

# French Second Language Learning in New Brunswick

A position paper submitted in the context of a  
review to the New Brunswick Official  
Languages Act

September 2021



**CANADIAN  
PARENTS  
FOR FRENCH**  
NEW BRUNSWICK

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September 15, 2021

Dear Judge Yvette Finn and Mr. John McLaughlin:

On behalf of the Canadian Parents for French New Brunswick (CPFNB) Board of Directors, I am pleased to submit this position paper to the Government of New Brunswick within the context of their Official Languages Act (OLA) review.

Now, more than ever, improving access to effective second language learning in New Brunswick is critical. Bilingualism is one of our greatest assets in the province in every sense: economic, social, cultural, educational, and much more. Effective French Second Language training programs, for both students and adults, is imperative to building a more bilingual New Brunswick, a pillar to our provincial identity.


As a proud product of New Brunswick's French Immersion program, and a past participant of CPFNB's grassroots programming for students in our province, I can attest to the impact of effective FSL programming. We look forward to seeing how the Government of New Brunswick will make increased improvements to our current FSL offerings within the context of the OLA review. As a leader in the provision of experiential FSL programming for New Brunswick students, CPFNB is ready to assist the provincial government in their efforts to improve current FSL opportunities.

We would like to express my sincere thanks to *la Société de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick* (SANB) for their consultation, expertise, and insight into this report. CPFNB is pleased to endorse their recommendations for their area of expertise, the *Official Languages Act*, and we are proud to have had their collaboration and endorsement for this position paper related to French Second Language learning. The collaboration of our organizations demonstrates the mutually-beneficial possibilities of linguistic collaboration in New Brunswick and is a testament to the desire amongst both of our communities to create a more unified, bilingual New Brunswick.

We would also like to thank Dr. Joseph Dicks, retired Professor at the University of New Brunswick's Faculty of Education and former Director of the Second Language Research Institute of Canada for his expertise in writing this formal submission. Your ongoing commitment to more research-driven, effective FSL programs is commendable.

Lastly, we would like to thank our team at CPFNB, H el ene Pelletier and Allison Davis, for their ongoing work to ensure that students in New Brunswick have access to a diverse range of resources and programming to use their second language outside of the classroom.

Sincerely,

  
Austin Henderson  
Vice-President, CPFNB

Canadian Parents for French NB Board of Directors (2021):

- President : Greg Keith
- Vice-President : Austin Henderson
- Secretary : Carole No el
- Treasurer : Robert Bernier
- Director : Dorothy White
- Director : Tara Thorne
- Director : Debbie Melanson

## **Executive Summary**

### **Focus and Content of this FSL Review**

This review is being conducted in the context of a larger review of the New Brunswick Official Languages Act [OLA], and, while distinct and separate from the general OLA review, is nonetheless an important consideration in the overall framework of official bilingualism in New Brunswick.

This brief focuses on the following aspects of French second language learning:

1. Improving access to French second language [FSL] instruction from early childhood to adulthood.
2. Improving the quality of French second language instruction from early childhood to adulthood.
3. Improving the transition from classroom-based French second language learning to the workplace.
4. Improving assessment of French second language learning and exploring assessment practices in schools and workplace settings.
5. Expanding opportunities for linguistic and cultural enhancement through engagement with French first language speakers.

Specific recommendations to the OLA commissioners to improve French second language instruction are made for the different educational contexts, with a particular emphasis on public school (K-12) French second language learning.

### **Early Childhood Education [ECE]**

The New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework document outlines a vision for learning where young children are “secure in their linguistic and cultural identities” (p. 1) and where the curriculum will “actively honour the diversity of New Brunswick’s children and their languages and heritages”.

There are no specific guidelines or program direction, however, with respect to second or additional language learning in ECE settings.

### **Early Childhood Education Recommendations:**

1. Include French second language learning as an integral part of the New Brunswick Early Childhood Education curriculum in order to provide exposure to French language and culture. Consider adapting French Experiences/FLORA activities currently employed at K-3 for use in ECE.

### **Effectiveness of FSL Program Models**

Successful second language learning programs require exposure to and opportunities to use and re-use the language being learned.

### **Grades K-3 English Prime**

New Brunswick does not have a formal French second language program from K-3. Instead, students may be exposed to French through French Learning Experiences or FLORA (French Learning Opportunities for Rural Areas).

### **Intensive French**

This program provides intensive exposure to French as a second language for all students not enrolled in French Immersion at Grade 5 over a five month period . The intensity of instruction and frequency of contact are reduced dramatically from Grade 6 onward.

### **French Immersion**

There are two entry points for French Immersion in New Brunswick: Grade 1 (Early French Immersion/EFI) and Grade 6 (Late French Immersion/LFI). One glaring difference that persists between New Brunswick and the other Canadian provinces and territory that offer French Immersion is the lack of FI at Kindergarten in NB.

### **Program Model Recommendations:**

1. Experiment with intensity of instruction in post-Intensive French to see if more concentrated exposure will have a positive effect on French language performance.
2. Conduct an in-depth study of the IF program, including feedback from teachers, students and parents, regarding its effectiveness, student engagement and student and parent satisfaction.
3. Maintain two distinct entry points for French Immersion: Early French Immersion and Late French Immersion at grade 6.
4. Strongly promote Late French Immersion to Intensive French students and their parents as a viable path toward bilingualism.
5. Implement a 50/50 English-French bilingual Kindergarten program for French Immersion.

### **French Second Language Programs and Language Proficiency**

According to the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [EECD] (2019) Oral Proficiency Interview [OPI] testing results, the majority of students assessed at Grades 10 and 12 are not reaching the established target for their program. It is not possible for many students who have successfully completed FSL courses in high school to take the OPI. There has also been some debate over the years whether the OPI is a valid measure of proficiency. The reading and writing abilities of French Immersion students are not measured or reported using this form of assessment.

### **FSL Assessment Recommendations:**

1. Adopt the *Diplôme d'études de langue française* [DELF] test as a short-term measure to assess students' language ability comprehensively in all FSL programs.
2. Work with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada [CMEC] to develop a made in Canada FSL assessment tool for immersion students based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language [CEFR] or the Canadian Language Benchmark [CLB] that assesses all language skills.

3. Work with teachers to improve pedagogy related to the development of oral language skills as per Michaud's (2020) suggestions.
4. Expand assessment of secondary students to all students who wish to be assessed and who have taken at least one FSL course during high school.

### **Enrolment, Attrition and Retention in French Immersion**

According to the national body of Canadian Parents for French, New Brunswick leads the way in Canada with 87.6% of eligible students enrolled in FSL. 36.8% are enrolled in French Immersion.

#### **Grade 1 Entry**

The attrition rate for Early French Immersion [EFI] in 2018-19 was 28.7%. The largest decline occurs in EFI at the end of grades 1 and 2 (16.2%), followed by Grades 10 and 11 (12.9%), and 10% at Grade 7 (mostly Late French Immersion students).

Potential reasons include concerns about first language literacy in early years, academic performance at middle school, and grades and scholarships at secondary school. Many of these concerns are unfounded.

#### **Enrolment, Attrition and Retention Recommendations:**

1. Develop specific strategies tailored to the different levels and potential reasons for attrition in order to improve retention rates. Carefully crafted sessions for specific audiences (parents, teachers, students, administrators) should be presented at the appropriate time so informed decisions can be made.
1. Make available supports for students who need extra help to succeed in French Immersion in order to ensure equity and maintain enrolments throughout elementary grades and beyond.
2. Avail of advancements in technology and teacher competency with remote learning to design and deliver a wider range of course options at the secondary level for French Immersion students.



