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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?

Your cultural identity is given to you at birth through your parents. French culture is what is shared by a group of people who speak French. These people share books, music, folklore, film, fashion, humor, games, theater, festivals, sports, history, religious institutions, political institutions, schools, etc. There are many Francophone cultures according to where a group of Francophones lives such as Alberta, Quebec, France or Senegal.

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Will my child feel apart from others because he is French?

He will not. Being French in an English-speaking province defines a child not only as an individual but gives him the courage to affirm, recognize and value his differences.

2

Why must we transmit our culture?

The transmission of Francophone culture is a key component of the maintenance and growth of Alberta's Francophone community. Language is critical to ensure cultural transmission.

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As a Francophone living in an English-speaking province, how can I adjust to this reality?

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

FRENCH AT HOME

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What can couples where only one spouse speaks French do to transmit the French language to their children?

First, in the couple, there must be a mutual respect for the culture and language of their partner. The Francophone parent as well as the Anglophone parent are a model for the child. Therefore, as a Francophone, it is your responsibility to pass on the French language and culture. Your commitment and perseverance will demonstrate your pride and your sense of belonging to the Francophone community.

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

The school cannot be the only means by which your child will learn French and acquire a Francophone identity and culture. The role of the Francophone school is to strengthen the French language and culture you have chosen to live at home.

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How can I help my child live in French in his everyday life?

You simply have to speak French to your child: play in French (imaginary games, board games, video games, computer games), read stories in French, watch French television, listen to the French radio, listen to French music...

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If I talk to my child in French and my spouse only speaks English, my child will certainly be confused to have to learn two languages simultaneously.

This is a prevalent myth. Studies show that children can learn two languages simultaneously. Furthermore, these studies say it would be beneficial for your child who lives in a Francophone minority setting to learn both languages simultaneously.

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

No. One must not believe that learning French will interfere with the learning of English and vice versa. Understanding a concept or an idea is achieved in English as well as in French.

THE RIGHT TO FRENCH-FIRST LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

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Who can register in a Francophone school?

Children whose parents have rights 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 enroll their children in a French school?

According to the document published by the Department of Learning (2001): Affirming Francophone Education - Foundations and Directions: A Framework for French First-Language Education in Alberta, there are two categories of students that can be admitted to French schools in the province:

- “children of parents who have francophone roots and want to reintegrate French identity and culture into their children’s lives”
- “children of parents who want their children to maintain their French language skills, identity and culture (i.e. 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 will allow your child:

- to develop equal skills in French and English
- to gain knowledge of Franco-Albertan and French-Canadian history, as well as the history of the international Francophonie
- to be able to appreciate the English culture in Alberta, Canada and the rest of the world
- to be more open to other cultures that are part of Alberta’s Francophone community, of the rest of Canada and even of the world
- to be able to develop, with the Franco-Albertan community, close and complementary links to French education
- to be able to develop its full potential to enrich its culture
- to understand the linguistic differences that make the French language so rich

PRESCHOOL EDUCATION IN ALBERTA

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Which Francophone preschool services are available in Alberta?

For children from birth to five years old, several services are available in Alberta. For preschool services in French in your area, contact the Fédération des parents francophones in Alberta at 780-468-6934.

Resource centres

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

French playgroups

This is an opportunity for parents to allow their child to play with other French-speaking children. Usually, these meetings are held once a week at the same location (often in Francophone schools in their area).

Daycares

There are in the province some French daycare centers or child care services in francophone families.

Preschools

Preschools (junior kindergarten) provide 3- to 4-year old children the opportunity to learn and play in French. The children attend preschool half a day, one to five times a week.

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My 3-year old child is entitled to a Francophone education even though my husband and I speak French poorly. Can we register our child in a Francophone preschool?

Yes. The operators of French preschool services in the province are familiar with children's French language needs, even those children who speak little or no French.

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My spouse does not speak French. One of our child's grandparents does not appreciate that we may consider registering our child in a Francophone preschool. What are the benefits for our child to attend a Francophone preschool?

A Francophone preschool will help your child:

- to meet other children from francophone families
- to become aware that the French language is a living language spoken in many families
- to play, sing and speak in French
- to acquire through games the basics of the French language while developing a Francophone identity

KINDENGARTEN IN A FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL

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My child, who is old enough to attend kindergarten, does not speak French but is entitled to a Francophone education. What are the benefits of attending a Francophone school?

At this age, we learn quickly. Attending a Francophone kindergarten will help him in every way to learn the basics of the French language. In addition, this will allow him to do better in grade one.

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

Full-day kindergarten offers your child more exposure to the French language. For children who do not speak French or little French, full-day kindergarten is a catalyst in the process of learning the French language. In the case of children for whom French is the language spoken at home, full-day kindergarten is a great way to enrich their level of French and to have the opportunity to develop a sense of belonging to the French culture.

THE FRANCOPHONE SCHOOL

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Why enroll my child in a Francophone school in Alberta?

A Francophone school is an effective way to acquire and master the French language.

