

# **Building on Success: The Future of FSL in BC**

**Canadian Parents for French – BC & Yukon Branch**

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## INTRODUCTION

French second language education in BC is, by all accounts, a success story. With more than 40,000 students now enrolled in French immersion, a number that has risen steadily for eight years running (and this at a time when enrolment rates overall in public schools is declining), French immersion is by far the most popular programme of choice ever offered in this province. Forty-four of 59 school districts now offer either early, late or both forms of French immersion, and CPF is currently working with parents or superintendents in Powell River, Revelstoke, Pemberton and Haida Gwaii, to introduce new immersion programmes in these areas. Even within French immersion programmes, innovation is taking place, with the Vancouver School Board set to start BC's first ever programme for gifted students at the elementary school level next fall.

At the same time, British Columbian parents, educators and school districts are warmly embracing intensive French as an innovative and effective improvement to the way French as a subject, or Core French, has traditionally been taught. Vancouver is the latest to have introduced intensive French; and Surrey's pilot project is now in its third year, having more than doubled in size during this period.

As you likely know, BC's obsession with French is not restricted to French second language programmes. Statistics released by the Conseil Scolaire Francophone, our Francophone school board, just last month reveal that enrolment in French first language schools is at its highest point ever, with more than 4,000 children enrolled in the district's 39 schools.

And, if graduation rates are any indication of success, we can start cheering. Over the past four years, the number of students graduating with their double Dogwood has climbed by almost 20 per cent. If rates of attrition remain steady, and enrolment continues to increase, we will surpass the federal government's target of doubling the number of bilingual graduates between the years 2003 and 2013. This is cause for celebration.

And there's more; students of French first and second language school programmes now have the opportunity to choose from the broadest offering of French post-secondary programmes ever offered – from SFU's Bachelor of Public Administration and Community Services degree, and its doctorate in Education, to Collège Educacentre's Resident Care and Early Childhood Education programmes. From pre-school to post-secondary school, British Columbian youth are leaping at the opportunity to embrace French.

**French Immersion and Total Enrolment BC Public Schools**

**2001/02 – 2006/07**

<b>Year</b>	<b>French Immersion Enrolment</b>	<b>FI % change from previous year</b>	<b>TOTAL Public School Enrolment</b>	<b>TOTAL % change from previous year</b>	<b>FI as a % of overall enrolment</b>	<b>BC Core French Enrolment</b>	<b>% change from previous year</b>
<b>2006-07</b>	39,511	+3.95%	587,819	-1.36%	6.72%	211,054	-2.58%
<b>2005-06</b>	38,009	+7.01%	595,859	-0.75%	6.37%	216,510	-3.02%
<b>2004-05</b>	35,519	+6.32%	600,328	-0.22%	5.92%	223,066	-0.72%
<b>2003-04</b>	33,407	+4.42%	601,672	+1.15%	5.55%	224,676	-3.62%
<b>2002-03</b>	31,990	+2.74%	594,810	+0.25%	5.38%	232,815	-2.40%
<b>2001-02</b>	31,136	-	593,309	-	5.24%	238,422	-
		<b>Growth over 5 years</b> ↑24.44%		<b>Loss over 5 years</b> ↓3.73%			

Source: BC Ministry of Education

**THE ISSUE**

With the rapid growth in the variety and number of French second language programs, however, has come myriad challenges – challenges that will need to be addressed to ensure that British Columbian youth have every opportunity to pursue their bilingual dreams. These include:

- the absence of provincial and district-level policy guaranteeing access to French second language programmes
- the growing demand for teachers in core, intensive French and French immersion
- access barriers to French immersion experienced by children of immigrants
- the inequity of resources available to students with learning difficulties and disabilities as compared to what their English-track counterparts receive
- the inability of funding to keep pace with programme growth and inflation

- the lack of public accountability on how French programme dollars are spent
- the failure to involve parents at the district level in medium and long-term planning for French programmes, and finally,
- community and school-based tensions arising from demographic change

## **THE OPPORTUNITY**

We know that Canadian Parents for French has a strong ally in the BC provincial government, and that we enjoy an exceptionally strong and respectful relationship with the Ministry of Education. It is with this spirit of mutual respect and collegiality that we come forward with this brief. It has been three years since we stood before you to present our recommendations on the federal French funding agreement between BC and Ottawa, and four years since our board of directors presented you with broad-based recommendations for the future of French second language programs.

With the Action Plan on Official Languages up for renewal in just six months, and the federal government's recent signal, through last month's throne speech, of its intention to renew the plan, it is appropriate to take a moment to reflect on and celebrate all that BC has accomplished in recent years, and to consider how we can work not only to address any weaknesses in the programs, but also to build on the strengths that have made our approach to teaching French the envy of the country.

Canadian Parents for French – BC and Yukon celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year. We now exist in 10 provinces and one territory, and bring to the table the breadth and depth of that experience. We are a national network of volunteers dedicated to the promotion and creation of French second language learning opportunities for young Canadians. With more than 7,500 members right here in this province, all organized into 46 chapters across BC, CPF-BC & Yukon has more than double the number of members of any other province in Canada.

By now, you are aware that Canadian Parents for French is one of the key players in the FSL community – locally, provincially and nationally – today. CPF has been actively involved in the development of just about every French immersion programme in this province, and is most often behind every effort to enhance, sustain, and defend them from closure. Our members are active! Together they contributed more than 40,000 volunteer hours last year alone to supporting FSL educational programmes, and to developing and running FSL extra-curricular activities – from French soccer camps to summer family camps, and from film festivals to carnivals.

