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French language instruction in BC: An overview of student and teacher data

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French-as-a-first-language has long been a part of the education landscape of British Columbia and can be traced as far back as the mid-nineteenth century. Blouin (2007), for example, chronicles the existence of a French school operated by the Hudson's Bay Company in 1848 and identifies the many religious-based schools established during the 1860s to educate francophone children in French. But it was only with the advent of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 that minority-language education became a right in Canada, ensuring that francophone children in BC could receive primary- and secondary-school instruction in French.

Today, four French programs exist in BC. Programme cadre, now known as Programme francophone, was established in 1979 to instruct native-French-speaking students in their first language and by so doing help to maintain a strong cultural identity. Over the 28 years of its existence, the program has grown from an enrolment of 232 students in nine districts to over 3,800 students situated in twenty-four communities across the province. The program is administered by District #93, Conseil scolaire francophone, established for this purpose in 1995.

In addition to Programme francophone, three programs provide French-as-a-second-language instruction to BC students. French Immersion, a program for non-francophones, uses French as the language of instruction in order to develop functionally bilingual students who, after graduation, have sufficient language skill to pursue work or further education in either French or English. Further, the program aims to “strengthen links and increase understanding among French- and English-speaking communities in Canada” (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The Core French program for students in grades 5 to 12, is intended to “enable students to begin to understand and communicate in French, as well as to experience francophone cultures” (Ministry of Education, 2007). Second-language instruction is a required part of the BC curriculum for students in grades five to eight, and French is the language most frequently selected. However, there is no second-language requirement for high school

graduation, and students can choose to opt out of second-language instruction after Grade 8.

Table 1, below, shows enrolments in Core French, French Immersion and Programme francophone, with total provincial enrolments for comparison. There are no Intensive French enrolment data yet available. As shown, Core French has experienced enrolment decline at a greater rate than that of the overall public student population. Since 1995, Core French enrolments have declined by 13%, and overall school enrolments have declined by 3.5%. While it is not surprising that the Core French program enrolments would decline as the overall population declines, it is surprising that Core French enrolments have declined in greater proportion.

However, there have been significant enrolment increases in both French Immersion (up 32% since 1995) and Programme francophone (up 40% since 1995). While the overall numbers are comparatively small, they reflect a strong and growing population of British Columbians with a strong commitment to French language learning.

Table 1: Student headcount enrolments in French programs

Year	Core French	French Immersion	Programme Francophone	Total French language students	Total Public Enrolments
1995/96	246,218	30,065	2,727	279,010	609,252
2000/01	241,626	30,423	2,772	274,821	632,048
2005/06	216,510	38,009	3,632	258,151	599,506
2006/07	213,296	39,658	3,816	256,586	587,819

Note: Total public enrolments are from the ministry's Summary of Key Information, in order to provide comparable figures for previous years.

Table 2, below, shows the numbers of students by district for three of the French programs for the 2006–07 school year. Programme francophone students are registered and managed by the francophone education authority, Conseil scolaire francophone (District # 93), but are physically situated in thirty-eight schools across the province. There are nineteen 'stand alone' schools for French-as-a-first-language instruction, and an additional nineteen French-as-a-first-language schools are located within existing English-language schools.

The table also shows that French Immersion is available in all but 15 of the 59 geographically situated school districts, and Programme francophone is available in 22 of 59 districts. While program enrolments are increasing, the provincial distribution of enrolments suggests that more can be done to ensure access to intensive French language instruction in BC.

