

Evolving French Language Learning: Overcoming Obstacles and Building Bridges

A CONSULTATION STRATEGY PAPER

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A Message from the Minister

On March 30, 2022, I announced that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) accepted the 18 recommendations made by the Official Languages Commissioners to improve second language learning in New Brunswick. Recommendation 18 of the Report on second-language learning highlighted the need for EECD to create an authentic, immersive, language-rich French second-language learning program for all students.

Our approach to French second-language learning in the Anglophone sector has led to less than half of New Brunswick's high school graduates being able to speak French at a conversational level. As Canada's only official bilingual province, more needs to be done to ensure that all students can converse in both official languages.

The French Immersion program is very successful and has many strengths that should be celebrated. The issue does not reside with this program, rather, the immersion and non-immersion structure that has developed over time.

The division between the French Immersion and English Prime cohorts has created imbalances in the Anglophone sector as a whole. The existing structure has had a negative impact on classroom composition and thus created challenges in the English Prime program.

As such, our educational system has come to a critical crossroads. We must evolve from our current system and work together to develop an equitable and accessible French language learning model that provides every Anglophone sector learner with opportunities and successes in learning French.

Over the coming months, EECD will be consulting and engaging stakeholders, educators, researchers, experts, parents, students and interested parties on what the new French language learning model will look like in our Anglophone educational system.

As Minister, I encourage everyone to participate in the consultation process by visiting our website at gnb.ca, sending your input by email to consultation.EECD-EDPE@gnb.ca or by mail to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 5H1, attention Evolving French Language Learning.

It will take courage and vision to move away from a system that is familiar to us all. I ask that you reflect and think about the strengths and challenges of our current French second language programs. Ask yourself,

- What ideas would you have for creating an accessible and equitable French second-language learning model?
- How can New Brunswick achieve the goal of conversational French for all students by graduation?
- What resources, activities, or programs currently exist or could be in place in your community to help students develop a positive attitude towards learning French and gain authentic and meaningful experiences in speaking French?
- How can early learning and child care services and after-school programs be leveraged to increase exposure to the French language and culture?

I look forward to hearing your innovative ideas, opinions, and personal experiences as we work together towards developing a French language learning approach for all learners.



Hon. Dominic Cardy

Minister of Education and
Early Childhood Development

1.0 The Consultation Process

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) is inviting public input on the development and design of a new French language learning model in the Anglophone sector. Over the next few months, EECD will be:

- establishing committees and teams to support and inform the development of a new French language learning framework;
- holding engagement sessions with community members, educators, key stakeholders, parents, and students;
- conducting extensive public consultations; and
- promoting our consultation platforms to the public to facilitate input, questions, and comments.

Throughout our consultation process we will be gathering and analysing public input and diverse perspectives on the French language learning framework to help with our design process. These consultations are important as it allows EECD to work collaboratively with the public and key stakeholders to create an accessible and equitable French language learning model for every Anglophone sector learner.

Creating a framework that will meet the needs of schools will be complex. Therefore, we will need to define this framework together. EECD is looking for possibilities and potential solutions from the public and from stakeholders; all voices matter in this consultation process and we encourage everyone to participate in this important discussion.

MOVE AWAY FROM...	TOWARDS...
A two-tiered system (English Prime and French Immersion) that divides students on different paths of success.	An accessible and equitable French language learning model that supports all learners.
29.8 per cent of students assessed on the Grade 10 Oral Proficiency Interview (2017-18, 2015-16 and 2013-14) achieved conversational French.	All New Brunswick graduates being able to converse in both official languages.
In 2021, 49 per cent of Grade 12 students reported on their Exit Survey that they felt comfortable using French outside of school.	Improvement (percentage) of students who have a positive attitude and gained confidence in speaking French.

Individuals and stakeholders can provide input by:

- emailing to consultation.EECD-EDPE@gnb.ca, by mail to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, P.O. Box 6000, Fredericton, New Brunswick, E3B 5H1, attention Evolving French Language Learning, or by visiting our website at our website at gnb.ca.

DEADLINE FOR INPUT IS NOVEMBER 30, 2022.

EECD will also be hosting engagement sessions with key stakeholders Fall 2022. More information will be available at our [website](#).

Public and stakeholder input as well as the recommendations of committees will be analyzed and will contribute to the development of a new French language learning model in the Anglophone sector. A summary document of what we heard will be released in 2023.