3. Provide FSL teachers with the appropriate training and working conditions in order to conduct effective remote learning classes.

### **FSL Program Access and Quality**

A fundamental tenet of a public school system in a just society is that similar educational opportunities should be available to all students. This involves both access to programs and quality of experiences.

#### **Intensive French in English Prime**

The overall quality of the “language experiences” offered at K-3 is dependent upon the curriculum and materials, the FSL training and enthusiasm of the teachers providing those experiences, and scheduling.

#### **French Immersion**

One major hurdle related to French Immersion enrolment is population density and ensuring sufficient class sizes in rural areas. As students move through the French Immersion program, particularly at the secondary school levels, it is also challenging in rural areas to provide a range of courses that will interest all students.

There is a related issue of “myths” and misinformation about French Immersion that is all too prevalent in today’s digital “information” age.

The issue of access as it relates to students of varying ability levels is a critically important one. Students who struggle in early French Immersion are able to succeed in that program when appropriate support is provided. This is critical to the success of French Immersion but also to the fundamental premise of equality of opportunity.

#### **Teacher Recruitment, Retention, Qualifications and Teacher Education Programs**

From K-5, superior language proficiency in oral and written French as per the C1 or C2 is essential. From grade 6 onward, it would not be unreasonable to expect that subject matter

teachers in immersion could possess a level slightly lower than French language arts [FLA] teachers. All teachers should have methodological training in FSL teaching.

### **Positive Interaction between both Official Language Groups**

This can have various forms that could benefit teachers and students with respect to language models and cultural awareness and appreciation.

### **FSL Access and Equity Recommendations:**

1. Conduct a thorough review of FSL at the primary/elementary level including parental satisfaction and desires in order to provide a solid FSL program from K-4.
2. Utilize various media (radio, tv, social media) to promote the benefits of a bilingual education and encourage students to become proficient in French.
3. Use bussing and French Immersion centres in rural areas as needed to provide a French Immersion option.
4. Provide critical training for teachers in the design and management of multi-age classes and inform parents of the challenges and advantages of such classes for French Immersion.
5. Consider adjusting teacher language competency requirements according to grade level and subject matter with higher formal competency required at lower grades and in French Immersion language arts (FILA) classes than in middle school or secondary subject matter classes.
6. Use information gathered through recent research by agencies such as Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers [ACPI] and Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers [CASLT] to establish practices to enhance both teacher recruitment and retention.
7. Ensure through teacher certification that all teachers in French Immersion possess the methodological knowledge and ability to teach in that setting, or have the opportunity to obtain that certification through established professional learning sessions.

8. EECD should work with the Ministère de l'éducation et de la petite enfance to establish partner schools and develop a tandem learning platform to facilitate interaction between francophone and immersion students.

### **Post-Secondary Education and the Workplace**

New Brunswick has two major post-secondary institutions, *l'Université de Moncton* and the University of New Brunswick [UNB] that are recognized for their work in the areas of bilingual education. During this period of crisis in teacher recruitment for FSL, collaboration between institutions on teacher education for French Immersion could be beneficial.

Moving from a training program of any kind to the workplace is challenging. It is important to recognize that many academic language programs often do not provide students with the specific language skills for a particular job.

### **Post-Secondary Education and the Workplace Recommendations:**

1. Francophone and Anglophone post-secondary institutions should explore ways of collaborating to complement one another so as to facilitate the education of teachers for both francophone schools and French Immersion.
2. Programs need to be developed to assist the transition from school to the workplace. These could include:
  - Specific college training programs that have French language training as part of their professional program.
  - Specific language upgrading courses in the workplace that are targeted to that particular job.
  - An intensive immersion experience for students intending to transition from a post-secondary training program to the workplace but who do not possess the required language skills.

## **Conclusion: Celebrating and Promoting Bilingualism**

Bilingualism is a huge advantage both for the individual and for society. One of New Brunswick's greatest resources is its bilingual citizenry. In order to increase this resource, we need to:

1. Increase the number of anglophone students who are choose to remain on the path to bilingualism and;
2. Provide them with the tools they need to develop and adapt that bilingualism to different contexts in the workplace and elsewhere in society.

## **Focus and Content of this French Second Language Review**

This review is being conducted in the context of a larger review of the New Brunswick Official Languages Act [OLA]. We recognize, however, that much of French Second Language [FSL] education in the province of New Brunswick occurs in settings that are not governed by the OLA. The Commissioner of Official Languages wrote the following in a brief submitted to the Commissioners of this review in July 2021.

*Note that the following are not included in the OLA's definition of institution: separate educational institutions; separate cultural institutions; the provinces school system, including the English and French sections of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and the schools and their committees, boards and administrations; community centres; and universities and, as applicable, community colleges. Consequently, the OLA does not apply to these institutions whose linguistic homogeneity is protected under sections 16.1 and 23 of the Charter and under the Act Recognizing the Equality of the Two Official Linguistic Communities in New Brunswick.*

In a footnote, the Commissioner explained that: “The OLA does not take precedence over the Education Act or any other statute or legislative provision or measure intended to promote the equality of both linguistic communities or to establish separate educational or cultural institutions. “

Also, from the government of New Brunswick website (Bilingualism NB), we find this statement (emphasis added):

***In addition to the review**, the commissioners have been asked to identify ways to improve the access to and quality of second language training. Providing the opportunity for all New Brunswickers to learn their second official language and communicate comfortably in both English and French is how we achieve a truly bilingual society.*

It is clear, then, that this submission on French second language learning will be viewed as distinct and separate from the general OLA review, but is nonetheless an important consideration in the overall framework of official bilingualism in New Brunswick.

We agree with the OLA commissioners' premise that the ultimate objective of French second language programs is to "allow as many students as possible to graduate with the capacity to converse in their second language." We also recognize that there are numerous benefits of bilingualism. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review in detail all the research evidence regarding these various advantages that are cognitive, social, cultural and economic in nature. The BBC article entitled "The amazing benefits of being bilingual" (2016) and the Harvard University article entitled "Bilingualism: Start early, and earn all your benefits!" (2019) provide excellent summaries of these benefits.

Given such advantages, and following the request for specific submissions related to improving second language learning, this brief focuses on the following aspects of French second language learning:

1. Improving access to French second language instruction from early childhood to adulthood.
2. Improving the quality of French second language instruction from early childhood to adulthood.
3. Improving the transition from classroom-based French second language learning to the workplace.
4. Improving assessment of French second language learning and exploring assessment practices in schools and workplace settings.
5. Expanding opportunities for linguistic and cultural enhancement through engagement with French first language speakers.

Specific recommendations to the OLA commissioners to improve French second language instruction are made for the different educational contexts, with a particular emphasis on public school (K-12) French second language learning.

As an officially bilingual province, New Brunswick holds a unique position among Canadian provinces and territories. The commitment to official bilingualism in New Brunswick is reflected in part through the French second language programs being offered within K-12 education and the number of students studying FSL in the public school system.

Pre-school and post-secondary settings are also important contexts for learning French as a second language in New Brunswick. This brief will examine each of these three educational settings beginning with Early Childhood Education, followed by K-12 public school education, and finishing with post-secondary education and the transition to the workplace. A concluding section will address the importance of celebrating and promoting bilingualism.