## **THE BACKGROUND**

The Federal Action Plan on Official Languages signed in March 2003 set out the ambitious goal of doubling the number of bilingual graduates in Canada by the year 2013. It is important to note that this goal is shared by Canadian Parents for French, and by all of our critical partners here in BC – by the Conseil Scolaire Francophone, post-secondary institutions such as UBC,

SFU and Educacentre, and by BC's dynamic and vibrant Francophone community, who have been increasingly reaching out to Francophile parents and youth with a rich variety of extra-curricular activities.

By all accounts, BC is likely to achieve the federally-established goal – in 2003 when the goal was set, there were 1413 students graduating with a double Dogwood. By 2013, that number will have risen to 2433.

Heightened access to French immersion – by far the best pedagogical approach to attaining functional bilingualism – is among the principle reasons explaining that increase. The number of French immersion programmes in the province has grown rapidly since 2000, making it a neighbourhood option for students in many communities; in short, where parents and students no longer had to cross town to get to the programme of their choice, choosing French immersion became a more obvious option.

At the same time, heightened interest by the media, better promotion at the district level, and more conclusive research on the benefits of studying French as a second language, have helped convince parents that enrolling their children in French, and helping them stay in the programme, makes educational, economic and cultural sense. Indeed, when parents see studies on the linguistic, academic, economic and cognitive benefits of French immersion, studies such as that conducted by researcher Wally Lazaruk (Canadian Modern Language Review, August 2007), they increasingly insist on access for their children. Such studies demonstrate that:

- French immersion students develop high levels of proficiency in both French and English at NO COST to their overall academic success
- by grade six, early French immersion students' English proficiency matches or exceeds that of their non-immersion peers, despite the fact that English language arts is not officially introduced until grade three
- Early French immersion students typically develop 'native-like' receptive language skills by about 11 years of age
- Bilingualism is associated with heightened mental flexibility and creative thinking skills

There are lots of reasons behind Canadians' current obsession with French. According to a 2007 CROP poll prepared for CBC Radio-Canada, 88 per cent of Canadians believe that people who speak more than one language are better equipped to succeed in today's global economy. Equally important, for the purposes of this brief, a full 82 per cent believe that learning a second language is one of the more fulfilling activities one can pursue, and two thirds of the participants surveyed felt that Canada's two official languages helps define what it is to be Canadian. By far the majority of parents believe in the intrinsic value of second language learning.

In short, British Columbians are embracing French like never before because they are certain of its cognitive and academic benefits, convinced of its economic and cultural advantages, and passionate about its capacity to keep this country united.

And therein lies the problem: with so many parents, and increasingly children themselves, clamouring to learn French and to become bilingual, the programmes are beginning to show the strain.

## **THE CHALLENGES**

### *a. Access*

While more than 290,000 students are currently enrolled in French second language programs in BC, access is not guaranteed. In many communities in BC, even core French is not offered at the secondary school level. Only two districts offer Intensive Core French. Fifteen school districts still offer neither early nor late French immersion. Several districts routinely apply caps on French immersion enrolment. And subsidized bussing is denied to students enrolled in programmes of choice, leading to those living at greater distances from programmes being less likely to enroll. Neither the Ministry of Education, nor school districts in BC have a written policy guaranteeing students access to core French or to French immersion.

Turning our attention first to French immersion, it should be noted that increasing numbers of Canadian parents are expecting BC's public school system to give their children strong second language skills – in fact, many expect their children to emerge from high school functionally bilingual. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that French immersion offers students the best chance for attaining bilingualism. Heightening the number of, and enrolment in, early and late French immersion programmes thus seems the obvious way forward.

Yet waiting lists to get into immersion persist in communities large and small, with hundreds denied entry in districts such as Vancouver. In response to consistently growing demand in Richmond, the school district imposed caps on enrolment last fall for the first time in years. And until recently, student's educational future in New Westminster was determined by a lottery – the lucky winners got to enroll, and the hundreds of losers were left behind.

Along the Sea-to-Sky highway, parents in Whistler and Pemberton – the two communities set to welcome the world in 2010 – have been denied repeated requests to start early immersion, despite more than sufficient registration numbers and broad community support. Many districts, moreover, make no mention on their websites of the immersion programmes they offer, or of their many benefits, leaving many parents in the dark as to how and where to access them.

That those living in small and remote communities have even more limited access to immersion – that is, that their children are less likely to have the opportunity to become bilingual than their urban peers – is well known. Smaller population bases, fewer resources, larger geographic distances for districts to cover, lack of subsidized transportation for students, and the difficulty of attracting teachers all combine to make this a reality. Even within school districts that do offer immersion, access is limited, with students in one community offered the programme, and those in a neighbouring community denied. For instance, there is a program in Cranbrook but not in Fernie or Elkford; there is a program in Prince George but not yet in Mackenzie, a program in Golden but not in Kimberley, a program in Castlegar but not yet in Trail.

Moreover, smaller communities interested in immersion lack sufficient resources to conduct a comprehensive analysis on the cost and viability of opening new programmes; in the absence of the analysis they cannot move forward.

The situation is exacerbated by the lack of subsidized transportation. Under BC provincial policy, French immersion is viewed as a district-wide local choice, meaning that students, regardless of where they live in the district, have no automatic access to school bussing. CPF has helped some communities develop creative solutions: in Comox/Courtenay, for instance, parents have collaborated with the Francophone school board to develop an affordable transportation option accessible to immersion students. In Saanich, all bus riders, whether they are within or out of catchment, can now pay \$12 a month to attend the school of their choice. However, many districts – urban and rural alike – have no such arrangements. This makes it particularly difficult for students with single parents who must work and/or older high school students without cars to stay in the FI program. Indeed, in the past four months alone, CPF chapters in Victoria, Langley, Coquitlam and Maple Ridge have been working with parents and frustrated teenagers who, in their transition from middle or elementary school to high school, have been forced to drop immersion as a result of the transportation issue. In the absence of any transportation, or alternatively, differential transportation fees, the principal of equitable access cannot be upheld.

