



**Senate Committee on Official Languages**  
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In collaboration with  
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## BACKGROUND

The British Columbia Association of Teachers of Modern Languages (BCATML) is a 45 year old Provincial Specialist Association (PSA) of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF). We work in partnership with the BCTF and other second language associations, such as the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT), to promote, support and advance the teaching and learning of second languages and cultures in BC.

## CONTEXT

I want to underscore that public French education is delivered in three main ways in British Columbia. Firstly, there are French public schools which offer instruction completely in French to Francophone children in the French School Board known as the Conseil Scolaire Francophone (CSF). Secondly, there are French Immersion programs which offer instruction completely in French to non-French speaking children. These programs can start in Kindergarten or in grade five. Thirdly, there are classes known as French as a second language (FSL) or Core French classes. It is the teachers of these courses whom I represent today. In BC, this program is mandated to begin in Grade 5; however, school districts are not necessarily required to offer Core French in Grade 5 and may opt to offer a different second language such as Mandarin, Punjabi or other language depending upon the cultural make up found within the local school community. Elementary students can study anywhere between 40 and 120 minutes of French per week, but there is no prescribed minutes of instruction for Core French at the elementary level. In some districts, elementary Core French instruction is offered by a specialist teacher, but in nearly all districts there are generalist elementary teachers delivering this class. Usually, but not always, a qualified specialist Core French teacher delivers secondary level French courses.

## RESEARCH

In 2007, BCATML and BCTF conducted a comprehensive provincial survey of French as a second language (FSL) teachers regarding the contexts and characteristics of French instruction in BC. More than 800 teachers answered questions regarding their teaching context, education, experience, support they received from stakeholders, resources, and their preferred forms of professional development. The resulting report written by Dr Wendy Carr entitled *Teaching Core French in British Columbia: Teachers' Perspectives* remains the only comprehensive wide-scale study that examines the state of Core French programs in BC. <http://www.bcatml.org/cfinbc2007.html>

## FINDINGS

The results of this survey were shocking. 78% of elementary FSL teachers reported that they did not feel comfortable conversing and reading in French, whereas 71% of middle years teachers reported they did not feel comfortable conversing in French. Pause for a moment to consider this. Three quarters of FSL teachers said they did not feel comfortable speaking French! What would have happened if it were Math teachers admitting that they did not feel comfortable solving equations? Or English teachers who did not feel comfortable reading and writing in English?

This speaks volumes to the quality of French as a second language instruction in BC. Our teachers, most noticeably at the elementary level, must rise to the challenge of achieving provincial learning outcomes despite low levels of proficiency, confidence and methodological background.

In addition, a review of **elementary & middle years teachers'** comments about the challenges they face in teaching core French showed, in order of frequency:

1. insufficient methodological or linguistic background
2. not enough time allocated to core French
3. inconsistent valuing of French by parents and the community at the elementary level
4. negative student attitude in the middle years
5. A need for professional development and collegial collaboration

The challenges articulated **by secondary teachers** were:

- articulation with earlier grades
- concern about retention rates of students
- access to quality up-to-date teaching resources
- maintaining competence in French

Taking this into account, BCATML's first recommendations would be to :

- require that all pre-service generalist/intermediate teachers take a French methodology course before being certified to teach French;
- establish a more rigorous screening process to ensure that new hires have a minimum fluency level similar to the screening process when hiring teachers for French Immersion;
- provide ongoing Professional Development opportunities for French teachers to maintain fluency and a connection to the culture of Francophone society; and
- facilitate networking and support of French teachers throughout Canada

## FUNDING

The French Federal Funds have been one of the key components supporting the success and sustainability of Core French to BC's students. This funding is fundamental to the continued development of bilingual Canadian citizens. However, we believe adjustments in the management and disbursement of those funds need to be made.

Some of our recommendations include:

- providing more teacher autonomy and control over the management and use of the French Federal Funds;
- requiring better scrutiny and accountability by school districts to the Ministry of Education explaining how the French Federal Funds were used and allocated;
- increasing funding for more cultural activities to occur in and out of the classroom; and
- allowing French Federal Funds to enhance cultural activities.

## INCENTIVES/RECOMMENDATIONS

Several Canadian jurisdictions have implemented programs based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) which can lead to certification called the DELF, the *diplôme d'études en langue française*. BCATML members have observed that a DELF certificate can provide a sense of accomplishment and achievement in students. If government were to fund DELF examinations for senior French students, this may help to foster a lifelong learner philosophy and encourage students to continue studying French at the post secondary level and into the workforce. Students would see that French studies have merit and that they are considered an asset.

Additionally, BCATML recommends that government fund teachers to undertake DELF examinations training. Not only would teachers' understanding and proficiency in French improve, there would be the added benefit of standardizing competency levels across BC in the five areas of language acquisition: reading, writing, listening, speaking and interaction.

## INTENSIVE FRENCH:

Finally, BCATML recommends that the government encourage and fund the Intensive French program. By making Intensive French training accessible to more French teachers, it will greatly help to improve not only their French proficiency in the areas of speaking, reading and writing, but it will also provide teachers with high impact strategies and methodologies in French classrooms.

## SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

In the area of Special Needs students, BCATML recommends that better supports be put in place to help retain students with special needs in French classes rather than withdrawing them and using that time to work with a Resource Teacher. The hiring and retention of French-speaking Resource Teachers and Special Education Assistants needs to be encouraged. Far too often, learning disabled and special needs students are removed from French classes simply because they are unable to access the support they need in French. Most resource support teachers lack any proficiency and/or skill with French. French can and should be for all Canadians who want to learn it. We make our classes rich and interactive which all students can enjoy.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, French as a second language courses in BC require a large injection of fluent speakers, training in the newest language learning methodology along with corresponding professional development, and finally easier access to the Federal Funds allotted to their programs in order to realize the full potential of BC students in their quest for bilingualism.

## TERMS AND ACRONYMS

FSL	French as a second language also known as Core French French for non-native speakers taught as an academic subject
Immersion	Schooling offered in French for non-French speaking children
Elementary	Grades K - 7 or K-5 (when there are middle schools)
Middle	Grades 6-8
Secondary	Grades 8-12
BCATML	The British Columbia Association of Teachers of Modern Languages
PSA	Provincial Specialist Association
BCTF	British Columbia Federation of Teachers
CASLT	Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers
Pro-D	professional development also known as continuing education
CEFR	Common European Framework of References for Languages
DELF	diplôme d'études en langue française these exams are based on the CEFR