

French as a Second Language Advisory Committee Toronto District School Board



fslactoronto@gmail.com
www.tdsb.on.ca/fslac

Working together for our students
Travaillons ensemble pour nos élèves

May 30, 2019 for TDSB Committee of the Whole Budget Meeting, June 3, 2019

Re: Proposed Cuts to French Immersion and Extended Programs in 2019-20 TDSB Budget

Dear Trustees,

As passionate supporters of public education and the TDSB, we have a profound appreciation of the difficult situation you face as a Board, both in deciding what to cut and in managing to a very short timeline.

Our members have scores of years of collective lived experience in TDSB French as a Second Language (FSL) programmes and with this letter we wish to summarize and clarify important issues we hope you will consider when making decisions about the proposed changes to the TDSB budget with regards to FSL programmes. We thank you for the opportunity to weigh in.

Our Request to Reconsider Proposed Cuts

When we learned of the proposed package of budget cuts, the members of the French as a Second Language Advisory Committee (FSLAC) were surprised and disappointed. As we learned more in the past two weeks, and after talking with hundreds of parents, we are sharing our questions and concerns with you regarding:

- FSL shouldering a huge portion of the overall cuts
- Cuts inconsistent with Drivers in the Five-Year Strategic Plan
- Equity of access to French programs reduced due to new barriers
- Trust and parent expectations compromised
- FSL Funding misunderstandings and diversion to other priorities
- Transportation reduction impacts on enrolment movement across the system
- Questions about impacts on staffing and continuation of basic, critical work
- Questions about how the cuts respect and relate to the 2018 French Review

FSLAC asks:

That the Board of Trustees considers the questions and concerns below before adopting the proposed cuts in September 2019 and 2020; and

That the Board allow for a full public examination of staff recommendations related to the 2018 French Review--which have not yet been shared with students, parents and the FSLAC--before making changes to French programs (e.g., transportation and staffing).

Background

1. Scope of Proposed Cuts

Firstly, regarding the scope and size of the cuts in French as a Second Language programs. The known and precise figures (Supplementary Teachers – French, \$12.15M; Transportation, \$9.6M as reported by staff at the FSLAC May 14, 2019) add up to \$21.75M.

That is a whopping 32% of the total cuts of \$67.83M shouldered by one very specific part of TDSB programming.

The unspecified spending cuts are to 1 FSL central staff position, duties unknown, out of 4 positions. Centrally Assigned Principal positions cuts are from 55 to 42, impact to FSL unknown. and Interdisciplinary Studies.

2. Relation to Drivers

Many Core, Extended and Immersion French parents have followed and participated in the development of the budget drivers and while we considered asking that FSL be specifically mentioned, ultimately we see French Immersion and Extended programs strongly reflected in the drivers for all students, particularly in these three:

- Creating the conditions and programs in schools for students to best meet their interests, strengths, and long-term goals;
- Inclusion of students with Special Education needs;
- Responding effectively to our students' well-being and academic needs so all students have the opportunity to succeed; among others

3. Equity of Access to French Immersion and Extended

FSLAC applauds TDSB's commitment to giving every on-time applicant to French Immersion and Extended a spot and the provision of transportation since this board was created 20 years ago as stated in Policy 80 as a commitment to "equity in participation" (item 4.8 PO 80 <http://ppf.tdsb.on.ca/uploads/files/live/97/1798.pdf>). This has been maintained through many equally challenging (or even worse) budget processes.

Since 2008, the TDSB has worked hard to spread the programs geographically, adding SK French Immersion at 30 sites and Grade 4 Extended at 37 sites. Even in areas with more programs, transportation ensures no child is denied the opportunity because they can't get to school. Cutting transportation will create barriers to access for lower and middle income families, new Canadians, diverse communities, people without cars, and will also exacerbate already inconsistent and complicated access to childcare.

In Toronto's suburban areas, catchment areas for SK French Immersion range from serving only the home school English population to having as many as 14 feeder schools. The largest catchment areas are in Scarborough, Etobicoke, York and North York and bussing helps to mitigate those stark geographical inequities.

Growing diversity in the French Immersion and Extended programs to arrive at equity requires a variety of interventions and transportation is a very important one when some 6000+ French Immersion and

Extended students are not within walking distance of the programs and yet are willing to make the effort with the support of the Board to achieve the best possible levels of French proficiency.

