

Supporting

Students With Special Education Needs

In French As A
Second Language

A PARENT GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been developed as a way to help reassure parents that support is available so that all children can be successful in French as a Second Language (FSL) environments.



Parents who do not speak French may wonder how to support their children in their second language acquisition. A positive attitude can be the single most important factor in their success.

Ideas to promote French learning outside of the school environment:

- Watch French media with your child
- Listen to French music
- Explore the local area for French community places, groups, events, and bookstores
- Read with your child in any language
- Communicate positive messages about French to your child
- Talk to your child about what is happening in school
- Use online resources/apps to support your child's French development (See resources on page 8.)

As a parent, it is difficult to see your child struggle. Regardless of the subject or task, the initial instinct is to find a solution. As each child learns differently, there is no one solution. This is especially true for children with special education needs. Regardless of the program: Core, Extended or Immersion, there is a place for ALL students in FSL.

MYTH: My child will do better academically and feel better about themselves if they do not participate in French.

FACT: Students who leave FSL environments often experience a decrease in their level of confidence when they move to an English only classroom because they feel that they are not capable or that they have failed French. By contrast, students with special needs who stay in FSL programs have "increased motivation, self-esteem, and confidence". (Arnett, 2013) Social benefits associated with the participation in FSL of students with special education needs include increased motivation, self-esteem, and confidence, which can be linked to being included with one's peers (Arnett, 2013). Students with special education needs who receive appropriate supports in FSL programs also gain access to the numerous advantages available to all Canadians who have the confidence and ability to communicate in both official languages. These advantages include greater employment options and earning potential, enhanced problem-solving skills, greater creativity, and increased cognitive flexibility and ability to formulate concepts (Alberta Education, 2009).

This guide is based on the foundational belief stated in Learning for All, K-12, that "All students learn best when instruction, resources, and the learning environment are well suited to their particular strengths, interests, needs, and stage of readiness." (p.8). It is also important that "decisions about program participation, including participation in FSL programs, should be made on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual student." (Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs, p. 3)

Navigating through the education system can seem overwhelming. Getting support as soon as a concern is recognized with respect to a child's learning is important. Parents can help their child by:

- **Being Involved**
- **Monitoring Progress**
- **Encouraging Self-Advocacy**

BEING INVOLVED



MYTH: French Immersion is only for academically advanced students.

FACT: According to the Ministry of Education, FSL programs are welcoming and inclusive of all students. French immersion programming can respond to a wide range of student needs and abilities.

Ultimately, it is up to parents to consider all pertinent information regarding which program is best suited to their child. When parents hear negative comments about French from their children, asking questions will help determine next steps:

Talking with my child:

What should I talk to him/her about?



- ? What do you find difficult about French class?
- ? What things do you enjoy in French class?
- ? What could your French teacher help you with?
- ? How do you feel during French class?
What makes you feel this way?
- ? How do you behave during French class?
How is this different from other classes?
- ? What do you like about school?

It is important to share this information with the French teacher, through a parent/teacher meeting, as you have a common goal of creating opportunities for success for your child. The teacher can provide additional information about your child's strengths, areas of need, and strategies to try.

In preparation for the meeting parents may wish to consider....



Questions:

Write down any specific questions you would like to discuss.



Bringing Your Child To The Meeting

Depending on the age of the child and the goals of the meeting, this could be essential. Adult discussion may be necessary as well.



Priorities

Consider what the goals for your child might be and share them with the teachers and the principal. Valuing a bilingual education will set a positive tone to the meeting.

At The Meeting



Be positive:

Everyone who is participating in the meeting is there to support your child.



Be open:

Make the teacher aware of any circumstances at home that may be affecting your child's performance at school.



Be honest: Express your concerns about your child's struggles.



Be specific: Provide speaking points.



Ask about strategies for home and school:

Leave this meeting with clear and realistic next steps on what strategies the teacher will implement and what you can try at home.



Determine next steps: Establish a follow-up plan for ongoing communication.

After the meeting:

Be patient: New strategies take time to take effect.

Be positive: Attitude towards the French program can affect your child's willingness to try.

Have confidence: The French teacher wants your child to achieve success in French.

Follow through: Take time to try the strategies suggested.

Communicate: Keep open communication with the French teacher, and share any changes you may notice.

MONITORING YOUR CHILD'S PROGRESS

MYTH: A child with special education needs would perform better without French programming.

FACT: Research does not support better performance in an English only environment. The document "Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL Programs" provides a Review of Research (p.10-15). Learning a second language will support the development of the first language, regardless of what that the first language is. Working in multiple languages actually helps language development.

If a child is still struggling despite their Individual Education Plan (IEP), it does not mean the child should be removed from French. It means that a review of the IEP is necessary, and can be done with the school team

If a child continues to struggle in FSL, and the parent and the French teacher both feel that additional support is necessary, it is important to engage the school team.

It is important that parents continue to monitor their child's progress in cooperation with the French teacher.

Maintain communication:

Throughout the school year and from one year to the next.

Share:

Share any new or additional strategies used.

Celebrate success:

Talk to your child about their successes in French class.

Request outside agencies:

Ask for any outside agency support that might be available in the community. Advise the school of any outside agency involvement.

Support the French program:

Continue to demonstrate the value of learning a second language.