Consultation Timeline

EVOLVING FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNING: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES AND BUILDING BRIDGES

MARCH TO AUGUST 2022

- Publish consultation strategy paper
- Establish and meet with teams and advisory committees
- Form consultation facilitation team and conduct planning sessions
- Plan and schedule engagement sessions
- Launch website and channels for public input
- Communicate with key stakeholders
- Review models from New-Brunswick, across Canada, and beyond
- Review research

SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2022

- Facilitate engagement sessions through focused workshops, individual and small group sessions, think tanks, and world cafes with:
 - The general public/community members
 - School staff and Early Learning and Child Care Educators (ELCE)
 - District staff
 - Parents
 - Students
 - Key stakeholders
 - Experts in the field of language acquisition
- Continue to meet with teams and advisory committees
- Conduct online surveys
- Conduct forums on promising practices
- Conduct research and review findings

JANUARY TO MARCH 2023

- Continue gathering information through meetings, consultations, engagement sessions and surveys
- Collate themes and findings
- Publish *What We Heard* document

APRIL TO DECEMBER 2023

- Facilitate follow up sessions after the launch of the *What We Heard* document
- Review collated themes and findings
- Submit suggested recommendations
- Establish next steps for consultations

2.0 Our Vision

French language learning is a vital component of New Brunswick’s Anglophone school system that has been evolving for more than 50 years. Being able to communicate in both official languages provides learners with social, cultural, academic, and cognitive benefits and opportunities that will follow them throughout their school years and beyond.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) recognizes that our current French second-language learning programming does not provide all learners with the same opportunities to develop their second (or third) language. This is why we recently accepted the 18 recommendations from the 2021 Review of the Official Languages Act of New Brunswick: Report on second-language learning to improve language learning frameworks in the early childhood sector and the public school system of New Brunswick. These recommendations from the report will lead to changes to the current French second-language learning model in the Anglophone sector beginning in the 2024-2025 school year.

Over the coming months, EECD will be working and collaborating with school districts, schools, Early Learning and Childcare Facilities, educators, stakeholders, researchers, experts, parents and students to design a more equitable and accessible French language learning framework for all learners. The goal of the model will be to ensure that all students graduate high school with the ability to speak in both official languages.

2.1 CHANGES TO THE FRENCH SECOND-LANGUAGE LEARNING MODEL

Our current two-tiered structure, French Immersion and English Prime, divides students on different pathways of success. Students who complete the French Immersion program (early and late entry points) will achieve at least an Intermediate level of French proficiency by the time they graduate high school. The English Prime program, however, does not produce the same outcomes. The majority of students in the English Prime program do not develop conversational proficiency in French. This is significant as more than 60 per cent of Anglophone sector students do not enrol in French Immersion, or do not have the ability to enrol in it.

To ensure that all students are successful in developing French language, EECD wants to move away from this two-tiered structure and adopt a more inclusive and accessible model. EECD strives to deliver equitable and quality education for all learners, this includes French language learning.

Beginning in the 2024 school year, the selection between the French Immersion (early and late) and the English Prime programs will no longer be an option. That is not to say we will be eliminating or erasing the well researched and successful curriculum of French Immersion, rather,

adopting the important pillars of the program to create a framework that will follow all students throughout Kindergarten to Grade 12, including Early Learning and Childhood Facilities.

Changes to the two-tiered structure will also impact students in existing French second-language learning programs. The model will change for all learners in the Anglophone sector. A transitional plan will be developed through our consultation process to address how we can achieve conversational French for all learners who are already going through the French Immersion or English Prime programs.

2.2 AN EQUITABLE AND ACCESSIBLE MODEL FOR ALL

Our vision is clear, schools will provide all students with an accessible and equitable French second-language learning program. This learning model will address the unique needs of all Anglophone sector students, including newcomers and multilingual language learners, so that they are supported in learning both our official languages.

Under this new framework, the goal will be to ensure that every Anglophone sector student will achieve a conversational level of French proficiency (or higher) by the time they graduate from high school.

Our vision is not to create a one size fits all solution. New Brunswick schools and learners will have different needs when it comes to French language learning. For example, learners who have more exposure to the French language and culture in their communities, will have different needs than those who live in predominantly English-speaking areas. Likewise, the availability of qualified French-speaking teachers will impact some schools more than others. It is important that school administrators and teachers are empowered to design a French language learning framework that will meet the needs of their communities, schools, families, and learners.