The proposed cuts to Transportation funding for French Immersion and Extended risks reversing all progress in building the programs since amalgamation, and indeed represents a risk of severe and immediate erasure of our collective efforts to create equity.

4. Trust and Expectations

Since May 13, when the cuts to French first became known to the FSLAC via the media, the response from French Immersion and Extended parents has been surprise and disappointment. We are hearing from parents who feel 'betrayed'.

Many, if not most of the families of the 6000+ students impacted by this change will have no choice but to remove their children from French Immersion or Extended programs. It will be privileged families who will be able to adapt and arrange their own transportation.

Parents have committed to French programming in the TDSB based on the strength of the bussing assurance. These parents are placing their trust in a pathway right until grade 12 with the supports offered at information meetings during the application process.

The proposed one-year delay to transportation cuts will have immediate impact.

With proposed bussing cuts in 2020, parents won't send their kids to Immersion programs in September 2019 to minimize the number of transitions. Because TTC tickets will no longer be provided for secondary students in September 2019 unless need is established, not all will come forward to ask for this accommodation because of stigma. In 2020, the exodus and decline in registrations could be much larger, again putting the program quality and availability at risk for remaining students due to a significant reduction in critical mass.

Questions to Consider

- How will this upheaval affect the health, well-being, and achievement in French and emerging identities of our children as French/English bilinguals?
- Is this how the Toronto District School Board wants to treat its students and families: creating conditions where they have no choice but to quit programming they committed to for 8 years in Extended French and 13 years in French Immersion, in the full expectation that their Board would keep up their end of the deal?
- How can the TDSB **not** honour its commitment to all of the children from SK to grade 12 whose pathway to graduating with a Certificate of Bilingualism in French Immersion or Extended French is dependent on yellow busses and TTC tickets?

Please note that no notice of these developments was given until the budget plan released May 13, 2019. No previous information, not even hints, and definitely no consultation. No analysis has been shared on the possible impact on the health of the programs and the impact on families or the possibility of grandfathering existing students being transported. No analysis has been shared on the transportation funding envelope and historical inclusion of French Immersion and Extended students

from the starting point at amalgamation. No efforts have been shared on identifying efficiencies in the transportation budget where cost per student seem high compared to other Boards.

Making cuts before we know anything of the staff recommendations coming from the 2018 French Review throws into question the importance of the input provided by the 10 000 students, parents and staff and the shared hope that the TDSB's commitment is to improve French programs.

5. FSL Allocation, Funding and Expenditures

It is our understanding that the Toronto District School Board receives roughly \$30M in additional funding for French Second Language programming under the FSL Allocation of the Language Grant, an envelope that is not being cut by the province for 2019-20. 'Sweatered' or not, it is specifically earmarked for FSL and can (should?) therefore be expected to be used for French Second Language programs. ALL students are already funded for items like the classroom teacher, prep time, (most of) library, classroom resources, (most) facilities, and so on out of the Pupil Foundation Grant. Additional, incremental costs related to French resources are relatively small.

Should the FSL Allocation in fact support Transportation to enhance access to, and equity in, French programming? Might it even include "Supplementary Teachers", to keep programming accessible and/or viable as it grows to full capacity in each site?

Questions we ask you to consider before approving the proposed cuts:

- Can the TDSB specify what incremental expenditures, unique to French, are currently being funded by \$30M FSL allocation?
- Sweatered or not, isn't the Board concerned that the provincial government may lower the FSL allocation if it is widely acknowledged that that it is not, or will no longer be used at all for French?
- Is there not a realistic risk that the proposed cuts to French programming will actually backfire on the Board? The planned savings will be reduced by a corresponding loss of revenue from the provincial FSL allocation, compounded year over missed year of French.
- How much (extra) FSL Allocation money does the TDSB stand to lose per student who drops out of French Immersion or Extended over the course of their TDSB years?
- How many students does Staff estimate will drop out of French Immersion and Extended due to the elimination of transportation and/or other potential changes to French programs?
- How much funding does the TDSB lose per student who leaves the TDSB altogether to pursue French programming in other School Boards (like TCDSB and the French Boards)?

