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questions
& answers

About French first language education in Alberta

FRANCOPHONE CULTURE

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What are cultural identity and francophone culture?

People's cultural identity is passed on to them at birth from their parents. Francophone culture is what is shared by French-speaking people through books, music, folklore, film, fashion, humour, games, theatre, festivals, history, religious institutions, political institutions, schools, etc. Francophone culture can take many forms depending on where a group of francophones lives (Alberta, Quebec, France, Senegal...).

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Will children feel set apart from others because they're francophone?

No. Having a francophone identity in an English-speaking province not only defines children as individuals, but also gives them the courage to affirm, recognize and value their differences.

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Why is it important for Franco-Albertans to pass on their culture?

By passing on their culture to the next generation, Franco-Albertans help ensure that the provincial francophone community continues to survive and grow. Language is the key to making this happen.

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How can francophones adjust to the reality of living in an English-speaking province?

Adjusting means accepting the English language and anglophone culture without forgetting one's own francophone identity.

FRENCH AT HOME

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How can I help my child live in French in our daily life?

If you have French as a mother tongue, all you need to do is speak that language to your child. If you're not a francophone but your spouse is, encourage him or her to speak French to your child and to use the language when playing games (imaginary, board, video, computer, etc.), reading stories, watching TV, listening to radio and music, and so on. Make these French-language activities a family affair by taking part as much as you can.

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We want our child to learn English, which is why we speak only English at home. Will our child be able to learn French at school?

School cannot be the only place where your child learns French and develops a connection to francophone identity and culture. The role of the francophone school is to reinforce the French language and culture that you and your spouse choose to include in your family life.

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How can couples pass on the French language to their children if only one

First, both parents must respect each other's language and culture. Each parent is a role model, which means the francophone spouse is ultimately responsible for passing on the French language and francophone culture. If you're the non-francophone parent, however, your active encouragement and support are vital. The commitment and perseverance both of you show, regardless of your different mother tongues, will help your child develop a sense of pride and belonging to the francophone community.

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If I speak to our child in English and my spouse speaks only French, won't our child be confused by having to learn two languages simultaneously?

No, this is just a common myth. Studies show that children can learn two languages at the same time. In fact, it can even be beneficial for children who live in a francophone minority setting to do so.

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Will learning a second language hurt the acquisition of the first language?

No. Learning French won't interfere with the learning of English, and vice versa. Children can understand a concept or an idea in English as well as in French.

THE RIGHT TO FRENCH-FIRST LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

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Who can enrol their child in a francophone school?

Parents who qualify under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

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Do families who arrive in Alberta from a francophone country have the right to enrol their children in a francophone school?

According to the document *Affirming Francophone Education – Foundations and Directions: A Framework for French First Language Education in Alberta*, published by the Department of Learning in 2001, parents in this situation can enrol their children in francophone schools if they:

- have francophone roots and want to reintegrate French identity and culture into their children's lives, or
- want their children to maintain their French language skills, identity and culture (for instance, francophone immigrants who are permanent residents of Canada).

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Why should I consider a francophone education in Alberta for my child?

A francophone education helps children:

- develop equal proficiency in French and English
- learn Franco-Albertan and French-Canadian history, as well as that of the international Francophonie
- appreciate anglophone culture in Alberta, Canada and the rest of the world
- be more open to other cultures present in Alberta's francophone community, the rest of Canada and the world
- become stakeholders in French-language education as members of the Franco-Albertan community
- develop their full potential and enrich their cultural identity
- understand differences that make the French language so rich.

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

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What francophone preschool services are available in Alberta?

Many services are available in Alberta for children up to five years old. For preschool services in French in your area, contact the Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta at 780-468-6934.

Resource centres - These are centres where you can borrow French resources (books, games, cassettes, DVDs, CDs, puppets, educational software, etc.).

French playgroups - This is an opportunity for parents to meet each other and enable their children to play with other French-speaking children. These get-togethers are usually held once a week at the same location (often in francophone schools in their area).

Daycares - Francophone daycares and childcare services can be found throughout the province.

Preschools - Nursery schools (junior kindergarten) give three to four-year-old children the opportunity to learn and play in French. Attendance is half-days, up to five times a week.

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My three-year-old is entitled to a francophone education even though my spouse and I speak little French. Can we enrol our child in a francophone preschool?

Yes. Francophone preschools in the province are well aware of the language needs of children who speak little or no French.

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My spouse speaks French but I don't, and one of the grandparents isn't pleased that we plan to enrol our child in a francophone preschool. What are the benefits of attending a francophone preschool?

A francophone preschool will help your child:

- meet other children with francophone parents
- see that French is a living language spoken in many households
- play, sing and speak in French
- build French-language basics through play and begin to develop a francophone identity.

KINDENGARTEN IN A FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL

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My kindergarten-age child doesn't speak French but is entitled to a francophone education. What are the benefits of attending a francophone school?

Children learn quickly at that age. Attending a francophone kindergarten will help your child learn the basics of French, and succeed better in Grade 1.

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Is full-day kindergarten necessary for a five-year-old child?

Full-day kindergarten gives your child more exposure to French. For children who speak little or no French, this is a catalyst in the language-learning process. If children speak French at home, full-day kindergarten is an excellent way to enrich both their language use and their sense of connection to francophone culture.

THE FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL

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Why enrol my child in a francophone school in Alberta?

Francophone schooling is an effective way to learn and master the French language.

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Is the quality of French good in Alberta francophone schools?

The French language is of utmost importance to francophone schools, which emphasize quality in its use in all their academic, cultural, athletic and social activities.

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How many francophone schools are there in Alberta?