While obvious, it bears mentioning as well, that access cannot be guaranteed when the programmes themselves are tenuous. Smaller communities continue to struggle in their efforts to sustain immersion programmes. Last year, 11 school districts experienced declining enrolment in French immersion including Mission, Kamloops, Golden and Fort St. John. Much of that loss is attributed to general economic downturn in these communities. However, these patterns defy the fact that in many other communities suffering economically, enrolment in immersion has nonetheless climbed. When enrolment declines, the threat of closure becomes imminent.

Over the past two years, CPF chapters have been actively engaged in local efforts to start, expand, or defend from closure early or late immersion programs in Pemberton, Whistler, Powell River, Haida Gwaii, Revelstoke, New Westminster, Campbell River, Castlegar, Langley, Saanich and Victoria. These provincial campaigns are critical to achieving the goal of doubling the number of bilingual graduates in BC and in the Yukon to which the federal and provincial governments have committed. Equally important, they are critical to responding to the clearly articulated desires of parents and students for strong French second language programmes that can lead to bilingualism. These collective efforts would be greatly advanced by the following recommendations.

**Recommendations:**

1. Create a provincial-level policy that ensures that all districts provide French second language programmes, and guarantee access, to students from kindergarten through grade 12.
2. Insist on district level immersion policy that ensures that all districts offering French immersion guarantee universal access, eliminating lotteries, capping practices, proficiency testing, and other practices aimed at limiting enrolment.

3. Insist on district-level policy guaranteeing subsidized transportation for students in immersion, and provide funding to cover these costs.
4. Develop a special advisory position on FSL programmes within the Ministry of Education that is designed specifically to support districts in their efforts to introduce and maintain FSL programmes.
5. Provide funding and support to increase the number of French immersion programmes and spaces across the province.
6. Direct funding to rural and remote communities to subsidize start-up and retention costs for new French programmes.
7. Insist on district level French immersion policy that ensures all districts offering French immersion place programme information on their websites and in schools.

***b. Core French***

Increasing the number of functionally bilingual graduates necessarily means turning our attention to the FSL programme that by far the majority of British Columbian youth pursue – Core French. As you are no doubt aware, the Ministry of Education mandates that students study a second language between grades five and eight. Most districts continue to offer French, though an increasing number have begun to introduce courses in Spanish, Mandarin, Japanese and Punjabi. While CPF fully supports the expansion of these linguistic course offerings, we believe, nonetheless, that providing an FSL option, and one that is of the highest quality, must be mandatory for school districts.

Tremendous strides have been taken in the last four years to improve the quality of core French. Significantly, 19 school districts in BC now offer some form of core French starting in kindergarten ensuring that all students receive a minimum of 100 minutes per week in French language instruction.

Equally exciting, BC school districts and teachers have warmly embraced the home-grown and innovative Accelerative Integrated Method or gestures approach to instruction, which is helping to fuel a passion for French among elementary school students we have never before witnessed. Its extensive use of drama, song and gestures, its emphasis on oral and written language production, and its creative approach to grammar are revolutionizing the way many young students learn French.

But perhaps most exciting of all is the recent introduction of Intensive Core French, the most radical improvement to the way French as a subject is taught that this province has ever seen. Intensive French maintains the primary goals of core French which includes its focus on developing basic communication skills among students. Intensive French is a program in which grade six students receive intense language arts training for four hours per day for half the year, and then supplement that study with an additional daily hour of French during the remaining half of the year. In grade seven and beyond, students follow an enriched French program along with the regular curriculum which is compacted and taught in English.

Surrey was the first BC district to introduce intensive French and the programme has since more than doubled in size. The results of the first two years demonstrated that students emerged from grade seven speaking at a level equivalent to that of a grade ten core French student, and writing at the level of grade three Québécois students. These results are consistent with those from across Canada. Vancouver piloted their own programme this past September in two schools.

The success of intensive French is largely attributed to the fact that increased time and intensity lead to higher levels of fluency; whereas students in the regular core French programme receive 150 hours of instruction spread over grades five through seven, those in intensive French receive 600 hours in grades six and seven alone. While the program in BC is too new to determine its effect on graduation rates, we do know that in provinces such as Newfoundland and New Brunswick where intensive French has been more broadly implemented and for a longer period, intensive French students are more likely to continue to take senior high school level French courses, and to graduate with higher proficiency levels than their regular core French counterparts.

On a precautionary note, it must be stated that the success of intensive French is not without its own serious challenges. The Ministry of Education, districts and parents all must take note to recognize that Intensive Core French is an improvement to core French and not an alternative to French immersion, which offers students a minimum of 5,000 hours of instruction in French between kindergarten and grade seven. While both help to instill a love of the language and culture, intensive French ensures grade seven students can engage in a general conversation, whereas French immersion remains the most successful and most widely proven option for students who wish to emerge from high school fully functionally bilingual.

It must further be noted that intensive French is still all too rare and that the current core French program is not adequate in its efforts to instill a love of French among the majority of students. The BC Language Coordinators Association has indicated that in order to develop functional bilingualism, 1,500 hours of second language study are required. At present, students in traditional core French get approximately 240 hours of study in French from Grade 5 to Grade 8. Many receive even fewer than that.

Moreover, as noted above, core French is not offered to all students in all districts. The teacher shortage, felt most acutely in rural and remote communities has meant that some districts have had to cancel their FSL programmes at the high school level entirely. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that many districts compensate for the lack of teachers by hiring courageous but unqualified English-track teachers to take on FSL course loads; neither the teachers nor the students are well-served through this strategy. The reality is that in an age when knowing more than one language is essential, an unsatisfactory core French system may be turning students off the study of French and other languages.

