

**Canadian Parents For French**  
**(Ontario)**

**Study of Transportation to**  
**French Immersion and Extended French Programs**  
**in Ontario School Boards**

**Fran Sutton**

**CPF (York Region Chapter)**

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## **Purpose of the Study**

To identify areas in the province where access to FSL programming is, or could be, adversely affected by a lack of transportation or the level of transportation provided by school boards.

## **Focus of the Study**

While there are other transportation factors which influence parents' or students' choices in FSL programming such as travel time on a bus, transferring, or taking a bus at all to school, this study focuses solely on whether or not a school board provides transportation which does not require an expenditure of money on the part of the student or the availability of a parent/guardian driver in order to get to and from a school or a bus stop. Hence, three broad categories emerge:

- board provided service
- partially board provided service
- no board provided service

## **Time Frame**

Data was collected during the 2000-2001 school year.

## **Method of Collecting Data**

- Written and phoned messages from FSL parents in response to a request for information (CPF, ON newsletter, Fall, 2000).
- Direct phone calls to FSL parents and to school boards resulting in conversations with a variety of board staff including a Board Chair, a Director and an Assistant Director of Education, a Manager of Finance, Superintendents in charge of French, French Consultants, Language Co-ordinators, Curriculum Co-ordinators, Transportation Heads (and assistants) and a principal of an Immersion school.

FSL parents and school board staff are invited to update CPF on any situations that change and parents are particularly invited to contact CPF if the description of their board's service does not fully reflect the reality that their children experience accessing FSL programs.

## Summary of Service Levels in First and Second Categories

### **1) Board Provided Service:**

Of the 55 boards (of 60) that offer programs in Immersion or Extended French, 40 have what can be considered “board provided service;” i.e., the student can get to school without financial cost to the family and without a parent/guardian driver. This category can include:

- Regular home to school service as is provided for the English stream students.
- School to school shuttle whereby a student arrives at his home school as a walker or a bused student and boards another bus to go to the Immersion centre. This works well, generally, but can present problems of co-ordination and timing between the arrival of a student’s English stream bus to his/her local school and the departure of the shuttle for the Immersion centre. A board has reported at least one student being unable to make this connection and having to rely on alternate means (i.e. parent driver) to meet the shuttle.
- Centralized pick up points which also work well as long as reasonable (for the age of the student) walking distance to the pick up point and safety issues are addressed.
- Use of public transit rather than school buses, where it is more efficient, with the provision of a pass or tickets. However, some Toronto parents have expressed concerns with safety on the TTC system, especially where younger students (Grades 6-8) are concerned.

Many boards use staggered start times to enable them to reuse buses with second and third runs. If the F.I. school is given either the earliest or latest time, a greater number of buses is then released for the other runs since the F.I. school, as a magnet location, is often the most heavily bused.

### **2) Partially Board Provided Service:**

**Twelve** boards fall into this category:

**Five** do provide the first category of service at the elementary level, K-8, but not at the secondary level. Of these five, one provides no service at the secondary level while the other four provide some service at the secondary level but not where adequate public transit exists; i.e., no tickets/passes are given. However, these latter four boards provide school bus service outside the public transit area or, in the case of at least one board, if the student resides outside 4.8 km.(even in a transit area) or where safety is considered by the board to be an issue. Also, some of these boards provide tickets/passes when needs criteria are met. This is, however, a concern to some parents who might not meet the needs criteria but for whom the transit cost is a problem, nevertheless. There are also situations in which a family might meet the needs criteria, but parents are too embarrassed to give details about their income. Thus, in some cases, the cost of transit can be a

disincentive to a student's participation in the FSL program if that student could attend a closer English stream school and, thereby, not incur a transportation cost.

However, staff members in the Ottawa-Carleton District and Toronto District Boards hasten to point out that this disincentive might not always apply in their cities. It appears that, in the core of Ottawa, the Immersion high schools are very close to each other, and in the suburbs, most high schools host the program. So, a student is less likely to incur a cost because he has chosen a French Immersion or Extended French program over an English stream program.

In Toronto, while the Immersion or Extended French high schools are not as numerous as in Ottawa, a staff member believes that in some areas, notably the south, most students purchase a TTC pass for other reasons such as getting to part time work or entertainment and are therefore not faced with making a decision regarding a French program based on a cost factor. Parents in the north, however, have expressed the opinion that, in that area, the cost of transit is, indeed, a hurdle for some in accessing the high school program.