As of 2017, there are 40 francophone schools in Alberta, administered by four school boards:

- **North West Francophone School Board** (Falher, Grande Prairie, Peace River)
- **North Central Francophone School Board** (Beaumont, Camrose, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Jasper, Legal, Lloydminster, Red Deer, Saint Albert, Sherwood Park, Wainwright)
- **Centre East Francophone School Board** (Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Lac la Biche, Plamondon, Saint-Paul)
- **FrancoSud Francophone School Board** (Airdrie, Brooks, Calgary, Canmore, Cochrane, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Okotoks).

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I've been told that francophone schools are small, that there's not enough competition at the academic level, and that sports and extracurricular activities are almost nonexistent.

The student-teacher ratio in francophone schools is significantly better than that of other schools in Alberta.

Francophone schools are very active in sports and culture. Like all schools in the province, they offer physical education classes and, each year, students in Alberta francophone schools are invited to attend the Alberta Francophone Games and the Western Canada Francophone Games. Culture is also very much alive in the province's francophone schools through choirs, theatre, music, festivals, student radio, school newspapers, etc. This is important because it shapes francophone cultural identity.

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Do francophone schools have resources equivalent to those of English-language schools?

Yes. Francophone schools have a vast array of teaching resources for all grades. Alberta Education provides teachers in the francophone system with a database of the many approved French educational resources.

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The number of students in francophone schools often means there will be more than one grade per class. Do multi-grade classes disadvantage my child? How is teaching done in these classes?

Research shows that students in multi-grade classes succeed as well as, or better than, students in single-grade classes. Students in multi-grade classes also have the advantage of developing greater autonomy while learning.

In multi-grade classes, teachers use a theme-based approach and adapt their strategies and expectations according to each grade.

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Are resources (books, CDs, DVDs, cassettes, magazines, etc.) more expensive in French?

No. The prices are comparable to the resources authorized for the province's anglophone schools.

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If I live outside a major urban centre, will I have access to specialized services in a francophone school?

Yes. There is a provincial French-language special-education network, to which students with special needs are referred. Rural francophone schools also usually have a social worker and a nurse assigned to them.

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What is the difference between a francophone school and a French immersion school?

Francophone schools have two main goals: to teach French as a first language, and to reinforce families' efforts to help their children develop a francophone identity.

French immersion schools focus on teaching French as a second language.

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My francophone spouse and I have just arrived from Quebec and we want our children to learn English quickly. We don't want them to feel left out of Albertan society. Is an immersion program the best solution?

The best way to integrate your children into Albertan society is to enrol them in a francophone school. By continuing their education in French, they'll be able to maintain and master the language, which in turn will prevent them from feeling uprooted.

As for learning English, just living in a predominantly English-speaking society will ensure that your children learn the language very quickly.

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We live outside an urban centre. Will we be able to have our child attend a francophone school?

Transportation is usually available, but you must contact the school or school board in your area.

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Will the French immersion program offered in English schools ensure that my child becomes as fluent in French as a child who attends a francophone school?

No. Teaching in a francophone school takes place entirely in French except for the English Language Arts course. In immersion programs, French is generally used as the language of instruction from 40 to 75 percent of the time.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL AND FRENCH IMMERSION SCHOOL

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Can we choose the francophone school we want?

In Alberta, there are public and Catholic francophone schools, and your child can attend the school that corresponds to your beliefs. However, your options depend on where you live: cities can offer a choice of schools, but that's not always the case in rural areas.

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What are the costs of enrolment in a francophone school?

As with English and immersion schools, francophone schools are fully funded by the province. Any supplementary costs will depend on what grade students are in and the courses they want to take.

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Is the quality of teaching in a francophone school comparable to that in an English or immersion school?

Yes. All schools in Alberta teach the same curriculum. Teachers in francophone, anglophone or French immersion schools undergo similar training and must all meet the same requirements to obtain their Alberta teaching certificate.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND THE ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Why do most francophone schools not allow the teaching of English before the third year?

Many studies show that one mother tongue should be learned and mastered before learning to read in another one.

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If my child attends a francophone school, will he or she be able to speak and write English well?

Once again, research clearly shows that students in a francophone minority setting will become as proficient in English as their anglophone peers.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Do students in francophone schools achieve satisfactory results, particularly in the provincial achievement tests?

It has been proven that students who are eligible for francophone education succeed better when they attend a francophone school rather than a French immersion or English school.

The results from Alberta Education for grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 show that students in francophone schools meet or exceed the acceptable standards.

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How can I help my child with homework if I don't understand French?

Don't hesitate to ask for help. You can:

- contact another parent from your child's class
- ask someone from your family or community
- let your child have a friend over to help with homework
- contact your child's teacher.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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After graduating from a francophone high school, will my child be ready for postsecondary education?

Yes. Francophone school graduates are ready for postsecondary education in French or English.

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Could choosing a francophone education limit my child's future educational choices?

No. Francophone school graduates in Alberta can enrol at the Campus Saint-Jean, where they take courses in French, or in English colleges, technical institutes and universities. These students' postsecondary results are as strong as those of graduates from high schools throughout Alberta.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PARENT

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How can I participate in my child's school life if I don't speak French?

Every year, there is an incredible number of tasks to be done in a school. As an English-speaking parent, it's important to let your child's teacher or principal know that you want to participate in school projects or help organize school activities.

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How are families with only one French-speaking parent seen and received in a francophone school?

Families with only one French-speaking parent are a reality in Alberta's francophone community and not a threat to its survival. Francophone schools have developed concrete ways to welcome, help and guide these parents so that they can be actively involved in their children's francophone education.

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