

## **The Depreciated Status of FSL Instruction in Canada**

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### **Abstract**

An analysis was conducted of relevant documents published by federal and provincial governments and other French as a Second Language (FSL) stakeholders to examine whether governmental and school board policies are contributing to the general decline in status of FSL instruction in Canada. Federal documents published by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Canadian Heritage, and other branches of the Government of Canada were included in the analysis, as were provincial documents produced by Ministries of Education. Published documents by several FSL stakeholders such as Canadian Parents for French were also included in the analysis, as were conversations held between the researcher and school board officials. The analysis demonstrated that drastic cuts to federal funding of FSL programs, inconsistencies in programming within and amongst provinces, and a general lack of respect for FSL studies at the school board level have all contributed to the message that French is a subject of lesser importance in Canada.

## **Introduction**

In the second half of the 20th century Canada moved to address its dual language nature by seeking to raise a new generation of Canadians who can communicate with each other in either French or English (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1973). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, after the introduction of the promising French immersion<sup>1</sup> model of language teaching, the focus of federal support for language programs shifted away from adult Canadians and towards Canada's youth (Ministry of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1998).

Although some federal support exists for FSL programming, education policy is mainly determined at the provincial level in Canada. As demonstrated in Canadian Heritage's 2003-2004 Annual Report on Official Languages (Canadian Heritage, 2005a), provincial governments have made progress in entrenching second language (L2) education policies in their official policies on education. The number of English-speaking students studying FSL outside of Quebec has, as a result, increased substantially from 1,489,537 students in 1970-1971 to approximately 2 million in 2002-2003. The increase in bilingualism specifically amongst English-speaking Canadians outside of Quebec has also been impressive. While only 7% of Anglophones outside of Quebec between the ages of 15 and 24 were bilingual in both official languages in 1971, the percentage had more than doubled to 14.7% by 2001 (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2005).

Despite the success of FSL programs in elementary and secondary schools across Canada, there is growing concern about their future. Numerous studies have indicated a general decline in the status of FSL instruction in Canada (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, 2004; Canadian Heritage, 2005a; Canadian Parents for French, 2004a). School boards across the country are struggling to recruit and retain qualified FSL teachers (Canadian Parents for French, 2002; 2004b; Macfarlane & Hart, 2002; Turnbull, & Lawrence, 2002). French teachers are growing increasingly frustrated over poor working conditions (Edgar, 1995; Richards, 2002), and

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<sup>1</sup> FSL program where French is used for the teaching of other subjects as well as French language arts during the entire school day or a significant portion thereof (Canadian Parents for French, 2003).

student attitudes toward the study of French in Canada are increasingly negative (Kissau, 2005; Netten, Riggs, & Hewlett, 1999).

### **Purpose of Study**

Given these reported concerns, it could be argued that governmental and school board policies undermining FSL programming in Canada's elementary and secondary schools are further contributing to this general decline in status. The purpose of this study was thus to examine relevant documentation published by both federal and provincial governments, as well as other FSL stakeholders to determine what kind of message these documents are delivering in regard to the status of FSL instruction in Canada.

### **Method**

A variety of documents were analyzed. Although education is under provincial jurisdiction in Canada, FSL instruction is heavily influenced by federal funding and policies concerning both of Canada's official languages. For this reason, provincial and federal documents were examined. Key federal documents examined included those produced by the Department of Canadian Heritage, and the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The Department of Canadian Heritage works to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society and administers the Official Languages Support Programs. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages ensures recognition of the status of English and French (Canadian Parents for French, 2005). The analysis of documents published at the provincial level focused on those produced by the various ministries of education, including the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, an organization which is composed of the Ministers of Education and Training for Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. Published documents by several FSL stakeholders, most notably Canadian Parents for French, were also included in the analysis. Canadian Parents for French is a national network of volunteers which is dedicated to the promotion and creation of French second language learning opportunities for young Canadians (Canadian Parents for French, 2005). Documents produced by researchers in the area of second language acquisition and

conversations held between the researcher and school board officials were also included in the analysis.

Conversations were included in the document analysis to allow for the incorporation of both quantitative and qualitative data. The significant amount of quantitative data collected in the published documents was useful in analyzing funding and enrolment trends. On the other hand, the qualitative data obtained from the conversations, being verbal in nature, afforded deeper insights and perspectives on the topics that emerged from the quantitative data analysis.

