

Guiding students to pursue French: The guidance counsellor's  
perspective in the decision to continue FSL

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## **Abstract**

This exploratory case study investigated the role secondary school guidance counsellors believed they played in the course selection process, especially regarding the continuation of French as a second language (FSL). As new initiatives have been recently introduced to increase retention in all FSL programs throughout Ontario (OME, 2013a), this study also sought to identify the factors guidance counsellors believed contributed to students continuing (or not continuing) the study of FSL past the mandatory Grade 9 credit. The following research questions guided this study: (1) How do guidance counsellors describe the process of course selection, with regards to FSL in particular?; (2) How do guidance counsellors view their role in the course selection process?; and (3) What do guidance counsellors identify as factors that contribute to students continuing (or not continuing) the study of FSL past Grade 9? Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 guidance counsellors from 12 schools across one school board in Ontario. Analysis of the insights shared by guidance counsellors highlight the complexities of the course selection process, as well as the strategies and tools they each used to prepare students to make the most informed decisions regarding their course selection. When counselling students about continuing optional FSL courses after Grade 9, participants expressed that they would encourage the pursuit of FSL courses, if the topic was student initiated. Emerging evidence showed that core French and French immersion students were counselled differently, with the latter receiving more attention if they expressed a desire to leave the program. Finally, guidance counsellors identified a wide variety of reasons they believed affected retention and attrition rates at their schools, with the most common being for future employment purposes and not seeing the value in learning French.

## Résumé

Cette étude de cas exploratoire a investigué le rôle que les conseillers en orientation ont cru avoir joué dans le processus de sélection de cours d'élèves du palier secondaire et particulièrement dans la poursuite de leur étude du français langue seconde (FLS). Avec la mise en place de nouvelles initiatives visant à augmenter la rétention dans tous les programmes de FLS en Ontario (OME, 2013a), cette étude a également cherché à identifier de quelles façons les conseillers en orientation croyaient avoir contribué au processus de décision de ces élèves, dans leur choix de continuer ou de ne pas continuer de suivre des cours de FLS après avoir complété le cours obligatoire en 9<sup>e</sup> année. Les questions de recherche suivantes ont guidé cette étude : (1) Comment est-ce que les conseillers en orientation décrivent le processus de sélection de cours, en ce qui concerne le FLS en particulier ?; (2) Comment les conseillers voient-ils leur rôle dans le processus de sélection de cours ?; et (3) Qu'est-ce que les conseillers en orientation identifient comme des facteurs qui contribuent à la décision des élèves de continuer ou de ne pas continuer de suivre des cours de FLS après la 9<sup>e</sup> année? Les entretiens semi-structurés individuels ont été menés auprès de 14 conseillers en orientation de 12 écoles d'un conseil scolaire en Ontario. L'analyse des idées partagées par les conseillers en orientation mettent en évidence la complexité du processus de sélection de cours ainsi que les stratégies et les outils utilisés par chacun d'entre eux pour préparer les élèves à prendre ses décisions. En conseillant les élèves sur la poursuite des cours de FLS optionnel après le 9<sup>e</sup> année, les participants ont exprimé qu'ils encourageraient la poursuite des cours de FLS, si l'idée avait été proposée par l'élève. Les conclusions préliminaires montrent que les élèves en français de base et les élèves en immersion française sont conseillés différemment, ces derniers recevant plus d'attention s'ils ont exprimé un désir de quitter le programme. Enfin, les conseillers en orientation ont identifié une variété de raisons pour

lesquelles ils croient que les élèves décident de continuer ou ne pas continuer les cours de FSL dans leurs écoles ; le facteur le plus commun lié à la poursuite de ces cours était pour les besoins éventuels en lien avec le milieu de travail et le facteur le plus commun de ne pas continuer était parce que les élèves ne voyaient pas l'importance d'apprendre le français.

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# 1. Introduction

I first became interested in the topic of persistence in French as a second language (FSL) when I was a secondary school student. As a student enrolled in a French immersion program, my teachers and family members always told me about all the benefits that French could bring me later on in life, such as the increased employment rates for bilinguals and the ability to travel and communicate with more people around the world. Culture and communication were explicitly taught to us in French immersion and were at the heart of my FSL education, pushing me to continue my studies in French, eventually deciding to become a French teacher myself. As an FSL teacher, my goal is to pass on the passion for the language and culture as well as encourage my students to continue to be lifelong learners of French. Many people who I have encountered over the years, mostly who studied core French in high school, confided in me that they were not taught about the exciting world of francophone culture, and that any French language they still remember is in the form of verb tables – definitely not what would be expected after a minimum of six years studying FSL.

I still remember in my Grade 11 year when I considered leaving the French immersion program because I was struggling with the amount of work I needed to put into my French immersion courses. I also had a limited number of elective courses that I could take and had difficulty trying to prioritize which ones I really wanted to pursue. I consulted with my mother, my teacher, and notably the guidance counsellor who was assigned to me. Because I was in the French immersion program, I felt as though more ‘attention’ was paid to me, and those who I consulted with all encouraged me to ‘stick it out’ and finish the program in which I had invested so many years. Needless to say, I did decide to ‘stick it out’ and learned that I too wanted to contribute to more students continuing to study FSL, whether it be as a teacher or as a researcher

developing policies and recommendations, both with the aim to increase retention in Ontario's FSL programs.

In this exploratory qualitative case study, I gathered insight into the decision making that occurs during the course selection process from the perspective of guidance counsellors. As I will describe in subsequent chapters, this includes the annual course selection, in which students are picking all of their courses for the following academic year, as well as the course switching that occurs throughout the year, which involves removing one course and replacing it with another one offered during the same time slot. I interviewed guidance counsellors and asked them to first describe the course selection process and then to reflect upon their role during the course selection process, in particular regarding when students are asking for advice about continuing FSL courses, both in the core French and the French immersion programs. In addition, guidance counsellors were asked to elaborate on some of the factors that they believe contribute to the high attrition rates seen when French is no longer mandatory in Grade 10.

One of the guiding documents of this study is *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools* (hereon referred to as the Framework) released in 2013 by the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME). This policy document is changing the K-12 FSL landscape in Ontario by raising the issue of the declining persistence of FSL. This document is presented as part of the context (Chapter 2).

Concern about FSL attrition rates in Ontario has been of interest recently with some researchers exploring the encouragement that students receive to continue studying FSL has been conducted. In 2007, Kissau investigated the various spaces where students were receiving encouragement to continue studying core French. One of the findings suggested that guidance counsellors at the school in question may actually discourage students, especially males from

continuing studying FSL. In this paper, Kissau also called for further research to investigate encouragement in second language learning. Furthermore, in 2009, Lapkin, Mady, and Arnott completed an extensive review of current research related to core French and called for more studies examining the engagement of students in FSL programs. The aforementioned Framework document (OME, 2013a) echoes these calls for research. To date, the language competency of core French students has been analysed after students complete the program, however, an understanding of the decision-making process to continue or not is lacking. By using the information provided by guidance counsellors, I gathered an in-depth perspective of the dynamics related to the course selection process in general, and more specifically, the course selection of FSL courses beyond Grade 9.

This thesis is organized into seven chapters. The next chapter (chapter 2) will contextualize the study, including the current status of French within Canada and Ontario (the context of this study), the policies related to teaching FSL, the requirements for secondary school graduation in Ontario, and a brief description of the process of becoming a guidance counsellor in Ontario. It is in this chapter that I will also present my research questions. In the third chapter, I will review the relevant literature and research related to motivation in second language learning, and scholastic choices. Then, I will present some OME documents related to career and guidance counselling in Ontario and the current role of guidance counsellors in Ontario secondary schools. In the fourth chapter, I will present the participants, instruments, procedure, and data analysis. In the fifth chapter, I will present the findings, using themes that surfaced during the data analysis phase, followed by the discussion in the sixth chapter, organized by research question. Finally, I will conclude with the teaching implications and directions for

further research. In this final chapter, I will also present some suggestions to improve retention rates in FSL programs in Ontario.

## 2. Context

As this study was conducted in Ontario, I will first elaborate on the context of French and the study of FSL in both Canada and Ontario. For each setting, I will describe the current status of French, followed by a brief overview of the student participation rates in FSL programs throughout Canada and in Ontario. I will follow with a more detailed description of the requirements needed to earn the Ontario Secondary School Diploma, and a summary of the status of FSL programs in Ontario. Lastly, I will describe the process of becoming a guidance counsellor in Ontario and conclude this chapter with the elaboration of my research questions.

### 2.1 Canadian Context

Before I can describe the current status of French at a regional or provincial level, it is important to also understand the national context. This section presents the Canadian context of French and FSL education through the presentation of policies and statistics.

**2.1.1 Status of French in Canada.** While Canada has had two official languages since 1969, with the Official Languages Act establishing both English and French as languages of equal status, much of the population cannot converse in both official languages (Statistics Canada, 2012). In this case, equal status refers to the ability to access federal services in both official language. According to the definition that Statistics Canada has set, Canadians are considered bilingual if they report that they are “able to conduct a conversation in both of Canada's official languages” (2012, p. 20). The percent of Canadians who Statistics Canada considers to be bilingual marginally increased between 2006 and 2011<sup>1</sup> by 0.1% to a total of 17.5% of

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<sup>1</sup> The latest Census data available.

Canadians being classified as bilingual. However, this increase is largely attributed to more people from Quebec learning English and not the rest of Canada learning French, where Quebec alone “accounted for 90% of the net increase” during this time (Statistics Canada, 2012, p. 20).

One of the first actions that the federal government led by Lester B. Pearson made when it took power in 1963 was to authorize the creation of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (henceforth referred to as the “B and B Commission”). This decision was in response to “the radical changes taking place in immigration policy, the federal government’s attempts to abolish the Indian Act, and the rise of Quebec’s linguistic nationalism and independence movements” (Haque, 2012, p. 31). The B and B Commission made several recommendations, including ensuring the right to federal governmental services in French and English where numbers warrant, the right to plead your case in court in the official language of your choice, and the right to access all laws and publications from Parliament in French and English. With these recommendations, the federal government passed the Official Languages Act in 1972 “to mediate a putatively equal relationship between the French and English – and the introduction of the policy of multiculturalism, which would outline the place of the other ethnic groups in the nation” (Haque, 2012, p. 22). This Act ensured that all federal services were available in both French and English, and neither language had a higher status. In addition, the Act required all federal laws and regulations be published in both languages (Laurendeau, 2006a). In 1988, an updated Official Languages Act was passed in order to meet two main objectives. The first was to update sections to keep up to date with governmental changes and the second was to encourage provinces to promote the use of English in Quebec and French in the rest of Canada (Laurendeau, 2006b). Section 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, signed into law in 1982, ensured the right to minority language education where the numbers were sufficient.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note here that education falls within provincial jurisdiction. More details will be elaborated on how minority language education is funded in the following sections.

Throughout Canada, only one province and two territories have more than one official language; New Brunswick with English and French; Nunavut with the Inuit Language, English, and French; and the Northwest Territories including nine indigenous languages in addition to English (“The Legal Context of Canada's Official Languages,” n.d.; The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2006). All other provinces and territories are unilingual English, apart from Quebec, which is unilingual French.

According to Lepage and Corbeil (2013), the number of Canadians who are able to carry on a conversation in both official languages peaks at the ages of 15 to 19, but as Canadians age, they tend to lose this ability. This trend is explained when looking at longitudinal data gathered over 15 years:

[M]any Anglophones outside Quebec do not retain their bilingualism as they grow older.

