

Meeting Labour Market Needs for French as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario

*Understanding Perspectives Regarding the French as
a Second Language Teacher Labour Market Issue*



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION



INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the Ontario Labour Market Partnership Project, Meeting Labour Market Needs for French as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario – *Understanding Perspectives Regarding the French as a Second Language Teacher Labour Market Issue*. The funding for this Labour Market Partnership Project was provided in part by the Government of Canada and the Government of Ontario. The full report can be found at www.opsba.org.



Please note that the views expressed in this report are the views of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province.

BACKGROUND

Since the early 2000s, English language public school boards across Ontario have been experiencing persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers qualified to teach French as a Second Language (FSL) programs in elementary and secondary schools. These challenges have been reported in the academic literature, in reports by advocacy groups, in program reviews by multiple school boards across the province, and by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008).

These challenges have also garnered ongoing media attention and most recently have been the subject of a number of public policy announcements by the Ontario provincial government and the Canadian federal government.

The growing gap between the number of students enrolling in FSL programs and the availability of qualified teachers to do the job led the Ontario Public School Boards' Association to submit an application to the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD) to establish an Ontario Labour Market Partnership (OLMP) project. The project was guided by two key objectives:

1. to study the supply and demand issues specifically related to the recruitment, hiring and retention of FSL teachers;
2. to develop and begin to implement recommendations towards workable solutions with key stakeholder groups.

A number of factors converge to create this labour market challenge, each with different implications regarding potential solutions. Analyses from various stakeholders point to key factors such as overall increases in the demand for French language education programs (in particular, supplementary programs such as French Immersion), reduced numbers of qualified graduates from teacher education programs, attrition within the existing FSL teacher supply, and modest success in recruiting qualified teachers outside Ontario.

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Under the Education Act, French language instruction is mandatory in Ontario schools, with students obliged to study the language for a period of 6 years from grades 4 through 9. School boards have the option to offer supplementary French language programs, such as French Immersion, based on local demand and resources.

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Since 2005, the average annual enrolment growth of French Immersion has been 5.7 percent.

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PROJECT COMMITTEE STRUCTURES

The FSL-OLMP project aimed to uncover the factors most affecting the FSL teacher supply pipeline, the policies governing FSL teacher supply, and how these factors and policies play out in the English language school boards across Ontario.

Given the number of stakeholders involved in the complex FSL teacher supply and demand issue, the FSL-OLMP project was structured through the work of three inter-dependent committees. Each committee's work was grounded in the guiding principles of *Program/Policy Memorandum 159, Collaborative Professionalism* to ensure that all voices were heard in order to build shared understanding, ongoing consensus and commitment to the project's objectives.

The **French as a Second Language Labour Market Partnership Committee (FSL-LMPC)** included representatives from the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO), the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), the Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF), the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), the Ontario Council of Directors of Education (PCODE & ECCODE), the Ontario Association of Deans of Education (OADE), the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario (CPCO), public and Catholic Supervisory Officers' Associations of Ontario (OPSOA & OCSOA), all publicly-funded English language public and Catholic school boards in the province through their trustee/school board associations, (OPSBA & OCSTA), and the Ontario Ministry of Education.

The **French as a Second Language-Labour Market Partnership Steering Committee** and **Research Technical Team** supported the FSL-LMPC in undertaking specific tasks related to the overall project objectives.

About French language standards for hiring:

"It would be nice if there was some sort of common standard between the boards . . . So some consistency between the boards of what is acceptable for each level [of FSL]."

COMMENTS FROM YEAR 1/YEAR 2 FSL TEACHERS

RESEARCH PLAN

The research plan of the FSL-OLMP project identified two key research questions:

- i. Why do school boards find it challenging to recruit sufficient numbers of French teachers and support staff?
- ii. What strategies can be implemented by key stakeholders to satisfy the increasing market demand?

Three data sources were explored for use by the Labour Market Partnership Committee to help inform project recommendations:

1. A review of past studies and reports on FSL teacher recruitment, attrition, working conditions and policy implementation;
2. Qualitative and quantitative employment data from school districts' Human Resources (HR) departments, the Ontario College of Teachers, and the Ministry of Education to quantify the FSL teacher shortage and to better understand related factors in different board contexts, e.g. rural, northern, urban;
3. Quantitative and qualitative data from recently hired FSL teachers regarding their experiences looking for work, being hired, and transitioning to the role of FSL teacher.

This latter data source has been largely missing in the current body of FSL teacher research and so was considered an important link in understanding the current supply-demand landscape.

To better understand FSL teacher supply and demand from an HR perspective, surveys were used to discover the types of FSL programs school boards offer, the number of FSL teachers needed, the types of recruitment strategies used, and the specific challenges boards face in satisfying their FSL teacher demand.



Surveys and focus groups were also used to gather the recruitment, hiring and early teaching experiences of first and second year FSL teachers.



WHAT WE LEARNED

Satisfying the need for qualified FSL teachers is a complex, dynamic process that is influenced by many factors and, therefore, difficult to express numerically. However, the cumulative knowledge gathered over time from various sources points to the following findings:

From past research:

- Little academic research has been published specific to the recruitment, retention, and hiring of FSL teachers in Canada.
- Considerable research has focused on effective FSL pedagogy to optimize student learning. Students enrolled in FSL programs, particularly discretionary program such as French Immersion, consistently show strong performance in French language acquisition and overall academic achievement. This finding may account, in part, for the consistent and growing demand for such programs over time.