### **Results**

Three major themes appeared to emerge from the data analysis. Concerns were frequently being raised by school board employees, FSL stakeholders, and even government officials pertaining to the funding of FSL programs, Ministry of Education requirements, and school board procedures.

#### **Funding of FSL Programs**

Since 1993 there have been drastic cuts to the federal government's Official Languages in Education Program (OLEP), which provides funding to provinces and territories to help with the costs of L2 programs. The 1988-1993 OLEP budget was set at 988.3 million dollars. Approximately 338 million dollars from this total was allocated specifically to FSL instruction. In the 1993-1998 budget, just over 880 million dollars was provided by OLEP, and approximately \$255 million of this sum was set aside specifically for FSL. In the most recent budget (1998-2003), the federal government provided \$684 million for this program, a decrease of over \$300 million from the budget set 10 years earlier. Approximately \$228 million of the 1998-2003 budget targeted FSL instruction, constituting a reduction of over 30% from 1988-1993 (Canadian Heritage, 2003).

It has been noted that the reduction in federal funding has already affected the stability and quality of French immersion and core French programs across the country (Ministry of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1998). Faced with decreased federal support, provincial governments across Canada have been forced to make difficult and often controversial

decisions in regard to FSL programs. Ontario demonstrates the adverse effects of these cutbacks. The Ministry of Education in Ontario no longer provides financial support for core and extended French<sup>2</sup> programs from kindergarten to Grade 3. As a direct result, many school boards across the province of Ontario no longer offer core French instruction in the primary grades. It should be noted that core French provides over 90% of non-French speaking students across Canada with their exposure to French (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2004, 2005). Its elimination at the primary level is, therefore, troublesome.

Further indicative of budget cuts, at the Ontario Ministry there is now only one education officer who carries responsibilities for FSL curriculum and policy, along with other responsibilities. The last brochure published by the ministry to provide information on FSL programs was published in the early 1980s, and FSL research by or in boards has not been funded for many years. In an article exploring the research agenda for FSL in the 1990s, Lapkin and Swain (1990) attested to the detrimental effects of such inadequate research. The researchers reported that the lack of research investigating characteristics, problems, resources, and services available in French immersion was particularly problematic. More than 10 years later in a document published by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, Lapkin (2003) stressed that research in FSL instruction remains inadequate. According to Lapkin (2003), no research yet addresses the more demanding expectations of core French, current expectations have generally not been tested, and there is no evidence to suggest that the expectations listed in policy documents are even realistic. Furthermore, while numerous studies have reported an FSL teacher shortage, very little research has been done to investigate the working conditions of such teachers (Edgar, 1995; Richards, 2002). The reduction of FSL programming in Ontario due to budget cuts has also resulted in most boards deciding to eliminate FSL consultants as a cost-cutting measure (Canadian Parents for French, 2000). In the 2004 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Commissioner was highly critical of these many setbacks encountered within the official languages program, as a result of the budget cuts of the 1990s (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> A type of special core French program designed to provide additional exposure to French. French is the language of instruction for one subject such as Social Studies in addition to core French (Canadian Parents for French, 2003).

In an effort to reverse many of the negative effects brought on by budget cutbacks and to revitalize official languages in Canada, in 2003 the administration of former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien allocated \$751.3 million, over a 5 year period, as part of the Federal Action Plan. The goal of the Action Plan is to double the percentage of bilingual students in Canada graduating from high school by 2013. As part of this plan, \$381.5 million was committed to official languages education in all provinces and territories (Government of Canada, 2003). A more detailed breakdown of how this funding is to be allocated is provided in Table 1. Although \$137 million have been allocated as part of this plan for second language instruction, it must be remembered that these funds are for the teaching of both of Canada's official languages. As many aspects of the Action Plan are still being negotiated, the amount of money earmarked specifically for FSL instruction has yet to be announced (Canadian Heritage, 2005b).