### **Early Childhood Education**

With respect to early childhood education [ECE], the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework document (2008) outlines a vision for learning where young children are “secure in their linguistic and cultural identities” (p. 1) and where the curriculum will “actively honour the diversity of New Brunswick’s children and their languages and heritages” (p. 2). In the section “Valuing Cultures and Languages”, reference is made to Mi’kmaq, Maliseet (Wolostaqey) and Passamaquoddy languages and to New Brunswick’s status as an officially bilingual province. Reference is made to “innovative approaches” (p. 10) like the bicultural curriculum and “language nests” in New Zealand; “experiencing and developing diverse linguistic repertoires” (p. 42); and making different languages spoken by families “valued and made verbal and visible” (p. 43).

The accompanying “communication and literacies” document makes reference to “investigating home literacies unique to families such (sic) hunting, gardening or knitting” (p.3) and incorporating home and heritage languages and recognizing that “multilingual children may switch languages and express ideas differently in different languages” (p. 17).

These statements represent a solid basis for second/additional language learning in early childhood. There are no specific guidelines or program direction, however, with respect to second or additional language learning in ECE settings. Given the importance of bilingualism provincially and nationally and the increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse society that we are becoming as a province, this situation should be addressed. Moreover, second language research has found that there are a wide range of benefits for children to learn a language at a young age (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013). The

importance of awareness of and appreciation for other cultures at a young age cannot be overstated. There is also evidence that such exposure promotes thinking ability, attention control, and metalinguistic awareness, which are important for development of literacy skills (Bialystok, McBride-Chang & Luk, 2005; Bourgoin, 2014)

With regard to ECE curriculum and additional language learning, there are several recent initiatives that are particularly informative. The New Brunswick ECE curriculum mentions has referred to some of these. There is also a pre-school program of the Victoria State Government of Australia for 4-year olds that exposes children to another language for up to three hours per week (Victoria State Government Education and Training) . This model could be explored in the New Brunswick context. Indeed, the existing model of French Learning Opportunities for Rural Areas [FLORA] that is being used at the primary grades in New Brunswick public schools could be expanded to the pre-school context for French second language. It could also be adapted for New Brunswick Indigenous languages. This would be consistent with the New Brunswick ECE curriculum framework that seeks to “honour the diversity of New Brunswick’s children and their languages and heritages” (p. 2). This is particularly timely given the recent federal-provincial initiative in the establishment of affordable Early Childhood Education centres and investments in the training and hiring of qualified ECE staff (Government of New Brunswick (?) Budget, 2012). This would also provide a smoother transition to French immersion at Kindergarten should that option be available in New Brunswick as it is in all other jurisdictions in Canada offering French immersion.

### **Early Childhood Education Recommendations**

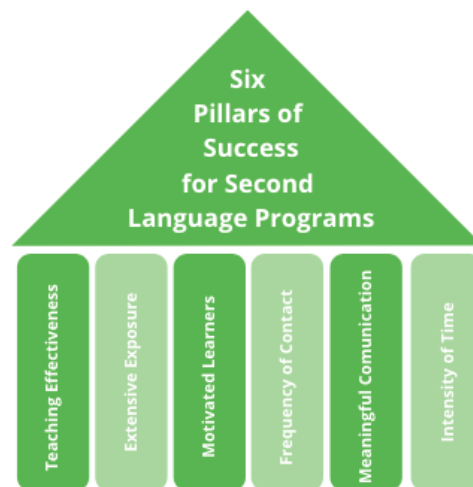
1. Include French second language learning as an integral part of the New Brunswick Early Childhood Education curriculum in order to provide exposure to French language and culture.
2. Consider adapting French Experiences/FLORA activities currently employed at K-3 for use in ECE.



## Effectiveness of K-12 French Second Language Program Models

Before examining the various program models at different stages of schooling, it is useful to consider what constitutes effective second language teaching and learning. Successful second language learning programs require exposure to and opportunities to use and re-use the language being learned. According to Dicks (2018), the most successful second language programs maximize these six key pillars which are also illustrated in the diagram that follows:

- 1) Frequency: Contact occurs regularly (daily if possible).
- 2) Intensity: Contact lasts all day long if possible.
- 3) Extensiveness: Classes extend over many weeks, months, and years. The sooner one begins the more extensive the exposure can be.
- 4) Meaningful communication: Learners have something interesting and important to watch, to listen to, read about, speak about, and write about.
- 5) Motivation: Motivated learners perceive the language being learned as important and useful and view bilingualism/multilingualism as a positive personal achievement.
- 6) Teaching effectiveness: Successful teachers are highly proficient in the language, knowledgeable about and appreciative of the culture, possess excellent teaching skills generally, as well as the specific knowledge and skills for teaching in their particular second language setting.



To the extent that any one of these pillars is missing or not fully realized, a language program will be less effective than it might be otherwise.

New Brunswick currently has two streams for students learning French as a second language in the public school system.

In the English prime stream, French instruction begins at Grade 4. From Kindergarten to Grade 3, students may have access to French Learning Experiences (FLE) or French Learning Opportunities for Rural Areas (FLORA), a program developed in New Brunswick designed to help students attain simple vocabulary and develop positive attitudes toward French. The formal English prime program sequence is as follows:

1. Grade 4: either FLORA or pre-Intensive French
2. Grade 5: Intensive French
3. Grades 6-12: post-Intensive French (12% per week (120 hours per year) in Grades 6 to 8, one French course in Grades 9 and 10 (90 hours per year)

In the French immersion stream, students may choose either:

1. Grade 1 entry (Early French Immersion)
2. Grade 6 entry (Late French Immersion)

In New Brunswick, Policy 309 which was first enacted in 1994 “establishes standards for the provision of French Second Language (FSL) programs in New Brunswick anglophone school districts” (p. 1). The 2018 revised version of Policy 309 stipulates that:

1. “French Learning Experiences are mandatory for all Kindergarten to Grade 3 students who follow the English Prime program. These experiences will be integrated into curricular areas and offered a minimum of 30 minutes per week” (p. 3);
2. “FSL instruction is compulsory until the end of Grade 10” (p. 3);
3. Grade 5 English Prime Intensive French consists of a minimum 345 hours of instruction in French; a minimum of 300 hours of instruction in French during the intensive term, and an additional 45 hours in the term that precedes or follows (p. 3);

4. “In Grades 6 to 8, instructional time in Post-intensive French consists of approximately 120 hours per year” (p. 3);
5. “In Grades 9-10, instructional time decreases to 90 hours per year” (p. 3);
6. For Early and Late French Immersion: “Grades 11 and 12 receive a minimum of 25 percent of instructional time in French” (p. 4).

### **Grades K-3 English Prime**

New Brunswick does not have a formal French second language program from K-3. Instead, students may be exposed to French through French Learning Experiences (FLE) or French Language Opportunities for Rural Areas (FLORA). Now, as Arnott and Lapkin (2018) discuss, some research (e.g., Burstall, 1975; Munoz, 2006) indicates that there is no meaningful advantage in proficiency for students who begin programs that lack intensity earlier than later (such as core French at Grade 1 versus Grade 4). There are, however, sound reasons for having a formal FSL program at the earliest grades in New Brunswick. First, as Dr. Fred Genesee (2008) has pointed out, when one begins second language education is dependent upon the context. In a bilingual province like New Brunswick where French has the status of an official language and where students may encounter French and interact with francophone peers in various settings it is important that students be made aware of French language and culture from an early age. Moreover, play-based learning the learning of French through using puppets, storytelling, song and dance and drama are exceptionally well-suited to younger learners. This is important for the development of positive attitudes toward French and francophone culture. It also quite simply allows for student to “have fun” learning French and to associate French language and culture with positive learning experiences. The FLE/FLORA initiatives attempt to do this, but it is limited in scope and does not have the support or expertise of qualified French teachers to implement it. This should be changed. FSL in New Brunswick should begin in ECE, be well established in K-4 and then followed with a sound program in Grade 5 onward.