For example, take the 15- to 19-year- old Anglophones outside Quebec in 1996, whose rate of bilingualism was 15%—their rate of bilingualism five years later (when they were 20 to 24) had dropped to 12%. Ten years later (in 2006, when they were 25 to 29) their rate was 10%, and 15 years later (in 2011, when they were 30 to 34) it was 8% (Lepage & Corbeil, 2013, p. 4).

As the years pass since students have been learning French as a second language, Anglophones are losing the ability to converse in French. Students who have studied the language for many years, notably French immersion<sup>3</sup> students, do not always lose the language as quickly (Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, 2015). One could hypothesize that the maintenance of French could be attributed to the number of hours of education completed in French for a French

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<sup>3</sup> The French immersion program in Ontario offers students the highest number of instructional hours in French. This is through the explicit teaching of the French language, in addition to other subject courses taught in French, for example history or science. Further information is provided on page 10.

immersion student compared to a core French<sup>4</sup> student. By Grade 12, a French immersion student from Ontario will have accumulated a minimum of 4,900 hours, compared to that of a core French student who will have only accumulated 1,040 hours (but only 710 hours if they did not continue after Grade 9) (OME, 2013a). This loss of the second language could also be affected by the limited number of French post-secondary options available to students after graduation as well as limited bilingual employment opportunities.

**2.1.2 Teaching FSL in Canada.** At the federal level, Canada has two official languages; however, the situation differs in each of the provinces and territories. Education is primarily controlled through provincial jurisdiction and therefore, each province has the ability to teach its own curriculum and develop its own French education policies. The federal government offers funding to each of the provinces and territories to support FSL programs in English language school boards, with a total budget of just over \$434 million, to be distributed over 5 years, between 2013 and 2018 (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada & Department of Canadian Heritage, 2013). Each province receiving funding must submit an annual action plan as to how they plan to evaluate the usage of the funds aimed at aiding in such areas as student retention, availability and development of programs, and improved performance of students after the completion of FSL programs.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the majority of Canadian provinces and territories offer mandatory FSL education (Canadian Parents for French [CPF], 2013b). Alberta, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Saskatchewan do not currently make the teaching of FSL mandatory. The same is seen in British Columbia and Manitoba, however, the learning of an additional

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<sup>4</sup> The core French program in Ontario is the basic French program and mandatory for all students from Grades 4 through 9. This is through the explicit teaching of the French language. Further information is provided on page 10.

**Table 1.** *FSL programs offered by Canadian Provinces and Territories*

	Mandatory FSL	Starting Grade			
		Core French	French immersion		
			Early	Middle	Late
Alberta	<i>No</i>	4 or 10	K or 1	4	6 or 7
British Columbia	— <sup>a</sup>	K	K or 1	—	5 or 6
Manitoba	— <sup>a</sup>	K	K or 1	4	7
New Brunswick	4 to 10	—	—	3	6
Newfoundland and Labrador	4 to 9	K	K	—	7
Nova Scotia	4 to 9	4	K	4	7
Northwest Territories	<i>No</i>	K	K	4	
Nunavut	<i>No</i>	1	—	—	—
Ontario	4 to 9	1 or 4	SK or 1	4	7
Quebec	K to Secondary V	SK	K	—	—
PEI	4 to 9	4	K	4	7
Saskatchewan	<i>No</i>	1	SK or 1	—	6
Yukon	5 to 8	SK	SK	—	6

*Note.* K = Kindergarten; SK = Senior Kindergarten. Adapted from “An overview of French second language education in Canada,” by Canadian Parents for French, 2013, p. 9.

<sup>a</sup> British Columbia and Manitoba require the learning of an additional language and French is among the choices students may pick.

language is mandatory, where students may select French amongst others as their language of choice. Nunavut is the only province or territory that does not offer the French immersion

program. In all the provinces and territories, apart from Quebec, that offer mandatory FSL programs, students start in Grades 4 or 5, or at about the age of 9 or 10. The Yukon offers the shortest mandatory study period, lasting for only three years from Grades 5 to 8. In Ontario, where this study took place, a minimum of six years of French is required from Grades 4 through 9 in the core French program.

The two most popular programs offered to teach FSL in Canada are core French (also referred to as basic French) and French immersion. In the core program, French is taught as a subject course. The number of hours dedicated to French instruction is less than 25% of the total instructional hours (Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages, 2015). The French immersion program was notably first developed in Quebec in 1965 and is becoming ever more popular in Canada (Alphonso, 2016). The immersion program we know today began as an experiment with a handful of students, eager researchers and determined parents, wanting their Anglophone children to “foster more cross-cultural communications between French and English Quebecers” (Safty, 1991, p. 474). With an increasing desire from interested parents to register their children in immersion programs, school boards are turning to lottery systems and waiting lists to try to accommodate the demand (Hammer, 2012). In French immersion, there are three different streams available in different parts of Canada, as shown previously in Table 1 (CPF, 2013b). Early immersion always starts in either Kindergarten or Grade 1. Middle immersion begins in either Grade 3 or 4 and late immersion begins in either Grade 6 or 7. In the immersion program, students are exposed to significantly more French than the core French program and are taught subject courses in French. Typically for the first few years, students take 90-100% of their courses in French, with the number of hours decreasing as the years continue (total

immersion). There are partial French immersion programs as well, where the number of French courses starts, and remains at approximately 50%.

## **2.2 Ontarian context**

While Canada has two official languages, Ontario has not made French a second official language in the province; this section explores the current status of French in Ontario.

Furthermore, I will provide a greater description of the public school system, including the various FSL programs that are offered, the secondary school degree requirements, and the process of becoming a guidance counsellor.

**2.2.1 Status of French in Ontario.** According to the 2011 census data, the Francophone population makes up an average of 4.8% of the population in Ontario, varying from region to region (Government of Ontario, 2014b). For example, in the Northeast and East regions of Ontario, there is the highest percentage of Francophones, with 23.4% and 15.4% of the population identifying as francophone, respectively. The regions that have seen the highest growth rates are the Central and Eastern regions, growing to a rate of 9.8% and 6.5% respectively (Government of Ontario, 2014b). When looking at urban communities, the greatest number of Francophones live in the Ottawa area (25.2%), followed by Toronto (9.7%). Furthermore, the Greater Toronto Area (including Toronto, Durham, Peel, York, and Halton) saw the most significant growth between 2006 and 2011, increasing from 2% of the population (110,265) to 2.1% of the population (124,875) (Government of Ontario, 2014b).

There are 12 French-language school boards in Ontario that serve the needs of Franco-Ontarians, four public boards, and eight Catholic boards. In addition, there are nine French post-

secondary options: two French colleges and five bilingual universities. These post-secondary options are located across Ontario, with the most northern options being Sudbury and Hearst (*Collège Boréal, Laurentian University, University of Sudbury, Université de Hearst*) and the most eastern city being Ottawa (*La Cité, University of Ottawa, and Saint Paul University*) (Government of Ontario, 2016). Other postsecondary institutions that offer French language options are available in Toronto (*Glendon Campus at York University and Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto*) and Kingston (*the Royal Military College*) (Government of Ontario, 2016).

The status of French language education in Ontario has come a long way in the last century as, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, French and all other languages other than English were not allowed to be taught in Ontario. This was due to Regulation 17, a policy put in place to ban the teaching of any other language than English. An exception was made for French and it was allowed to be taught during the first few years of elementary school. Regulation 17 was eventually suspended in 1927 after a report revealed that English as a second language could only be mastered when there was a good foundation in the mother tongue (Oliver, 1972). In 1968, the Education Act was altered to officially recognize French-language secondary schools in Ontario.

Following the signing of the national Official Languages Act, the French Services Act was passed in Ontario in 1986. This Act guaranteed citizens the right to provincial services in both official languages, in 26 areas throughout the province (Government of Ontario, 2014a). These services include all those administered by the provincial government, such as driver's licences and birth certificates. Approximately 81% of all Franco-Ontarians live in these 26 designated

areas and if an individual who does not reside in one of the areas requires service they may opt to receive service online or at another centre. (Government of Ontario, 2014a).

**2.2.2 Teaching FSL in Ontario.** FSL has been taught in Ontario for several decades, and has been a requirement for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) since 1984 (OME, 1999a). Today there are three main programs that students can take to study FSL, French immersion, core French and extended French. Core French is the default program, offered by all English-language school boards. During the 2010-2011 school year, approximately 81% (N = 792,422) of all students in Ontario who were studying FSL were in the core French program, while 15.8% (N = 155,232) of students in FSL programs were in an immersion program (CPF, 2013a).

In addition to the funding the federal government provides for FSL programming, the provincial government also provides funding to schools on a per student basis (CPF, 2013b). For elementary school, the level of funding per student depends on the average daily length of the French program, ranging from \$291 for core French to \$371 for French immersion (CPF, 2013b). In secondary, the same per student funding exists, between \$74 and \$98 per students taking FSL as a subject (including both core and immersion programs) for Grade 9 and 10, and Grade 11 and 12 students respectively. The funding increases to \$123 per student for Grade 9 and 10 subjects taught in French (typically extended and immersion courses) and \$191 in Grades 11 and 12. The total projected funding for FSL in Ontario was \$240 million for the 2012-2013 school year (CPF, 2013b).

Today, in the core French program in secondary schools, French is taught as a subject course. According to the OME curriculum for FSL, in order to be eligible to take the Applied<sup>5</sup> or Academic Grade 9 course, students must have previously received at least 600 hours of instructional time in FSL<sup>6</sup>, equivalent to Grades 4 to 8, or approximately 120 hours a year (OME, 2014, p. 16). Students must take one French credit, equivalent to 110 hours of French instruction in secondary school to obtain their OSSD. Unless exempted, this credit is normally obtained in Grade 9, after which French classes become optional.

In 2013, CPF published FSL enrollment numbers throughout Canada from 1999 to 2011. The charts summarize the number of students who were enrolled in each of the FSL programs in each province during this time. Using the data from Ontario, when tracking the 1999 cohort of students throughout their schooling from Grade 4 to Grade 12, only 9% chose to continue studying core French until Grade 12 (CPF, 2013a). The greatest attrition is seen in core French between Grades 9 and 10, with an average of 75% of students choosing not to continue studying French (CPF, 2013a). This attrition trend also occurs in the French immersion stream, with an average of 35% leaving the French immersion program during the transition to secondary school (CPF, 2013a).

In 2013, the OME released *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools* (2013a). This document presents the issue of declining persistence in FSL programs and proposes three main goals for the province, related to FSL:

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<sup>5</sup> Applied level courses “focus on the essential concepts of a subject and develop students’ knowledge and skills through practical applications and concrete examples,” while Academic courses “develop students’ knowledge and skills through the study of theory and abstract problems” (OME, 2011, p. 65).

<sup>6</sup> If students do not have the 600 hours of previous instruction time in FSL, they have the opportunity to take an Open level Grade 9 credit to meet their diploma requirement (OME, 2014). This course is designed as “an introductory course for students who have little or no knowledge of French” (OME, 2014, p. 88). The OME further defines Open level courses as being suitable for all students and “are designed to broaden students’ knowledge and skills in subjects that reflect their interests” (OME, 2011, p.65).

1. Increase student confidence, proficiency, and achievement in FSL.
2. Increase the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation.
3. Increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL. (OME, 2013a, p. 9)

As part of the Framework (OME, 2013a) requirements, school boards must outline, in three-year plans, the steps they are taking to meet these goals. School boards will need to submit their first progress report at the end of the 2016-2017 year. This exploration into the course selection process, when students are deciding whether or not to pursue FSL courses can provide educators, parents, and policy makers with information that may help schools retain more students in the optional FSL courses after Grade 9.