**Table 1**  
**Federal Action Plan Funding of Official Language Education**

Area Targeted	Funding
Minority Language Education	\$209 million
Second Language Instruction	\$137 million
Summer Language Bursary Program	\$24 million
Official Languages Monitor Program	\$11.5 million

The absence of any mention of this additional funding by the federal government since the retirement of Jean Chrétien has produced a growing amount of anxiety amongst FSL stakeholders across the country. However, it was confirmed in the House of Commons on February 18, 2004 by Pierre Pettigrew, former Minister of Official Languages that the Government of Canada will fully respect the funding allocated to the Action Plan for Official Languages (Government of Canada, 2004).

Any relief following such reassurance, however, may be premature. The former Minister of Official Languages stated that the additional funding provided by the Action Plan would be negotiated with provincial Ministries of Education in conjunction with the regular budgeted funding provided via the Official Languages in Education Program (Government of Canada, 2004). As previously demonstrated, there have been drastic cuts over the past 10 years of approximately \$300 million to this program. If this trend continues for the next 5-year-period (2003-2008), and if the two sources of federal funds are combined, any additional funding for FSL programming may in fact be greatly reduced.

Even with the prospect of additional funding, skepticism on the part of FSL stakeholders remains high. Additional funding for FSL programs, as made evident by the Ontario Ministry of Education for the 2003-2004 school year, does not always translate into significant increases for classroom expenditures. Following the Rozanski Report, which called for increased funding for education in Ontario, language grants to school boards were increased across the province (Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 2003). Funding for core French students at the elementary level increased from \$229 per pupil to \$244 per pupil. This increase in funding, however, must be viewed cautiously. Close examination of the funding formulas reveal that under the previous formula which entitled boards to \$229 per pupil, a day of core French instruction consisted of 20-50 minutes (Government of Ontario Press Releases, 2000). Under the new formula, however, the length of instruction has been increased to 20-59 minutes per day. This \$15 increase per student could, therefore, be somewhat deceiving. At the secondary level, the increase is even less significant. For core French students in Grades 9-10, school boards previously received an additional \$57 per credit (Government of Ontario Press Releases, 2000). For the school year 2003-2004, this amount was increased to \$62 per credit. What makes these small increases at the elementary and secondary levels even less significant is that it is specifically stated in Ministry of Education documentation that the increased funding is in large part to compensate for increased teacher salaries (Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 2003). These increases, thus, do not necessarily go towards improving FSL programming.

A great deal of skepticism exists on the part of FSL stakeholders in regard to how and where funding for language programs is spent. A search of relevant documentation from such

stakeholders as Canadian Parents for French (2003, 2004a, 2004b) reveals a call for greater transparency of spending at the provincial level of government. At the Ontario Second Language Education Stakeholder Consultation, held in March of 2004, it was stated that there is a need to improve accountability regarding how money earmarked for FSL programs is actually spent by the provinces. It was further noted that although the federal government may wish to improve the status of both official languages in Canada, education is under provincial jurisdiction, and provincial and federal goals may not necessarily be the same (Canadian Parents for French, 2004a).

Similar accusations of inappropriate spending of FSL funds have been brought against school boards (Canadian Parents for French, 2004a). Even in the presence of additional federal or provincial funding of FSL programs, decisions about where money is spent are made at the school board level, and many schools do not necessarily see the money spent on FSL instruction. In a study investigating the marginalization of core French teachers in Ontario, Richards (2002) stated that an example of the depreciated status of FSL instruction is evident in board policies that deny French teachers funds that are rightfully theirs. While this finding may not be representative of all school boards across Canada or Ontario, reports on the State of FSL in Canada do give this concern some credence. For example, a report by Canadian Parents for French (2000) stated that there is no system for tracking the use of funds to support FSL once they are received by school boards. A more recent report by Canadian Parents for French (2004b) further claimed that although information regarding the actual amount of funding provided to school boards is available, since FSL funding is folded into general school board revenue, it is not possible to accurately determine how the money is spent or if it actually reaches the FSL classroom.