## **Intensive French**

This brings us to Intensive French. New Brunswick has invested heavily in the Intensive French program. This program provides intensive exposure to French as a second language for all students not enrolled in French immersion over a 5-month period (either September to January or February to June) during the Grade 5 academic year. As noted above, as a follow-up to this intensive half-year in French, students spend about 200 minutes per week in Grades 6 to 8, blocked in 2 or 3 periods, and do one French 90-hour course per year Grades 9 and 10. One 90-hour course per year is available in Grades 11 and 12, but is not compulsory.

The relative success of Intensive French at Grade 5 is in part due to its inclusion of at least four of the six pillars of success mentioned earlier: daily contact, intensity of instruction, extensive instruction, and qualified teachers. The other two pillars, student motivation and meaningful communication, are more difficult to assess and beyond the scope of this position paper. However, we do know that the more students are able to learn and express themselves about topics that are meaningful to them, the more they will want to participate and consequently develop their language proficiency. Anecdotally, there are reports of students and teachers being excited about the rapid gains in proficiency that occur at Grade 5, but also being bored with the repetitive nature of the language and some related classroom exercises, particularly at the middle school levels.

The situation in post-Intensive French appears to be particularly challenging. The intensity of instruction is reduced dramatically (200 minutes per week in PIF instead of nearly 200 minutes per day in IF). The frequency of contact is also reduced severely – as little as twice per week instead of daily. As a result, the extensiveness of instruction is reduced considerably. Ideally, one would like to have a high degree of both frequency and intensity of instruction. However, when time is limited, longer (more intensive) periods of instruction have been shown to be superior to shorter more frequent periods (see Arnott & Lapkin, 2019). The PIF curriculum recognizes this and recommends two 90 minute classes per week or three 60 minute classes per week. It would seem that two 90 minute periods of PIF would be preferable in order to allow for more development of language rich

opportunities. It would also be interesting to experiment with different scheduling options (e.g., one 150 minute period and one 50 minute period) to see if this allows for more encouraging results for PIF students at Grade 10.

Also, enrolment statistics indicate that the uptake for Grade 6 Late French Immersion has not increased meaningfully since the addition of Intensive French at Grade 5. This is surprising and represents a potential lost opportunity for students. The intense nature of French language learning at Grade 5 in Intensive French should prepare students for Late French Immersion. Indeed, students and parents should be strongly encouraged to consider this option at Grade 6. This issue will be considered again in the section on enrolment and retention of students.

### **French Immersion**

As noted earlier, there are two entry points for French immersion in New Brunswick: Grade 1 Early French Immersion [EFI] and Grade 6 Late French Immersion [LFI]. However, provincial governments in New Brunswick have a propensity to modify the entry point for EFI. The negative ramifications of these changes have been dealt with in detail in the latest task force report on FSL in New Brunswick (Lockyer & Robichaud, 2012). The most serious of these deserve repeating however:

- loss of French immersion teachers to other provinces, to the English program, or to the francophone school system;
- confusion and frustration among parents with children in programs at different starting points;
- lack of coordination with other Canadian provinces;
- stress and strain on program developers and personnel responsible for program implementation, hiring and professional learning for French immersion teachers;
- reduced proficiency due to a reduction in overall cumulative time;
- potential for greater streaming as a result of K-3 literacy development in English being used as a screening tool for French immersion.

Essentially, these negative effects can be avoided by having two stable and distinct entry points. Grade 1 and Grade 6 currently allow for this stability. The Grade 6 program, while not producing as strong a level of French proficiency as the Grade 1 entry EFI program, nonetheless plays a valuable role and, in view of the hours of contact and intensity, an acceptable level of French (see the following section for details on French proficiency levels by program). The LFI program allows those parents who are legitimately concerned about their child's first language or cognitive development at a young age to wait and enrol their child later. It also allows for students transferring from other jurisdictions where enrolment in Early French Immersion was not possible (including outside the country) to have an option to enrol in an immersion program.

It is generally recognized that the LFI program is more challenging due to the more complex nature of the subject matter that students have to undertake in their second language (Wesche, 2002; Dicks, 2017). For this reason, students who are struggling academically are less likely to enrol or to succeed in LFI. However, the existence of the Intensive French program at Grade 5 in New Brunswick should provide students with a more substantial base in French allowing them to overcome some of the linguistic challenges experienced by students who do not have an intensive language program prior to enrolment. This premise is further elaborated on the sections on language competency, enrolment and retention.

One glaring difference between New Brunswick and the other Canadian provinces and territory that offer French immersion is the lack of FI at Kindergarten in New Brunswick. Every other Canadian jurisdiction that offers French immersion has at least an option for Kindergarten. The Australian ECE program referenced earlier also has a 50/50 bilingual program that exposes pre-school children to the second language for 7.5 hours per week. Half of the time, learning occurs in English and the other half is spent in another language. In the New Brunswick context, a bilingual Kindergarten with half the time spent learning French and half the time learning English for all students would provide a solid preparation for Grade 1 French immersion.

The success of EFI and LFI has been largely reported in relation to students' proficiency on the Oral Proficiency Interview [OPI]. The following section deals with perceptions of students' proficiency and alternative assessment possibilities.

### **Program Model Recommendations**

1. Experiment with intensity of instruction in post-Intensive French to see if more concentrated exposure will have a positive effect on French language performance as it does in French immersion.
2. Conduct an in-depth study of the IF program, including feedback from teachers, students and parents, regarding its effectiveness, student engagement and student and parent satisfaction.
3. Maintain two distinct entry points for French immersion: Early French Immersion and Late French Immersion at Grade 6.
4. Strongly promote Late French Immersion to Intensive French students and their parents as a viable path toward bilingualism.
5. Implement a 50-50 English-French bilingual Kindergarten program for French immersion.

### **French Second Language Programs and Language Proficiency**

According to the Government of New Brunswick 10-year education plan, *Everyone at their Best* (2016), the goal is for 90% of students to be able to “achieve appropriate or higher levels on the provincial French Second Language oral proficiency assessment” (p. 10).

These levels are defined as follows:

- For Intensive French/Post-intensive French = Intermediate
- For Late French Immersion students = Intermediate Plus
- For Early French Immersion students = Advanced

The New Brunswick Department of EECD website is much less precise stating that the goal is that “90% of graduates can effectively communicate in their second official language”.

This section reports the results for Grade 10, the last year that French is compulsory. This assessment is conducted every two years and the last year reported is 2017-18, the last year for grade 3 entry students to be assessed. A sample of the student population is selected at grade 10 but this sample is less selective than at Grade 12 when only students taking 5 or more courses in EFI and LFI are included and only Post-Intensive French students taking a course at Grade 12 are included. According to the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development [EECD] (2019), the results at **Grade 10** were as follows:

<b>Program</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>% at or above target</b>	<b>% at or above ½ level below target</b>
“Early” French immersion (Grade 3 entry)	Advanced	9.9%	46.3% (Intermediate Plus)
Late French Immersion	Intermediate Plus	16.5%	70.9% (Intermediate)
Post-Intensive French	Intermediate	2.2%	8.9% (Basic Plus)

The Grade 3 entry students were the strongest French language oral proficiency. Of those sampled, nearly 10% met or exceeded the target level of Advanced and 46% met the level just below that (Intermediate Plus). (Grade 1 entry students in 2015-16 performed somewhat better with 12% at Advanced and 51% at Intermediate plus.)