2.3 HOW IS CONVERSATIONAL FRENCH DEFINED?

The goal of the French language learning model will be to provide all learners with the opportunity to achieve at minimum, a level of conversational French proficiency by graduation. Students interested in advancing their French proficiency beyond this level will be offered advanced classes at higher grade levels.

The New Brunswick school system currently uses the New Brunswick Second Language Oral Proficiency Scale to assess and define language proficiency amongst students. On this scale, conversational French would be equivalent to an Intermediate level. This proficiency level enables individuals to participate in common social situations including introductions and casual conversations about events in school and community, providing autobiographical information in some detail, giving directions, or giving accurate instructions in a field of personal expertise.

Of note, EECD will be adopting the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), one of the recommendations made by the commissioners. Since 2011, New Brunswick has been using the CEFR to support the development of curriculum. This scale provides benchmarks for all components of the language: oral, reading and writing. It is also recognized and used internationally for many different languages. A conversational level of French would be equivalent to a B1.1 level on the CEFR scale.

2.4 CURRENT FRENCH SECOND-LANGUAGE PROGRAMMING

Currently in the Anglophone sector, students can develop French as a second language through the French Immersion program (early or late entry points) or the Intensive and Post-Intensive French Program through the English Prime program. French second language programs are set by Policy 309: French Second-language Programs. More specific details regarding the current programs can be found at the following link: [Everyone at their best: Learning French as a second language 2022](#).

The way that our current French second-language programming is structured has considerable challenges, complexities, and inequalities. Many of these challenges were identified by the commissioners in their Report on second-language learning. It is important to briefly highlight these issues as they are important factors in why this change is being undertaken by EECD.

1. French Immersion has caused a streaming effect in schools. Children with additional social, emotional, or behavioural needs will typically be placed into the English Prime program. For example, the Auditor General's 2018 report highlighted that for 2016-2017 school year, 93 per cent of the students with Personalized Learning Plans were in the English Prime program.¹ The streaming effect has resulted in imbalanced classroom compositions between the French Immersion and English Prime programs. This does not align with EECD's inclusive education practices.
2. There is a shortage of qualified French-speaking teachers in the New Brunswick educational system. School districts and schools must navigate this retention and recruitment challenge while also planning their staff and resources around the many French second-language programming options that are available to students in the Anglophone sector.

For example, a middle school that offers French Immersion would need qualified French speaking teachers for their English Prime cohort (Post-Intensive French), their Early French Immersion cohort, and their Late French Immersion cohort. At times, teachers with lower language proficiencies or individuals who have the language proficiency but do not possess a B.Ed. must fill the gaps.

¹ Auditor General of New Brunswick, "Chapter 2 – Improving Student Performance: A New Brunswick Challenge," in *Auditor General Report – Volume II*, January 2019, <https://www.agnb-vgnb.ca/content/dam/agnb-vgnb/pdf/Reports-Rapports/2018V2/Chap2e.pdf>, 66.

3. As the data demonstrates, English Prime students are not receiving enough French instruction hours to achieve conversational French. This is evident from the results of the Grade 10 French Second Language Oral Proficiency Interview (2017-18, 2015-16 and 2013-14) where:
- 4.3 per cent of English Prime students assessed achieved Intermediate or higher;
 - 91.8 per cent of Early French Immersion students assessed achieved Intermediate or higher; and
 - 73.4 per cent of Late French Immersion students assessed achieved Intermediate or above.

The intensity, which represents the numbers of hours of instruction per day, is an important pillar for a successful second language program. This pillar is not as predominant in the English Prime program compared to the French Immersion program. The retention and recruitment of qualified French-speaking teachers adds to this issue.

4. In some rural communities in New Brunswick, the choice of French Immersion is not an option at the school. As noted in the Report of the French Task Force (2012) many parents in smaller communities felt disadvantaged that immersion was not available to their children.² As per Policy 309: French Second Language Programs, enrollment numbers, the availability of qualified French-speaking teachers and transportation costs, influence whether a French Immersion program is implemented at a school. For the 2021-2022 school year, there are 66 schools out of the 205 schools in the Anglophone Sector that do not offer French Immersion.³
5. The retention rates of students in the French Immersion program is a recurring challenge. As EECD data shows, the common exit point of the French Immersion program is at the high school level. From 2015 to 2021, around 21 per cent of Early French Immersion students and 30 per cent of Late French Immersion students chose to leave the immersion program in high school. This can be attributed to a number of factors such as, a lack of course options, scheduling issues for students who are building their schedule around post-secondary pre-requisite courses, a lack of confidence in French as the subjects become more complex, or the desire to take math and science courses in English rather than French to prepare for post-secondary.