ENCOURAGING ADVOCACY

MYTH: Students with learning challenges will be more successful in English-only schools than in French immersion schools.

FACT: The claim that struggling students are at greater risk by remaining in French immersion programs has never been substantiated by research (Dr. Fred Genesee, 2012).

An IEP supports a child's learning throughout their learning career. As such, it needs to change as the child's needs change.

If a parent finds that the current content in the IEP is not responsive to their child's needs, then it is important to discuss this with the French teacher and the Special Education teacher to review the goals. It is essential that both the parent and the child mention their concerns or needs to the French teacher.

All children can ask for accommodations/help to support their learning.

Some of these supports can include but are not limited to: preferential seating, use of technology, additional time for assignments/tests, etc.

It is important to discuss possible accommodations when planning the child's IEP with the school team.



ENCOURAGING ADVOCACY (CONT.)

As students get older, they are encouraged to take greater ownership for their learning. As a child gains more learning experience, they will become more aware of their strengths and areas of need.

Taking ownership can be done in a variety of ways and with various supports.

These may include:



Supporting Independence:

Your child can speak to the teacher about their day-to-day needs as well as which learning strategies work.



Goal-setting:

Your child can set personal, short-term goals for French.



Maintaining communication:

Throughout the school year and from one year to the next, your child can share any additional strategies that are working at home.



Supporting the French program:

Your child can become familiar with the various resources available in class. Or, when permissible, your child may wish to use his/her own personal technological devices to assist his/her learning.

MYTH: A student with a language learning difficulty cannot learn French.

FACT: Students with language based learning difficulties can achieve at the same level as similar peers in the English mainstream program. Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs states that "Learning another language helps children to become more aware of their own. This awareness can lead to improvements in literacy across the curriculum." (Languages without Limits" website, at www.languageswithoutlimits.co.uk/why.html)



Checking for Accommodations and Modifications:

Ensure that French is included on your child's IEP. Your child should be made aware of the learning expectations outlined on the IEP.



Expressing Abilities:

As your child develops strategies to meet with success, he/she may be presented with a task in which he/she does not require additional supports. It is advantageous for your child to express his/her ability meet the grade level expectations.

CONCLUSION



All students who participate in FSL, including those with special education needs benefit from the advantages and skill development associated with second language acquisition. "FSL is a valuable component of every child's education" (Ontario, 2013a, p.38). Parents are the best advocate throughout a child's education, even after the children are able to self-advocate. In that role, parents can work together with the child's educators in order to provide an advantageous learning environment for the child.

Ontario Ministry of Education. (2013). Supporting Your Child's Success In French Immersion and Extended French, Kindergarten to Grade 8. Toronto, ON: author.

Canadian Parents for French - Ontario Branch: on.cpf.ca

Canadian Parents for French: cpf.ca

Rainbow Schools. La Boîte à Outils: A Toolbox for Parents of students in French Immersion and Core French. Retrieved from: http://www.rainbowschools.ca/programs/French/support/FI_toolGuide.pdf

Alberta Learning. (2002). Yes, You Can Help. Retrieved from: <https://education.alberta.ca/media/3091402/yesyoucanhelp.pdf>

RESOURCES



REFERENCES

For additional information corresponding to any of the information found in this booklet, you can review the following research:

Arnett, K. (2013a). The genesis and perpetuation of exemptions and transfers from French Second Language programs for students with diverse learning needs: A preliminary examination and their link to inclusion. In K. Arnett & C. Mady (Eds). *Minority populations in Canadian second language education* (pp. 103-117). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

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Bourgouin, R. (2011). Immersion and at-risk learners: What does the research say? *Journal de l'immersion*, 33(3), 27-30.

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Ontario Ministry of Education. (2015). *Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs*. Toronto: Author.

Turnbull, M., Lapkin, S., & Hart, D. (2001). Grade 3 immersion students' performance in literacy and mathematics: Province-wide results from Ontario (1998-99). *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58, 9-26.

GLOSSARY

Individual Education Plan (IEP)

- A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, based on a thorough assessment of the student's strengths and needs – that is, the strengths and needs that affect the student's ability to learn and to demonstrate learning;
- A record of the particular accommodation needed to help the student achieve his or her learning expectations, given the student's identified learning strengths and needs;
- A working document that identifies learning expectations that are modified from the expectations for the age-appropriate grade level in a particular subject or course, as outlined in the Ministry of Education's curriculum policy documents;
- A working document that identifies alternative expectations, if required, in program areas not represented in the Ontario curriculum;
- A record of the specific knowledge and skills to be assessed and evaluated for the purpose of reporting student achievement of modified and/or alternative expectations;
- An accountability tool for the student, the student's parents, and everyone who has responsibilities under the plan for helping the student meet the stated goals and learning expectations as the student progresses through the Ontario curriculum. (Ontario, 2004, p. 6)

Accommodations:

The term accommodations is used to refer to the special teaching and assessment strategies, human supports, and/or individualized equipment required to enable a student to learn and to demonstrate learning. Accommodations do not alter the provincial curriculum expectations for the grade. (Ontario, 2004, p. 25)

Modifications:

Modifications are changes made in the age-appropriate grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student's learning needs. These changes may involve developing expectations that reflect knowledge and skills required in the curriculum for a different grade level and/or increasing or decreasing the number and/or complexity of the regular grade level curriculum expectations. (Ontario, 2004, p. 25)