Late French Immersion students attained the next highest level of proficiency at Grade 10 with 16.5% achieving Intermediate Plus or better and nearly 71% meeting the Intermediate level.

However, only 2% of Intensive French students interviewed at Grade 10 met the Intermediate target level and just 9% of them met the level just below that (Basic Plus).



First, it is clear from these oral proficiency results that none of the programs is meeting the target of 90% of students reaching the designated proficiency level at Grade 10. The EFI and LFI programs, however, are approaching that level if one considers that achievement at one half-level below target is encouraging. Indeed, pedagogy that focuses specifically on oral language development, taking into account the various facets of communicative competence, could produce much stronger results. The potential for higher levels of achievement is clearly evident from the high percentages of students achieving just one half-level below target. Michaud (2020) has conducted an in-depth analysis of oral proficiency interviewing and results in French immersion in New Brunswick and implications for teaching and learning. She recommends that teachers should (p. 169):

- 1) supplement in-class teaching with cultural experiences in the language classroom;
- 2) implement a holistic approach to teaching speaking in language classrooms;
- 3) explicitly teach effective language strategies to minimize ruptures in speech production;
- 4) use the language portfolio in class as a long-term tool to track language development;
- 5) teach language registers and provide opportunities for students to use their French in authentic settings.

The situation in Post-Intensive French (PIF), however, is concerning. With nearly 90% of students tested not meeting the half-level below target at Grade 10, this situation needs to be examined more carefully. There are several possibilities that need to be addressed:

- 1) Is the intensity of instruction in PIF too weak to maintain the gains achieved in Grade 5?
- 2) Is the curriculum and methodology appropriate for the age level?
- 3) Are the topics and opportunities for communication engaging for learners of this age group and level?
- 4) Is the oral interview an appropriate measure of proficiency? Do other measures confirm these results or suggest different degrees of competency?

There has also been some debate over the years whether the OPI is a valid measure of proficiency. As the assessment expert James Popham (2020) argues, tests are not valid in and of themselves; tests are valid for a particular purpose, time, place and audience. The issue therefore is not whether the OPI is a sound or scientifically based instrument – it clearly is. Rather, the question should be “is this instrument the most appropriate one for secondary students learning French in an immersion setting?”. In answering this question, one should consider factors such as: the age and maturity of the students, the familiarity of the students with the assessment context (a face-to-face interview), the difference between everyday oral communication and the kind of communication that occurs in the classroom (social versus academic language), the stress level created by a high stakes test that is a “one-shot” deal, amongst other factors. These factors could be considered when questioning the validity of the OPI in a secondary school setting. In addition, the oral proficiency interview is by its very essence a test of oral proficiency only. The reading and writing abilities of French immersion students are not measured or reported using this form of assessment.

However, there are alternatives. The New Brunswick Department of EECD has devoted considerable efforts to revising its FSL curricula to incorporate the levels of proficiency as outlined by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, nd). This framework outlines proficiency levels for all language skills: oral production, oral interaction, listening comprehension, written comprehension and written expression. A formalized assessment procedure that includes all language skills and that is more suited to students in a school-based environment would present a more complete picture of students’ FSL abilities.

One such test is the *Diplôme d’études de langue française* [DELF] which was designed in France and used in a number of countries that have students learning French around the world. Some obvious advantages of this test are that:

- 1) it is a comprehensive test (all language skills are assessed);
- 2) it is standardized and assessed by trained assessors;
- 3) it is available.

Some disadvantages are that:

- 1) it is relatively costly;
- 2) it is overseen by France and scheduling can be difficult;
- 3) certain items contain cultural biases that non-European students may not understand thereby reducing its validity.

An alternative would be to design a “made for New Brunswick” test based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language [CEFR] descriptors or the Canadian Language Benchmark [CLB] descriptors. The CLB is another comprehensive second language assessment framework developed in Canada (CLB-NCLC, ). Indeed, a “made in Canada” test for FSL proficiency in schools based on the CLB would be a longer-term project but an extremely worthwhile one. (Bournot-Trites, 2021) The EECD might consider using a DELF type test with levels/specific tests for different key stage levels for French immersion (such as at the end of Grade 1, end of Grade 3, end of Grade 6, end of Grade 10, end of Grade 12 and appropriate key stages for LFI and IF programs).

A related issue concerns the assessment regulations and practices currently employed at Grade 12. Policy 309 states that:

The Grade 12 French Oral Proficiency Interview is mandatory for all Grade 12 Post Intensive French students registered in at least one course taught in French, as well as all Grade 12 French immersion students registered in at least a total of 5 courses while in Grades 11 and 12. Although it is mandatory for these students only, other Grade 12 Anglophone students registered in a French second language course, or students who have taken a Grade 12 French second language course have the option to participate in the oral proficiency interview in order to obtain their French oral proficiency certificate. (p. 5)

One drawback of this policy is that some students who have been in French immersion for 11 years are not being formally assessed at the end of high school. It is not clear why any high school student who has taken courses in FSL is not eligible for the OPI. Perhaps this is

a monetary, logistical decision. It would seem, however, that any student wishing to be assessed after Grade 10 when FSL is no longer compulsory should be permitted to do so.

### **FSL Assessment Recommendations**

1. Adopt the DELF test as a short-term measure to assess students' language ability comprehensively in all FSL programs.
2. Work with the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) to develop a made in Canada FSL assessment tool for immersion students based on the CEFR or the CLB that assesses all language skills.
3. Work with teachers to improve pedagogy related to the development of oral language skills as per Michaud's (2020) suggestions.
4. Expand assessment of secondary students to all students who wish to be assessed and who have taken at least one FSL course during high school.

### **Enrolment, Attrition and Retention in French immersion**

According to the national body of Canadian Parents for French, New Brunswick leads the way in Canada with 87.6% of eligible students enrolled in one FSL program type or another (Canadian Parents for French, 2020, p. 2). 36.8% of eligible students are enrolled in French immersion. This compares with a national average of 46% of eligible students enrolled in FSL and 11.6% in French immersion. Out of 68,756 eligible students in 2018-2019, 34,946 are enrolled in Intensive/post-Intensive French and 25,315 are enrolled in French immersion with the vast majority in the Grade 1 entry early immersion program.

A critical part of enrolment statistics is attrition or retention rates. New Brunswick has an unfortunate recent history of vacillating between entry points for French immersion. In 2008 the provincial government eliminated the Grade 1 entry point for Early French Immersion. A grade 3, middle entry point replaced it in 2010-11. Then in 2017-2018, the province reverted to a Grade 1 entry point. These changes created a large number of problems and uncertainty for students, parents, teachers, school districts and EECD personnel. Many of these are outlined in the report of the task force on French immersion

(2012) and include: the need for extensive curriculum development and change, challenges with mobility from province to province, teacher re-assignment and preparedness, and confusion about literacy development and impact of French immersion on first language learning.