**Recommendations:**

1. Implement a policy requiring school districts and schools to report on compliance with Ministry of Education FSL guidelines.

2. Make French a required subject for students from grades five through nine.
3. Change the curriculum to increase the number of hours students study French.
4. Continue to support research into Core French pedagogy.
5. Create financial incentives for in-service FSL teachers to upgrade their French skills.
6. Develop financial incentives encouraging districts to adopt the Intensive Core French model.
7. Financially support and promote teacher training in the intensive French model.

### *c. Teacher Shortage*

With a 25 per cent increase in French immersion enrolment over the past five years, and no end in sight to this positive trend, the demand for additional, fully-bilingual teachers is expected to increase by more than 300 by 2010, this at a time when up to 40 per cent of all teachers are eligible to retire by the year 2010. Today, students of French immersion and Core French regularly receive instruction from non-qualified, non-functionally bilingual teachers. There is no greater challenge for French Immersion and Core French than the current and growing teacher shortage. Without qualified teachers, these programmes cannot grow. Indeed, it will be a challenge to maintain them at present levels.

Consider that:

- In some smaller communities we have visited over the past year, French is not offered even as a subject in high schools. An inability to find and retain qualified French teachers is most often cited as the reason for its absence. In these cases, no second language option is being offered to students.
- It is not uncommon to have non-French speaking teachers delivering Core French. Parents of both immersion and core French students have expressed concern about the low French proficiency levels of some teachers, many of whom have often not completed senior secondary courses in French.
- Students of French immersion regularly receive instruction from non-French speaking substitute teachers.
- An FSL pedagogy course is not required course work in post-secondary teacher education programmes, despite the possibility that many will teach in FSL programs when they secure a teaching position
- The immersive experience is consistently and routinely diluted by the fact that immersion students regularly receive music, library, physical education and other non-academic instruction from non-French speaking teachers within the school.
- School districts small and large cite the teacher shortage as the principal barrier to expanding the number of French immersion programmes in their region. For the first time in years, for instance, Richmond School District 38 placed caps on enrolment in EFI. Vancouver school board has consistently pointed to the shortage for its decision to cap enrolment for the past seven years, and Saanich District 63 cited the teacher shortage as justification for not initiating a late French immersion programme last year
- Lower mainland school districts have an edge over outlying districts in recruitment as they can easily offer practica opportunities to pre-service teachers in their schools, and follow these up quickly with contract offers

- Shortages are exacerbated by a complex certification process for teachers from other provinces and French-speaking countries
- There are fewer than 50 teachers in BC fully trained in the intensive French methodology
- Almost half of French teachers say they've considered quitting, and 32 percent don't hold FSL specialist certificates, according to a 2006 survey conducted by the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, and the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers

It is not, of course, all bad news. The growing number of French immersion graduates represents a potentially important source of future French second language teachers. The quality of life in our province continues to attract teachers from throughout the French-speaking world. The new teacher education programme at the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles at SFU is now fully subscribed. This issue requires the urgent attention of the entire education community. It has always been a priority for CPF-BC & Yukon – our Student Bursary, provided to post-secondary education students every year for the past 15 years is only one example. It is critical, however, that we collectively elaborate and implement a comprehensive response to this critical challenge.

**Recommendations:**

1. The ministry should work with partner organizations such as Canadian Parents for French, BCTF, APPIPC and BCATML to quickly establish a multi-stakeholder committee to develop long-term, sustainable mechanisms and strategies for addressing the teacher shortage.
2. Act on the 2006 agreement of cooperation between the governments of Quebec and BC to develop fully funded, multi-year teacher exchange programmes, helping to fill the demand for English teachers while bringing teachers qualified to teach a range of subjects in French (including science, art, math, social studies and French) to BC.
3. Develop a fully-funded teacher recruitment mechanism aimed specifically at serving small and remote communities, at once eliminating the competitive and financial burden experienced by small communities in their search for teachers.
4. Specify FSL teacher qualifications, including French-language proficiency, FSL teaching methods and subject competency for all FSL programs.
5. Provide incentives for newly graduated FSL teachers to teach in rural and remote areas.
6. Work with university post-secondary education programmes to make French Second Language pedagogy a mandatory course requirement for all education students.
7. Work with the BC College of Teachers to ease teachers' certification restrictions.
8. Significantly heighten the amount of provincial level funding for in-service teacher French-language training.
9. Increase bursary funding for post-secondary students entering the FSL teaching profession.
10. Develop a province-wide advertising campaign to promote the teaching profession to senior high school students.
11. Develop programme and incentives to attract out-of-province education students to pursue their school-based practica in BC.
12. Increase funding to BC-based post-secondary education programmes allowing them to heighten the number of programme spaces.

***d. Students with learning challenges***

That students with special needs, learning challenges, or lower academic abilities are often discouraged from enrolling in French second language programs by teachers, administrators and concerned parents is hardly news. Indeed, many parents are advised that immersion and core French are unsuitable for their children before they are even enrolled. This is particularly true of parents enrolling children in French immersion, where a misplaced but widespread belief holds that French Immersion is harder than the English program.

Yet researchers have consistently found that “below-average students in immersion score at the same level as below-average students in the English program on English language and academic achievement tests”. Moreover, “below-average students in immersion scored significantly higher on second-language tests than the below-average students in the English program” (Genesee, In Press 2007). In other words, students with lower academic ability do as well in immersion as in English programs but receive the additional cognitive and employment benefits that bilingualism confers.