6. Transportation Cuts and Ramifications of Shifting Enrolment

In addition to system-wide equity impacts of the transportation cuts, we are concerned about the impacts on enrolment at schools throughout the system. The postponement of transportation cuts for

a year, to 2020, will provide more time to accommodate students who need or want to change into a different programme. Given that we expect many families will have no choice but to remove their children from French programming we encourage you to consider these questions:

- How many local programs may be at risk for lack of enrolment?

Scenarios should be developed for all program sites with benchmarks like 25% of bussed students will leave, and/or 50% will drop out, and/or 75% will.

- How will the return of FI/Ext students to their English Home Schools be facilitated?

If the local school is over capacity, busing these students away to a new (English) location would indeed be a rather odd, but quite possible consequence requiring transportation dollars.

- How will children who were 'redirected' and provided bussing to an FI/Ext school further away, be accommodated in FI/Ext at their neighbourhood walkable dual track school?

7. Staffing Questions

Supplemental Teachers – French-Y2 Implementation

- Is this cut going to be realized solely from increasing French Immersion and Extended class sizes?
- Will this cut also impact English classes in dual/triple track schools?
- Is the TDSB anticipating that the tight supply of French teachers will be solved by the increase in class sizes and the anticipated drop out due to transportation cuts? Will this populate the occasional teacher lists with highly qualified French teachers?

Central Staff Cuts

To our knowledge, there is a coordinator and 2 dedicated coaches for FSL, International & Classical Languages, plus one office administrator. The 2 dedicated FSL coaches are paid out of the sweated funds of the Official Languages in Education Program.

- If so, for purpose of the budget discussion, isn't the cut to FSL central staff really 1 out of 2 positions that are funded through general revenues?

The centrally assigned principal is covered on page 2-3 of Appendix G which outlines cuts and indicates a cut of 13 positions. The current Centrally Assigned Principal for FSL is also responsible for Classical and International Languages, ESL, Social World Studies and the Humanities, Library Learning Resources and Global Education.

- Does the cut to centrally assigned principals mean increasing the subject and program area assignments for the remaining ones?

FSL is both a program where applications and development of the program are central responsibilities in addition to professional development work and system wide program support like the DELF. The on-line registration system and support for parents was centralized to streamline the process and reduce

workload in school offices. In 2008 in response to the 2006 Review, there was a peak of 14 central staff supporting the program.

- How is it possible to perform all essential work for student achievement, equity and inclusion in FSL programs with this proposed level of staffing?

8. 2018 French Review Recommendations Expected in June 2019

The cut of \$12.15 M to Supplementary Teachers French and \$9.6 M to transportation support for French Immersion and Extended indicates that a large re-organization of French Immersion and Extended French is being planned in response to the findings of the 2018 French Review.

Questions:

- How can one book such savings before knowing about, let alone approving, the plans?
- Don't all of the proposed cuts to French Immersion and Extended underscore the finding of the 2018 French Review (p.22) that "Going back to 2006 when the previous French programs review was conducted, many of the same themes mentioned exist today. French programs need: system leadership and support, consistent support at the school level, additional learning supports provided to students in French programs, and additional French resources"?

And finally,

The volunteer parents of the FSLAC dedicate countless hours to provide Trustees with informed advice and to support the work of Trustees and Staff in making TDSB French programs equitable, effective and accessible. This work contributes to "the conditions and programs in schools for students to best meet their interests, strengths, and long-term goals" in French programs, an important budget driver. We fully acknowledge the external pressures in this budget situation. Nobody in the TDSB wants any of this. Good solutions, however, are not ones that will set French programs back years, decrease participation and will make them inaccessible and elitist.

We are very proud of the work parents have done collaboratively with Toronto boards over 50 years to establish and build these programs from zero to 28000+ students. We know you are too.

We ask you to protect our children whose opportunity to have the best possible programs in French, an important Canadian skill is at risk with the proposed budget cuts. Please bear in mind that the Ontario FSL curriculum states that learning French improves mental flexibility, problem-solving skills, understanding of aspects of a variety of cultures, awareness of global issues and career opportunities.

We ask you to weigh this matter carefully in consideration of this submission, our best possible advice, given the information available to us as of May 28, 2019, as your French as a Second Language Advisory Committee.

Sincerely,

Mandy Moore
Parent Co-chair, FSLAC
On behalf of the 22 parent members/alternates of the FSLAC