**One** board in this category provides service for French Immersion at both the elementary and secondary levels but not for Extended French at either the elementary (Late Immersion) or high school level.

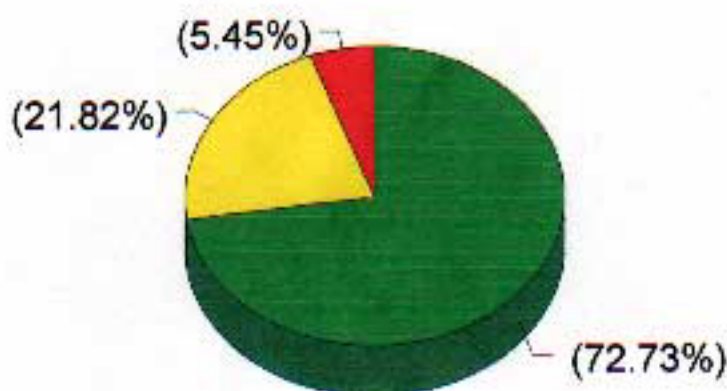
**Five** other boards in the second category make at least partial use of a system that has been dubbed by some transportation staff as 'piggybacking' on the existing English stream system. Others call it an 'empty seat' policy or a 'fill-up-the-bus' policy. If an F.I. student can get to a stop that is scheduled for an English stream student, and there is room on the bus, he/she may ride. This system has several weaknesses. The stop may not be within walking distance, thus requiring a parent/guardian driver. There may not be room on the bus. Also, in at least one board, the spot can be lost during the course of the F.I. program and even during the school year if the English stream student moves or graduates and therefore that stop is no longer part of the route or if a new English stream student moves into the area and bumps the F.I. student off the bus. In addition, there can be a question of which F.I. student gets the empty spot if only one is available.

**One** board in this partial provision category has a policy for French Immersion busing that it describes as 'express' and 'direct main roads only.' While students are guaranteed a spot on the bus, the distance to the stop can be beyond walking distance in the urban area and as far as 20 km. from home in the rural area. Thus, this system often requires a parent/guardian driver to reach the bus stop.

It should be noted that, in the pie graphs on the following page, (p.6), some of the boards in the partial service sections (21.82 %) do have what this study categorizes as 'board provided service' for some of their students; for instance, elementary vs. secondary, urban vs. rural or F.I. vs. Ext. Fr.

# Level of Service

Across the Province

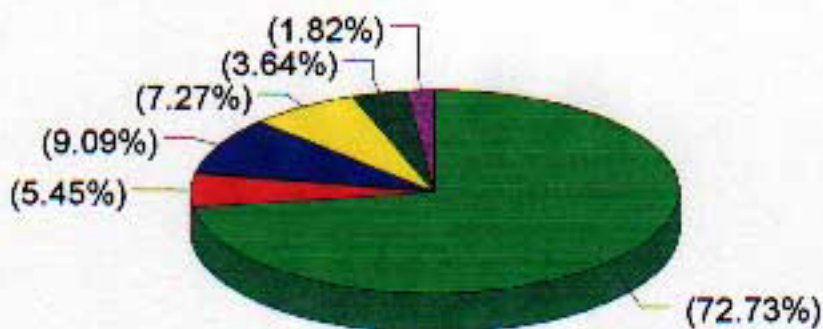


Expressed as a percentage of 55

- Board Provided Service
- Partially Board Provided Service
- No Board Provided Service

# Level of Service

Includes Breakdown of Partial Service



- Board Provided Service
- No Board Provided Service
- Piggyback Service
- No Board Provided Service Where Public Transit i.e. No Tickets
- Combination Board Provided / No service
- Direct Main Roads

**Note:** school boards are listed in the order in which they appear on the Ministry of Education web site. The use of public transit, shuttle service, collection point pick up or piggyback service refers to at least some use of those methods - not necessarily for all students at those levels (elementary or secondary). The abbreviation 'Fr.' covers French Consultants, Language Co-ordinators and Superintendents in charge of French. Although 55 boards offer programs in F.I. or Ext. Fr., those programs are not necessarily offered yet in all geographical areas. Many boards are still harmonizing their programs following amalgamation.