### **Ministry of Education Requirements**

Unfortunately, the apparent lack of concern and respect for FSL programs in Canada goes beyond inadequate or inappropriate use of funds and extends to Ministry of Education requirements across the country. The Federal Government of Canada's goal of increasing bilingualism amongst its youth to 50% raises the question of why the study of French is not



mandatory, at least to some basic level, in elementary and secondary schools across the country. A review of documentation published by the various Ministries of Education (see Table 2) reveals that there is no consistency in FSL programs across Canada, and furthermore, that the study of French is not a national priority. For example, while the study of French is mandatory in New Brunswick to Grade 10, it is completely optional throughout elementary and secondary schooling in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta and compulsory at only a few grade levels in the other provinces and territories (Canadian Parents for French, 2004b; Macfarlane, 2003). Furthermore, little consistency in French programming appears to exist within provinces. Boards of education, working within provincial guidelines, frequently retain considerable discretion as to the extent of French programming they offer. In Ontario, for example, as of 1987 it has been mandated that core French programs begin no later than Grade 4, and that a minimum of 600 hours of instruction be accumulated by the end of Grade 8. As a result of such loose guidelines, a student's first year of core French instruction in this province can range from junior kindergarten to Grade 4. The resulting accumulation of hours of French instruction can therefore also vary from the mandated 600 hours to approximately 1100 hours of instruction (Calman & Daniel, 1998).

**Table 2**  
**Synthesis of Core French (CF) Program Characteristics by Province**

Province	CF Compulsory	Entry Points	Min # of Hrs to End of Gr.12.
BC	Grades 5-8	K, Gr. 4, or Gr.5*	no language
AB	no	many	no language
SK	no	many	no language
MB	no	K, 1, or Gr. 4**	no language
ON	Grades 4-9	K, 1, or Gr. 4**	1040
QC	K-Gr.11	K or Gr. 1**	1300
NB	Grades 1-10	K or Gr.1**	no language
NS	Grades 4-9	4**	no language
PEI	Grades 4-9	K, 1, or 4**	no language
NF	Grades 4-9	K, 1, or 4**	960

\*any second language, but usually French

\*\* usual entry point

In addition to having loose and inconsistent FSL requirements at the provincial level, some provinces like Ontario have made it increasingly difficult to study French at the secondary level. In Ontario, the fifth and final year of high school has been eliminated. Having to obtain 30 credits, 18 of which are compulsory, in a shorter period of time, leaves little time for the pursuit of optional courses, such as French. In Ontario, students are required to study French until the end of Grade 9. However, in the year French first becomes optional, i.e., Grade 10, students are only allowed three options. When tempted by a multitude of different and often intriguing courses, many students simply cannot find space in their timetables for French (Ministry of Education and Training, Ontario, 2004). Similar scheduling difficulties appear to be adversely affecting FSL enrolments across Canada. In 2004, Canadian Parents for French (2004b) surveyed 105 university students from across Canada for the purpose of exploring their attitudes to core French programs in elementary and secondary schools while experiences were still fresh in their minds. Of the students who did not continue studying French throughout high school, 17% cited a lack of space on their timetables as the primary reason for dropping French. A similar survey was conducted by the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation (2002) involving approximately 3000 students in Grade 11 who were no longer studying French in high school. Twenty-five percent of the respondents stated that their timetables did not permit them to enroll in French. Even more troubling is the message that such scheduling difficulties convey to students about the importance of learning French. As indicated by the words of an FSL teacher contacted during this study, the inaccessibility of French courses in high school is resulting in many students questioning the value of studying the language and thus, is contributing to the depreciated status of French instruction in Canada.

They are only allowed a very small number of options in Grade 10, so they are not really given the room to pursue language study. So a lot of them will say that French must not be a very important subject. How do we improve student interest in French? First the government has to provide the opportunity for them to study French. The government has to show students that French is an important subject.

According to a recent study by Canadian Heritage (2005b), the status of a program depends largely on provincial and territorial graduation requirements. An ensuing recommendation of the study to ensure Canadian students have the opportunity to complete all of their high school French courses was to grant these courses core status in their graduation requirements. Otherwise the courses that do have core status will take precedence over French, and students will continue to drop French for other subjects (Canadian Heritage, 2005b). Not surprisingly, during recent FSL stakeholder consultations in all provinces, it was strongly recommended that French be made mandatory throughout elementary and secondary education in Canada (Canadian Parents for French, 2004a).