It is essential for the health of all persons involved and the health of the system that New Brunswick have a stable and predictable educational system, including its French immersion options. This is not to say that change can never occur (including change to entry points); however, such change should be made on irrefutable scientific evidence that examines all facets of the change and the wide-ranging implications of such change. As the EECD's assessment statistics indicate, Early French Immersion is the only program that has consistently produced students achieving at the Advanced level of proficiency, confirming the view that an earlier start will produce the highest proficiency levels in the long run (Dicks, 2008; Wesche, 2002; Harvard Educational Review, 2019).

In 2007-2008, there were 1,595 students enrolled in Grade 1 Early French Immersion. In 2018-2019, there were 1649 students enrolled in French immersion at Grade 12. Of this same cohort, there were 2314 enrolled at Grade 6 in 2012-2013. This represents 665 fewer students and an attrition rate of 28.7%

IMMERSION <sup>1</sup>												
007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017 - 2018	2018-2019	
1,595										1,943	2,125	
1,491	1,428										1,860	
1,334	1,354	1,336	1,562	1,738	1,804	1,938	1,972	2,120	2,227	2,281	2,272	
1,332	1,274	1,287	1,296	1,464	1,617	1,683	1,836	1,867	1,985	2,109	2,148	
1,344	1,292	1,256	1,274	1,267	1,407	1,550	1,617	1,765	1804	1,918	2,022	
2,377	2,271	2,438	2,325	2,272	2,314	2,304	2,404	2,371	2,424	2,583	2,688	
2,245	2,229	2,137	2,272	2,202	2,167	2,202	2,197	2,286	2,270	2,367	2,466	
2,209	2,127	2,143	2,074	2,174	2,125	2,093	2,148	2,131	2,226	2,193	2,271	
2,125	2,041	1,944	1,984	1,937	2,020	2,005	1,982	2,040	2,030	2,114	2,077	
1,884	1,918	1,811	1,769	1,763	1,764	1,832	1,835	1,850	1,918	1,896	1,973	
1,529	1,481	1,634	1,626	1,602	1,576	1,553	1,724	1,679	1,642	1,792	1,764	
1,254	1,243	1,246	1,272	1,261	1,317	1,338	1,349	1,601	1,493	1,553	1,649	
20,719	18,658	17,232	17,454	17,680	18,111	18,498	19,064	19,710	20,019	22,749	25,315	
110,288	108,407	106,394	104,421	102,579	101,079	99,921	98,906	97,912	97,842	97,755	97,895	
18.8	17.2	16.2	16.7	17.2	17.9	18.5	19.3	20.1	20.5	23.3	25.9	
78,563	77,288	75,974	74,579	73,124	71,955	70,935	69,972	69,049	68,922	68,797	68,756	
26.4	24.1	22.7	23.4	24.2	25.2	26.1	27.2	28.5	29.0	33.1	36.8	

Source: CPF National

A closer examination of the enrolment statistics reveals the following patterns:

- 1) The largest declines in enrolment in Early French Immersion occurs from Grade 1 to Grade 2 and Grade 2 to Grade 3. There are 167 fewer students in the program at Grade 2 than at Grade 1; and 92 fewer students at Grade 3 than at Grade 2: a total of 259 fewer students from Grade 1 to Grade 3, a 16.2% decline.
- 2) From Grade 3 onward, the decline is much smaller, equating to 40 fewer students at Grade 4 and 29 fewer students at Grade 5.
- 3) The Grade 6 enrolment statistics indicate an increase of 1047 students due to the addition of Late French Immersion.
- 4) The largest decrease in enrolment in Middle School (from Grade 6 to Grade 8) occurs from Grade 6 to Grade 7 with 112 fewer students at Grade 7 than at Grade 6. There are just 54 fewer students from Grade 7 to Grade 8: a total of 168 fewer from Grade 6 to Grade 8. The data available does not indicate whether these are Late French Immersion students; however, given the stable declines in EFI from Grades 3 to 6, it is reasonable to assume that the vast majority of this decline is from LFI.
- 5) At the beginning of high school, we see another substantial decline with 108 fewer students at Grade 9 than at Grade 8, and an additional 122 fewer students at grade 10 than at Grade 9. A total of 230 fewer students from Grade 8 to Grade 10.
- 6) The largest declines of all occur at high school where French is no longer compulsory: 126 fewer students at Grade 11 and an additional 122 fewer at Grade 12 – a total of 248 fewer students from Grade 10 to grade 12.

By far the largest decline in enrolment occurs in EFI at the end of Grades 1 and 2. Here is a summary of the most acute points of attrition:

End of Grade 2	-259 (16.2%)
End of Grade 7	-112 (approximately 10%) <sup>1</sup>
End of Grade 9	-230 (10.7%)
Grades 10 and 11	-248 (12.9%)

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<sup>1</sup> Assuming that the vast majority of these students are withdrawing from LFI

Research conducted in French immersion (including Halsall, 1991; Obadia & Theriault, 1997; Ellsworth, 1997) identifies a number of potential reasons for this attrition. Some of these reasons include:

- 1) At Grades 2 and 3, there are concerns about literacy development and general behaviour related to attention span, attitude, and well-being.
- 2) At Grade 7, a number of students enrolled in LFI at Grade 6 find the context to challenging or do not wish to be there for a variety of reasons including both social and academic.
- 3) At Grades 9 and 10, some parents and student feel that it is more advantageous to take courses in English at high school.
- 4) At Grades 11 and 12, concerns about university courses – scholarships and whether or not taking courses in French may hinder chances of scholarships or ability to succeed at university come into play. Course timetables and availability of courses are also factors that are noted in research.

Looking at the Grade 3 entry the attrition at Grade 4 and 5 is much lower than at Grade 1 entry for Grades 2 and 3 (155 vs 259, or 10%). This is likely due to the reduced concern about first language (English) literacy skills compared to parents of students end of Grade 1 and 2. This is quite understandable; however, we know that many of the concerns at Grade 1 and 2 are unfounded and are based on misunderstandings and false or partially incorrect information (Bourgoin, 2011; Dicks, 2017).

The Grade 7 attrition situation, however, is similar for Grade 3 entry program (-107) and the Grade 1 entry EFI program (-112), suggesting it is the LFI students who are leaving at Grade 7. Attrition for the rest of the school year to Grade 10 is similar to grade EFI Grade 1 entry; attrition at Grade 10 (at end of Grade 9) is down to 1896 from (11%).

At the secondary level, more course options for students are needed. Apart from the potential effect this could have on retention rates, recent grade 12 FSL proficiency assessment results clearly point out the advantages for Early French Immersion students taking 5 or more courses over those taking fewer than 5 courses: 46.7% of students who

took 5 or more courses achieved Advanced proficiency compared to just 22.2% of those taking 4 or fewer courses.

With advancements in technology and greater teacher competency and confidence in delivery of courses using platforms such as Zoom or Teams, a wider range of courses for French immersion should be developed and delivered. This will only be successful, however, if teachers are confident and comfortable delivering courses in this manner. Appropriate training and classroom conditions that recognize the complexity of teaching both in face-to-face and virtual contexts simultaneously need to be put into place.

In order to improve retention rates in French immersion, each of these “hot spots” needs to be examined more carefully. Education about French immersion that involves dispelling myths (see, e.g., Dicks, 2017) should be conducted with parents, teachers, administrators and students.