From the HR perspective in this project:

- Discretionary FSL programs such as French Immersion affect demand in that they require more FSL teachers than mandatory FSL programs such as Core French.
- Over 90% of Ontario school boards offer at least one discretionary FSL program.
- Key factors affecting FSL teacher demand are the number, type and duration of discretionary FSL programs.
- The current demand for FSL teachers is approximately 5 times greater in elementary grades than in secondary grades.
- Internal and external factors affect the supply of FSL teachers:



- Individual school boards use a wide range of assessment practices and evaluation criteria in determining French language proficiency standards.
- On average, approximately one quarter of FSL teacher applicants do not meet French language proficiency standards established by individual boards.

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French language proficiency is an important factor in the supply of FSL teachers.

From the first and second-year FSL teacher perspective in this project:

- In pursuing an FSL teacher role, newly hired FSL teachers are motivated by the healthy job market, the opportunities to continue to speak French, past positive experiences learning, and understanding the benefits of knowing French.
- Most new FSL teachers learned French in a school setting rather than with a community of French-speakers.
- When applying to specific boards, teachers are strongly influenced by the proximity of the board to where they want to live, and by previous knowledge of the board itself.
- Approximately 36% apply to only one school board; 60% apply to two to five school boards.
- Most new full-time FSL teachers are teaching French Immersion or Extended French; most new part-time FSL teachers are teaching a combination of Core French and Immersion/Extended.
- 80% of new FSL teachers are confident in their teaching, and are most rewarded by seeing students learn to communicate in French.
- The greatest challenge in teaching FSL is availability of suitable teaching resources, followed by students' attitudes towards learning French.
- New FSL teachers' top two professional needs: accessing effective teaching resources, and opportunities to improve French language skills.
- Approximately 10% of newly hired FSL teachers self-identify as Francophone; approximately 50% describe their French language proficiency as Intermediate or Upper Intermediate using the CEFR scales.

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83% of applicants were granted interviews; the interview experience was generally a positive one but applicants would like more opportunities for meaningful feedback.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below represent the consensus of the FSL-LMPC members achieved through collaborative professionalism over the course of this project. All member FSL-LMP organizations and associations have supported the Project recommendations and an application to MAESD for a follow-up Labour Market Partnership project.

The recommendations stem from three primary sources regarding the FSL-OLMP project, including:

1. a review of related literature in the field of teaching French as a Second Language;
2. input based on experience and expertise of project partners;
3. research findings from this project.

Regarding FSL teacher recruitment, it is recommended that:

1. a) English language school boards continue to support the expansion of implementation of CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference)-based assessment tools with secondary school-aged students in order to provide a common measure of French language proficiency for graduating students.

b) the FSL-LMPC facilitate a collaborative forum to discuss the viability of creating and consistently using a provincial framework for describing and developing FSL teachers' French proficiency, e.g.: informed by the CEFR.

Viability discussions to include:

- Faculties of Education using/implementing such a provincial framework to develop teacher candidates' French proficiency and French language pedagogy in preparation for employment in FSL programs in Ontario schools.
- school boards using the provincial framework to describe their respective proficiency level requirements when recruiting, hiring and developing teachers in their FSL programs.

2. school boards, teacher federations, the Ontario College of Teachers, and the Ministry of Education collaborate to extend the Ministry's current efforts and further develop a communication strategy to highlight the employment opportunities available in Ontario for FSL teachers. This strategy will target both the international teacher community as well as teachers who received their Canadian teacher-education from outside the province.

3. Faculties of Education, Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development collaborate to develop a targeted recruitment strategy that maximizes enrolment of teacher candidates in the FSL qualifications streams.

4. the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) facilitate forums with English language public school boards' Human Resources officials to share data collected in this project related to effective recruitment and hiring strategies, e.g.: use of technology to conduct portions of job interviews, use of social media, pool hiring, hiring timelines, and others.

Regarding FSL teacher retention and professional support, it is recommended that:

1. the Ministry of Education provide financial subsidies for FSL teachers to enrol in courses and other language learning opportunities that support French language development, e.g.: language development courses, general interest courses taught in French, language immersion experiences, Additional Qualification courses taught in French.

2. key stakeholders develop a coordinated provincial strategy for professional learning that articulates a range of professional learning opportunities for FSL teachers that includes:

- being responsive to professional learning needs identified by FSL teachers and school boards;
- developing teachers' own French language proficiency;
- professional learning opportunities that span the first 5 years of an FSL teacher's employment in a board and provides continuity with the New Teacher Induction Program;
- providing funding as an incentive to participate in French language and cultural immersion experiences.

3. the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) facilitate forums with English language public school boards' Human Resources and Program officials to share research that identifies issues that may affect the long-term retention of teachers in FSL programs.

NEXT STEPS

The Ontario Labour Market Partnership Project, Meeting Labour Market Needs for French as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario - *Understanding Perspectives Regarding French as a Second Language Teacher Labour Market Issue* is envisioned as a three-year project. If successful in a follow-up Ontario Labour Market Partnership application, the next step is to begin to develop action plans to effectively implement the recommendations germane to the recruitment, hiring, retention and professional support of FSL teachers, and to conduct research and develop recommendations that address the recruitment, hiring, and retention of sufficient numbers of French-speaking education workers (such as Early Childhood Educators and Educational Assistants).

About French language proficiency needed to teach:

“My biggest experience so far (in learning French) was going on those 2 programs (Moncton and Trois Pistoles). Had I not had those experiences, there’s no way I could do this job (Core French). To learn a language, it’s vital to be immersed in it, even for a short while. Even during our teacher training, these kinds of experiences should be mandatory.”

COMMENTS FROM YEAR 1/YEAR 2 FSL TEACHERS

The best thing about teaching French:

“Being able to show my students that it is okay not to be perfect, and that in order to succeed they must continue practicing. Further, it’s a great way to keep learning and maintain my French skills.”

COMMENTS FROM YEAR 1/YEAR 2 FSL TEACHERS





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