Unfortunately, no greater consistency in regard to FSL studies or greater importance attached to such studies is found at the university level. While the University of Ottawa has a L2 admission requirement and Memorial University has recently introduced a L2 graduation requirement (Canadian Parents for French, 2004a), only in British Columbia do all universities have a language requirement for entry (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2004). Ironically, universities in the United States, where English is the only official language, have more stringent language requirements than do most universities in Canada (Brod & Huber, 1996).

It was recently suggested by a task force of FSL stakeholders investigating how to achieve the goals of the federal government's Action Plan, that the number of students studying French at the secondary level could be increased, if there were more opportunities for studying French at the post-secondary level (Canadian Heritage, 2005b). For this reason, Canadian Heritage (2005b) is investigating the feasibility of reinstating a L2 admission and graduation requirement at all Canadian universities.

### **School Board Procedures**

According to LeBlanc (1990), the success of FSL programs depends heavily on school board administrators and the value they place on FSL instruction. A study by Macfarlane and Hart (2002) investigating the FSL teacher shortage indicated that school administrations show a

general lack of commitment to French instruction. In the previously mentioned study by Richards (2002) it was reported that 70% of the 21 teacher-participants felt that most principals consider French to be either the least important subject or among the least important subjects. The second language classroom is often not given the same consideration in scheduling, timetabling, resource support, staffing, professional development, and level of importance to the general education of the students as other subject areas (Macfarlane & Hart, 2002).

The frequent lack of a stationary FSL classroom was also thought to be indicative of FSL's diminished status (Macfarlane & Hart, 2002; Richards, 2002). Often deprived of their own room, FSL teachers are forced to move with their teaching resources from classroom to classroom on a cart. A survey completed by 82 elementary FSL teachers in Ontario investigating teacher perceptions of the classroom setting on student attitudes to FSL found that only 53% had their own FSL classroom (Castagna, 1997). Richards (2002) reported that in some Ontario school boards **virtually** all core French teachers share classrooms.

Even when a specific FSL classroom is **allocated**, the conditions are often not conducive to learning or indicative of a valued program. French classrooms have been located on gymnasium stages, in the back of libraries, and in large broom closets (Richards, 2002). In fact, while collecting data for this study the researcher came across an FSL class being taught in a kitchen.

The depreciated status of FSL instruction also appears at the school board level in the form of lack of encouragement to study the language. The 2004 Annual Report by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages specifically states that schools must do more to encourage English-speaking students to study French. The report goes on to say that a better job must be done explaining and promoting the benefits of bilingualism in Canada (Office of the Commissioner of Official languages, 2005). In the previously mentioned survey conducted by Canadian Parents for French (2004b), when the students who had taken fewer than four years of core French in high school were asked if they had been encouraged by guidance counselors or other school administrators to continue studying French, 77% said they had received no encouragement, 17% reported having received minimal encouragement, and 6% could not remember.

Although no demographic information was provided for the students who participated in the above-mentioned survey, the failure of schools to encourage students to study French is particularly blatant in regard to male students. Far from encouraging their male students to study French, school board scheduling procedures can actually make it difficult for males to take French after Grade 9. During a conversation between the researcher and the Director of Education of a southern Ontario school board it was learned that guidance counselors, with the help of a widely-used computer program, schedule Grade 9 and Grade 12 courses into school timetables first. This system allows schools to provide Grade 12 students with the courses they require to graduate without scheduling conflicts, and to accommodate the varied courses offered to Grade 9 students. Courses offered in Grade 11 are then scheduled, followed by Grade 10 courses, including French. The result of this scheduling protocol is that by the time Grade 10 courses are addressed, there are very few time slots available, and conflicts are unavoidable. It was further explained that since most males do not take French after Grade 9, courses that are traditionally very popular with boys, such as Physical Education, are offered in the same time slot as French. Following this school board logic, only those few boys that were interested in taking both French and Physical Education classes would have scheduling conflicts, and would have to make a decision which course to take. A modern language department head working for this same school board vented his frustration with such scheduling: "I mean what would a boy rather take, Grade 10 French or Co-ed Phys. Ed? I mean, come on!" While again emphasizing such scheduling procedures may not be representative of all school boards across Ontario, it was felt by the Director of Education in this case that software programs, such as the one used by the school board, as well as the board's scheduling protocol, are quite common in high schools. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that school board practices across Ontario and perhaps across Canada compel many male students to make difficult decisions, usually to the detriment of FSL enrolments. While the Director of Education refuted the notion that guidance counselors intentionally discourage male students from taking French in Grade 10, she admitted the result of such scheduling procedures did disadvantage male students who wished to study French beyond Grade 9.