**2.2.3 Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements.** In Ontario, students attending publicly funded schools receive the OSSD after the completion of 30 credits, 40 hours of volunteer work, and passing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OME, 2013d). Of the 30 credits (each representing a full course of 110 hours), 18 are compulsory and 12 are optional. As outlined in Table 2, fifteen of the compulsory credits are prescribed, and three ‘Group Credits’ offer some student choice, as set by the OME (2013d). Students in publically funded Catholic schools are required to take an additional four Religion credits, increasing the number of compulsory credits to 22.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Religion credits are not explicitly mandatory as part of the OSSD, however English Catholic secondary schools oblige students to enroll in a Religion credit every year.

**Table 2.** *Ontario Secondary School Diploma credit requirements in public school boards*

# of credits required	Subject
4	English in ELS or <i>Français in FLS</i> (1 credit per year)
3	Mathematics (1 credit must be obtained in Grade 11 or 12)
2	Science
1	Canadian history
1	Canadian geography
1	Arts (Media Studies, Visual Arts, Music, Drama)
1	Health and Physical Education
1	FSL in ELS or <i>English as a second language in FLS</i>
0.5	Career studies
0.5	Civics
1	Group 1 credit
1	Group 2 credit
1	Group 3 credit

*Note.* ELS = English language schools; FLS = French language schools

When students are selecting their credits to fulfill the Group credit requirements, the OME provides a list from which students must select their choices (OME, 2013d). As of a 2011 revision of the OSSD requirements, cooperative education<sup>8</sup> and FSL are options in each of the groups:

<sup>8</sup> Cooperative education courses provide students with the opportunity “to earn secondary school credits while completing a work placement in the community” (OME, 2011, p. 75). The cooperative education course must be related to another course, where students will practice what they have learned in the related course. Students may choose to link their cooperative education course to a French course if their placement is in French.

1. English or French as a second language; a native language; a classical or international language; social sciences and the humanities; Canadian and world studies; guidance and career education; or cooperative education;
2. Health and physical education; the arts; business studies; French as a second language; or cooperative education;
3. Science (Grade 11 or 12); technological education; French as a second language; computer studies; or cooperative education.

While FSL and cooperative education appear in every group, students may only apply two FSL or cooperative education credits towards the Group credit required courses. For example, this means that if a student were to take an additional three FSL credits, they would not be able to apply them to all three of the groups; but rather, just the first group and another of the students' choosing. The third credit would count as one of their 12 optional credits, limiting the courses students may want or need to pursue for post-secondary.

The above information, found in ministerial policy documents, is typically shared with students by secondary school guidance counsellors. The next section will explore how teachers qualify to become guidance counsellors in Ontario.

**2.2.4 Becoming a guidance counsellor in Ontario.** All guidance counsellors in Ontario are also certified teachers. Once certified as a teacher by the Ontario College of Teachers<sup>9</sup> (OCT), teachers can take additional qualifications courses offered by universities to further their professional development. There are three parts to the additional qualification, each allowing the candidate to gain more knowledge about how to counsel students. After completing this three-

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<sup>9</sup> The organization that governs teachers in Ontario.

part course, candidates are named ‘Specialists’ in the subject. One of the numerous options teachers have is to take an additional qualification in Guidance and Career Education. The goal for Part I of the additional qualifications course is for the candidate to ‘understand’ and ‘critically explore’ various topics relating to youth development and post-secondary education (OCT, 2014a). For example, when looking at one particular curriculum outcome in the Part I course, it focuses on “understanding the role of the guidance teacher/counsellor in collaboration with all educational and community partners” (OCT, 2014a, p. 7). In Part II, the candidate begins to ‘integrate into practice’ and ‘apply’ the topics learned in Part I, having the curriculum outcome change to “deepening understanding the role of the guidance teacher/counsellor in collaboration with all educational and community partners” (OCT, 2014b, p. 7). Finally, in the Specialist course, the candidate learns how to act as a ‘facilitator’ or ‘model’ and position themselves as a ‘leader’ within their school (OCT, 2014c). Looking at the equivalent curriculum outcome again, in the Specialist course, the candidate will focus on “facilitating an understanding of the role of the guidance teacher/counsellor in collaboration with all educational and community partners” (OCT, 2014c, p. 7).

Based on my reading of the curriculum outcomes set by the OCT for the additional qualifications course, candidates are learning the knowledge and skills to be able to support students in the various issues that may arise. In the Part II course, two outcomes (out of over a total of 50) talk about having the candidate explore post-secondary information to be able to pass it on to students. Furthermore, another objective has candidates learn to tailor their career exploration discussions with students to relate to their ambitions and current achievements. In the next chapter, I will elaborate further on how some researchers describe the role of a guidance counsellor.

The information presented in this chapter situated the geolinguistic and geopolitical (curricular) contexts of this study. The research questions are presented in the following section, which is followed by the literature review, chapter 3.

### **2.3 Research questions**

This research study is timely given the poor retention rates, in both the French immersion and core French programs presented earlier in this chapter, and the OME's pressure on school boards to retain more students in their FSL programs. As the following chapter outlining the current literature available will demonstrate, current research has investigated the role of parents and teachers in motivating students to continue studying a second language; however, few studies have investigated how guidance counsellors encourage or counsel students about their decision to continue or discontinue their FSL courses after the mandatory secondary credit. For these reasons, this research study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do guidance counsellors describe the process of course selection, with regards to FSL in particular?
2. How do guidance counsellors view their role in the course selection process?
3. What do guidance counsellors identify as factors that contribute to students continuing (or not continuing) the study of FSL past Grade 9?

### **3. Literature Review**

In this section, I will first describe research relating to persistence in FSL programs in Canada and the factors that may play a role in the students' choice to continue. Following, I will present some of the choices students must make throughout their schooling, (i.e., school, program, and course). I will conclude with a review of OME documents related to guidance and career education, and the current role of guidance counsellors in the Canadian school system.

#### **3.1 Persistence of FSL in Canada**

As this project relates to the continuation of FSL in secondary schools, it is necessary to first discuss what influences Canadian students in their decision to continue or discontinue the study of FSL. These influences can include the attitude students may feel towards FSL, educational barriers present at their schools, or the influence of people in their lives. Likewise, since this study was conducted in Ontario and education is provincially funded, I will present two studies that both asked students in Ontario about their decisions to continue or discontinue their FSL studies, both French immersion and core French.

**3.1.1 Attitudes towards FSL.** It is widely accepted that language learners arrive at the classes with their own attitudes and motivations towards the target language that can be shaped by many factors, including gender (Kissau, 2006) or status as a newcomer in the country (Mady, 2010a; Mady, 2010b). These attitudes students have towards French may influence students when they are choosing to continue studying FSL past the mandatory Grade 9 credit.

Several studies over the past 40 years have demonstrated that girls tend to have a more favourable attitude towards foreign language learning (Burstall, 1975; Gardner & Smythe, 1975; Powell & Littlewood, 1983). A more recent study surveying Grade 9 students in the core French program confirmed that this

favourable attitude towards language learning in girls still existed (Kissau, 2006). When interviewing teachers in the core French program, one of the teachers even expressed that “[l]earning French, it’s not perceived as a man’s job” (Kissau, 2006, p. 415). In this case, a teacher was referring to other students perceiving language learning as a more female dominated pathway.

Another attribute that is showing an influence on FSL attitudes is whether or not students have immigrated or are born in Canada. An estimated 25% of the student population in Ontario’s schools are identified as being English language learners, some of whom have immigrated to Canada (OME, 2013b). When students arrive in Canadian schools, they bring with them their own set of attitudes and beliefs from their native countries. Ontario’s language policies and practices surrounding allophones (one who speaks neither French, nor English as their first language) learning French have been interpreted as suggesting that these students do not have the capacities to learn an additional language while they are already learning English as a second language, and are often exempt from attending the mandatory core French classes (Mady, 2010b). Findings from Mady (2010b) contradict this interpretation, showing that newly arriving immigrants can outperform their Canadian-born peers after only one semester in a special introductory FSL class.

**3.1.2 Educational barriers.** At times, even if students would like to continue studying French, they face barriers at their schools, preventing them from registering in the course. In 2002, Cashman conducted a large-scale project in the Atlantic provinces in Canada, surveying close to 3,000 Grade 11 students who had chosen to discontinue with their core French studies. Interestingly, 25% of students cited issues with timetabling as the main reason for discontinuing their core French studies, elaborating that there were course conflicts or the FSL courses were simply not offered at their school. Other reasons included limited proficiency levels, more important courses were needed, and insufficient levels of success in the classroom

(Cashman, 2002). Furthermore, 37% discontinued their FSL studies to ensure that their grade average would not be affected and 28% were 'dissatisfied with the class sizes', making them not want to continue (Cashman, 2002). The study makes it unclear whether it was because the class sizes were too large or too small. In this case, those who were concerned about their grade average may have been facing a barrier at the post-secondary level, where firm grade-point averages are typically required for many programs.

Some suggestions have been made to lessen the number of barriers students face in they would like to continue. For example, in an attempt to reduce the number of core French students dropping French after Grade 9, representatives from 18 Ontario school boards suggested that Grade 10 students should be allowed to have more electives. This would be to alleviate the "students feeling they have no space in their timetable to take French" (Ontario Public School Boards' Association [OPSBA], 2007, p. 5). Furthermore, in order to encourage students to continue, representatives also suggested "awarding a Certificate of Achievement to students completing Grade 12 Core French" similar to one that is awarded after graduation in French immersion (OPSBA, 2007, p. 7). At the present time, no such certificate has been introduced for core French students who have continued the study of FSL until graduation.

**3.1.3 Influences to study FSL.** When choosing to continue studying FSL, students may find themselves turning to various sources for advice or influence. These can include, but are not limited to, teachers, parents, peers, or guidance counsellors (Chambers, 1999; Makropoulos, 2010; Kissau, 2007).

Second language teachers are especially influential with their students. For many students throughout Canada, and in Ontario, despite other resources being available in most communities, their French teacher is their only source of input in the target language. For this reason, attitudes that the teacher has towards French may be unknowingly transmitted to the students through the student-teacher relationship, the different types of feedback, their teaching styles, or the types of

praise given (Chambers, 1999). For example, in Ontario, some students felt that they were pushed out of the French immersion program because of the poor student-teacher relationship they had with their previous teachers (Makropoulos, 2010). This led to a feeling of disconnect in the classroom, and eventually resulted in leaving the program.

In another study, Kissau (2007) surveyed approximately 500 Grade 9 students and interviewed six core French teachers, asking about the various forms of encouragement that students get to continue studying FSL. Peers seemed to have more of an influence on girls; four of six teachers interviewed noted that girls tended “to be more social, and as a result, wanting their friends to take all the same courses” (Kissau, 2007, p. 426). In the same study, five of the teachers mentioned that the guidance counsellors at their schools not only gave little information about continuing French classes, but also actively discouraged male students from choosing to register for French classes after Grade 9 (Kissau, 2007). After a review of literature related to boys continuing FSL, Kissau and Turnbull (2008) proposed that attention should be paid to the role guidance counsellors play when encouraging students, especially males, to pursue French.