<b>Public School Board</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Elementary Service</b>	<b>Secondary Service</b>
Ontario North East District	Fr.	Timmins	board prov.	board prov.
Algoma District	trans. Fr. FSL par.	Sault Ste. Marie	board prov.	board prov.
Rainbow District	Fr.	Sudbury	board prov.	board prov.
Near North District	Fr.	North Bay	board prov.	board prov.
Keewatin-Patricia District	Trans. Head FSL par.	Kenora	part. board prov. - piggyback	part. board prov. - piggyback
Rainy River District	Fr.	Fort Frances	no prog.	board prov.
Lakehead District	Fr. FSL par.	Thunder Bay	board prov.	board prov.
Superior-Greenstone District	Fr.	Marathon	board prov.	no prog.
Bluewater District	B. Chair FSL par.	Chesley	board prov.	board prov.
Avon Maitland District	Fr. Princ. - Imm.	Seaforth	urban -- board prov. - shuttle rural--part. board prov. - piggy - back	no prog.
Greater Essex County District	Fr.	Windsor	board prov.	board prov. - pub. tran./tick.
Lambton Kent District	Fr. Ass.to Dir.	Sarnia	board prov.	board prov.
Thames Valley District	Fr. FSL par.	London	board prov.	board prov.
Toronto District	Fr. FSL par.	Toronto	board prov. - pub. tran. / tick.for gr. 6-8 or 7-8 dep. on area	no board prov. ser. where pub.tran. i.e. - no tick.
Durham District	FSL par. Trans. Head	Whitby	board prov.	no board prov. ser. where pub.tran. i.e. - no tick.
Kawartha Pine Ridge District	Fr.	Peterborough	board prov.	board prov.

Trillium Lakelands District	Letter to par.- (from Ass. Sup. Bus.) FSL par. Trans. 2 peo.	Lindsay	part. board prov: "express" - "direct main roads"	- part. board prov. - "express" "direct main roads"
York Region District	FSL par. Trans. Head	Aurora	board prov.	no board prov. ser. where pub. tran. i.e. - no tick.
Simcoe County District	FSL par. Trans.Head	Midhurst	urban - no board prov. ser. rural - piggyback	urban - no board prov. ser. rural - piggyback
Upper Grand District	Trans. Head FSL par.	Guelph	board prov.	board prov. - pub. tran./tick.
Peel District	FSL par.	Mississauga	board prov.	part. board prov. - piggyback
Halton District	Trans. Head	Burlington	F.I.- board prov. - coll. pt. (1 km. max.walk) Ext. Fr.- no board prov. ser.	F.I. - board prov.- coll. pt. (1 km. max. walk) Ext. Fr.- no board prov. ser.
Hamilton-Wentworth District	Trans. FSL par.	Hamilton	no board prov. ser.	no board prov. ser.
Niagara District	Fr. FSL par.	St. Catharines	board prov. - Gr. 7/8 - pub. tran./ tick.	board prov. - pub. tran./tick.
Grand Erie District	Trans.Head FSL par.	Brantford	board prov.	board prov. – shuttle
Waterloo Region District	Fr.	Kitchener	no board prov. ser.	no board prov. ser.
Ottawa-Carleton District	Fr. FSL par.	Nepean	board prov. - Gr. 7,8 - pub. tran/tick	no board prov. ser. where pub. tran. i.e - no tick.
Upper Canada District	Fr.	Brockville	board prov.	board prov.
Limestone District	trans. Fr.	Kingston	board prov.	board prov.
Renfrew County District	Cons. ( Sec. School Reform) Trans. Head	Pembroke	board prov.	no board prov. ser. (but several h.s. host Ext. Fr. prog.)
Hastings and Prince Edward District	trans. -2 peo.	Belleville	urban - board prov. - coll.pt. rural - part board prov. - piggy back	urban -. board prov. - coll. pt. rural- part. board prov.- piggyback