Yet support for special needs students in French programmes is minimal in most communities and is nowhere equitable to the support – human and material-based – that students in the English programme tend to receive. To make matters worse, most educational assistants allocated to French immersion classrooms are English speaking, with limited or no knowledge of French. We can clearly do better to ensure that all students, regardless of ability, have the opportunity to become bilingual.

**Recommendations:**

1. Require school districts to cease discouraging students with special needs or lower academic abilities from enrolling in immersion or core French programs.
2. Require school districts to provide specialist services and support to allow students with lower academic abilities and learning difficulties to enroll the French programme of their choice.
3. Develop policy requiring districts to provide support to immersion students with learning challenges equal to that provided to their English-track peers.
4. Provide adequate funding to support these policies.

***e. Students with English as a Second Language (Allophone Students)***

The influx of Allophone students, those whose first language is neither English nor French, has grown dramatically. There are almost 4,000 more ESL students in BC schools today than there were in 2002/03. This increase is mostly concentrated in urban centres. The primary reason many new Canadians immigrate to Canada is to ensure that their children will receive an excellent education. These parents are also keen to see their children learn the languages of their newly adopted country.

Allophone students are routinely discouraged, however, from pursuing any French language programme. Demanding that young students perfect their English before jumping into immersion, school districts, teachers and occasionally district language coordinators often dissuade students of immigrants from enrolling in early or late immersion. It should be noted as well that according to informal surveys conducted by this branch within the Lower Mainland in 2006, immigrant parents indicated that they had not or would not consider enrolling their children in French immersion as they felt it would hinder their child's ability to learn English. To worsen matters, Ministry of Education policy denies ESL funding to schools for ESL students who choose immersion over the English track programme. Finally, many parents of immigrant students simply choose to enroll their children in heritage languages to meet the mandated second language requirement, not fully recognizing the value of taking French in BC. If and when the value of French is recognized, it is often too late, for students who do commit to becoming highly proficient in English before taking on French are left with few if any options – for Allophone students who feel confident about learning French only at the high school level, introductory French classes after Grade 5 do not exist.

Yet studies clearly indicate that allophone students in immersion learn English as well if not better than their Anglophone peers, and, moreover, that in standardized tests, perform as well or better than their peers in French proficiency (Hart et al, 1988). Indeed, it should come as little surprise that the three 2006 grade 12 provincial winners of CPF's Concours d'art oratoire, our annual French-language provincial public-speaking competition, all learned French as a third language, and that all three went on to take first place in the national CPF competition.

Immigrant children learn English well in informal settings on the playground, in assemblies, in after school extra-curricular activities and through English language arts training they begin to receive in grade three. Still, that they need to be supported in their efforts to learn English is clear, regardless of whether they choose French immersion or English. Moreover, all students and their parents should be made aware of the value of speaking French in a bilingual country. In short, immigrant students should have the same opportunities to learn Canada's two official languages as every other child in British Columbia.

**Recommendations:**

1. Implement policies which require school districts to allow and encourage newly arrived Canadians and new British Columbia residents to participate fully in all FSL programs.
2. Implement policies which require school districts to offer introductory French courses at the secondary level so that Allophone students can quickly acquire the level of French proficiency required to study with their Anglophone peers.
3. Extend English as a Second Language funding support to ESL students in French immersion to support their efforts to learn English.
4. Provide adequate school district funding to support these policies.
5. Promote FSL programmes in heritage languages within the immigrant community.

*f. Attrition*

Attrition from core French programmes has outpaced the general decline in school enrolment in BC schools for the past five years, a reflection, if one were to throw a positive light on this trend, of the heightened interest of students in pursuing French immersion. However, declining overall school enrollment, and the movement away from core towards immersion are not the only factors accounting for the drop in core French enrolment. There is no doubt that students continue to drop French after it no longer is mandatory, and that most students graduate with little ability to converse in or understand French. Moreover, attrition from immersion programmes, though declining every year, remains a concern, and one that CPF chapters address on virtually a daily basis. On average only 40 per cent of grade seven FI students receive their bilingual or double Dogwood with 24 per cent of students leaving in either grade 10, 11 or 12. While students leaving immersion have benefited substantially from the programme and may well be functionally bilingual, the loss in learning momentum is considerable.

Attrition remains a key indicator of programme quality. These children are leaving French for a variety of reasons including: poor teaching quality, a lack of variety in course work, a perception that marks are lower in French, and the lack of post-secondary French language options in British Columbia. It should also be noted that no university or college in BC currently requires students to pass a proficiency test in French to be admitted. Nor do employers have preferential hiring practices for students graduating with a double Dogwood – in short, there are few incentives to encourage students to take French.

Those who leave immersion continue to do so at key transfer points in their education – when moving from middle school or elementary school to high school, and when moving from grade 10 to 11. Poor course offerings at the high school level (many immersion schools offer no more than Sciences Humaines and Français Langue Seconde), a forced choice between continuing in French immersion or enrolling in other programs of choice, and an unwillingness to travel to a more distant secondary school are among the most commonly cited reasons. Many students simply have no choice at all as immersion programmes in many communities – Burns Lake, Whistler and Vanderhoof, for instance – do not extend beyond grade seven.

But, once again, there is positive news to report. It is compelling to review district-by-district attrition rates over a period of years and to note how greatly the statistics vary from district to district. For instance, in Saanich, a suburban school district near Victoria, with an average family income, only 24 per cent of grade seven students leave the program before graduating. Other school districts see much greater attrition rates, with neighbouring districts often varying significantly. School District 61 (Greater Victoria), for instance, borders on Saanich and has an attrition rate closing on 70 per cent. The statistics do not provide much guidance based on regional or socio-economic factors to explain attrition rates in districts.

