

# The administrator role in supporting new French Immersion teachers: positive steps towards retention

Kara Bowles | Consultant, speaker specializing in French as a Second language support for school administrators | [bowlkar@gmail.com](mailto:bowlkar@gmail.com)



It has been clearly established that there is a recruitment and retention issue for French teachers across Canada. As a result, many school boards focus on recruitment strategies in an attempt to meet the growing needs for French language instructors. Website reviews, hiring practices and other strategies are

indeed crucial supports to ensure that the individuals who want to become teachers are able to find all of the information they need in order to apply. In an environment of increasing competition to find qualified instructors, what can we do, as school administrators, to maintain and support the retention of French teachers?

**If 100 teachers are hired, but only 40 remain after 3 years, the problem will never be resolved.**

As school administrators, crucial short and long term actions can be taken in order to support the retention of new French Immersion teachers.

## Suggestions for the first week

- Commit to sit down with the new hire for a few minutes to introduce yourself and the new hire to the school board and to their new school. These precious few introductory moments are the cornerstone to building a relationship with the individual. As stated in the most recent Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) resource [Compendium of Evidence-informed Strategies and Practices to Support School Administrators with FSL Programs](#), "School leaders who build and sustain trusting, collaborative relationships with teachers directly influence teacher learning and efficacy" (p. 13). In an administrator's busy schedule, this meeting needs to be a priority.
- Take the teacher on a tour of the school. Ensure that they have met key teachers that they will be working with. It will reinforce to the school community that you value the French program and, in turn, the role of new French Immersion teachers.

- If at all possible, creating a school handbook that outlines all of the fundamental expectations and routines of the school is an asset for all staff but also an indispensable guide for new teachers. In the absence of this type of document, consider the ACPI resource [Guide d'accueil pour les nouveaux enseignants](#). This guide provides guidance for many of the first year teachers' worries and questions. Any support that you can give in the first few days will build confidence in the individual and place you as a person we can trust. This is a key retention strategy.
- Carefully and strategically select a mentor. This is an important relationship for the new teacher. In order to support this relationship, the [New Teacher's Handbook: Surviving and Thriving in the Second Language Classroom](#) is a wonderful resource from Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT). It offers tips from new and experienced teachers, solutions to 10 frequent situations new teachers face, planners to implement those solutions in day-to-day teaching, and plenty of resources to explore new strategies.
- Do you have several new FI teachers? Consider creating a new teacher collaborative at your school and offer a lunch and learn or a before/after school meeting to address any concerns or questions they may have. Using the scenarios in the *New Teacher's Handbook* is a great way to suggest ready-made key topics for the sessions.

## In the first few months

- Take time to visit the new teacher's classroom outside of any type of evaluation while ensuring the teacher understands that you are "checking in because you want them to be successful". However, it is also an opportunity for the principal to know the teachers' practice in order to preempt any possible issues and support the professional development of the staff member.

- Model a growth mindset for language learning. If you are a French-language learner yourself, try speaking French with your teachers. Modeling one's own commitment to French speaking and learning is a way to show that you value the FI program.
- Ask the teacher about the resources they are using, then delve into the *New Teacher's Handbook: Surviving and Thriving in the Second Language Classroom* and ask them some questions found in the scenarios. It is also an opportunity to ask which resources they are lacking and to seek ways to obtain those resources that will help them develop their practice.
- Notice an issue of practice? Ask your FSL consultant about any upcoming professional development opportunities. Have a conversation with the teacher asking how you might assist. Check out the ACPI website for online support. Provide constructive feedback that reinforces the positive aspects of their teaching practice while supporting areas for growth.
- Ensure the new teacher is aware of the support available at the school board as well. Ensure that the FSL consultant knows that there is a new FI hire in your school.
- During report card writing, check that the new teacher has the appropriate support and guidelines.
- Consider offering the new teacher a membership to French associations like ACPI that can support professional development and other opportunities for growth. For example, new FI teachers in their first five years qualify for the [ACPI's French Immersion Career Launch Program](#) – however, places are limited. Those who are chosen receive:
  - personalized support from an experienced teaching coach (monthly meetings)
  - a free copy of *Guide ontarien du nouvel enseignant : Persévérer et progresser dans la classe de français langue seconde* (\$30 value)
  - a free copy of *L'immersion en français au Canada : Guide pratique d'enseignement* (\$50 value)
  - access to an exclusive virtual training session
  - a free annual A+ ACPI membership (\$90 value)

## In the long term

Ask the new teacher about the students they have concerns about and the ones they feel they have supported well. In what areas do they feel they need professional learning?

Celebrate the positives! When you hear something that the teacher is pleased about, celebrate with them! Is it something to mention in a school newsletter? During a staff meeting? How can you support new FI teachers to feel a part of the school community?

At the end of the year, have a meeting to discuss progress, concerns and next steps. Set goals together including opportunities which may include maintaining and developing language proficiency.

There are many excellent recommendations in the recently released OPSBA resource *Compendium of Evidence-informed Strategies and Practices to Support School Administrators with FSL Programs*. Check out a few of the suggestions that will reinforce a whole-school approach to valuing the FI and FSL programs at your school.

## What about the principal? What exists to support me?

Become a member of ACPI yourself! Very soon there will be a new addition to the ACPI website dedicated to school administrators (available in English). Regardless of whether you speak French or not, the new resources will be an asset for you. From research to colleagues in administration sharing their experiences, these are key resources to have at your fingertips.

[Join ACPI today!](#)

## References

- Association canadienne des professionnels de l'immersion (2022). *Guide d'accueil pour les nouveaux enseignants*. [https://www.acpi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ACPI\\_Extrait.pdf](https://www.acpi.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ACPI_Extrait.pdf)
- Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers / Association canadienne des professeurs de langues secondes (2016). *New Teacher's Handbook: Surviving and Thriving in the Second Language Classroom / Guide du nouvel enseignant : persévérer et progresser dans la classe de langue seconde*. <https://www.caslt.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/sample-nth-en.pdf>
- Ontario Public School Boards' Association (2023). *Compendium of Evidence-informed Strategies and Practices to Support School Administrators with FSL Programs*. <https://fslresources.opsba.org/supporting-school-administrators-with-fsl-programs/>