Chambers (1999) argues that researchers should not overlook parental involvement when discussing the motivations to continue studying an additional language, even though some researchers tend to do so. Parents tend to dominate the entire informational input that young children receive, have the ability to shape their attitudes towards groups of people or behaviours, and tend to be more influential in the decisions young children make (Oskamp & Schultz, 2005, p. 168). An example when comparing gender, Kissau (2007) found that parents were more likely to encourage their daughters to continue studying FSL, while encouraging their sons to pursue science and mathematics. In addition, when comparing Canadian born and recent immigrant secondary school students, Mady (2010a) discovered that recent immigrant students were more likely to receive parental support and encouragement to continue studying core French.

**3.1.4 Specific studies.** The following three research studies were all conducted in Ontario, asking students about their decision to continue or discontinue their FSL studies. Presented chronologically, Massey (1994) compared the motivational factors between two cohorts of core French students, Makropoulos (2010) also investigated motivations, but in French immersion, and recent work (Arnott, Romero & Fairbrother, 2015) has been conducted, examining students' intentions to pursue further core French classes.

In 1994, Massey investigated the factors behind 24 Grade 10 students' decisions to continue or not to continue studying core French in Kingston and Ottawa, two cities in Ontario. The results of the study indicated that students from Ottawa, a city generally viewed as 'more bilingual', chose to continue studying core French because they liked the culture and it added to their identity of being Canadian. This differed from students in Kingston, whose main motivations were hoping to seek employment or a better education. Interestingly, students from both cities noted that their French was greatly inferior to that of French Immersion students and that their previous classes lacked the usage of authentic materials in the classroom. Students who chose not to continue studying core French, both in Ottawa and in Kingston, cited their poor French proficiencies after having studied for many years and their low grades as major factors in their decisions to leave the program. Most had said they made this decision towards the end of their Grade 9 year, but Massey (1994) elaborates that through their unwillingness to communicate in French and their lack of participation in the previous class, it could be said that this decision to discontinue FSL courses happened sooner.

Makropoulos (2010) interviewed 23 Grade 11 students in the Ottawa area about their identities, motivations, and experiences related to the French immersion program and why they chose to continue (*engaged students*) or not (*disengaged students*) with their FSL studies. She found that the engaged students were all studying pre-university level courses, and some were concerned with their marks studying a subject

in French. When it came to the disengaged students, student-teacher relationship, organization demands and academics played major roles in determining their decision not to continue. Students frequently discussed that their schedules did not permit them to continue studying both French and the hard sciences or that the French immersion “curriculum did not correspond with their abilities and interests” (Makropoulos, 2010, p. 8).

Currently, work is being done with Grade 9 students in the Ottawa area, regarding their intentions to pursue core French in the following year (Arnott, Romero & Fairbrother, 2015). Preliminary results show that over 50% of students are planning to continue with core French in Grade 10. Some of the reasons cited for continuing were future employment and travel opportunities.

### **3.2 School and program choice**

Throughout a child’s scholastic years, there are many choices that need to be made regarding school selection, program choice, and course selection. Some decisions are made by parents when the children are too young to do so, while others may be a joint decision or the students’ sole decision as they become older.

Decisions made during the course selection process can greatly impact the future academic careers of students. Students must make decisions about pathways (applied vs. academic and college vs. university) and program choices, while keeping in mind the requirements they will need for post-secondary education, as determined by their career choices. These decisions are so complex that the Toronto District School Board (2015) has recently published a 50-page document to help students and parents to understand the course selection process.

Typically, during times of transition, adolescents are more likely to seek opinions and advice from their peers (Tilleczek, Ferguson, & Laflamme, 2010). This is notable in instances

where the student is transitioning from elementary to secondary school. When making decisions about post-secondary education in New Brunswick, both parents and secondary students responded that the majority of their information came from guidance counsellors and the secondary school (New Brunswick Department of Education, 2007). While students reported receiving most of their information from school, they added that they first learned about career opportunities by word of mouth from family members and friends. Findings by Dietsche (2013) support this, with guidance counsellors indicating that parents tend to influence their child's career planning 'Very Much' (51%), followed by someone they know working in the field (31%).

While an initial school selection will likely be a parental decision when the child begins Kindergarten or Grade 1, the students themselves tend to play more of a role during the transition from elementary school to secondary school. Cotnam-Kappel (2014b) spent an extensive period of time in a minority French language elementary school in Ontario, investigating the decision making process of selecting a secondary school. She distributed a questionnaire to 122 students and conducted interviews with 17 of them. When analysing her data, Cotnam-Kappel noted that peers, parents, and teachers tended to influence students' secondary school choices (2014b). As in the case of FSL students (see Kissau, 2007, Chambers, 1999; Makropoulos, 2010), peers, parents, and teachers seem to be involved in school and program choices.

### **3.3 An overview of guidance and career education policies in Ontario**

Over the last decade, many new guidance and career education initiatives have been implemented by the Ontario Ministry of Education. These include updates to the curriculum, the implementation of career focused portfolios, and more encouragement to participate in programs such as co-operative education (co-

op), Specialist High Skills Majors (SHSM) program, or Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). Also, the curriculum for the guidance and career education courses was updated in 2006, creating two new courses focused on discovering and exploring more workplace options (OME, 2006a; OME, 2006b).

In the fall of 2014, the *Creating Pathways to Success*, “a comprehensive Kindergarten to Grade 12 education and career/life planning program,” was fully implemented in all Ontario schools (OME, 2013c, p. 3). Its aim is to encourage students to set more personal goals for themselves, leading them to become “competent, successful, and contributing members of society” (OME, 2013c, p. 3). From Kindergarten to Grade 6, students are to be given the opportunity to contribute to their ‘All About Me’ portfolios twice a year, which will follow them throughout their schooling (OME, 2013c). The time and support given to work on these portfolios is to be determined by the students’ teachers.

In Grade 7, students move to a web-based application called the ‘Individualized Pathway Plan’ (IPP). Two web-based applications offering this are *Career Cruising* and *myBlueprint*. Like the portfolio, students are supposed to be given class time to update their IPP at least twice a year and it will follow them until graduation (OME, 2013c). In Grades 10 through 12, one of the updates must occur during their annual course selection process and is suggested to be completed “in collaboration with a teacher and/or guidance teacher/counsellor” (OME, 2013c, p. 18). By using a web-based application, information about course prerequisites, post-secondary requirements, and pathway options is easily accessible to students.

### **3.4 The guidance counsellor in Ontario**

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter (i.e., Context), guidance counsellors in Ontario do not necessarily have a background in social work or psychology, but are rather teachers who are qualified in other teachable subjects. In a survey of 145 guidance counsellors in Ontario, 79% of respondents indicated that the highest level of education that they held was a Bachelor’s Degree, 15% held a Master’s Degree and

5% a Doctorate (Malatest, 2009). The disciplines of each degree were not reported for each province, however in the Canadian data, the most common Master's degrees reported were a Master of Psychology, and a Master of Education (Malatest, 2009).

In elementary schools, the Ontario Pupil Foundation Grant, paid for by the OME, offers enough funds to provide one guidance counsellor for every 5,000 students; the counsellors are primarily intended for students in Grades 7 and 8 (People for Education, 2015). On average in secondary schools, the province also allocates enough money to provide one guidance counsellor for every 384 students, with 99% of secondary schools in Ontario reporting that they had at least one guidance counsellor present at the school (People for Education, 2015).

Guidance counsellors play many roles in secondary schools today. The Ontario School Counsellor's Association (OSCA) describes the guidance counsellor as one who "support[s] and promote[s] students' well-being and continuous growth in three areas: personal (student) development, interpersonal development, [and] career development" (n.d., p. 2). Personal development refers to the physical and emotional well-being of students, as well as character growth. Interpersonal development includes the social aspect of relationships and creating a sense of community at the school. Finally, guidance counsellors are also those who are supposed to foster career development, including supporting positive transitions between programs and schools (elementary to secondary), aiding students in building the skills needed for the workplace (curriculum vitae and interview skills), and helping students plan for their future careers. This also includes counselling students on the course requirements that students need to match their post-secondary goals.

In order to meet the needs of students, guidance counsellors may offer support through classroom instruction, assemblies, workshops, individual counselling, and collaborations with other teaching and administrative staff (OSCA, n.d.; OME, 2013c). In Ontario, 41% of participating guidance counsellors (n =

145) reported offering at least one workshop a year on career education at their school, open to both parents and students (Malatest, 2009). Expanding to a national context, Malatest (2009) discovered that throughout Canada, guidance counsellors (n = 491) spent most of their day doing individual career planning with students (23% of their day), followed by the completion of administrative tasks for 19% of their day (2009). In this study, Malatest (2009) refers to career planning as the completion of career personality tests and career exploration, while administrative tasks include student course selection and timetabling. In Ontario, this individual career planning was still the task that guidance counsellors did most frequently (i.e., for 21% of their day), with administrative tasks and program support both taking up 19% of a guidance counsellor's day. Malatest (2009) describes program support as being related to research, community development, curriculum development, and professional development. In another relevant survey, Ontario secondary schools reported that guidance counsellors spend the majority of their time helping students in their personal and career development areas (People for Education, 2015). More specifically, guidance counsellors are “‘supporting social-emotional health and well-being’ and ‘supporting student development and refinement of their Individual Pathway Plans’” (People for Education, 2015, p. 26).

Due to their participation in these professional roles and contact with post-secondary institutions, guidance counsellors are considered privileged and knowledgeable about the subject of post-secondary and careers, by students and parents alike (Labrie, Lamoureux & Wilson, 2009). Through interviews with 20 guidance counsellors in French language school boards across Ontario, Labrie, et al. (2009) discovered that when discussing post-secondary options, there was still a strong preference towards university among students and guidance counsellors. One participant described a parental preference for their child to attend university, as opposed to pursuing other post-secondary options (p. 32). Furthermore, during interactions with students regarding career aspirations, participants took into account the students' aspirations and strengths (Labrie, et al., 2009).

When counseling students on career planning, guidance counsellors in Ontario shared that there were various ways students received advice on career planning. For Dietsche (2013), career planning is the act of planning for post-secondary, whether it be “apprenticeship, college or university study or the workforce following high school graduation” (p. 6). In his study, Dietsche (2013) describes the resources that students have when career planning, and asked guidance counsellors to rate the usefulness of the various resources. The three resources that were identified as being the most useful were individual appointments with the guidance counsellors, the mandatory career planning course in Grade 10 (0.5 credit course), and online resources such as *Career Cruising* and *myBlueprint*. Forty percent of participating guidance counsellors rated both individual counselling and online resources as being ‘quite a lot’ helpful to students, equally tied with participating in co-op courses and speaking with post-secondary guidance staff.

### **3.5 Summary**

This review of the literature related to persistence in FSL programs, school choices, and the policies and practices relating to counselling in Ontario’s schools shows that there is a large gap in research relating to how students are being counseled on staying in FSL programs until high school graduation. As presented, the research shows when students are deciding to persist in FSL, many factors come into play, including how people around them are encouraging them to continue. For example, in one instance specifically identified by Kissau and Turnbull (2008), teachers identified that guidance counsellors were discouraging male students from pursuing FSL and the authors called for further investigation. This study responds directly to that call, giving voice to guidance counsellors to speak further on this issue. Furthermore, since students and parents identify guidance counsellors as being privileged in the subject of career planning, (Labrie, et al., 2009), the guidance counsellor holds a significant position of influence during course selection. With the release of the Framework (OME, 2013a), this study is timely as it pertains to the goal of retaining more students in FSL programs across the province.

## 4. Methodology

In this chapter, I will situate the qualitative framework of my research and present the details on the selection of the sites and participant recruitment. Furthermore, details will be presented on how the data was collected and analyzed.