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Is the quality of French good in Alberta Francophone schools?

Francophone schools attach great importance to the French language and value the quality of the language in all school activities, including cultural, athletic and social activities.

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How many French schools are there in Alberta?

In 2015, there are 39 francophone schools in Alberta which are 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,

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I am told that Francophone schools are small, that there is 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 Alberta, Francophone schools offer physical education classes. In addition, each year, students in Alberta Francophone schools are invited to attend the Alberta Francophone Games and the Western Canada Francophone Games. The cultural aspect is also very much alive in Alberta's Francophone schools (choirs, theater, music, festivals, student radio, school newspaper, etc.). This is the most important aspect since it shapes francophone cultural identity.

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Do Francophone schools have resources equivalent to those of English schools?

Yes. Francophone schools have a large number of educational resources for all grade levels. Alberta Education provides teachers in Francophone schools with a database of a great number of approved French educational resources.

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Often the number of students per class in Francophone schools results in more than one grade level per class. Do the multi-level classes disadvantage my child? How is education given in these classes?

Research findings show that students in multi-grade classes do as well or better than in a single grade class. In addition, students in multi-grade classes have the advantage of developing greater autonomy while learning.

In multi-grade classes, teachers plan according to themes and adapt teaching strategies and student expectations according to their students' grade level.

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

No. The prices are comparable to the resources authorized for English schools in Alberta.

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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 special education provincial network. Students with special needs are referred to this network. In addition, Francophone schools

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What is the difference between a Francophone school and a French

Francophone schools have two key goals: the acquisition of French as a first language as well as supporting families in the construction of the students' Francophone identity. French immersion schools focus on the acquisition of French as a second language.

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Will the French immersion program offered in English schools ensure that my child will be as proficient in French as a child who attended a Francophone school?

No. Teaching in a Francophone school is entirely in French except for the English language arts course, while immersion schools generally use French as the language of instruction from 40% to 75% of the school year.

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We live outside an urban centre. Can we consider allowing our child to attend a Francophone school?

School transportation is usually provided but you must contact the school or school board in your area.

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I have just arrived from Quebec and I want my children to learn English as soon as possible. I do not want them to feel set aside from Alberta's society which is English. Is immersion education the best solution?

The best way to integrate your children in Alberta is to enroll them in a Francophone school. In so doing, you will prevent the uprooting of your children, because they can continue their education in French and as such, they can maintain and improve their French language proficiency. As to learning English, living in a predominantly English-speaking society will ensure that your children will learn English very quickly.

L'ÉCOLE FRANCOPHONE ET L'ÉCOLE D'IMMERSION FRANÇAISE

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Can we choose the Francophone school we want?

In Alberta, there are public and Catholic Francophone schools. Your child can attend the school that corresponds to your beliefs, but the range of choices will depend on where you live. The urban centers of the province can offer you a choice of schools, but that is not always the case in rural areas.

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

Yes. All schools in Alberta teach the same curriculum. Teachers in Francophone, English or French immersion schools undergo similar training and have to meet the same requirements to obtain their Alberta teaching certificate.

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What are the costs of registration in a Francophone school?

As in English and immersion schools, Francophone schools are funded 100% by the province and your child's registration cost depends on their grade level and the courses they will take.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND THE ACQUISITION OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Why don't Francophone schools allow the teaching of English before the third year?

Several research findings show that the mother tongue should be learned and mastered before learning to read in another language.

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Because my child attends a Francophone school, will my child be able to speak and write English well?

Once again, research clearly shows that students in Francophone linguistic minority settings reach a level of English proficiency equivalent to that of their English-speaking peers.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SUCCESS

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Do students in Francophone schools achieve good results? Which achievement tests are administered by Alberta Education?

There is evidence that students in Francophone schools do better by attending 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 do not understand French?

Do not hesitate to ask for help.

You can:

- contact another parent amongst your child's classmates
- ask someone else in the family or in the community
- allow your child to have a friend at home to help with homework
- contact your child's teacher

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

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After graduating from high school in a Francophone school, will my child be ready to take post-secondary courses?

Yes. Graduates from Francophone high schools will be ready to take post-secondary courses in French or English.

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

No. Graduates from Francophone schools in Alberta register at Campus Saint-Jean, where they take courses in French, or in English technical institutions and universities. The academic results obtained by these students during their post-secondary education demonstrate that they perform as well as graduates from other high schools in Alberta.

FRANCOPHONE SCHOOLS AND THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING PARENT

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How can I participate in my child's school life if I do not speak French?

In a school, year after year, there is always an incredible number of tasks to perform. As a parent speaking only English, it is important to inform the school principal or your child's teacher about your desire to participate in the undertaking of school projects or to assist in the organization of school activities.

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How are families where only one spouse speaks French understood and welcomed in a Francophone school?

Families where only one spouse speaks French are a reality in the landscape of Alberta's Francophone community and not a threat to its survival. Francophone schools must therefore implement concrete measures to welcome, help and guide these parents so that they can be actively involved in the Francophone education of their children.

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