### **Enrolment, Attrition, and Retention Recommendations**

1. Develop specific strategies tailored to the different levels and potential reasons for attrition/retention in order to improve retention rates. Carefully crafted sessions for specific audiences (parents, teachers, students, administrators) should be presented at the appropriate time so informed decisions can be made.
2. Make available supports for students who need extra help to succeed in French immersion, particularly at Grades 1 and 2 and Grades 6 and 7 in order to ensure equity and maintain enrolments throughout elementary grades and beyond.
3. Avail of advancements in technology and teacher competency with remote learning to design and deliver a wider range of course options at the secondary level for French immersion students.
4. Provide FSL teachers with the appropriate training and working conditions in order to conduct effective remote learning classes.



## **FSL Program Access and Quality**

A fundamental tenet of a public school system in a just society is that similar educational opportunities should be available to all students. This involves both access to programs and quality of experiences.

### **Intensive French in English Prime**

French Learning experiences and the Intensive French program are intended to be universally available in New Brunswick Anglophone schools. Some concern has been expressed however about the “language experiences” at K-3. The 2012 task force on French Second Language noted that:

A significant number of parents and teachers acknowledged that there was little, if anything, going on in French in Grades 1 and 2 although there is supposed to be 30 minutes of activity. This, in spite of a Department survey of the system that concludes otherwise. (p. 7)

Given the unique and special place of French language and culture in New Brunswick, it is imperative that all students in the public school system from Kindergarten onward have access to a quality FSL program. The overall quality of the “language experiences” from K-3 is dependent upon the curriculum and materials, the FSL training and enthusiasm of the teachers providing those experiences, and scheduling. While the FLORA/language experiences materials may be well-designed and motivating, they are intended as “experiences” and do not constitute a complete FSL program. They may be perfectly fine if adapted for an early learning (pre-school) setting; however. All elements related to the delivery of FSL programming at the primary/elementary grades in New Brunswick should be reviewed to ensure both access and quality FSL instruction in K-3.

## **French immersion**

Access to French immersion in New Brunswick is also governed by Policy 309. Currently, Policy 309 stipulates that:

A Superintendent implements an immersion program in a community where there is sufficient interest and where it is deemed to be sustainable over time.

6.4.2 In order to assess the sustainability of and a desire for French immersion program, the superintendent shall consider:

- a) the number of students in the community to be enrolled at the grade level of implementation (based on student population trends for current and future years);
- b) the availability of qualified school personnel;
- c) transportation costs, where these may be affected by students being bussed from one area of the district to another. (p. 4)

Clearly, school district Superintendents hold a great deal of responsibility with regard to the implementation and continuation of French immersion programs. Current enrolment, projections, and transportation are critical issues in access to FI programming. One major hurdle in rural areas is population density and ensuring sufficient class sizes.

This relates directly to transportation. One solution to low enrolment is to create immersion centres where students are bussed from various communities to a common site for French immersion. Where bussing distances and travel times are not excessive, this option should be explored where feasible and transportation should be provided at no cost to parents.

Another solution is to consider combined classes. The inclusion of French immersion Kindergarten would allow for combined Kindergarten/Grade 1 classes in certain areas, and for combined Grades 2/3 classes as well. Despite the misgivings of some, there is evidence that, with the proper pedagogical training, combined classes can work extremely well and purposeful grouping within classes can be beneficial to students at different ability levels

regardless of the grade they are currently in (Song, Spradlin & Plucker, 2009). As students move through the French immersion program, particularly at the secondary school levels, it is also challenging in rural areas to provide a range of courses that will interest all students. The use of remote learning and platforms such as Teams can be extremely beneficial in this context. If there is one positive outcome of the COVID-19 situation, it may be with regard to digital learning. Educational institutions at all levels have had to adapt quickly to a new reality and, in so doing, have greatly increased the capacity of personnel to provide quality programming through various remote learning formats.

In addition to enrolment challenges and solutions, there is a related issue of communication about FI programs. This relates in part to the issue of “myths” and misinformation that is all too prevalent in today’s digital “information” age.

Policy 309 also stipulates that:

Parents have the opportunity on an annual basis to indicate their preferences with regard to FSL programs in their community by providing access to information to all parents with children in either Kindergarten or in Grade 5. At a minimum, the information shall include brief description of the FSL programs and factors involved in making a choice, and shall provide a means for parents to indicate their preference. (p. 4)

The 2012 task force report also examined this issue and stated that:

Every single parent told us they wanted more information. Brochures and web sites give factual information to parents; percentage of time, subject areas and so on. What parents also want to know is what are the chances of their child succeeding (most do), what effects learning a second language will have on the first language (none or positive), if they should keep reading to their child in English (yes), when their English skills catch up (depends on entry point), if there is research on Immersion (yes), etc. We strongly recommend a review of the print and online materials offered to parents and that such a review include consultation with parents with experience and parents without experience. More importantly, there

should be a guide for parent information sessions that is provided to those leading such sessions with explicit and up to date information. (p. 19)

It is true that the EECD provides factual information about programs – instructional time, expected outcomes, and so on. It has provided a link to the document created by Dr. Joseph Dicks entitled “French immersion: Myths and Reality” on its website. There are also information sessions regarding French immersion provided at the district level each year. These are important improvements in information that need to be continued and enhanced. The issue of access as it relates to students of varying ability levels is a critically important one. We know from research that students who struggle in Early French Immersion are able to succeed in that program when appropriate support is provided (Arnett, 2013; Bournot-Trites, 2008; Genesee & Jared, 2008; Bruck, 1985; Wise, 2017; Bourgoin, 2011). This is critical to the success of French immersion but also to the fundamental premise that access to quality education should be available to all who seek it wherever it is available.

### **Teacher Recruitment and Retention, Qualifications, and Education Programs**

Policy 309 also refers to the “availability of qualified school personnel” (p. 4) as a factor in the decision to implement or (dis)continue FI programs. Indeed, teacher recruitment and retention have been identified as being at a crisis level nationally and the situation is also quite acute in New Brunswick, particularly in rural settings. Currently, there are at least three national studies of this issue sponsored by *l'Association canadienne des professionnels de l'immersion* (Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers [ACPI]), McGill University, and the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers [CASLT]. The results of these various studies should be informative regarding current challenges and future directions. The New Brunswick Department of EECD can, and should, avail of these data and recommendations in its planning for future recruitment and retention.

Related to recruitment and retention is the issue of teacher competency for teaching in French immersion. There are four related areas of competency involved:

- 1) French language ability

- 2) Subject matter competency
- 3) Pedagogy of the subject matter
- 4) Pedagogy of teaching in an immersion context.

For teachers of French as a subject (French language and literature), the first two elements are very closely connected and both must be at an extremely high level. For teachers of other subjects (mathematics, science, social studies, etc.) they also must possess a high level of French ability and a solid knowledge of their subject area. All teachers must possess both pedagogical skills related to the teaching of their subject and teaching in French immersion. Currently, Policy 309 states that all French immersion teachers must possess a “Superior” level of competency on the New Brunswick Oral Proficiency Interview. No stipulation in Policy 309 is made regarding subject matter or immersion teaching pedagogical competency.

This is a complex issue related to teacher certification in New Brunswick whereby, according to the Government of New Brunswick website, teaching certificates are issued if the applicant has at least “30 credits of pedagogical training” and “a major (30 credits) in a teachable subject or a combination of a major (24 credits) and a minor (18 credits) in two teachable subjects.” (There are no specific teacher certificates in New Brunswick for grade levels or specific subjects or programs). (For more details see [https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services\\_renderer.599.Teacher\\_Certification.html](https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/services/services_renderer.599.Teacher_Certification.html)).