### 4.1 Research type

This study aims to provide a greater understanding about a single behavioural-based event, the course selection process, particularly the selection of FSL courses beyond the mandatory Grade 9 credit, from the perspective of the guidance counsellor. As such, this qualitative research design, which uses a combination of individual interviews and artifacts provided to me by participants, aims at answering the study's research questions.

Qualitative research is characterized by its “focus on the social world” (Croker, 2009, p. 7). Researchers can call upon many approaches and tools that can be used to better understand the experiences of the participants in various situations, based on their research question(s). Qualitative studies can be *exploratory* or *descriptive* in nature; it may also make use of many data sources, such as interviews, focus groups, observation, questionnaires, and diaries (Croker, 2009).

A case study is used when the researcher is trying to gather more understanding about “a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009), more specifically, about certain ‘cases’ that exist in their natural world. Creswell (2007) elaborates that case study research uses multiple sources of information, with the goal of “developing a detailed analysis of one or more cases” (p. 79). Case studies lend themselves well to exploratory research, for they are flexible in nature and are participant focused (Yin, 2009). In brief, I have chosen to use a qualitative exploratory case study design.

## 4.2 Participants

In this study, there were two levels to selecting participants for this study – the first was at the level of site choice (i.e., where I decided to conduct this project); and the second was at the level of participants within that particular site. This section will describe the selection of the school board and participant recruitment, as well as a description of the participants.

**4.2.1 Recruitment.** When choosing a site to conduct this research study, I chose a particular school board out of convenience. The school board where this study was conducted was in a suburban setting, ensuring a smaller distance between the schools and allowing the ability to travel between schools in a reasonable amount of time. Lastly, each secondary school employed at least one guidance counsellor. The participating school board was located in a suburban area of Southern Ontario. Ethics approval was sought from both the University of Ottawa and the participating school board.

For this study, I was interested in interviewing guidance counsellors who were currently working in secondary schools. On the school board ethics application, I chose 12 secondary schools within the school board from which I was interested in recruiting guidance counselors. I selected six schools that offered the French immersion program and an equivalent number of non-French immersion schools, taking into account the number of students enrolled at the school. Furthermore, the 12 schools were spread across the territory of the school board, and I chose to include three secondary schools from each of the four districts identified by the school board.

The ethics board at the participating school board requested that I contact each of the principals in order to gain permission to enter the school before I could contact participants directly. I attempted to gain this permission through emails and phone calls. Once this permission was granted, I could then contact the guidance counsellors and invite them to participate. All guidance counsellors at each school who counselled

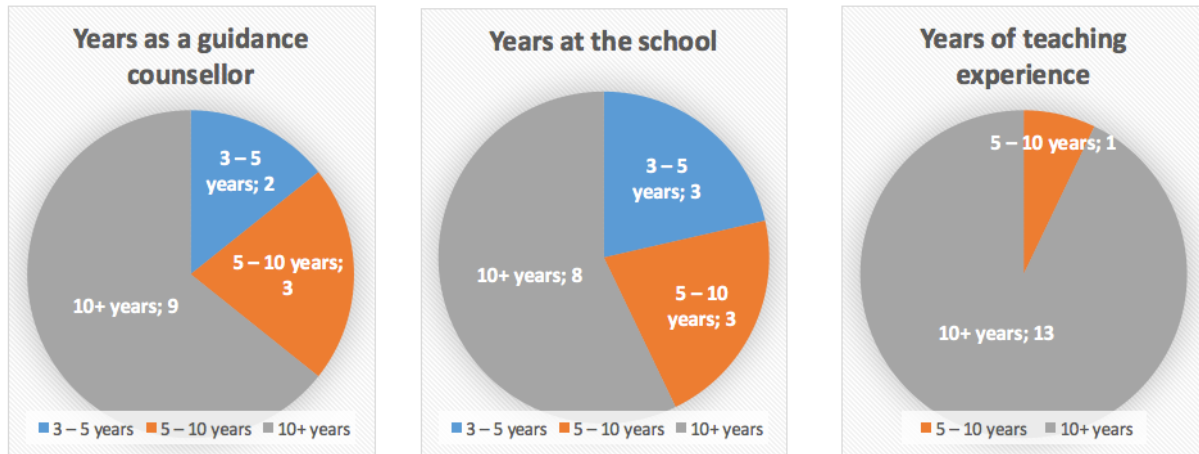
students during the course selection process were invited to participate. When receiving permission from the principal, I was frequently told to contact the head of the guidance department, or the principals provided me with the names of those who had told the principal they would like to participate. I did not reach out to additional guidance counsellors unless given permission to do so. Interview times and locations were set up through email and phone calls directly with participants, based on their convenience.

#### **4.2.2 Description.**

I sent invitations to 12 schools to participate and guidance counsellors from nine schools chose to participate. In total, I interviewed 14 guidance counsellors from a total of different eight schools. During the interviews, I asked participants to complete a questionnaire where they had to indicate some background information and characteristics of guidance counsellors. I asked participants how many years of experience they had as classroom teachers, guidance counsellors and the number of years they had been at the school where the interviews were conducted. Lastly, I ask participants to write down the teaching subjects they were qualified to teach. This was to gather some general, overall characteristics of the participants. While case study research is participant focused, presenting the participants individually with all of their unique characteristics could have compromised the participants' anonymity. Therefore, the characteristics of the participant sample are presented as a group, and not individually (as seen in Figures 1 and Table 3). Figure 1, below, presents the years of experience participants had as a guidance counsellor, how long they have been at their particular school, and the years of experience as a classroom teacher. The majority of participants had 10 or more years of experience as a guidance counsellor ( $n = 9$ ), while three participants had five to 10 years of experience and two participants had three to five years of experience. Finally, all participants had been at their current school for a minimum of three years, with eight participants having been at their school for 10 or more years. When asked about their previous teaching experience, 13

participants indicated that they had a minimum of 10 years of teaching experience in a classroom setting, while the remaining one had five to ten years.

**Figure 1.** Participants (Years of experience).



When asked to elaborate on the subjects they were qualified to teach, as per the OCT standards, participants said that they were qualified to teach 3.5 subjects on average (ranging from two to five). As shown in Table 3, between all of the participants, the most common teachable subject, other than Guidance and Career Education, was the Cooperative Education (co-op) qualification (n = 7). Next, five participants were qualified to teach one of the sciences (with one participant qualified to teach two sciences) and five participants held a qualification in Special Education. One participant identified as being qualified to teach FSL.

**Table 3.** Participants (Teaching qualifications).

Teachable Subject	Number of participants who are qualified	Teachable Subject	Number of participants who are qualified
Co-op	7	Science	6
Special Education	5	Geography	4
History	3	Math	3

Business	2	Social Science	2
Physical Education	2	French as a second language	1
English	1	Technology	1

**4.3 Instrument**

For this study, I chose to use semi-structured interviews as my data collection tool, as I “[hoped] to understand the setting [...] from the respondent’s viewpoint” (Tierney & Dilley, 2002, p. 455). This allowed participating guidance counsellors to share with me their perspective on the course selection process and FSL attrition rates. During each of the interviews, I used an original interview protocol to guide the interview, asking additional follow up questions as needed. I developed the interview protocol based on current themes in literature related to FSL attrition and motivation (see a copy in Appendix A). Since I was using a semi-structured interview format, I was able to ask questions that were not in the interview protocol, based on answers provided by previous participants. If previous interviews elicited a certain theme that was not always elicited through the interview protocol, I was able to ask subsequent participants regarding this theme. This happened most often with regards to course offerings at the school (e.g. asking how many and which FSL courses are running this semester). Table 4 outlines how each of the protocol questions relates to the research questions and the codes used during analysis. The data codes used in Table 4 are explained in Table 5 (see page 40).

**Table 4.** *Relationship between the research questions, the interview protocol and the analysis codes.*

Research questions	Corresponding interview questions	Data codes
1. How do guidance counsellors describe the process of course selection, with regards to FSL in particular?	<p>a. Has a student ever come to you asking for advice on their course selection process?</p> <p>b. Describe a time when a student came to you asking for advice on their course selection process. How often does an interaction like this happen?</p> <p>c. Has a student ever come to you asking for advice about continuing core French or French immersion?</p> <p>d. Walk me through how you would advise a student coming to you for the first time, unsure about their future in French.</p> <p>e. How do you make decisions on how to advise students when it comes to selecting French as a second language courses?</p>	<p>Path; PathFSL;</p> <p>PathU; PathC;</p> <p>PathO</p> <p>RGC; RGCa;</p> <p>RGCc; RGCt;</p> <p>RGCcp</p> <p>RetR; RetG</p> <p>AttR; AttPre;</p> <p>AttPro</p> <p>CSw; CSt; CSr</p> <p>AB</p> <p>CD</p>
2. How do guidance counsellors view their role in the course selection process?	<p>a. Has a student ever come to you asking for advice on their course selection process?</p> <p>b. Describe a time when a student came to you asking for advice on their course selection process. How often does an interaction like this happen?</p> <p>e. How do you make decisions on how to advise students when it comes to selecting French as a second language courses?</p>	<p>Path; PathFSL;</p> <p>PathU; PathC</p> <p>RGC; RGCa;</p> <p>RGCt; RGCv;</p> <p>RGCcp</p> <p>RetR; RetG</p> <p>AttR</p> <p>CSw; CSt; CSr</p>

	<p>f. How knowledgeable do you think students are about the effects of their course selection may have on their future academic careers?</p> <p>i. Has a student ever requested to conduct their co-op placement or complete their volunteer hours in French? What followed?</p>	<p>AB</p> <p>CD</p>
<p>3. What do counsellors identify as factors that contribute to students continuing (or not continuing) the study of FSL past Grade 9?</p>	<p>c. Has a student ever come to you asking for advice about continuing core French or French immersion?</p> <p>d. Walk me through how you would advise a student coming to you for the first time, unsure about their future in French.</p> <p>g. Why do you think that there is a trend for students to discontinue their French studies?</p> <p>h. Thinking about the OSSD requirements, how many students would you say take advantage of the fact that FSL credits can now count towards Groups 2 &amp; 3?</p> <p>i. Has a student ever requested to conduct their co-op placement or complete their volunteer hours in French? What followed?</p>	<p>Path; PathFSL;</p> <p>PathU; PathC;</p> <p>PathO</p> <p>RGC; RGCa;</p> <p>RGCc; RGCt;</p> <p>RGCcp; RGCv</p> <p>RetR; RetG</p> <p>AttR; AttPre;</p> <p>AttPro</p> <p>CSw; CSt; CSr</p> <p>AB</p> <p>CD</p>

#### 4.4 Data collection

The data was collected over a period of four weeks; two weeks in December 2015 and two weeks in January 2016. Thirteen interviews occurred during school hours and in the participants' offices and one over the phone.

Most of the interviews were audio-recorded ( $n = 11$ ) and then transcribed. Three participants requested their interviews not be audio recorded. In these cases, I took detailed notes and typed up summaries for each of the interviews, grouping answers by question. The interviews lasted an average of approximately 30 minutes, with a range from 15 minutes to 50 minutes.

Each of the participants was either assigned or chose a pseudonym to ensure their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses. Moreover, when transcribing the interviews, any identifying information about the location of the school or other staff members was removed. A list of the pseudonyms as well as the school FSL programming that is offered each participating school is presented in Table 5, below. Eight participants worked at schools that only offered the core French program and six participants worked at schools that offered both core French and French immersion.