There are eight school districts with average secondary attrition rates of 26 per cent or less. This research gives us cause for confidence in our capacity to reduce attrition rates significantly across BC. After all, if Saanich, Kelowna, Prince Rupert or Kamloops can have low attrition, so can other districts.

We know that improving the quality and approach to French language instruction is key to curbing the high rate of attrition. Intensive French has been demonstrated, for instance, in provinces with a longer history of its implementation, to be a highly successful antidote to the generalized tendency of students to switch out of French when it is no longer mandated. We expect to see the same results here in BC.

We also know that the advent of late immersion programmes which merge with early immersion in high school, have kept the immersion population in high schools vibrant and robust, increasing the demand for and viability of a broader and more interesting range of immersion courses.

We know, moreover, that offering extra-curricular opportunities for children from pre-school to post secondary is among the single most effective strategies for instilling a love and desire for French among youth. French exchanges to Quebec, voyages to France, film festivals, talent shows, afternoons spent with Charlotte Diamond, Family French camp, after-school soccer camps, Carnival, theatre, and dance – together, this rich variety of cultural and sporting activities, all offered in French, fuel the bilingual dreams of many BC youth. Last year, CPF chapters and members organized more than 200 activities – involving thousands of students in both core French and immersion -- in communities across the province. The majority of these were funded jointly by the BC Ministry of Education and local parents. CPF's province-wide public-speaking competition, Concours d'art oratoire and Rencontre Française involved more than 11,000 students from kindergarten through grade 12 last year alone, and helped to forge links between Francophiles and francophones in the process.

Finally, we know that promoting the benefits of French to those at key transfer points in their education, helps keeps them in the programme, whether immersion or core. Giving them an opportunity to hear from older students who are still in the program and have had opportunities to go on an exchange to Quebec or France, hearing from counselors about the post-secondary scholarships for which they might be eligible, are all proven strategies in motivating students to stick with French.

Many of the recommendations below are best dealt with through a dynamic district French Advisory Committee and we have been advocating for the establishment of district-level French Advisory Committees for many years. The establishment of a provincial committee would give district committees the uniformity and best practices they so clearly need.

In sum, addressing attrition demands that we continue to take a collective, holistic approach that recognizes that the path to bilingualism is one in which schools, parents and community are intimately and creatively involved.

**Recommendations:**

1. Establish a provincially-based French Advisory Committee to analyze, promote and share best practices among districts across the province.
2. Require school districts to establish a French Advisory Committee, with the task of curbing attrition among its terms of reference.

3. Continue to extend funding to community-level French second language extra-curricular activities.
4. Promote the value of the double Dogwood among high school immersion students, parents and employers.
5. Implement a grade 11 or 12 French language requirement in BC colleges and universities.
6. Support the continued development of new post-secondary opportunities in French.
7. Support and promote multiple entry points for French immersion by encouraging districts to implement both early and late French immersion programmes.

***g. Post-Secondary Education***

It should come as no surprise that BC's first ever French-only post-secondary programme – that offered through SFU's innovative Bureau des affaires francophones et Francophiles is now fully subscribed. In the fall of 2000, with the support of the BC and federal governments, the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique surveyed French first language and immersion students to assess the demand for a bilingual or French-only faculty attached to a local university (2000 French Immersion and 75 Programme Francophone students responded to the survey). The study noted that, of those grade 10, 11 and 12 students who planned to go on to post-secondary studies, a full 88 per cent hoped to do so in BC. A full one-quarter of grade 10-12 immersion students further indicated they would be interested in a French-only program if it were offered in BC, and 42 per cent said they would be interested in a bilingual program.

The Ministry of Education and Simon Fraser University need to celebrate their role in this incredible achievement. We now have a model that can be replicated across faculties and across post-secondary institutions in BC. At the same time, BC's only French-language college, Collège Educacentre, has doubled its programme offerings in French, has extended its reach to rural communities across the province, and has implemented a state-of-the art distance education programme.

Success in these areas is dependent on building on existing strengths.

**Recommendations:**

1. Continue to extend funding to the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles, allowing it to expand its programme offering as well as the number of students in the programmes.
2. Continue to extend funding to support College Educacentre in its efforts to broaden its course offerings and its reach across the province.
3. Promote the success of these models to other post-secondary institutions.
4. Develop a public information campaign aimed directly at students and their parents on the French-language post-secondary options available to them in BC.
5. Promote a career in teaching FSL and immersion to high school students by increasing the number and value of bursaries offered to students choosing to pursue a post-secondary degree in education.

### ***h. Distributed Learning***

As mentioned earlier, access to required and elective French courses at the secondary level has been spotty or non-existent in many communities, a reality felt most keenly in rural communities where overall enrolment is declining and where the teacher shortage is most acute. New initiatives such as the Connected Learners Project offered through LearnNowBC are beginning to address the situation. The Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la C-B is now offering several online courses to meet the needs of students who live in communities without a French First Language school. While some core French courses are already available online, few students and parents are aware of these. Moreover, French immersion programs across the province could benefit greatly from new technologies that would allow students to continue taking required French courses needed to graduate with a double Dogwood.

According to the Ministry of Education's enrolment statistics, more students than ever are choosing to pursue secondary courses through distributed learning. With the decline in overall enrolment felt most keenly in rural areas, growth in this educational option is truly spectacular. There are almost 3,000 more students accessing distance education than there were only five years ago. These numbers reflect new rules allowing students in Grades 10 to 12 to take one or all of their courses electronically. New and exciting initiatives, such as the Connected Learners Project are only the beginning.

LearnNowBC offers students in Grades 10 – 12 choice and flexibility through the hundreds of courses delivered online throughout the province. Adapting certain online courses for the French immersion audience would pave the way to lower attrition, greater access to new and exciting course options, and dynamic interaction between students and teachers from diverse districts.

