

FSL for School Administrators

FROM AWARENESS to ACTION

From Awareness to Action is a professional learning publication to support school administrators in the strengthening of French as a Second Language.



ISSUE 10 Supporting FSL Teacher Language Proficiency in French

IN THIS ISSUE

the focus is on encouraging and supporting the ongoing language development of FSL teachers.

French programs, especially immersion, continue to grow in popularity. At the same time, school boards are struggling to find FSL teachers considered proficient enough to teach these programs. It is worthwhile for school boards and administrators to reflect on what is meant by language proficiency and what can be done to support ongoing language development for teachers. The hiring process can serve as an opportunity to assess a teacher's language proficiency as a starting point.

According to *Meeting Labour Market Needs for French as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario (OPSBA OLMP Year End Report 2021)*, 20% of new teachers surveyed reported a lack of confidence in their FSL teaching with one of the main contributors being a lack of confidence in their communication skills in French. Many educators fear not appearing “bilingual enough” or worry that their accent isn’t “good enough” (*Building Linguistic Security: Be Brave, Speak French!* 2020).

Using a growth mindset, how can administrators support linguistic risk-taking by staff?

The goal of the French as a Second Language program is communication and interaction “with growing confidence in French” (*The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language Revised, 2013, p. 6*). Focusing on communication in French and placing emphasis on the ongoing development of language is an important message to promote with staff and families. It is an opportunity to share a message of inclusion. Accents and vocabulary may differ. By recognizing and celebrating French diversity, we acknowledge the richness of the French language and foster a sense of belonging for all. It is also worth noting that proficiency levels of language identified in the ‘can do’ statements of the *Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)* also focus on the clarity and ability to communicate messages (*CEFR Companion Volume 2020*).

Learning a language is about communicating messages in the target language. By listening and engaging with French speakers from a variety of cultures, and in different contexts, staff and students will continue to develop confidence and proficiency in their language skills.



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WHAT'S MY ROLE?

How can I support the development and progress of teacher proficiency and confidence in French?

New FSL teachers ranked opportunities to use / improve French language skills among the top three professional learning needs (*Meeting Labour Market Needs for French as a Second Language Instruction in Ontario – OPSBA OLMP Year End Report 2021*). A teacher's lack of confidence and proficiency can undermine their ability to teach effectively and their sense of self-efficacy leading to lower job satisfaction and higher turnover (*OPSBA Developing a French-Language Proficiency Assessment Toolkit and Resource Guide*, Year 1, p. 19 **Developing a French-Language Proficiency Assessment Tool-Kit and Resource Guide**). Leadership Strategies to support the ongoing development of language proficiency and confidence for staff include:

- Promote the visibility of French throughout the school through signs and wall displays
- Include messages in school communications (e.g., newsletters, websites) that celebrate French language learning
- Establish a non-judgmental language environment that encourages “linguistic risk-taking” and that includes written as well as oral communication (e.g., email, notes, announcements)
- Support opportunities for collaboration with other FSL teachers on staff and beyond the school.
- Promote a culture of learning where mistakes are seen as essential to language improvement
- Model and encourage staff and students to speak in French inside AND outside the classroom
- Create opportunities for professional learning that occurs solely in French

Establishing a culture of language risk-taking is a whole school approach. It is important to invite the ideas from staff both individually and collectively as to how they see the promotion and encouragement of French communication in the school and their own language development.

Many FSL educators are on a language continuum and desire professional learning and opportunities to improve their French proficiency and confidence. This is especially the case for FSL teachers new to the profession. School administrators are encouraged to support French-language proficiency for their FSL teachers.



One article to read, one quote to consider, one link to click...

1. *CEFR: Common Reference levels – Qualitative aspects of spoken language use* – An at-a-glance chart of descriptors to help language speakers self-assess strengths and areas for growth [CEFR level descriptions](#).
2. “Educators may also experience linguistic insecurity, and this can have a direct effect on FSL programs if teachers don’t feel supported in and/or leave their French positions. Just as with language learners at any level, ongoing linguistic development is necessary.” Dr. Wendy Carr, UBC Education Professor & CPF National Board Director, *Be Brave, Speak French!*
Reflection question: As a school administrator, how do I model and demonstrate value for ALL French speakers?