This differs from provinces like Ontario that has specific certificates for Primary, Junior (Elementary), Intermediate and Senior high. Teachers must also be qualified in one subject in the first three levels and two subjects for secondary. Ontario’s College of Teachers oversees these qualifications. In British Columbia, there are distinct requirements that apply to those applying to be elementary teachers or secondary school teachers. British Columbia also has certification standards that are sanctioned by the BC Teachers’ Council. Standards for French immersion teaching in New Brunswick should reflect more carefully the level and subject areas at which teachers intend to be working.

From K-5, superior language proficiency in oral and written French is essential. In these years, particularly the early years of immersion, the importance of a solid language model cannot be overstated. Pedagogical competence for primary/elementary students and for teaching in immersion must also be essential components. From Grade 6 onward, language proficiency is also important but one may consider different levels for French language arts teachers and teachers of other subject areas. All teachers must be able to express themselves clearly in French and explain complex concepts in that language in a variety of ways. However, the intricacies of French grammar, particularly as they relate to writing, are elements that French language arts teachers need to master and be able to relate to students at a level that other subject-matter teachers may not be capable of. It would not be unreasonable to expect that subject matter teachers in immersion could possess a level slightly lower than FLA teachers. However, these teachers should also possess sound pedagogy in their subject area and in teaching in a French immersion setting.

### **Positive Interaction between both Official Language Groups**

Related to the issue of language proficiency for teachers, and for students, is the larger question of positive interaction between Francophone and Anglophones. In the school context, this can have various forms that could benefit teachers and students with respect to language models, cultural awareness, and linguistic appreciation. One initiative that could be employed with existing infrastructure is that of tandem teaching. Susan Parks and Susan Priego of Laval University have been experimenting with a tandem language learning platform that promotes interaction between students learning French and students learning English. This platform is found at <https://tandem.ulaval.ca>. This model could work in New Brunswick between French immersion classes and Acadian students who are learning English as a second language. Other initiatives that could involve cultural presentations by Acadian students in French in French immersion schools, and French immersion students in French in Acadian schools are also possible.

## **Access and Equity Recommendations**

1. Conduct a thorough review of FSL at the primary/elementary level including parental satisfaction and desires in order to provide a solid FSL program from K-4.
2. Utilize various media (radio, tv, social media) to promote the benefits of a bilingual education and encourage students to become proficient in French.
3. Use bussing and French immersion centres in rural areas as needed to provide a French immersion option.
4. Provide critical training for teachers in the design and management of multi-age classes and inform parents of the challenges and advantages of such classes for French immersion.
5. Consider adjusting teacher language competency requirements according to grade level and subject matter with higher formal competency required at lower grades and in French immersion language arts (FILA) classes than in middle school or secondary subject matter classes.
6. Use information gathered through recent research by agencies such as ACPI and CASLT to establish practices to enhance both teacher recruitment and retention.
7. Ensure through teacher certification that all teachers in French immersion possess the methodological knowledge and ability to teach in that setting, or have the opportunity to obtain that certification through established professional learning sessions.
8. EECD should work with the Ministère de l'éducation et de la petite enfance to establish partner schools and develop a tandem learning platform to facilitate interaction between francophone and immersion students.

## **Post-Secondary and the Workplace**

New Brunswick has two major post-secondary institutions that are recognized for their work in the areas of bilingual education: The *Université de Moncton's* Faculty of Education, mainly for its work promoting French in a minority context; and the University of New Brunswick's Second Language Research Institute of Canada [L2RIC] for its work with French second language teacher education. It is also worth noting that the University of

New Brunswick does also work with students intending to teach in the Acadian school system, and *l'Université de Moncton* with FSL-bound students. During this period of crisis in teacher recruitment for FSL, it would be worthwhile to explore whether more students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education [B.Ed] at *l'Université de Moncton* are interested in teaching in French immersion contexts. These students could take specific FSL methodology courses at the University of New Brunswick. In a reciprocal manner, students enrolled in the B.Ed at the University of New Brunswick who wish to teach in FI, but do not have the specific language level, could take certain French language methodology courses at *l'Université de Moncton*. This again highlights how technology and remote learning could assist the logistics of this. Deans of Education at both universities and faculty members involved in French first language and French second language education might meet to consider potential collaboration.

Currently, L2RIC at the University of New Brunswick and St. Thomas University's Faculty of Education are offering enhanced French language proficiency improvement sessions for students who wish to teach in FI but are not at the required language level. These initiatives are important ones that should also be maintained and enhanced.

### **Transition to the Workplace**

Moving from a training program of any kind to the workplace is challenging. A critical component of the transition from school to workplace is mentorship and "on-the-job" learning that involves shadowing, collaborative work teams, lunch and learn, and other established procedures. When the individual is also moving into a job situation that involves communication skills in their second language, the situation is all the more challenging. It is important to recognize that many academic language programs often do not provide students with the specific language skills for a particular job. Many of the language requirements of a paramedic, for example, would be quite different from someone working at a tourist information booth. It is important that employers recognize that while job applicants may be bilingual insofar as they possess a solid basis in French,



there are specific gaps in vocabulary and particular tuning with regard to accent, speed of conversations, and regional differences in languages that will need to be acquired.

### **Post-Secondary & Workplace Recommendations**

1. Francophone and Anglophone post-secondary educations should explore ways of collaborating to complement one another so as to facilitate the education of teachers for both francophone schools and French immersion.
2. Programs need to be developed to assist the transition from school to the workplace. These could include:
  - Specific college training programs that have French language training as part of their professional program. One example of this is the Oulton College/Université de Moncton collaboration on the paramedic program whereby non-Francophone students can take French language courses from U de M instructors within the context of their paramedical training. To the extent that these courses can be “language for specific purposes” (LSP) courses focused on the particular job for which the student is training, the more advantageous they will be for the workplace.
  - Specific language upgrading courses in the workplace that are targeted to that particular job. New Brunswick’s Department of EECD and certain school districts are doing this with language sessions for currently hired teachers that are focused on French language of the classroom and language needed for professional interactions in a French educational context. Provincial and Federal governments also have language training programs and courses for employees. Incentives for private sector employers to offer similar language improvement opportunities for bilingual workers are needed including support for the design and delivery of such programs.
  - An intensive immersion experience for students intending to transition from a post-secondary training program to the workplace but who do not possess the required language skills. One example is the *Centre international d’apprentissage du français [CIAF]* at Shippagan through *l’Université de*

*Moncton.* The Government of New Brunswick might look at creating additional partnerships for programs such this and broaden its scope to different specialized fields and sectors.

### **Conclusion: Celebrating and Promoting Bilingualism**

Bilingualism is a huge advantage both for the individual and for society. Apart from the importance of official French-English bilingualism in New Brunswick and Canada, bilingual individuals are well-positioned to become multilingual and to take up important roles in our global society that is quickly evolving and expanding. We believe that the Government of New Brunswick should undertake, and/or partner with organizations to undertake, a promotional campaign to promote both bilingualism and French as a Second Language learning. New Brunswick is unique among Canadian provinces. One of its greatest resources is its bilingual citizenry. In order to increase this resource, we need to (1) increase the number of anglophone students who are choose to remain on the path to bilingualism and (2) provide them with the tools they need to develop and adapt that bilingualism to different contexts in the workplace and elsewhere in society.

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