Until recently, the Conseil Scolaire Francophone had been struggling with its mandate to offer French First Language courses to all those who, by rights, are entitled to a French-language public education in BC. With only 39 schools in BC, the Conseil's challenge was obvious: how to bring the classroom to the student rather than the student to the classroom. This year, the Conseil began offering more than a dozen courses by distance, allowing their students to meet graduation requirements.

With the current dearth of qualified French immersion teachers, the possibility of offering students in Burns Lake *Sciences Humaines* 12 by linking them with a class in Burnaby for example, may be the best possible way to offer greater access. The province can take the lead by funding the development of an online and e-classroom model, thus offering home schoolers and distance education students both access to a program of choice not previously available to them, and more importantly, an opportunity to become functionally bilingual.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Establish a new multi-year fund, administered by the Ministry of Education, to develop an online delivery model for French immersion distributed learning options.

2. Make these courses available through distributed learning so that any student in the province who meets the prerequisites would be able to continue in the immersion program through to graduation.
3. Publicize the new initiative, especially in rural communities.
4. Continue to support the development, promotion and dissemination of on-line core French distributed learning courses.

### ***i. Funding***

The federal government's goal of doubling the number of functionally bilingual graduates by 2013 is one we at CPF-B & Yukon share. More important than any targets set by government ministries and departments, however, are the parents and students' desires for a bilingual education. The federal-provincial funding agreement on French programmes continues to be essential to the sustainability and growth of all French programs in BC.

In the past four years since the Federal Action Plan was announced, demand from parents has led to an impressive **seven** new immersion or intensive French programs initiated in BC: EFI in New Westminster (2003); EFI in Ladysmith (2004); LFI in Whistler (2005); LFI in Summerland and Sooke in 2006; and Intensive French in Surrey (2005) and Vancouver (2007). These new programs are equally spread between rural and urban regions.

Under the federal - provincial French funding agreement, school districts across BC received \$7,015,065 last year. As a comparison, in 2002/03, before the Action Plan funding was available, a total of \$5,696,579 was sent to districts in federal French funding. The difference, \$1,318,486 represents a 23% increase. This increase is almost entirely due to the increase in the number of students in the French Immersion program, with additional but small amounts allocated for Immersion dispersion and core French resources. This despite the fact inflation in BC has grown by 2 – 2.5 per cent annually over the past 10 years. During the past four years, enrolment in immersion programs increased by over 7,500 students while Core French has seen a decrease of more than 21,000 students. Even with the decline in core French enrolment, the current funding formula is not able to cover current realities, let alone meet future needs.

In rural BC and in small districts, federal funding continues to ensure the very survival of French Immersion. In some communities, even with a high proportion of students entered in immersion, declining rural populations are making it very difficult to maintain class sizes. The result is that rural districts, most of which are deeply in deficit, are threatening to close existing programs despite their success. Here, federal funding is critical to ensure program survival and to offer new programs such as Late French Immersion in communities where it does not exist. Essentially, federal funding is needed to subsidize smaller class sizes.

With more and more people from diverse backgrounds and educational abilities clamouring to learn French, the demand for teachers, resources, learning assistance and French cultural opportunities has grown exponentially. Yet funding has not kept pace. Funding for learning assistance, for example, is currently offered only to districts with a total French immersion

enrolment of fewer than 250 students. If a district has multiple yet geographically distant communities and total immersion enrolment in each community is fewer than 250 students, the district still qualifies only for \$10,500 or 20 per cent of an FTE teacher. Thus only a portion of students in that district will be served.

The recommendations we have made throughout this document depend heavily on an increased and strategic allocation of funding across a broad range of priorities. Renewing the Canada-BC Funding Agreement with funding to all nine categories as well as for French immersion revitalization and Core French improvements increased to at the very least keep pace with inflation and program growth, is critical. We would also include the following amendments or new initiatives:

1. Access – French Immersion

- Strengthen the federal French funding formula to ensure that additional funding is allocated to small and remote communities to offset penalties suffered from having small class sizes and greater geographic district distances.
- Establish a fund, administered by the Ministry, to encourage rural districts to start or expand French Immersion programs.

2. Core French

- Create financial incentives for in-service FSL teachers to upgrade their French skills.
- Develop financial incentives encouraging districts to move towards adopting the Intensive Core French model.
- Financially support and promote teacher training in the intensive French model.

3. Teacher Shortage:

- Develop a fully-funded teacher recruitment mechanism aimed specifically at serving small and remote communities, at once eliminating the competitive and financial burden experienced by small communities in their search for teachers.
- Provide financial incentives for newly graduated FSL teachers to teach in rural and remote areas.
- Significantly heighten the amount of provincial level funding for in-service teacher French training.
- Increase bursaries for post-secondary students entering the FSL teaching profession.
- Increase funding to BC-based post-secondary education programmes allowing them to increase the number of programme spaces.
- Create financial incentives for in-service FSL teachers to upgrade their French skills.

4. Students with Learning Challenges

- Amend the funding formula so that districts with multiple programs with less than 250 FTEs in one or more communities can access funds for learning assistance.

5. Support to Allophone learners of French:

- Provide funding to promote the inclusion of allophone students in immersion programs.

- Adjust rules denying districts ESL funding for allophone students who choose to enter immersion programs.

6. Attrition

- Establish a provincial French Advisory Committee to act as the source for best practices.
- Continue to extend funding to community-level French second language extra-curricular activities.

7. Post-secondary education

- Continue to extend funding to the Bureau des affaires francophones et francophiles, allowing it to expand its programme offering
- Continue to extend funding to support College Educacentre in its efforts to broaden its course offerings and its reach across the province.

