The usage of French during non-instructional time makes it clear to students that French is not restricted to the classroom and provides opportunities to apply the French language in different context thus giving meaning to their linguistic experience. Although a *Linguistically Rich Environment* was a priority area for school initiatives, there has been no significant change over the five-year period in the use of French during non-instructional time and various school activities. Despite this, the department anticipates future improvement given the priority accorded to the creation of a linguistically rich environment by schools and the long-term change of school culture required to see results.

### Validation of Students’ Linguistic and Educational Experience

Focus on Language Acquisition	Enriched School Environment	Impact on Student Learning	Valuing and Encouraging the Learning of Languages
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The French Immersion Program is based on the philosophy of learning language through content in authentic and meaningful academic, cultural and social situations. In order for students to become effective and confident speakers of French, their experience in the language needs to be reinforced and validated. In the key area of *Validation of Students’ Linguistic and Educational Experience*, the 2013-2014 report recommended that the subcategories of *Focusing on Language Acquisition* and *Impact on Student Learning* should be areas of special focus. This systematic focus on language acquisition is necessary to improve students’ language accuracy and proficiency, building and strengthening confidence and engagement. Likewise, it is necessary to examine program-expected outcomes for students as key measures of student success in the French Immersion Program.

*Validation of Students’ Linguistic and Educational Experience* was the most popular category of initiatives reported by schools, with 66 initiatives in 2016-2017. The initiatives in the four subcategories appeared in roughly equal numbers. Initiatives included the development of relevant learning situations for students to improve their French-language skills while interacting with subject-area content and application of the integrated approach to language learning with its emphasis on corrective feedback in a comfortable risk-taking enabled environment. Other initiatives focused on having students take responsibility for their own learning and the development of plurilingual identities as lifelong language learners. The relatively even balance of initiatives between the four subcategories was not the case in the 2015-2016 report; it had significantly more initiatives in *Focusing on Language Acquisition* and *Impact on Student Learning*. This may be an indication that schools have taken all four subcategories of *Validation of Students’ Linguistic and Educational Experience* into consideration as they worked on developing well-rounded, confident French-speaking students.

The questionnaire surveyed schools regarding the program-expected outcomes that validate students’ linguistic experience. The outcomes each identify an aspect of pedagogical practice that can be used to bring a greater awareness of the French language and its context to students. Although data regarding the program-expected outcomes remain somewhat constant over the five-year reporting period, the following has been observed:

- In both 2016-2017 and 2015-2016, the most frequently addressed outcomes—“always” or “often”—were *Engage in Learning and Using French*, *Improve Language Proficiency* and *Develop Confidence in French Language Skills*.
- There has been a slight improvement (“always” or “often”) in the categories of *Discover and Experience Different Aspects of la Francophonie* and *Engage in Learning and Using French*.
- There has been a slight decrease in all subject matters in the following categories *Motivate Participation in the Francophone Community* and *Identify Themselves as Bilingual Learners*.

- Outcomes were most frequently addressed in the *Français* course, to a lesser degree in *Sciences humaines* and *Science de la nature*, and to some degree in *Éducation artistique* and *Mathématiques*.
- There has been a significant increase in the category *Discover and Experience Different Aspects of la Francophonie* in *Éducation artistique*, *Éducation physique et Éducation à la santé*, and *Mathématiques*.

There remains work to be done to ensure that all program-expected outcomes are addressed more consistently and become part of daily practice in all subject areas, by making language acquisition an integral part of the academic program. Improved focus on these learning outcomes will support students towards achieving academic success, improving engagement and motivation, and nurturing their identities as plurilingual learners and speakers.

### Educational Staff and Professional Learning

Recruitment and Retention of Staff	Professional Learning
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To provide a quality French education for students, the sustainability and growth of the French Immersion Program rely on the recruitment and retention of educators (teachers and school leaders) with the necessary competencies: language skills, cultural knowledge and second language methodology that supports student learning and decision-making. Throughout the five-year period, the data shows that the hiring of educators continues to prove challenging. The 2013-2014 report recommended that, to retain existing personnel, all staff be supported throughout their careers via professional learning. Particular attention should be paid to school administrators to ensure they are well equipped to provide leadership in the school community.

Almost all initiatives in this key area focused on building teacher capacity through professional learning: 45 of 48 in the 2016-2017 report and 43 of 51 in 2015-2016. Activities included networking and planning opportunities, subject-specific sessions and discussions related to the vision of French Immersion Program. As many schools concentrated their initiatives on professional learning, they report that the most frequently addressed professional learning topics in Early, Middle and Senior Years in 2016-2017 included

- *Literacy*
- *Methodology that Supports the Development of Language through Content*
- *The Vision and Philosophy of the French Immersion Program*
- *Numeracy*
- *Subject Specific PD*

Schools also reported on their professional learning priorities, these being distinct from, but related to, the professional learning topics actually addressed. There has been a shift in priorities since the beginning of the five-year reporting cycle. The top priorities identified for all three grade groupings were

- *Literacy*
- *Methodology that Supports the Development of Language through Content*

The focus on literacy and language development through content is most likely due to the rollout of the vision of the French Immersion Program and the government's focus on literacy as a strategic priority.

The recruitment of educators remains a significant challenge to the successful implementation of the French Immersion Program. This highlights the need for retention strategies and succession planning. These could include support for new and experienced administrators and continued professional learning opportunities for educators.

## Student Enrolment Trends

Visibility and Communication	Entry Points and Transition	Retention
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School divisions are experiencing success as French Immersion enrolment is increasing across the province. This increased enrolment often masks the challenges of student retention as approximately half of the French Immersion students leave the Program as they move through the school system. Since attrition poses a challenge to Program stability, it was recommended in the 2013-2014 report that a concerted effort be made to improve K-12 student retention.

For the 2016-2017 report, schools listed few initiatives in this key area, as was the case for the 2015-2016 report. Initiatives under this key area included program promotion and transition-related information sessions, as well as ongoing monitoring of attendance and attrition information.

Activities related to promotion are frequently offered in the Early Years, with far fewer in Middle and Senior Years. It may be the case that schools focus more on recruitment than retention. There needs to be a common understanding that visibility and communication as part of day-to-day school practice explicitly and implicitly create an environment that validates students and engages parents, thereby supporting retention. In addition, there needs to be renewed focus on strategies to support struggling students, to guide students during transition points, and to increase the French Immersion diploma graduation rates.