**Table 5.** *List of participant pseudonyms.*

Name	French programming offered
Andrew	Core French only
Beth	Core French only
Boris	Core French only
Chantal	Core French and French immersion
David	Core French and French immersion
Janelle	Core French and French immersion

Jordan	Core French only
Kindle	Core French only
Lorena	Core French only
Martha	Core French and French immersion
Michelle	Core French only
Samantha	Core French only
Sarah	Core French and French immersion
Teri	Core French and French immersion

Before the analysis, I sent participating guidance counsellors an email with the final version of the transcript attached for them to review. For those who chose not to have their interviews recorded, I sent them the typed summaries of their interview. The transcript was sent as a password protected Word Document in order to protect their privacy. Participants had the opportunity to highlight certain quotes or themes that were most important to them, as well as to add or clarify statements made, using track changes or by adding comments to the document. Participants were given a week to complete this step and it was presented as optional to participants, as I understood how busy they would be during the data collection time period. This strategy was inspired by Cotnam-Kappel (2014a), however as her participants were children, she conducted this member checking in an interview with participants. The extra consistency check had the potential to reduce or eliminate errors in my transcription of the interview and to add to the study's trustworthiness. In the end, four participants responded; three indicating that they required no changes and one asked for changes to be made to their language use (going from an informal register to a more formal register).

## 4.5 Data analysis

After transcribing all of the interviews, I began analyzing the data thematically (e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Shank, 2006). No participants highlighted any passages or added any comments to their interview, so this was not included in my analysis. Firstly, I reread all of the interviews to refresh my knowledge of the content and to highlight some of the main themes, which became the first series of codes. This process yielded 20 major themes. During the data analysis stage, I performed two reliability checks with one of my supervisors to ensure consistency and accuracy. We both used the same codes I provided to her to analyze the same passage when performing these consistency checks. In the initial check, it became very apparent that I was using too many codes, with each of us sometimes using different codes when analyzing the same passage or interpreting two different codes in similar ways. I had also found it difficult to organize all of the codes and keep all 20 themes in mind while coding. This prompted me to review my codes, condensing the original themes to seven major themes, listed in the Level 1 column of Table 5. When some of the codes needed more precision, I created the Level 2 column themes as subsidiaries of the Level 1 themes. As an example of this process, I originally had 'Reasons for Retention' as one major theme, however it seemed fitting to place 'Retention' as a Level 1 major theme and 'Reasons for Retention' (and one other) as level 2 themes under it. When coding, I took note of both recurring themes and variances.

**Table 6.** *Codes used in data analysis.*

Code	Level 1	Level 2
CSr	Timeline of Course Selection	Resources
CSw		What (Purpose)
CSt		When (Frequency/Timeline)
RCG	Role of Guidance Counsellor	Other Jobs
RGCa		Advising during a meeting

RGCCc		Creating new courses
RGCT		Timetabling
RGCCp		Co-op
RGCV		Volunteer Hours
Path	Academic Pathways	General knowledge
PathFSL		FSL
PathU		Academic/University
PathC		Applied/College
PathO		Open
RetR	Retention	Reasons
RetG		New Guidelines
AttPre	Attrition	Prevention
AttPro		Process
AttR		Reasons
AB	Attitudes and beliefs about French or FSL programs	
CD	Context dependent	Actions depend on context

After an initial coding, I went back to review the transcripts and inputted the coded data into the Nvivo software. This step allowed me to review my codes for a second time, cleaning up and catching any segments that were missed during the initial coding process. The software allowed me to organize the participants quotes by theme and to pull out quotations that were most representative of the theme discussed. Following this, I compared participant responses noting which were similar and which varied. As the

interviews were coded by theme, the same participant could mention multiple themes and be included in each of the frequency counts.

#### **4.6 Presentation of data**

The findings and discussion of findings will be presented in two separate chapters. I will present my findings in Chapter 5, which is organized by theme. Then, in chapter 6, I will discuss the findings by answering each of my research questions. As participants presented me with an overabundance of reasons that could contribute to retention and attrition in FSL programs, the findings will only focus on reasons identified by at least four participants.

## **5. Findings**

In this chapter, I have chosen to first present the findings from the interviews using the themes that informed my data analysis. A summary of these themes, and subthemes, is included as Appendix B. I will demonstrate the relationship between these themes and the research questions in the following chapter.

Each of the interviews with the 14 guidance counsellors provided me with rich data regarding course selection, their role during the course selection process, and the factors they believe impact the continuation of FSL past the mandatory Grade 9 credit. I will begin by outlining how guidance counsellors described the course selection process as a whole, followed by the various roles they play during the process. I will then present the idea of ‘pathways’ that exist in Ontario secondary schools (that is the various streams that students can select for their courses), and how these can impact course selection, followed by the guidance counsellors’ perspectives on retention and attrition in FSL programs. Finally, I will conclude by outlining some of the attitudes and beliefs made by guidance counsellors about FSL programming or the course selection process that became apparent through my analysis.

### **5.1 Course selection process**

The ‘Course Selection’ theme was discussed by all participants, as they were explicitly asked to describe the course selection process. During the interviews, the level of detail participants used to describe the course selection process varied. In these descriptions, the participating guidance counsellors also provided a timeline of notable course selection events during the school year. When describing the course selection process, participants shared that as guidance counsellors, they often performed course modifications, presented information to current and incoming students during the annual course selection, and answered questions about post-secondary requirements.

**5.1.1 Description.** Advising during the annual course selection differs from performing course modifications<sup>10</sup>, as in the latter, students are only able to modify their timetable using courses that were offered during that same time slot. Samantha explained that when a student requested a course modification, she would normally recommend courses at the same Grade level as the student (e.g., a Grade 11 student would be presented with the Grade 11 courses available in the particular timeslot). Michelle echoed this by saying that when students are “trying to get rid of an elective they [don’t] like [...she will] always list everything that’s available” (Michelle, 45-46<sup>11</sup>).

Eleven guidance counsellors representing all eight participating schools explained that they give presentations to either current students (Grades 9 through 12), incoming Grade 8 students, or both, to prepare students for the annual course selection. At David’s school, he visits the feeder schools’ Grade 8 classes twice, once in the fall to “touch base” (David, 17) with students and then again in January to explain how to select their Grade 9 courses. The content of these course selection presentations will be further explained in the section on the role of the guidance counsellor.

Four guidance counsellors identified that many of the questions that commonly arise during course selection were related to post-secondary planning and admission requirements:

Students ask for advice based on usually on their post-secondary pathways. So they need to know, if I have this particular pathway in mind, what subjects do I need, or do I need this particular one.

Often, if they’re struggling in a particular subject, they want to know if they need it up to the Grade

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<sup>10</sup> Participants frequently used the term ‘course selection’ in their responses to describe both the process that occurs in the winter semester, where students select all of their courses for the upcoming year, as well as the act of swapping, adding, or dropping one or more courses throughout the year. When necessary to distinguish between the two events, I will use the term ‘annual course selection’ to describe when students select all of their courses for the following school year and ‘course modifications’ when referring to students swapping, adding, or dropping courses throughout the school year.

<sup>11</sup> I have chosen to cite participant quotations using the corresponding line numbers from the transcripts or summaries.

12 level, if it will be a required course for their planned pathway. So that's typically the types of questions. (Andrew, 12-16)

Students at Janelle's school took advantage of a drop-in career center "to ask questions [...] and to get] help using the resources to be able to find post-secondary admission requirements" (Janelle, 28-30).

Furthermore, five participants outlined that parents often can influence their child's course selection, sometimes accompanying the student to the meetings.

[M]any times this discussion over course selection can be with a parent also – they just want to hear the message so they tend to be a little bit more in depth just because the parent will have several questions also but [Teri doesn't] mind those at all because the better you know [she] can inform the parents and the students the better off [they] all are in the end. (Teri, 108-112)

Distinguishing between students with parents who are involved and students whose parents are less involved, Teri explained that those with parents who "are involved in a healthy way, usually are a little bit further along that path than a [student's] parent that is not part of the educational planning" (Teri, 327-329). Martha estimated that at her school "20-30% [of students] kind of [pick] courses based on [...] what their parents told them," (Martha, 207-208) peer influence, or last minute selections, while the rest of the students do take the time to reflect upon their selection.

Finally, when explaining why students made appointments with them, Sarah and Beth said it was to double check information they are receiving from peers or other sources. Teri, Samantha and Boris said that students ask questions about workload or content of courses, while Lorena and Beth said that it was to confirm that they are registered for or choosing appropriate courses for their needs and future ambitions.

**5.1.2 Timeline.** In this school board, the annual course selection occurs in February of each year. In the weeks prior, guidance counsellors described that they see an influx of students inquiring about graduation

and post-secondary requirements, however all participants agreed that they see students about course selection all year round, and seven participants shared that they see students daily<sup>12</sup>. These visits include both “the more keen students who are planning ahead” (Chantal, 42-43) and students looking to modify their current timetable. Boris estimated that he could see dozens of students a day with questions during the annual course selection, and two to three students a day asking to modify their timetable during the off-peak course selection times.

A unique strategy that was being employed at one of the schools was having Grade 9 students complete a draft annual course selection in the weeks prior to when they would have to submit their Grade 10 course selection. She explains:

Like the first week of January we’re gonna be in every single Grade 9 class asking them to do a draft course selecting for Grade 10. And then when the first semester comes along it’s kind of a free-for-all and it’s, you know, “here’s the presentation on how you chose your courses and it has to be done by this date, and you have to figure out how to get computer time to get that done” so it’s a mad rush. But because a month ahead of time, we prepare them, we go through their draft, we hand their draft back to them with suggestions and hopefully they’re making good choices (Lorena, 169-175).

Lorena believed this strategy went above and beyond what other schools did and that it helped students to reflect upon their choices, which led to them making better selections.

While the bulk of the interactions regarding course selection tend to occur prior to the annual course selection process in January and February, there are also certain times of the year when there tends to be an influx of students looking to modify their course selection. Sarah explained that “in June [they] tend to find a

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<sup>12</sup> Other quantifiers participants used to describe the frequency of visits regarding course selection, not included in this count were: “It’s a lot.” (Jordan, 31); “All the time.” (David, 5); “Very often.” (Martha, 23); “We are constantly counselling students around course selection.” (Janelle, 9)

lot more students just sort of second guessing what they're doing" and again in September when students are "just double checking, [and] questioning what they had originally selected back in February" (Sarah, 35-36; 41-42). Lorena added that student will "always [visit] in the first two weeks of school, and often beyond that because it takes some students a little longer to determine whether or not they really are in the right courses" (Lorena, 43-45).

Kindle was the only participant to elaborate on the timelines that guidance counsellors follow after students have submitted their annual course selection requests. She described this as "we ask the kids what they want, and we have to have a concrete number before we move forward saying yes there's going to be a class" (Kindle, 68-70). She states that she and her colleagues in the guidance department will "do course verifications in March" (Kindle, 5-6) to determine which courses will be offered and look at the possibilities of how to arrange the timetable. As I will elaborate later, courses can be combined together in an effort to offer more courses to students.