8. Distributed Learning:

- Establish a new multi-year fund, administered by the Ministry, to develop an online delivery model for French immersion distributed learning options.

***j. Accountability***

Everyone, from the ministry, employers and school districts, to teachers, parents and students, has contributed greatly to BC's unequivocal success in FSL education. We all have a stake in ensuring its continued success. Accountability to all stakeholders must therefore be the underlying principle employed in any effort to determine our next steps whether with respect to allocating funds, or to planning for the future. The recommendations in this section arise out of the recognition that there are many, many experts on FSL education in this province; involving them all in overseeing, evaluating and planning will help guarantee the quality and sustainability of programmes well into the future.

The area of district-level financial accountability remains a principle concern of CPF and our parent members. We are certain, as the Ministry is, that districts allocate the majority of French federal funds to French programmes. We believe, however, that we have the right to verify this fact, and to see clearly how our public monies are being spent. The funding formulas are complex and teachers, principals and language coordinators alike contact CPF regularly for guidance on how to allocate these funds. At the same time, we regularly encounter principals and teachers who have little awareness of the funds' existence. The ministry took an important step recently in permitting a portion of federal funding to be allocated to staff time devoted to French language coordination in each district – it should be noted, however, that the majority of districts do not have a coordinator in place, and that many coordinators themselves have little knowledge of the federal funding mechanism.

Aside from the evaluation and effective spot audits conducted by the Ministry of Education, the main groups policing the agreements are local CPF parent-volunteers and chapters. And while stories of “French Immersion basketball hoops” are largely apocryphal, there are far too many instances where districts refuse to disclose how specific monies are spent in any given year.

Moreover, there is currently no policy requiring districts to report publicly on the spending of French federal funding dollars. In many school districts, CPF parents serve on French Advisory Committees that oversee the expenditures of these monies. In most of these communities, CPF chapters have worked collaboratively with districts to develop the FACs and to propose its membership and terms of reference. We believe that membership in FACs should be broad-based and include parent, teacher, trustee and school administrator representatives. They should also include representatives of the local Francophone community. And we believe that the terms of reference for FACs should be far reaching allowing the experts at the table to discuss and propose recommendations on current issues and future plans with respect to FSL.

Currently, FACs exist on paper in more than 15 communities. Some work well and others meet only rarely. The majority of districts have no FAC whatsoever. In these districts CPF advocates to ensure resources are properly spent and that some measure of transparency exists. We work closely with district officials to see that this happens.

Working collaboratively, whether at a district level or provincially, allows us to tap into the most experienced and knowledgeable minds with respect to FSL education. Currently, efforts to influence FSL education at a provincial level are ad hoc at best. Educational partners and an odd assortment of FSL stakeholders meet annually to discuss various aspects of the FSL programme. This does not serve our FSL programmes well.

**Recommendations:**

1. Develop a policy requiring districts to report publicly on the spending of French federal funding on French programmes.
2. Insist that, as a condition of receiving federal funding, school districts establish a local French Advisory Committee to review semi-annually the expenditure of French dollars and to develop medium and long-range plans regarding FSL programmes in the district. The model could be based on several existing French Advisory Committees in Saanich, Sooke and Surrey. Decisions on the make-up and governance of these committees could be made locally but each committee should have representatives of trustees, administration, teachers and parents (CPF and DPAC) and should meet a minimum of twice a year.
3. At the Provincial level, establish a Provincial Advisory Committee to meet three times annually to review and assess current programmes, identify best practices, and work with districts to strengthen FSL programming. Committee membership could be comprised thus:
  - Ministry of Education Staff
  - Representatives of Canadian Parents for French
  - Representatives of French teachers
  - Representative of post-secondary Faculties of Education
  - Representatives of the CSF
  - Representatives of the Francophone Parents Association
  - Representative of School Districts
  - Representative of the FFCB

### *k. Community*

BC is now home to the third largest community of Francophones in Canada outside of Quebec, and houses a rich variety of cultural, academic, economic and political civil society organizations that provide a range of services and activities to a diverse constituency. At the same time, with the dramatic increase in French immersion enrolment over the past eight years, and the parallel decrease in overall enrolment across the province, French immersion students are now the majority population in many schools. These realities are changing and enriching the character of our schools and broader communities, offering up a tremendous opportunity to build links between Francophones and Francophiles, and among those not generally exposed to French. But demographic change, even, or particularly, in school settings can be unsettling, and needs to be carefully observed and nurtured.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. Ensure that all districts inform all parents of the cognitive and academic benefits of learning French.
2. Insist that all districts with intensive French and immersion publicize these programmes on their websites.
3. Develop a broad-based, youth-oriented publicity campaign focused on the benefits of FSL learning.
4. Implement a strategic public information campaign aimed directly at students and their parents on the French-language post-secondary options available to them in BC.
5. Support the continued efforts of BC's Francophone community to build sustained links among Francophones, Francophiles, and the larger community.

## **CONCLUSION**

French Second Language education is an enormous success story in this province. More students are turned onto French than ever before, more are emerging bilingual and pursuing French language post-secondary studies, and more still are developing a love of language learning that will carry them out with confidence in our multi-lingual world.

We have much to celebrate.

This brief outlines these successes and makes specific recommendations aimed at addressing challenges of today and on the horizon. The strength of our programmes, CPF believes, lies in our abilities over 30 years, to pool our resources and to work collaboratively with a shared commitment to making our children's education the best it can possibly be.

Now has come the time for us - the educators, policy makers, parents and volunteers to build on our success to ensure children all over BC, regardless of academic ability, heritage, or community are able to pursue their bilingual dreams.