Table 2: Public student enrolments for French Programs and the province for 2006–07

SD #	District Name	Core French	French Immersion	Programme Francophone (District 93)	All Students
5	Southeast Kootenay	2,041	284	-	5,586.9
6	Rocky Mountain	1,331	207	-	3,385.5
8	Kootenay Lake	1,897	292	-	5131.9
10	Arrow Lakes	78	-	-	604.3
19	Revelstoke	613	-	-	1,173.4
20	Kootenay-Columbia	2,949	173	32	4,390.4

SD #	District Name	Core French	French Immersion	Programme Franco- phone (District 93)	All Students
22	Vernon	3,199	871	-	8,886.8
23	Central Okanagan	8,184	1,663	174	21,140.2
27	Cariboo-Chilcotin	2,035	333	-	6,075.5
28	Quesnel	1,523	250	-	3,902.1
33	Chilliwack	3,989	435	53	12,270.0
34	Abbotsford	7,115	1,134	-	18,711.1
35	Langley	6,984	1,394	94	19,020.1
36	Surrey	24,419	2,768	496	63,696.8
37	Delta	6,271	1,666	63	16,196.4
38	Richmond	7,221	2,350	69	22,415.5
39	Vancouver	19,915	3,942	711	55,420.7
40	New Westminster	1,953	700	-	6,514.8
41	Burnaby	8,711	1,636	-	23,981.3
42	Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows	6,482	1,425	-	14,857.7
43	Coquitlam	10,586	2,398	347	30,871.3
44	North Vancouver	5,951	2,010	193	16,883.6
45	West Vancouver	2,326	783	-	6,631.0
46	Sunshine Coast	1,478	-	134	3,682.3
47	Powell River	869	-	115	2,490.9
48	Howe Sound	1,559	270	137	4,294.9
49	Central Coast	68	-	-	286.9
50	Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte	174	-	-	754.5
51	Boundary	827	-	-	1,577.6
52	Prince Rupert	780	152	-	2,595.9
53	Okanagan Similkameen	1,246	-	-	2,765.9
54	Bulkley Valley	921	122	-	2,533.3
57	Prince George	5,476	661	144	14,931.6
58	Nicola-Similkameen	856	174	-	2,537.6
59	Peace River South	1,778	359	-	4,432.5
60	Peace River North	9,135	2,576	-	5,629.4
61	Greater Victoria	3,864	545	395	19,612.3
62	Sooke	3,864	545	-	8,502.1
63	Saanich	4,624	822	-	7,953.1
64	Gulf Islands	562	158	-	1,585.0
67	Okanagan Skaha	2,260	545	105	6,908.1
68	Nanaimo-Ladysmith	5,278	1,073	155	14,727.2
69	Qualicum	1,764	436	-	4,968.3
70	Alberni	2,150	282	-	4,359.6
71	Comox Valley	3,589	764	163	8,769.5
72	Campbell River	2,325	772	61	5,988.2
73	Kamloops/Thompson	6,671	776	54	14,528.9
74	Gold Trail	505	-	-	1,694.1
75	Mission	2,286	443	77	6,990.5
78	Fraser-Cascade	780	-	-	2,104.4
79	Cowichan Valley	3,900	531	-	9,028.2
81	Fort Nelson	395	-	-	998.1
82	Coast Mountains	2,109	342	44	5,504.5
83	North Okanagan-Shuswap	2,692	357	-	7,291.7
84	Vancouver Island West	222	-	-	440.8
85	Vancouver Island North	847	-	-	1,650.8
87	Stikine	25	-	-	270.5
91	Nechako Lakes	1,644	239	-	5,201.0
92	Nisga'a	-	-	-	536.0
93	Conseil scolaire francophone	-	-	3,816	3,745.5
Province		213,296	39,658	3,816	559,619.0

Table 3 shows changes in the numbers of teachers working in French programs in BC over the last four years. Because of data-reporting changes implemented by the Ministry of Education in 2003, no data are available that provide counts of teachers working in Core French programs. However, BCTF data provide counts of French language teachers working in French Immersion and Programme francophone. As the table shows, both programs have expanded their teacher workforce as student enrolments have increased.

Table 3: French language teacher headcount *

Year	Core French	French Immersion	Programme Francophone	HC of all teachers
2003-04	n/a	1,700	282	33,516
2004-05	n/a			33,314
2005-06	n/a	1,691	307	33,716
2006-07	n/a	1,803	336	33,865

* Counts are based on communication from locals with the BCTF; Core French program teacher counts are not available.