**5.1.3 Resources.** While I did not explicitly ask participants about the resources available to students during the course selection process, nine participants elaborated on the various resources that they either provide to students or directed them to use to help select appropriate courses. By far the most common resource used by both students and guidance counsellors was Career Cruising, which Janelle described in detail:

[It's] the online platform that [the] board has subscribed to. They have a course planner in Career Cruising that [students] can be going into it at any time of the year [...] And so it allows them to go in and map out their course selection and through Career Cruising that's the number one tool for them to be able to start doing the post-secondary research because Career Cruising has links to you know all of the different and colleges and universities and apprenticeship programs that are part of the public education system across Canada[.] (Janelle, 46-53)

A total of six guidance counsellors made reference to this tool. Samantha added that students at her school complete their course selection on Career Cruising, where they can also register for night school or summer school classes. Students can drag and drop courses into a planner that shows all four years. If a student selects a course in Grade 11 for which they do not have the requirement, an alert will pop up and the student will not be allowed to submit their course selection due to the error. Generally, Career Cruising is available to students in the school board from Grades 6 to 12 and is presented in a checklist format, according to the components of the recently introduced Individualized Pathway Planner (IPP) (OME, 2013c).

In addition to Career Cruising, three participants mentioned four other online resources that they use with students or direct students to use on their own. They are as follows:

1. [www.apprenticesearch.com](http://www.apprenticesearch.com)
2. [www.electronicinfo.ca](http://www.electronicinfo.ca)
3. [www.ontariocolleges.ca](http://www.ontariocolleges.ca)
4. [www.ouac.ca](http://www.ouac.ca)

Each of the sites details the various options that students have at different post-secondary destinations and can be used when they are investigating post-secondary options, with or without the help of a guidance counsellor.

Similar to how Lorena used a draft annual course selection at her school, two participants described that their departments created and used various course selection handouts with students to help them during the course selection process (see Appendix C). When students came to Teri with questions about course selection, she quite often used a four-year planner with “all the compulsory credits listed” (Teri, 24) and really liked it because “the student has something to take with them when they walk away” (Teri, 25-26). To better inform student course selection decisions, Teri reported that she would write on the planning sheet the grades students earned in each of their completed courses. Furthermore, Teri also used a math pathway

planning sheet, listing the preferred pathways available at the school and the suggested grades students should earn in order to successfully move on to the next course (see Appendix D). Finally, Teri was the only participant who volunteered information about a planning sheet that she uses with her students, in particular her French immersion students. The French immersion planning sheet lists all of the French immersion compulsory courses and the possible electives at the school (see Appendix E).

**5.1.4 Summary.** In sum, guidance counsellors reported that the annual course selection occurred in the winter, more specifically at the beginning of the second semester. To prepare students to complete the annual course selection, all participating schools gave presentations on course selection to students in Grades 8 to 12. All year long, students looking for more personalized advice took advantage of the opportunity to have individual appointments with guidance counsellors. These individual appointments also included students who wanted to make modifications to their course selection, typically in September and June. During these presentations and meetings, participants described some of the resources they used, most notably Career Cruising, which is based on the IPP.

## **5.2 Role of the guidance counsellor**

When asked explicitly about how they viewed their role, participants expressed to me that they often had many responsibilities during the course selection process. The five key roles as shared by the participants are presented in this section. First, the most common role was advising students throughout the year on course modifications and the annual course selection. As a follow up, I inquired how guidance counsellors were advising students on pursuing FSL courses. Second, participating guidance counsellors also shared with me their role in how their schools decide to offer new courses in their annual course selection every year. Third, participants described some of the other duties they perform, such as caring for

the emotional wellbeing of students or preparing students for the course selection. Finally, I asked participants about the completion of two opportunities students have to use French outside of the school: cooperative education (co-op) programs and the completion of volunteer hours. Even though guidance counsellors are not typically involved in the co-op program, they are aware of the students' course selection and the guidance department is where students submit their compulsory volunteer hours.

**5.2.1 Advising students on course selection.** The main reason that six participants gave for a student to make an appointment with them about course selection was if they needed advice on pathways selection or advice about specific courses. Three participants said that they would never consider telling participants what courses they should take, and clarified that it is the role of the guidance counsellor “to teach them how to use the resources so they can investigate what the options are and then they decide” (Janelle, 103-104). After reflecting, Janelle added that she “can't think of an instance where [she's] advised a student as to what they should be taking” (Janelle, 249-250).

When advising students coming to see them with questions, each participant had a different way of approaching the situation. To begin with, six participants said that they would try to get to know the student better, including their likes and dislikes. Teri described this process by saying that she makes decisions on how to advise students in the same way she “would make a decision for anything whether you know it's with [her] children or for [herself]” (Teri, 269-270). Her process, in more detail, is as follows

You have to do a little bit of research. And research in these cases would be knowing the student better in terms of what their plan is, what they're thinking, why they're having, you know, second thoughts or why they're debating whether they're taking a course or not as opposed to are we just going to flip a coin because it's a course. So, doing the research in terms of what I think I would need to know to help this student make the best decision and then looking at the pros and the cons to

that. Because in this job, there's never really a right answer it the best – it's getting the information and the student making the best choice that they can at that point in their life. So sometimes it's a little bit more clear-cut than others, and other times not at all. (Teri, 270-278)

The other participants who echoed this similar desire to get to know students in order to best advise them or make recommendations added that they may use these interests to investigate possible career choices, which in turn would affect the course selection.

Six guidance counsellors also talked about the importance of backwards planning when it came to course selection. This involved questioning the students as to the type of careers or post-secondary programs that may interest them, followed by looking up the requirements and planning backwards year-by-year down to the year the student in question is currently in. For example, if a Grade 9 student were to come in to see Janelle, she said that she would help them “do the back planning on their schedules that would help them decide then what courses should they be taking in Grade 10 and then 11 and then Grade 12” (Janelle, 30-31). Sarah said that she would do the same and shared: “so really to be honest, I work backwards. So I would say ‘What is your ultimate goal? Where do you wanna be after high school?’” (Sarah, 89-91).

Lastly, five participants recommended that students consult teachers with questions they may have about the specifics of the course. Even though students can read the course descriptions online, they may have questions regarding the day-to-day aspects of the course and elements of the evaluation process.

Chantal summarizes this well when she explained:

I always recommend that they go to the subject teacher so they know what's the every day. Because they'll read a description that we have on Career Cruising or on the school board website, which is very general, so I suggest they go and talk to the teacher and find out what do we do on a daily basis, what are the assignments like, ‘Are there group presentations?’, ‘Is it individual things?’, ‘Is it more hands on?’ So I'll share obviously as much as I can because I get that information from teachers too,

but I always push them to talk to the person who's teaching the course because it helps them make a more sound decision. (Chantal, 26-32)

Here, Chantal suggests that she can only know so much about the course content and the types of assessments used. In this case, the teachers are truly the experts the students should be consulting.

**5.2.1.1 Advising on FSL.** When questioned specifically about how participants would advise a student coming to them about continuing FSL, three participants immediately responded by clarifying that this was not a common occurrence. In Boris' experience, only a few students had ever come to him requesting to take French, adding that those were oftentimes students studying at the school on a study permit. Furthermore, in Beth's experience, French is not a subject that is discussed often and she would not bring up French or initiate a conversation about continuing without the student initially mentioning French. If a student has taken Grade 10 core French, Beth said that she would talk to the student about whether they would like to continue or not.

When students do come to guidance counsellors asking about continuing in FSL, four participants indicated that they would not encourage French any more than any other elective, as they "do have to stay neutral in that perspective" (Andrew, 69-70). This stemmed from a concern where other departments would view them encouraging the modern languages department and not others. Eleven participants did indicate that they would encourage students to continue studying FSL under certain conditions. For example, Sarah would encourage her students to pursue their French studies "*if they have any interest in French or passion about it*" (Sarah, 100), while Kindle would "always try to keep French open *if the child is interested*"<sup>13</sup> (Kindle, 85). Lastly, Samantha would first ask the student about their grades in the French course and whether it's "something they enjoy" or are doing well, and finally how demanding they feel the course load was (Samantha, 59). In total, three participants would encourage students to continue studying FSL if they

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<sup>13</sup> Italics added for emphasis.

showed interest in it, six would encourage if the student enjoyed French, and nine would encourage if they had good grades or excelled in FSL courses<sup>14</sup>. The guidance counsellor who held teaching qualifications for FSL<sup>15</sup> admitted: “being a French teacher myself, I think I’m a bit bias[ed] maybe, but I do really encourage my students to pursue their studies in French” (49-50<sup>13</sup>).

Finally, four participants described that they would share personal anecdotes or beliefs with students to give them more perspective. These included both positive and negative stories about themselves or their children learning FSL, or information that they believe to be true about the level of French proficiency required for post-secondary study or the job market. For example, Lorena was the only participant who shared stories about her own children in French immersion and commented “I tell them how great I think French is, how much I love it, how much having more than one language can help you eventually, and the little stories about my own children” (Lorena, 129-131). In Samantha’s case, she described that just simply taking the Grade 12 core French course will not make them more likely to get a job; what really matters is that students have the ability to speak French fluently and that they need to be bilingual.

These statements will be explored in the discussion chapter, with attempts to connect it to the previous research explored in the literature review.

**5.2.2 Incorporating new courses into the course selection.** When a school chooses to offer a course during the annual course selection, there is no guarantee that the course will run in the following academic year. If there were not enough students registered, the school may decide to not offer the course or to combine it with other grade levels, creating a class where multiple grade levels would be in once class, such as Grades 10, 11 and 12. Even though participants were not explicitly questioned about how new courses

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<sup>14</sup> If participants mentioned more than one condition, these were included in the frequency count which explains the total of 20 references.

<sup>15</sup> The pseudonym is not included here to protect the anonymity of the participant as there was only one FSL qualified participant.

are developed at their schools, six guidance counsellors brought up the theme of creating new courses and the role they themselves play in the creation of new courses, specifically relating to FSL. Before the OME created the Open level course in the updated curriculum (2014), two schools previously offered a beginner French course to meet the demands of their students. Responding to student demands was common at the schools, as three additional schools opted to offer additional French pathways as well. These will be discussed in subsequent themes, but in brief, Kindle said they have “done a lot of data study” (Kindle, 31-32) to come to the decision that they “will be offering more College level senior courses” (Kindle, 50) in core French. At Janelle’s school, they will be offering the Applied and Open level stream for French immersion, hoping that more students will be successful. Finally, at Andrew’s school, they have seen growth in the Grade 9 Open core French course and will be offering the Grade 10 Open course in the future.

**5.2.3 Other duties performed by guidance counsellors.** In general, David said that the “number one job as counsellors” (David, 5) was related to pathways and course selection, oftentimes on a daily basis. The second job he described for guidance counsellors was to address issues related to students’ social and emotional wellbeing where “counsellors are kind of just like the starting point or the gatekeeper to finding out where the experts are” (David, 7-8). Martha estimated that 20% of the queries she got were related to social/emotional issues, while Janelle believed that more of her time “is definitely spent helping students with mental health issues and that sort of counselling now then actually talking about course selection” (Janelle, 96-98).

Eleven guidance counsellors, representing each participating school, referred to course selection preparation presentations given to Grade 8 students, current secondary students, or both, that occur in the weeks prior to the course selection process. At the Grade 8 presentations, David says that his department will go to the elementary feeder schools twice. The first time is to “touch base with them and let them know

the specialized programs that we have at the school,” while the second time is a “one hour [...] information session on how to select your courses for Grade 9. And we talk about the different compulsory courses, the different elective courses and [...] the different levels academically, whether now it’s called in Grade 9 Academic, Applied, Locally Developed” (David, 17-24). Guidance counsellors at Janelle’s school will present information to Grade 9 students about understanding the course selection process in general. During these presentations Janelle said they also “provide [students] with handouts to help direct them to the resources that [they] would like to see them using as they do their research to guide their course selection” (Janelle, 21-23). As mentioned above, Teri also provided handouts to her students to help with planning.