It is apparent that the diminished status of the FSL instruction made evident at the federal and provincial levels of government is reflected in the treatment of French programs, and the working conditions of French teachers at the school board level. Whether this depreciated status manifests through school boards allocating FSL funds to other areas deemed perhaps to be more important, through French teachers being required to share classrooms and push their teaching materials from class to class on a cart, or through administrators indicating French language instruction as “spares” on teaching schedules, the demeaning effect on the status of the French language remains problematic. The results of a survey completed by 274 FSL teachers across Canada demonstrate this point. Over 60% of responding teachers felt that the working conditions of FSL teachers were worse than those for teachers of other subjects (Turnbull & Lawrence, 2002). Echoing this sentiment, Canadian Parents for French (2003), in a study on the teacher shortage in FSL, reported that working conditions must be improved for FSL teachers if these programs are to be successful. Unfavourable working conditions associated with core French were reported to create difficulties recruiting and retaining FSL teachers.

### **Implications**

Hope still remains for FSL programs in Canada. Recent attention drawn to FSL instruction brought on by the announcement of the Action Plan may help to elevate its status. In light of the federal government’s ambitious goal for 2013, there has been a growing amount of activity surrounding FSL education in recent months. In 2004, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages with Canadian Parents for French, the Privy Council, and Canadian Heritage held a symposium of FSL stakeholders uniting representatives of education, business, the media, arts, culture, and sport to discuss how to achieve the goals of the Action Plan (Shea, 2004). Later that same year, Canadian Parents for French, in conjunction with the Privy Council, conducted provincial/territorial consultations to discuss recommendations made during the symposium (Canadian Parents for French, 2004a). A large-scale study was also commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage to examine issues related to FSL instruction in Canada and to suggest the best possible course of action to achieve the goals of the Action Plan (Canadian Heritage, 2005b). Some of the many resulting recommendations of the study include creating a national body comprised of a variety of interest groups to oversee the progress of the Action

Plan, developing a common measure of FSL achievement, overhauling core French and French immersion programs, particularly at the secondary level, and expanding Intensive French<sup>3</sup> programs for core French students. In order to make French more appealing to students, it was also recommended offering more French language bursaries and a national certificate to students staying in French. Initiating an advertising campaign promoting the benefits of learning French and the advantages of bilingualism in Canada was also suggested. Greater use of technology, increased research into FSL education issues, and incentives to recruit and retain FSL teachers were also thought to be essential in achieving the goals of the Action Plan.

While acknowledging the importance of such exploratory studies, to achieve the goals of the Action Plan and to elevate the status of FSL instruction there is clearly a need to move beyond recommendations and towards implementation. Although the government still has several years to achieve its goal of doubling the percentage of bilingual students by 2013, the students who will graduate in 2013 are already in the system. There is, thus, a need for action. Concern has already been raised about the lack of significant progress in the first year of implementation of the Action Plan. In the 2003 Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Commissioner referred to the Action Plan's slow pace of progress, lack of momentum, stagnating negotiations on federal and provincial agreements, and an accountability framework that is still being developed (Commissioner of Official Languages, 2004). In the 2004 Annual Report the Commissioner went on to say that the delay in the allocation of funds under the Action Plan have put in doubt the reaching of its objectives (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2005).

In fairness to Ministries of Education across the country, a number of isolated steps to improve FSL education have, in fact, been initiated. In Alberta, for example, where at the present time FSL is completely optional throughout elementary and secondary schooling, a new policy is to be implemented starting in 2006 requiring the study of a L2 from Grades 4 to 9 (Government of Alberta, 2004). Although the L2 does not have to be French, it is believed that French will be the L2 most frequently chosen (Canadian Parents for French, 2004b). Initiatives to provide greater

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<sup>3</sup> A type of core French program that provides students (usually in Grades 5 or 6) with a concentrated exposure to an activity-based core French curriculum during a short period of time (usually 5 months) (Canadian Parents for French, 2003).

access to more varied FSL courses have also been undertaken in provinces such as New Brunswick, British Columbia, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador (Canadian Parents for French, 2003, 2004b).