<b>Catholic School Board</b>	<b>Source(s)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Elementary Service</b>	<b>Secondary Service</b>
Northeastern Catholic District *	Fr.	Timmins	board prov.	board prov.*
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District	Fr.	North Bay	board prov.	board prov.
Huron-Superior Catholic District	Fr.	Sault Ste. Marie	board prov.	board prov.
Sudbury Catholic District	Dir./Ed.	Sudbury	board prov.	board prov.
Northwest Catholic District	Fr.	Fort Frances	board prov.	no prog. (no Cath. h.s.)
Kenora Catholic District	Fr.	Kenora	board prov.	board prov.
Thunder Bay Catholic District	Fr. Teach./ FSL par.	Thunder Bay	board prov.	board prov.
Superior North Catholic District	Man. / Fin.	Terrace Bay	board prov.	no prog. (no Cath. h.s.)
Bruce-Grey Catholic District	Fr.	Hanover	board prov. - shuttle	board prov.
Huron-Perth Catholic District	Trans. Head Fr. FSL par.	Dublin	board prov.	board prov.
Windsor-Essex Catholic District	Fr.	Windsor	board prov. (25 min. max. ride)	board prov - pub. tran./tick. (25 min. max. ride)
English-Language Separate District No. 38	Fr.	London	board prov.	board prov. - pub. tran./tick.
St. Clair Catholic District	Fr.	Wallaceburg	board prov.	no prog.
Toronto Catholic District	Fr.	Toronto	board prov. - Gr. 6,7,8 -pub. tran./tick.	board prov. - pub.tran./tick.
Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District	FSL par. Trans. Head	Peterborough	board prov. - shuttle	board prov. - shuttle
York Catholic District	Fr.	Aurora	no prog.	no prog.
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District	Fr. Sup/Trans. Ass. Dir.	Mississauga	board prov.-shuttle	board prov. - pub.tran./tick.
Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District	Fr.	Barrie	no prog.	no prog.
Durham Catholic District	Fr.	Oshawa	board prov. - shuttle	board prov. - shuttle
Halton Catholic District	Fr.	Burlington	no board prov. ser.	no board prov. ser.
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District	Fr.	Hamilton	board prov.	board prov. - pub.tran./tick
Wellington Catholic District	Curr. Co.-or.	Guelph	no prog.	no prog.
Waterloo Catholic District	Curr. Co.-or.	Kitchener	no prog.	no prog.
Niagara Catholic District	Fr.	Welland	no prog.	no prog.

Brant-Haldimand-Norfolk Catholic District	Fr.	Brantford	board prov.	no prog.
Catholic District of Eastern Ontario	Fr.	Kemptville	board prov.	board prov.
Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District	Fr.	Nepean	board prov.	board prov.
Renfrew County Catholic District	trans. Fr. FSL par.	Pembroke	board prov.	no prog.
Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District	Fr.	Napanee	board prov.	board prov.

**\*Note:** this northern board, Northeastern Catholic District, subsidizes the living accommodations for a high school student to live in another town in order to attend the French Immersion program.

### Northern Boards in General

A critical mass is necessary in order to run an effective program in French Immersion or Extended French. In some small towns with only one elementary and one high school, the boards can not offer one of these programs due to insufficient numbers. The students can not always, however, be transported to a town that does, as often happens in southern boards, because the distance can be enormous, sometimes 2-3 hours' drive between towns. Unpredictably severe weather conditions can also influence transportation decisions even if the town is closer. So some children in the north are left out despite perhaps a generous transportation policy on the part of the board. There might be other northern boards that have a policy similar to that of the Northeastern Catholic District with regard to high school students boarding out of town to continue their French programs.

Needless to say, if there is only one school in a town and if that school has enough interested students to offer a program in Immersion or Extended French, the busing for FSL is not an issue since all students would attend that school anyway. It should be noted that these few boards are included in the total of 40 that fall into the category of "board provided transportation" to FSL programs since they meet the two criteria of this study; i.e., students are transported without cost to them and without assistance required from parent drivers. It is simply a case of transportation for the French program not being an extra cost to the board.

Another board where busing is not an issue for FSL is Ottawa-Carlton Catholic. Every school hosts a program in either Extended or Immersion French.

### **Funding Issues**

Board administrators and transportation heads have expressed concern about the freezing of funds at 1997 levels. Many boards had already cut costs, including establishing joint consortiums with their coterminous boards and independent schools, removing transit passes to students, increasing walking distances and negotiating frozen pay contracts to drivers (in one case, unrealistically, according to the transportation head). These boards claim that they do not now have the funds to reinstate the previous level of service (for example, transit passes) or wages. Also, while the Ministry of Education increases transportation funding as enrolment goes up, the funding does not take into account how many of the new arrivals actually require busing (one board reports that 61% of its students are bused). So if the majority of these students move into neighbourhoods that do not as yet have a school, the board is faced with busing them to holding schools while it scrambles to keep up to the requirement for new schools. If there are building delays or delays in approvals for land use, the circumstances become even worse. Boards in areas of huge growth, then, report that they are at a distinct disadvantage where money for transportation is concerned.