2 The French Second Language Task Force, *Report of the French Second Language Task Force*, February 2012, https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/K12/fsl/8760_FLReport_E.pdf?msclid=66c73b03c0c511ecb1c2c68b09e6b347, 19.

3 This number includes schools with the following Grades: K-5, K-8, K-12, 6-12, 7-12 and 9-12.

3.0 Where are we now?

3.1 SUCCESSES

The recommendations made in the commissioner's report align with work that has been underway with EECD's Language Learning Opportunity (LLO) initiative. For the 2021-2022 school year, 11 schools and two Early Learning and Childcare Facilities were selected by EECD to design and prototype new approaches to French second-language learning. Programs are designed and led at the local level by the schools' administrators and teachers with the goal of achieving conversational French by graduation for their anglophone learners. The LLO Initiative was launched in September 2021 and changes and tweaks to the prototypes will continue throughout the school year as schools adapt to the needs of their students and community.

EECD is gathering best practices and successful strategies from these prototypes to help inform future French language learning design approaches. A key success to this initiative is how it empowers teachers and other professional educators to work together to design and tailor an approach that best supports and engages their students. We have highly qualified and motivated educators in New Brunswick and this new model has fostered enthusiasm as local teams are empowered and supported in creating a framework that works for their learners.

The LLO initiative will continue and expand to more Early Learning and Childcare Facilities and schools into the 2022-2023 school year.

3.2 CHALLENGES

COVID-19 Fatigue

COVID-19 has had a large impact on the New Brunswick public school system. Since schools were reopened in September 2020, departmental, district, and school personnel have been working tirelessly to ensure students have access to quality education while simultaneously dealing with the impacts and challenges of the pandemic. COVID-19 has caused significant learning disruptions and fatigue amongst teachers and families. The impacts of COVID-19 will significantly affect EECD's approach to developing a French language learning model. Our approach will take this fatigue into account and changes implementation will be gradual and collaborative.

French Immersion Change Fatigue

Since 2008, there have been back and forth changes to the Early French Immersion entry point that has caused significant impacts to schools, teachers, and families. The Auditor General's 2018 Report cited the 2017 entry point change and its rushed implementation as a major

factor in causing instability and disruption within the Anglophone education system.⁴ Schools and principals had to quickly manage the administrative burden of preparing classes and hiring teachers for different cohorts of students that entered the French Immersion program at different entry points.

EECD acknowledges that these changes to French second-language programming have caused significant frustrations for parents, teachers and the public. While we see the importance of moving forward with creating a more equitable and accessible model, we understand that conditions of success must be in place before a new model can be rolled out. This is why the implementation of the French language learning framework will not begin until the 2024 school year.

3.3 NEXT STEPS

While our vision and goal for the new French language learning framework is clear, we must now work together to design an equitable and accessible model for all learners in the Anglophone sector. EECD encourages everyone to participate in the consultation process as described above. The voices and input of those who participate in the discussion will be at the heart and forefront of our new framework. We look forward to engaging New Brunswickers in important conversations that will inform the development of an equitable model to provide all learners from the Anglophone sector an opportunity to learn French in a more balanced classroom environment.

4 Auditor General, 42.

4.0 Important Links

[10-year education plan: Everyone at their best \(Anglophone sector\)](#)

[Everyone at their best: Learning French as a second language 2022](#)

[Evolving French Language Learning Consultation Website](#)

[French Second Language Education](#)

[Grade 10 Provincial Assessment Results 2020-2021: French Second-Language Oral Proficiency](#)

[Grade 12 Provincial Assessment Results 2020-2021: French Second-Language Oral Proficiency](#)

[New Brunswick Second Language Oral Proficiency Scale](#)

[Policy 309: French Second Language Programs](#)

[Portrait of a Learner](#)

[Succeeding at home: A green paper on education in New Brunswick](#)

[The Language Learning Opportunities Initiative](#)

[Commissioner's Report on second-language learning](#)

[Consultation Platform Website](#)

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