Despite the recent improvements, it would seem that the years of cutbacks and the years of neglect endured by FSL programs have started to take their toll. After 2 decades of increasing enrolment in FSL programs across Canada, as demonstrated in Table 3, the number of students presently enrolling in FSL has actually begun to decrease (Canadian Parents for French, 2003). Between 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 the number of core French students decreased in every province and territory. During this same time period core French enrolment dropped by 25,000 in Ontario alone (Government of Canada, 2003). In 2004, core French enrolment has continued to decline. In every province and territory except Prince Edward Island core French enrolment has decreased from 2003. Nationally, core French enrolment declined by over 28,000 students in 2004 (Canadian Parents for French, 2004b).

**Table 3**  
**Core French Enrolment in Canada**

	Enrolment (2001-2002)	Change From Previous Year
Elementary	1,193,983	-32,721
Intermediate	246,514	-5,868
Secondary	215,746	-9,254
Total	1,656,243	-47,843
% Change		-2.8

(Canadian Parents for French, 2003)

Canada's widely respected French immersion programs have also been adversely affected. The rapid growth in French immersion of the 1970s and 1980s has not continued throughout the 1990s. French immersion enrolments across Canada have for the first time reached a plateau (Canadian Heritage, 2005a; Canadian Parents for French, 2003, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2005). While enrolment in French immersion is growing at the elementary



level, it is decreasing at the secondary level. Statistics reveal that often these students are not continuing with French immersion instruction throughout their secondary education (see Table 4). This researcher's own experience teaching French immersion at the elementary level for the past 10 years supports these statistics. In fact, during conversations with school board officials at secondary schools that offered French immersion programming, it was noted by the researcher that many French immersion classes were being held simultaneously with other FSL courses due to very small numbers of students. In the previously mentioned conversation between this researcher and the Director of Education of a school board in Ontario the issue of secondary enrolment in French immersion programs was addressed. During this conversation further concern was raised about the future of French immersion education in Canada. With the growing costs associated with French immersion programming and dwindling class sizes at the secondary level, the viability of the program has been seriously called into question. Of even greater concern, the prospect of eliminating French immersion at the secondary level raises doubts concerning the viability of the program at the elementary level as well. As mentioned by the Director of Education, French immersion programming aims to have students continue with the program and graduate in Grade 12 bilingual in both English and French. If students are leaving the program at the end of Grade 8 before having reached the desired level of French proficiency, the goals of the entire program are greatly undermined. While this issue may not be indicative of all school boards across the province or country, the data provided in Table 4 do suggest that the problem is widespread.

**Table 4**

**French Immersion Enrolment in Canada**

	Enrolment (2001-2002)	Growth From Previous Year
Elementary	198,284	3,120
Intermediate	36,629	530
Secondary	54,121	-715
Total	289,034	2,935
% Change		1.0

(Canadian Parents for French, 2003)

## **Conclusion**

Of course there are many factors that influence a student's decision to continue studying French throughout secondary school, and declining FSL enrolments cannot be attributed solely to the depreciated status of FSL instruction made evident in this document analysis. However, it is in light of the many factors influencing student interest in learning French that attention must be paid to the status of FSL instruction in Canada. When students are struggling to decide which courses to take amongst a variety of options, the message that one course is of lesser value than the others can make the decision much easier. The FSL stakeholders consulted in this study were unanimous and adamant that enrolment in FSL would increase if the government and school boards placed greater value on learning the language. The following statement by a participating modern language department head exemplifies this idea:

One of the number one reasons why I didn't ever want to teach grade school French is because walking around as a professional with a cart or a big basket is insulting. The French teacher isn't appreciated as a professional. There is like a hierarchy. "Who is the French teacher? Oh, she's the one who gives our teacher her prep." Or if a kid has to make up a test, that's okay. "We'll take him out of French class to do it." I think the teacher and the subject is demeaned, and the kids get this message.

The present state of FSL in Canada, when compared with other subjects like math and science, is one of second class status. When a subject is thus diminished at the federal, provincial, and school board levels, it is of little surprise that students would understand it to be a subject of lesser value.

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