

Status of Core French Teachers and Their Programs

Executive Summary, Focus Group Sessions

This Executive Summary provides a synthesis of the information gathered through six teleconference focus group sessions and one national networking activity day on the status of Core French teachers and Core French programs. The participants included provincial and territorial representatives from provincial language associations (9), the ministry of education (5), school district FSL consultants (4), school administrators (3), faculty of education professors (5), and core French teachers (8). The complete report presents results by province / territory, and by stakeholder group (teacher, school administrator, consultant, etc). The complete report is attached in Appendix A.

1. What are the existing working conditions and practices for teachers of Core French?

- There appears to be a combination of itinerant specialist teachers and those having their own classroom. Most often elementary teachers move from classroom to classroom, while high school teachers will have their own classrooms. Specialist teachers without designated teaching spaces cannot display support materials to create a French learning environment.
- Teaching space is not an issue for those elementary teachers who teach their own Core French within their own classrooms. This generalist approach is seen most often in the Western provinces and in rural areas. The most often cited reason that Core French is being delivered by unqualified teachers is a lack of specialist French teachers. Lack of training and support for these teachers is stated as a grave concern relating to the quality of the program being delivered and may be affecting the actual teaching time done in French and on the French subject (less than mandated time allotments actually being delivered).
- Isolation is noted as a factor for Core French teachers, especially in rural areas where they have less access to resources, and less chance to collaborate with other French teachers.
- Integration of special education students and lack of assistance for these students during Core French is noted as a cause for concern in programming, program delivery, and discipline.
- School funding formulas are cited as a priority for discussion: no classrooms are being allocated to Core French during construction of new schools (ON, NS) which affects available teaching space and program delivery.
- Varying entry points, large class sizes, varying student abilities, conflicts in time-tabling, lack of principal support, and multilevel / split grade classes are cited as other working condition issues.

2. What kind of support and resources are available to our teachers. Any access issues?

- Access to support and resources are issues in rural areas and at the elementary level.

- More PD is available when school district consultants are in place. Regional PD is growing, large scale is seen as too expensive. Core French teachers cannot always access PD activities because of the lack of qualified supply teachers to replace them during their absence.
- Mentorship programs depend on local initiatives.
- Summer language programs and bursaries are available to teachers to improve their language skills. There is a need to improve new teachers' knowledge of how to access these programs. Knowledge of and access to Official Language Monitor Program varies by province.
- Most Core French teachers do not have access to school computer labs. Priority is given to other subjects. Some have access to individual computers in the-classroom but not necessarily Internet access.

3. How is the Core French Program Valued in the Province?

- Overall it is perceived to be valued less than immersion and less than other subjects by all stakeholders.
- High attrition occurs as soon as the program is no longer compulsory due to competition from other languages offered and time-tabling conflicts with other courses such as science and math.
- Weaker students are being counselled out of French, as French is not a graduation requirement.
- Negative parental attitudes towards Core French are cited in most provinces. Parents who support French tend to choose immersion programs for their children.

4. What is the level of Core French Teachers Self –Esteem and Confidence?

| Level | NWT | BC | AB | SK | MB | ON | NS | NF | NB | PEI |
|--------|-----|----|----|-----|-----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| High | | | | X √ | | | * | | | |
| | * | | | | | | | | @ | |
| Medium | | * | * | @ | √ | * | X | * | * | |
| | | | @ | * | | | | | | @ |
| Low | | | | | X @ | X | | √ | X | |

- √ Admin
- @ Min Rep
- * Teachers
- X FSL Consultants

5. What is the level of student-teachers' self-esteem and confidence towards teaching FSL? Core French and Immersion

- The student-teachers' confidence grows after successful practica experiences. Those with a strong level of preparedness (linguistic courses, immersion stays, travel, varied work experience) feel more confident.

- Language proficiency is the barrier. Although the summer language bursary is available it is not counted for credit. Some exchanges are also available but are not recognized by the College of Teachers and exist only in certain provinces.
- Core French is often not looked upon favourably and this affects student-teachers' perceptions. They therefore seem to prefer going into teaching Immersion. A fear of teaching middle school Core French (Grade 7-8 students) is noted. Immersion is considered to be more interesting, to have more resources, and better students.
- A language proficiency test is used in some faculties of education settings, and extra help is offered to support student teachers. A course on a personal language portfolio which considers the development of the language learner as a speaker, learner, teacher is suggested as a positive support and may be a positive alternative to a proficiency test.

6. What type of follow-up support does your Faculty of Education provide to teachers? (province identified)

- One-week immersion course for methodology of FLS teachers in the summer is offered by the OMLO (Official Minority Languages Office, Ministry of Education) (SK).
- A graduate diploma for Core French teachers with few qualifications is offered which focuses on language competence and links participants with mentors in the field. It is provided over 2 years in weekend meetings and summer courses to mesh with working schedules (BC).
- Non-credit language and methodology programs are offered for Core French teachers (BC).
- Support and encouragement for teachers to participate in language courses offered through Quebec universities (Multiple).
- Additional qualification courses for methodology are offered in the evenings and in summer sessions. On-site courses are offered during the summer; Partial Distance courses are offered for FSL Part 1 (some on-line and some Saturdays meetings); and Full Distance On-line courses are offered for FSL Part 2 and Specialist Part 3 (ON).
- Graduate courses (French second language curriculum, language teaching and learning) are offered (ON).
- Individual support and mentoring with past students is provided through email and phone contacts by individual professors (ON).

7. Is there a Core French teacher shortage in the province? Is there teacher attrition to other programs?

- A shortage of qualified and competent teachers is reported across the country, with strong language proficiency noted as a concern. It is more difficult to attract proficient teachers to rural areas.
- Qualified teachers choose not to teach in FSL education due to difficult working conditions. They choose to teach in immersion or other specialized fields, or choose to stay in urban centres.
- A perception exists that not enough candidates are entering the profession to replace those leaving.

Summary:

A need to revitalize the Core French program was strongly identified. Focus on developing language competency of teachers to enhance their confidence in teaching, hire qualified teachers for all levels of Core French, address teaching space issues to improve learning conditions, provide better access to resources and technology to enhance the learning experience were all identified as solutions for this point. Participants noted that providing adequate training and assistance to teachers was necessary, at the same level of access as teachers of other subjects and of immersion.

An isolation factor continues to plague the Core French teacher who is not always attuned to new resources, language bursaries or other types of support. Core French teachers have less access to support than their colleagues as noted by the lack of availability of supply teachers when needed. Core French teachers continue to feel like second class citizens when compared to their colleagues.