

How will my child benefit by studying French as a second language?

In Ontario and throughout Canada, many jobs require skills in both French and English. Even when French is not a mandatory requirement, it can be an asset in any profession that involves interacting with the public. Students gain significant advantages when they speak more than one language. In addition to expanding employment options and the potential to earn a higher income, learning French as a second language helps to strengthen first-language skills and establishes a solid foundation for learning additional languages. Studies have shown that learning more than one language has a positive effect on the development of problem-solving and creative-thinking abilities. Additional personal benefits include a heightened appreciation for French culture in Canada and around the world, a broadening of global perspectives, and increased opportunities for international travel and study as well as a general understanding and acceptance of diversity.

How can I prepare my child for learning French as a second language?

Children are not expected to know any French prior to beginning Core French, Extended French, or French Immersion. Even if they do not know French themselves, parents can encourage their children to take an interest in French in various ways. Children might enjoy noticing and examining how French is used in their environment – for example, on packaging of food and household items. Some children might also enjoy listening to French children’s songs and rhymes, watching French children’s programming, videos, or movies, counting in French, or singing the alphabet in French. A positive outlook, a commitment to supporting your child’s education, and a belief in your child’s ability to learn provide a strong foundation for a positive experience in FSL.

How can I help my child succeed in learning French as a second language?

Being a positive role model can have a powerful influence on children. Showing your child that you value the learning of French is one of the most important ways to nurture your child’s motivation to do well. You can do this by periodically listening to French audio books with your child, watching French television or movies together, and talking about the many communities in Ontario, throughout Canada, and around the world in which French is spoken. Another way of showing that you value French is by learning along with your child. You may also find it useful to take part in social activities for learners of French or to join a parent group that supports FSL education. Such experiences can increase your confidence in contexts where French is used, and thus enhance your ability to support your child’s FSL learning.

Because literacy skills acquired in one language will transfer to another, seeing their parents reading in English or their first language can motivate children to read on their own, thus developing literacy skills in the languages they are learning. Taking children to the library, reading together, and encouraging them to read in French as well as English are further ways for parents to support the development of their children’s literacy skills.

Some children may be eager to share at home what they have learned in French at school, while others may feel uncomfortable if called upon to “perform”. Asking children to say something in French will not likely result in a demonstration of what they know, whereas encouraging children to read books and magazines in French, their own French compositions, or French labels on packaging shows that you value their French-language skills. You could also explore opportunities for your child to take part in

French activities beyond the classroom, such as school trips, camps, or visits and exchanges. It is always beneficial for children to see that French is the language used by many people in their daily lives.

How can I help my child understand the benefits of continuing to learn French until secondary school graduation and beyond?

Children should understand that it takes time to develop French-language skills. Like a novice athlete or musician, an FSL learner cannot be expected to master the required skills without instruction and practice over an extended period. Drawing attention to bilingual role models can motivate children to continue their FSL studies so that they become proficient in French.

It is important to discuss the benefits of having French-language skills with children when they are thinking about secondary school course options, or even earlier than that, so they can make decisions that do not close doors and limit their opportunities in the future. If children find it hard to see how French-language skills a positive impact on their chosen field of interest will have, parents can point out that there are institutions and jobs, both in Canada and around the world, that require French-language skills. Having a high level of proficiency in French can open a wider range of career opportunities.

What can I do if my child encounters difficulties in FSL?

If you are concerned that your child is experiencing difficulties, you should let the FSL teacher know so that together you can discuss what can be done to help your child's learning. Most children encounter challenges from time to time, but if your child is worried, frustrated, or expresses a concern about learning French, it could be the sign of an underlying problem that should be resolved as soon as possible. Children progress at different rates and learn in different ways, so teachers plan instruction and assessment taking into consideration the students' interests, learning styles, and previously acquired knowledge and skills.

Will my child be able to speak French as well as read, write, and understand it?

All students learning FSL are expected to develop skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The Core French program is intended to help students develop a usable command of the language, while Extended French and French Immersion, which offer more hours of instruction in French, provide opportunities for students to develop greater fluency. As in any other subject, the level of achievement will differ depending on the child.

There are many factors that influence the level of proficiency attained, but students normally progress from being able to use very simple language about themselves and familiar situations to being able to communicate about a broader range of topics, using and understanding increasingly complex language structures. Generally, the more time spent in French as a second language courses, the higher the degree of fluency and accuracy attained.

How might French Immersion programs differ at the elementary level?

There are many models of French Immersion programs in elementary schools since school boards have the flexibility to design programs to meet local needs. For example, boards decide the grade at which immersion programs begin as well as which subjects will be taught in French, and in which grade the instruction of literacy in English will begin.

What should my child consider when choosing FSL courses at secondary school?

Grade 8 students should reflect on their strengths, interests, and goals as they consider the course descriptions and expectations contained in the Ontario curriculum documents Secondary FSL Curriculum. Students may also find it helpful to discuss their choices with their current elementary FSL teacher and where possible a secondary FSL teacher.