

A PARENT'S GUIDE FROM INSPIRE TUTORS

The French Immersion Survival Guide

What actually happens between Kindergarten and Grade 9, and what you can do about it.

If your child's in French Immersion, or you're about to sign them up, you've probably heard two versions of the story. One's all confidence: immersion rewires a young brain, and by high school your kid will be fluent. The other's quieter, and you mostly hear it from parents further down the road: it got hard around grade 7, and we pulled out.

Both versions are true, just for different families. This guide is the honest middle version, built from published research on French Immersion in Canada, not marketing copy. It's written for parents who'd rather know what's coming than be surprised by it.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- The real attrition numbers, and why grades 7–8 matter most
- Why kids actually leave, explained honestly
- The FSL teacher shortage most parents never hear about
- How “getting in” varies by school board
- A practical checklist for the years that matter

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01 • THE NUMBERS

The Real Numbers on Attrition

Here's the number that surprises most parents: close to 70% of kids who start French Immersion in Kindergarten are gone from the program by grade 9. That's not a rough guess. It comes from a 2019 Toronto District School Board report, and it's been cited since by both *The Conversation* and the *Globe and Mail*.

70%

**of kids who start French Immersion in Kindergarten
have left the program by Grade 9**

Source: 2019 TDSB report, cited by The Conversation and the Globe and Mail.

That 70% isn't spread evenly across every school year. The real drop-off window is grades 7 and 8. That's when most families make the call to move their kid into the English stream, right before high school course selection locks in.

None of this means French Immersion doesn't work. Most kids who stay through grade 12 come out with genuine, usable French. It means the middle years are the hard years. If you know that going in, you can plan for it instead of being caught off guard by it.

02 • THE REASONS

Why Kids Actually Leave

Researchers and school boards don't point to one single cause. A few reasons come up again and again when families explain their decision:

- **The academic load jumps right when it hurts most.** Grades 7 and 8 are exactly when core subjects, math, science, history, get more demanding. Kids already working harder to process instruction in French can suddenly find themselves behind on content, not just language.
- **Falling behind erodes confidence fast.** A kid who struggles for a term or two doesn't usually think "I need more support." More often they think "I'm bad at this," and that feeling can spread from French class to how they feel about school overall.
- **Home reinforcement isn't always possible.** Most parents didn't learn French in immersion themselves, so homework help, casual conversation practice, and simply noticing when something's off can be harder to offer at home.
- **High school arrives right on schedule.** Course selection for grade 9 happens during the exact window kids are most likely to be struggling, so a rough patch in grade 7 can turn into a permanent decision in grade 8.

Worth saying plainly: these are reasons families and researchers commonly cite, not a proven checklist of causes for any one child. Your kid's situation might match all four, one, or none of these.

03 • STAFFING

The Teacher Shortage Reality

Here's context that rarely comes up in the parent-teacher conversation: Canada has a well-documented, persistent shortage of qualified French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers. It's not new, and it's not local to one province or board.

What that means in practice varies. Sometimes it's a French class taught by a teacher who's still building fluency. Sometimes it's a larger class size, fewer specialist supports, or a favorite teacher who leaves mid-year and takes months to replace.

None of that is about your child's ability. It's a staffing reality that's been building for years, and it's worth knowing about, so you don't mistake a system-level problem for a sign your kid isn't cut out for immersion.

04 • ENROLLMENT

The Lottery and Waitlist Question

One thing that trips up a lot of families: "getting into" French Immersion doesn't mean the same thing in every city. Some boards, including Peel, York, Waterloo, and Calgary, use enrollment lotteries or hard caps, so a spot isn't guaranteed even if you apply on time. Other boards, including Toronto and Ottawa, guarantee a placement to any family that wants one.

If you're comparing notes with a friend in another city, keep this in mind. Her experience getting in, or her wait, might have nothing to do with what your board does. A quick look at your own board's enrollment page is worth it before you assume your experience is the standard one.

05 • WHAT TO DO

A Practical Checklist

Concrete things you can actually do, not just worry about:

- ☐ **Build in low-stakes speaking practice, not just exposure.** Watching a French show is fine, but it's passive. Five minutes of your kid actually producing French, ordering a snack, describing their day, narrating a game, matters more than an hour of listening.
- ☐ **Watch for the grade 7–8 confidence dip specifically.** Don't wait for it to show up as a grade. It usually shows up first as reluctance: skipped homework, "I don't feel like talking about school," more sighing than usual about French class.
- ☐ **Don't wait for the report card.** By the time a report card shows the problem, your kid's usually been struggling quietly for a month or two. A quick check-in every few weeks catches it earlier.
- ☐ **Ask the school directly what support exists.** Don't assume there's nothing available. Ask about tutoring resources, peer support, or extra help sessions. Some schools offer more than they advertise.
- ☐ **Normalize mistakes out loud.** Kids in immersion make more visible errors than kids in an English-only class, because they're doing more. Tell them struggling with a new language is the expected cost of learning one, not a sign something's wrong.
- ☐ **Pay close attention at the grade 8-to-9 transition.** This is the point where a temporary rough patch can turn into a permanent decision. If grade 7 was hard, talk to the school about what grade 9 French actually looks like before assuming the worst.
- ☐ **Get outside support before it's a crisis, not after.** Extra help does more in October than it does in May. If you've already noticed the dip, that's the moment to act, not the moment to wait and see.

A NOTE FROM INSPIRE

You Don't Have to Figure This Out Alone

Inspire Tutors has spent years working with exactly the families this guide is about. We've paired kids with certified 1-on-1 teachers since 2012, and we've taught more than 20,000 students across Canada and the US, plenty of them arriving right at the grade 7–8 point where confidence starts to slip.

A guide isn't the same as support. If you want a clear, specific read on where your child actually stands, book a 30-minute assessment with a certified teacher. It's a one-time \$12 USD (\$18 CAD), and you'll leave with a plan, whether that plan involves us or not.

Book a 30-Minute Assessment

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