### **Patterns/Trends**

Parents have reported concerns about charges of elitism when some children are left out of FSL programs because there is less than adequate transportation. Some have noticed that, often, enrolment seems to break down on socio-economic lines. Parents who need to work full time can have trouble driving children to their bus stops or schools. A letter from one parent describes her dismay at having to remove her two children from the program because she has to return to work. She has been driving them 20 km. a day (round trip) to school for a number of years.

In one case, a parent reports that her child's school is being called the "middle class private school" by those English stream parents whose children cannot participate because of a lack of adequate transportation. In this same instance, the F.I. elementary school happens to be in a neighbourhood that is somewhat more affluent than the one across town which houses children whose parents have been unable to enroll them or keep them enrolled because there is no bus for them. Parents have reported that, in some cases, these parents have been single mothers on social assistance who don't have a car.

At another school board, a staff member remarked that it seems to be the wealthier parents who are able to drive their children, in some cases, many miles, to the Immersion program.

## **Relationship Between Transportation and Enrolment**

Two examples of this relationship arose during conversations with board staff. In the first case, a board tried to start a grade one program for September 1999. Only 18 registered; so the program did not run. According to a staff member, the board concluded that the low enrolment hinged on a lack of transportation. So, the following year, transportation was offered and two classes of grade ones registered. In order not to disappoint the 18 from the previous year, the board allowed a grade two entry point for this year only and was able to pick up some additional students for that class because busing had been added.

In the case of another board, busing was discontinued, a few years ago, and enrolment dropped significantly. Now that it has been reinstated with amalgamation, enrolment has been going back up, but some classes that have now reached the middle grades are, in the words of a staff member, “decimated - always split classes.”

## **Conclusions**

Nearly 73% (40) of Ontario school boards presently provide a level of transportation to Immersion and Extended French programs that allows students to participate without cost to the family and without needing to be driven to a school or a bus stop.

Over 27% (15) of the school boards provide a level of service (or no service) that could result in some students experiencing a roadblock to accessing the programs.

Of these 15 boards, 3 (5.45% of the total 55) offer these programs without providing transportation.

A lack of adequate transportation can adversely affect enrolment with two possible results. In the first case, the board runs smaller classes, a situation which can lead to charges of elitism, since the English stream classes must be larger to allow for smaller French classes and still stay within the funded PTR. In the second case, boards try to keep the class sizes closer to the ministry funded level, by forming more split classes than would normally occur. This, in turn, has the potential to discourage parents from enrolling their children. Thus, the numbers can go down even further.

In many areas of the province, adequate transportation has a great impact on both accessibility and sustainability of programs in French Immersion and Extended French. In some cases, transportation is essential to maintaining the critical mass necessary to run these programs effectively. In addition, such adequate provision tends to level the playing field for families wishing to avail themselves of this opportunity in the public education system. Students from varying socio-economic backgrounds can participate. Students make an investment of time and effort in their F.I. programs. They should not have to abandon that investment because their transportation has been removed or there has been a change in their families' employment or financial circumstances.

### **Factors That Could Affect the Present Situation:**

- an increase in FSL grants and the willingness of boards to apply them to additional costs of offering the programs - including the cost of transportation
- no increase in existing transportation funding to boards or cuts in transportation funding

### **Suggested Use of the Data Included in This Report**

This information will allow FSL parents to approach their school board staff and trustees from an informed position based on province-wide data as to how school boards deal with the issue of transporting students to congregated programs in French Immersion and Extended French. When accompanied by up to date information on FSL grants which are based on the number of hours each student spends studying in the French language, this data can become a useful advocacy tool. Parent advocates can argue that with each additional child who is able to access the program through transportation, the board receives grant money to defray extra costs associated with offering the program, such as transportation.

In addition, this information identifies, for CPF Ontario, the school boards in the province where there are hurdles (in terms of transportation) to providing more opportunities for young people to become fluent in French. The data can be presented by CPF to those who determine funding amounts to school boards for transportation and those who make decisions about the size of FSL grants and their application. Ministry guidelines for the application of these grants at the board level should include a transportation factor. At present, they do not.