Table 4 shows the number of teachers in Programme francophone and French Immersion by district for the last two years. The distribution of teachers across the province reflects student enrolment in these programs, with teachers working in the same 15 of 59 districts. It is estimated that 16% of teachers in these two programs have a work assignment primarily or exclusively in Programme francophone.

Table 4: Number* of French Immersion and Programme Francophone (District #93) teachers by district, 2005–06 and 2006–07

SD #	District Name	2005-06	2006-07
5	Southeast Kootenay	15	15
6	Rocky Mountain	10	10
8	Kootenay Lake	12	12
10	Arrow Lakes		
19	Revelstoke		
20	Kootenay-Columbia	7	7
22	Vernon	44	40
23	Central Okanagan	65	71
27	Cariboo-Chilcotin	18	15
28	Quesnel	12	17
33	Chilliwack	18	15
34	Abbotsford	47	52
35	Langley	61	64
36	Surrey	108	118
37	Delta	65	68
38	Richmond	95	95
39	Vancouver	189	203
40	New Westminster	28	28
41	Burnaby	59	69
42	Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows	110	108
43	Coquitlam	103	110
44	North Vancouver	93	97
45	West Vancouver	28	30
46	Sunshine Coast		
47	Powell River		
48	Howe Sound	14	11
49	Central Coast		
50	Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte		
51	Boundary		

SD #	District Name	2005-06	2006-07
52	Prince Rupert	10	9
53	Okanagan Similkameen		
54	Bulkley Valley	5	8
57	Prince George	33	36
58	Nicola-Similkameen	12	9
59	Peace River South	16	16
60	Peace River North	14	16
61	Greater Victoria	109	120
62	Sooke	28	36
63	Saanich	39	41
64	Gulf Islands	6	6
67	Okanagan Skaha	17	18
68	Nanaimo-Ladysmith	49	52
69	Qualicum	21	23
70	Alberni	15	16
71	Comox Valley	31	33
72	Campbell River	33	37
73	Kamloops/Thompson	42	45
74	Gold Trail		
75	Mission	21	20
78	Fraser-Cascade		
79	Cowichan Valley	22	27
81	Fort Nelson		
82	Coast Mountains	20	21
83	North Okanagan-Shuswap	9	11
84	Vancouver Island West		
85	Vancouver Island North		
87	Stikine		
91	Nechako Lakes		
92	Nisga'a	11	11
93	Conseil scolaire francophone	336	358
Province		2,100	2,224

* Counts are based on communication from locals with the BCTF; Core French program teacher counts are not available.

The francophone teachers of BC are part of a significant francophone population in the province. According to the 2001 census data, French is the mother tongue (language first learned at home as a child and still understood) for about 1.4% of British Columbians, and about 7% of the population can conduct a conversation in both French and English. This means, using current population figures, that there is a community of about 60,000 francophone British Columbians and about 300,000 residents who speak both official languages.

Whether in support of first-language instruction, or in an effort to develop proficiency in both official languages, the French language programs in BC public education are essential. It is encouraging to see that despite significant enrolment declines in the BC public education system, both French Immersion and Programme francophone are strong programs well situated to support French language and bilingual instruction in BC. Furthermore, an innovative Core French model called Intensive French has been introduced in a number of provinces in Canada and is beginning to take hold in British Columbia. The program, implemented in Surrey school district in 2004, has shown promising results with “students speaking at a level equivalent to Grade 10 Core French and writing at the level of Grade 3 Québécois students” (Carr, 2007). Other districts in

the province are starting to notice and Vancouver is launching a pilot program in September 2007.

Teachers interested in exploring more about French language instruction in BC may contact the Association Provinciale des Professeurs d'Immersion et du Programme Francophone (APPIPC) or the BC Association of Teachers of Modern Languages (BCATML), through the BCTF Provincial Specialist Associations web page: bctf.ca/psas/.

Any questions about this research report should be directed to Colleen Hawkey at the BCTF Research Department (chawkey@bctf.ca).

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