

**Canadian Parents for French**

**Provincial and National French  
Second-Language Education  
Stakeholder Consultations**

**Yukon Consultation**

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## **Current State of French Education Services in the Yukon**

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Yukon ranks first nationally in per capita enrolment in core French education, and second when both core French and French immersion programs are considered. Since the 1980s, through a succession of administrations, there has been strong Government of Yukon support for French education.

Bilingualism is common in the Yukon. This is explained in part by the dominance of government in the economy. Since all levels of government offer services in both official languages, a high number of civil servants are bilingual.

Francophone culture in the Yukon benefits from the work of active community associations such as L'Association franco-yukonnaise (L'AFY), Les Essentielles, and Association des partenaires de l'école française (APEF). Partnerships between these groups, CPF, and the Department of Education help to bring francophone musicians, plays, and cultural events to the territory, which enhance educational opportunities in both immersion and core French.

The specifics of the Yukon's French education institutions are as follows:

- Yukon's early immersion program, with 268 students, (latest survey) is located at Ecole Whitehorse Elementary, which also houses the finest French immersion library in Western Canada.
- F.H. Collins High School in Whitehorse has 104 French immersion students, most of who have come up through the early immersion program.
- Ecole Emilie Tremblay, a kindergarten to Grade 12 French first language school in Whitehorse, has 110 students.
- A proposed pilot project to introduce late immersion would introduce 24 new students into the system at the Grade 6 level.
- In 2002, using professional marketing techniques, CPF Whitehorse was able to increase enrolment in French immersion kindergarten by 30%, a figure that translates into 24 students, an entire class. Today, numbers in kindergarten to Grade 1 are the highest they have been since 1989.

### **Priorities for French language education**

- Introduce a late French immersion component, as outlined in the pilot project.
- Continue to build partnerships within the francophone community, and with the broader Yukon community to enhance French language education services.

- In the longer term, improve numbers in core French.

### **Addressing challenges to French language education**

In the provision of French language services, the Yukon is an example to the rest of Canada. For more than 25 years, groups concerned with francophone culture and French language education have been developing a system of partnership, sharing, and open-mindedness to face the challenges of providing French language and cultural services to a remote area with a small population. As a result, French language and francophone culture are flourishing in ways that should be the envy of more populous centres. This spirit of cooperation is at the root of the territory's high standing in French language education.

Over time, the 2002 influx of students into the early immersion program will mean higher numbers throughout the system. More students will mean more programs available in French, and existing programs will continue into higher grades. In the long run, improved kindergarten enrolment will help to retain students in higher grades. In order to retain students, there is a need to provide interesting, challenging courses in French. The proposed pilot project for late immersion would inject 24 new students into the stream each year. Again, higher numbers mean more courses can be offered in French, which will help to fight student attrition in senior grades.

Many students are lost to the French immersion program in Grades 10 and 11, in part because not all the courses they need are available in French. Introducing late immersion, effectively doubling the number of French immersion students entering high school, will provide the numbers to justify offering more course in French.

The Yukon has a wealth of opportunities for high school students, including alternate programs such as Experiential Science and Music Arts and Drama (MAD). Some of the attrition from French immersion at the high school level is a result of students migrating to these very attractive programs. Strengthening French immersion numbers will make it possible to offer alternate programming in French, thereby increasing the number of French immersion students who will graduate. Experiential learning in French is well founded in Yukon. Continuing to support cultural activities from the Cabin a Sucre at Sourdough Rendezvous, to student trips to Quebec, will help to build enrolment and retain French immersion students.

Public support for French language education in the Yukon is high. Most Yukoners are aware of the advantages of core French and French immersion. Immersion students demonstrate a high level of academic ability in all subjects, and many continue on to post-secondary education. Bilingual graduates have more employment opportunities, particularly in the Yukon's government-heavy economy. Some French language students find summer work in the tourism industry.

Francophone culture is recognized as an asset to the local scene, and to the visitor industry. Public awareness of a vibrant francophone community helps to build support for French language education. Partnerships between CPF, L'AFY, Les Essentielles, and various levels of

government help to keep French language and culture alive in the Yukon. Cost sharing greatly increases the number of touring entertainers who perform both for the public and in the schools.

The Yukon business community recognizes the value of French language services. The *Annuaire des service en français au Yukon*, published by L'AFY, lists more than a hundred businesses and organizations that offer service in French.

## **Conclusion**

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For more than twenty-five years, CPF has been active in French language education in the Yukon. Core French, French immersion, and French first language studies have the support of the government and of the community at large. French education is available in all three streams from kindergarten to Grade 12. French language education benefits from a strong francophone community, from the Yukon spirit of openness, and from a willingness to work together. In order to realize goals for increased numbers of graduates in French, it will be necessary to maintain and improve upon current partnerships, to strengthen core French at all levels, and to increase the numbers of immersion students at the high school level by introducing a late immersion program.

## **Sources**

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An interview with Gilbert Lamarche and Mary Jane Warshawski, March 25, 2004

*French Second Language Education in the Yukon*, CPF (Whitehorse Chapter) June 2002

*Public School Enrolment 2003*, Yukon Bureau of Statistics.