

‘Action Plan for Official Languages 2018 – 2023’

The federal government revealed Investing in Our Future 2018-23 Action Plan for Official Languages announcing the investment of \$499 million (\$2.7 billion over 5 years) into Canada’s Official Languages. The Plan states that between 2003 and 2013, Canada saw a 52% increase in French immersion enrolment, although access is unequal across the country. It sets an objective to increase the bilingualism rate of the Canadian population to 20% (from the existing 17.9%) by 2036. As a common roadblock to FSL programming is the lack of qualified teachers, an investment of \$31.29 million in recruiting and retaining teachers for French immersion and French as a second language was announced.

CURRENT SITUATION

The promotion of the cognitive, cultural, economic and employment benefits of learning French as a Second Language (FSL) has contributed to the rising enrolment in FSL programs. Parents expect their children to be able to fully participate in the public and cultural life of our bilingual country. Canadian Parents for French has long monitored the situation and struggles of school districts / boards across the country in maintaining a sufficient supply of qualified French as a second language (FSL) teachers to respond to continually-increasing demand for French immersion programs as well as more core French and intensive French program options. Lack of data about the extent, location and the reasons for FSL teacher supply problems makes it difficult to effectively address supply and demand issues. Some of the following recommendations remain unchanged from the past, but we have compiled some new calls to action that we hope will yield results.

MAIN CHALLENGES IDENTIFIED

- FSL graduates are often unaware of the demand for and attractions of becoming a FSL teacher.
- Too small a population of French-speakers outside of Quebec to meet current demand for French second language teachers.
- Too few FSL teacher candidate spaces in some faculties of education to meet current demand. Too few applicants to fill the spaces in others.
- Too few post-secondary students meet the French-language proficiency requirements of FSL teacher education programs.
- Too few FSL teacher education graduates are relocating within or outside of their home provinces.
- FSL teachers move to English programs in response to often difficult working conditions.
- There is a lack of information about the extent and location of FSL teacher supply and demand problems.
- FSL education not a demonstrated priority by provincial/territorial governments and school boards / districts.

CALLS TO ACTION

Government of Canada

- Establish and implement a communications plan to help interested FSL teachers better understand the opportunities available across the country;
- Increase funding for the educational and professional development needs including language and cultural exchanges;
- Establish a comprehensive pan-Canadian website for interested job seekers to register their profile and apply for openings for teaching positions and post FSL teaching positions on the Canada Job Bank;
- Meet the request that the level of francophone immigration outside Quebec be increased to 5% and maintain the Express Entry System that now assigns additional points for candidates with strong French language skills;
- Develop and maintain a national registry of newly-qualified FSL teachers/teacher candidates enrolled in FSL teacher education programs, and faculty of education spaces for FSL teacher education to provide better understanding of where the FSL teacher needs and gaps exist (via Statistics Canada).

Council of Ministers of Education, Canada

- Include French-language post-secondary education in the next Official Languages in Education protocol for agreements for minority-language education;
- Focus on measures to encourage interprovincial/territorial mobility for students and graduates in the area of education; including possible incentives such as financial measures to offset tuition fees, professional education costs, as well as relocation costs;
- Establish Interprovincial agreements between the Ministries of Education to allow for the easy transfer and mobility of FSL teachers, reducing labour restrictions between provinces and territories.

Ministries of Education

- Promote opportunities for Grade 12 FL graduates to pursue post-secondary studies in French and post-secondary institutions;
- Establish mentoring and broad training support programs for internationally trained teachers to help them adapt and succeed in the Canadian FSL teaching context;
- Dedicate senior staff/manager position for FSL education and establish a provincial FSL advisory group which includes clear terms of reference and scheduled meetings with external FSL stakeholders to discuss FSL issues.
- Include standardized FSL teacher supply and demand data in the Protocol for Agreements for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction.

Ministries of Education and Faculties of Education

- Offer incentives to encourage enrolment in FSL teacher education programs.
- Fund more spaces in those faculties of education that are filled to capacity.

- Provide scholarships and bursaries to attract FSL teacher education candidates.
- Implement and expand the new agreement (Universities Canada, ACUFC and Embassy of France in Canada) to attract French citizens to Canada and encourage transferability of credentials.

Post-secondary Institutions and Faculties of Education

- Take measures to increase the availability of programs offering courses in French and establish an infrastructure of specialized services to support students from FSL programs who want to pursue their studies in French.
- Promote opportunities for FSL teaching in order to fill spaces within their own institution and elsewhere.
- Provide guidance to those applicants who do not meet entry-level proficiency thresholds so that they can continue to develop their proficiency and re-apply in the future.
- Loosen French-language entry requirements for teacher candidates entering in FSL teacher education programs and scaffold French-language learning toward high standard of proficiency by graduation.

School Districts / Boards

- Encourage immersion graduates to pursue some or all of their post-secondary studies in French to maintain proficiency levels and promote careers in FSL education.
- Address the often-difficult working conditions (such as not having one's own classroom) by providing a dedicated teaching space to all French immersion and core French teachers.
- Establish an incentives program such as possible financial measures to offset travel and housing costs for those willing to relocate to rural or underserved areas for a set period of time, e.g., 3 to 5 years;
- Offer more in-service professional development opportunities and allocate funding to encourage FSL teachers or those wishing to become FSL teachers to continue developing their French proficiency through district subsidy (e.g., for course fees, travel).
- Allow hiring short-term FSL teachers who hold a letter of permission.

FSL Stakeholder Organizations

- Canadian Parents for French to develop information for parents to support their child's FSL teacher.

CONCLUSION

Canadian Parents for French urges all stakeholders to implement recommendations flowing from current and historical FSL teacher supply and demand issues and invites the Department of Canadian Heritage and the Council of Ministries of Education Canada to include measures to monitor progress via future Official Languages in Education Program agreements.