Leading Engagement of French-language Learners and Stakeholders:

The critical role of school administrators

Synopsis

Discover specific ways in which some school administrators have successfully supported engagement of French-language learners and stakeholders.

Before Viewing
Reflecting on current practice

As a school administrator:

1. What impact do I have on engagement of French-language learners at the classroom level and at the school level?

2. In what ways do I already collaborate with staff and stakeholders to enhance engagement of French-language learners?

During Viewing
Making connections

As a school administrator:

1. How is my support of student engagement in French reflected in the research quote in this video?

2. School administrators in the video mention numerous ways in which they demonstrate that they value French-language learning. How do these practices compare with what I am already doing?

After Viewing
Moving forward

As a school administrator:

1. What opportunities do I provide staff to help them refine instructional practices unique to French second-language teaching?

2. How do I support staff in developing confidence in and the refinement of their own French-language skills?

3. How might I further support engagement of French-language learners and stakeholders in my school and district/board?

> "The literature on block scheduling for second/foreign language instruction underlines the importance of the flexibility provided by longer instructional periods for optimal pedagogy, student achievement and attitudes."
>
> – Lapkin (2008)

> "[M]agic happens when you create a culture of trust and a structure for feedback within classrooms. When these key pieces are in place, you can utilize the knowledge of the team to build expertise at the ground level where it counts."
>
> – Daelick (2017)

Going Deeper

School administrators support French-language learners, educators and other stakeholders whether or not they themselves have a background in French language or instructional practices relevant to second-language teaching. Understanding key factors that enhance engagement provides a focus for professional learning conversations between school administrators, staff and other stakeholders.

Nurturing positive relationships applies to the school level as well as within the classroom. As noted in *How leadership influences student learning* (Leithwood et al), "Successful leaders develop and count on contributions from many others in their organizations." Participants in this project commented on the importance of building a cohesive team. School administrators involved a variety of staff members, such as guidance counsellors, librarians and resource teachers, in supporting French-language learning. They encouraged these other stakeholders to take leadership roles and to collaborate in order to strengthen student engagement in French.

Several school administrators noted that nurturing strong relationships between French teachers and other staff members facilitates mutual sharing and appreciation of ideas to support language teaching and learning throughout the school. Positive relationships between French teachers and other staff results in a school culture in which learning French is valued by all.

School administrators also encouraged contacts beyond the school to enhance engagement in French. Several participants commented on the positive impact of strong relationships with post-secondary institutions. In one secondary school, students corresponded with first-year university students who were studying French. While the initial goal was to seek feedback on written productions, the influence extended beyond improved writing skills. The secondary school students became highly engaged in their interactions with the university students, inspiring many to continue learning French.

A number of participants found student engagement increased through interactions with Francophones in the community. School administrators supported collaboration with other stakeholders, for example, Francophone artists, French teachers at other schools, community organizations, pre-schools, and public institutions such as libraries, museums and art galleries.

School leaders play a key role in increasing engagement in the learning of French by supporting inclusion in French programs and student success for all. Administrators also noticed the positive impact on student engagement and success when French speaking resource teachers supported students in class and collaborated with French teachers. Administrators commented that they encourage all students to learn French and they support all staff in exploring different ways to engage students in learning, for example trying to speak in French to French learners.

Student success for all is fostered when school leaders take an active role in monitoring student progress in French. Principals included discussions about data on student achievement in French at school improvement team meetings, and collaborated with French teachers to set goals for improvement. One principal noted the positive impact on student and staff engagement that resulted from initiating a school-wide focus on strengthening oral language. A committee was formed, which included the principal and staff members, to evaluate the oral proficiency of every French-language learner on an annual basis.

Participants shared the importance of school administrators demonstrating that they value the French programs by scheduling longer blocks of time for French-language development, allocating resources, supporting opportunities for students to learn French in authentic situations, promoting professional development, supporting opportunities for teachers to refine their own French-language skills, and ensuring that French is visible throughout the school and in communications to families.

"Je parle beaucoup plus maintenant. C'est une classe de littératie [parce qu'ils ont les classes de soixante minutes]."

– Élèves du niveau élémentaire en français de base

"Les directions d'écoles exercent une influence favorable sur l'engagement des apprenants et des intervenants en favorisant l'attitude que le français est pour tout le monde."

– Jennifer Rochon, Teacher, Ontario

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