Three guidance counsellors reported that they booked computer labs twice a year for students to update and make changes to their IPPs on Career Cruising. Lastly, at her school, Samantha was also responsible for putting together volunteer opportunities for students.

**5.2.4 Co-op program and its suitability in French.** In the four participating French immersion schools, all of the guidance counsellors were able to describe a time when a student completed a co-op placement in French. When asked about the occurrence of co-op placements being completed in French, the six guidance counsellors at French immersion schools highlighted the possibility for students to complete their placements at their previous elementary schools, immersing the students in a French immersion teaching experience. One participant said that in the last 12 years, she has seen one French placement outside of teaching at an immersion school, with it being a “placement in design, computer design program because they [the supervisor] happened to speak French so they were able to do that” (Chantal, 318-319).

Six guidance counsellors who work in schools that offer only core French said that they have never heard of such an instance happening, however two did have some experience with students completing additional teaching in French. In one case, Lorena elaborated that students sometimes completed the

tutoring portion of their leadership class in French, but that “it doesn’t happen very often – especially not [at her school]” (Lorena, 292) because it was a core French school. The other case was at Jordan’s school, where they “do offer a teaching assistant program, through co-op, and [they] do have kids do a TA in French class” (Jordan, 282-283).

Two participants suggested that students may not be opting to participate in a French co-op placement because they did not know they could do so, or as Kindle suggests “French immersion would have a better link for the co-op and the student would probably be a bit more comfortable too” (Kindle, 204-205).

**5.2.5 Volunteer hours completed in French.** Similar to the division seen with French co-op placements, only two guidance counsellors from French immersion schools offered any kind of example of a student trying to complete their volunteer hours in French. Two participants from the same school mentioned that they had a student who “volunteered, but it wasn’t really a not-for-profit, but it was a French – they ran a French program in the summer” (Martha, 404-405). In this case, the student attempted to count these hours towards their 40 required hours, however she was denied because it was a for-profit placement. The other four guidance counsellors at French immersion schools could not offer any example of a student requesting to complete their volunteer hours in French.

For those teaching at a core French school, all eight had never heard of such a case. Four participants went on to add that if such an opportunity ever arose, they would be open to the idea. Janelle summarizes this when she said: “obviously, it would be acceptable as long as it meets all of the other eligibility requirements of the community involvement” (Janelle, 378-379).

**5.2.6 Summary.** During the course selection process, both the annual selection and when students are making modifications, participating guidance counsellors elaborated that they had many roles. The main role that all participants expressed was advising students on their course selections. This included giving individual advice on courses and post-secondary planning. Six guidance counsellors employed backwards planning strategies with students, encouraging students to look beyond secondary school to plan for what courses they needed to take to get to where they want to go. Specifically, with regards to FSL courses, 11 participants would encourage students to pursue their studies *if* the student enjoyed it, *if* they were interested in it, or *if* they got good marks in the classes. At over half of the participating schools, guidance counsellors shared how they were changing their course offerings to meet the demands of their students. Finally, all schools prepared their students for the annual course selection through presentations that described the pathways and various resources available to students when they are selecting courses.

Where responses differed depending on the French programs offered at the school was when participants were asked about students who completed their co-op placements in French. All participating guidance counsellors at French immersion schools described that they have heard of instances where students conducted their co-op placements in a French environment and it was most commonly at their previous French immersion elementary schools.

### **5.3 Pathways in secondary school**

When students reach secondary school, they must choose between various pathways options. Pathways refers to the route that students will take throughout their time in secondary schools, leading them to their final post-secondary destination. Generally, these decisions lead to going to university or college, completing an apprentice position, or going directly to the workforce. In Grades 9 and 10, students can select from Academic, Applied, Open, and Locally Developed courses, and in Grades 11 and 12, their

options are University, University/College, College, Workplace, and Open courses. In the following section, I will present how the guidance counsellors describe the pathways students can take and how each may impact course selection decisions.

**5.3.1 General pathways.** The reality is that the pathways selection decisions students make in secondary school will impact the future post-secondary options they can pursue. Even though guidance counsellors want to keep doors open for students as long as possible, when students select a specific pathway, they are sometimes closing doors. Unfortunately, Sarah noted that “it’s not really until Grade 10 to 11 that [students] realize that the courses that they’re taking can impact their future” (Sarah, 137-138). Kindle echoed this same sentiment, adding that students “do realize the ramifications of what they’re taking or not taking, but by not knowing what they want to do, they’re not even sure how they’re limiting it” (Kindle, 123-125).

Six guidance counsellors commented that they believe some students are in the wrong pathway. Jordan estimated that “somewhere in the neighbourhood of 20-25% of [his students] are on the wrong pathway. And they don’t want to admit that they are” (Jordan, 212-213). He struggled with the complex role he plays when advising students, commenting that his “job is to try and get the kids to look at and pick the right pathway, but that’s a difficult job on the best of days” (Jordan, 203-204). He questioned the amount of guidance he can give, explaining that if a student comes in with an average of 50%, should he be the one to tell the student that they cannot pursue engineering? Answering his own dilemma, he replied “[n]o I can’t do that. And I have no right to do that. But what I can do, is I can be very, you could say, pushy or directive and say here are the marks” (Jordan, 206-207) needed for admission into the program. When questioned further, Jordan guesses that it may be because of “parental pressure [as t]here’s still that misnomer out there that if [a student goes] to university [they’re] going to be making significantly more money than if [they] go to college” (Jordan, 217-218).

**5.3.2 FSL pathways.** Each participating school differed in the combination of French pathway options that they offered, with six schools describing how they were actively responding to the demands of their students (see pages 13 and 14 for a description of the FSL pathways offered in Ontario). Two confirmed that they currently have sections of the new Grade 9 Open course. Four schools confirmed that they did not have sections currently running, but that the course was in their course offerings for the following academic year. In the remaining two schools, they may have had sections of the Grade 9 Open course running, but it remains unclear as the question was not asked explicitly. Prior to the development of the Open course, two schools said that they previously had a ‘Beginner French’ course to meet the demands of their school demographics. One of these two schools was one that confirmed that they had a section of the Grade 9 Open core French courses current running.

The Academic/University pathway was the most common pathway offered in the core French program. For some schools, this limited the number of students who continued their core French studies, favouring those who were pursuing a university post-secondary destination. Teri offered, without an explicit question being asked, one challenge that she and her department faced:

One thing that we’ve always had a challenge of is the Applied French. We do run Applied French in Grade 9, but I don’t think we’ve ever ran Grade 10 Applied French. Students just aren’t interested. If they are taking French at the Applied level in Grade 9, it’s usually to get that one credit only and they don’t want to ever take French again in their lives. (Teri, 192-195)

Similarly, at Jordan’s school “the Applied French again, similar to the Open French – it’s offered in Grade 9, it does not continue beyond that. So realistically if a student is going to do a pathway piece, they really need to take the Academic French which is offered in [Grades] 9 through 12” (Jordan, 68-71).

Kindle and her department made the decision “starting next year, [to offer] more College level senior courses” to respond to the attrition levels present at her school (Kindle, 31-32). She explained: “The predominant pathway of particular students in this building is College pathway. So for us not to offer senior level French is going against the pathway that we have in this building.” (Kindle, 29-30).

It is important to note that students have the ability to move pathways, from the Grade 9 Applied to the Grade 10 Academic FSL course without the need for a transfer course or additional bridging. In Beth’s experience, she would take a look at academic achievement and what the student is telling them, including if they are motivated to pursue French, in order to determine if the student who took the Grade 9 Applied course could continue successfully in the Grade 10 Academic course. Even though students are allowed to move between pathways, the message that Beth received from her Modern’s department was that students needed to have the Grade 9 Academic background in order to be successful in the Grade 10 Academic course.

After consulting with parents and students, Janelle’s school will be offering the French immersion Applied/Open pathway through to Grade 12 starting in the 2016-2017 school year. This means that courses taught in French will also have an Applied option (for example, Grade 9 French immersion geography will have both Applied and Academic options). When I questioned her about doing something similar in the core French courses, she responded that no such option was possible, as the school needed “to be very careful not to offer too much stuff [... because the school can be] left having to cancel courses because [they] cancel courses that don't get enough students” (Janelle, 316-318). Furthermore, she elaborated that “if [the school ends] up with too many single sections of courses, again it becomes very difficult to timetable the school” (Janelle, 323-324).

Finally, five participants shared that senior level core French classes offered at their school were typically combined Grade level courses. For example, at Michelle’s school the Grade 11 and 12 courses are

put together and it is only scheduled once this school year. Participants were not explicitly posed a question about combined Grade classes, so this practice may have been more common than reported.

**5.3.3 Academic/University pathways.** As mentioned above (in section 5.3.1 General pathways), six participants felt that some students were in the wrong pathways. This was most often a student who was in the Academic/University pathway that may not have the skills to successfully continue. David commented on how self and parental expectations are unfortunately not realistic for some students: “The biggest challenge for them with course selection is their own expectations or their parents’ expectations with respect to post-secondary pathways. So there are many students who are trying for university but don’t have the skills set to get 85 plus” (David, 184-187). Parents seem to privilege the university pathway, specifically one that is science and math based, with participants quoting parents as asking “what are they [(my child)] going to do with their Bachelor of Arts?” (Teri, 350-351).

Two guidance counsellors from the same school believed that their university-bound students “have very clear lines about what to do” and which courses they need to select in order to attain their post-secondary goals (Kindle, 104).

**5.3.4 Applied/College pathways.** While most students at the schools were quite academically focused, one school in particular described that a significant part of their population goes on to continue in the Apprenticeship or College pathway after secondary. Since this interest has continued to increase over the years, the school is now offering more targeted programming to better suit the needs of their students (as mentioned above, in section 5.3.2 FSL pathways).

**5.3.5 Summary.** The interview protocol never prompted to discuss in detail the pathways that are available to students; however, it became a theme that persisted and was presented in every answer. It was frequently discussed in regards to post-secondary planning and students had to be mindful of their preferred post-secondary destination in order to select the most suitable courses. Just under half of participating guidance counsellors claimed that some of the students they see were in the wrong pathway. These students were mostly selecting courses in the Academic/University pathway due to unrealistic self or parental expectations. With regards to the FSL course offerings, each school differed in the combination of FSL pathways and courses that they offered. The most common pathway available in both FSL programs was the Academic/University, but more recently schools have been integrating more Applied, College, and Open level FSL credits to meet the demands of their students.

## **5.4 Retention in FSL**

Overall, guidance counsellors had a very good idea as to why students choose to continue studying FSL after it becomes optional in Grade 10. The interview question asked participants to identify factors as to why they believed students were leaving the program. Their responses reveal the complexity of the issue, and their quick responses demonstrate the importance of the question in their schools. Their answers can be grouped into three broad categories: reasons for retention; preventing attrition and provincial initiatives. Findings for each category are presented in the following sections.

**5.4.1 Reasons for retention.** The following section presents by frequency the reasons that students continue (according to guidance counsellors), as well as reasons participants reported offering to students in order to encourage them to continue studying FSL. Appendix F presents all of the factors guidance counsellors identified, and the factors mentioned by at least three participants will be presented below.

**5.4.1.1 Jobs and employment.** By far the most common factor that guidance counsellors identified as one to encourage students to continue with French was the possibilities for future jobs and employment. A total of nine participants brought up this factor, some multiple times. David mentioned that he points out the benefits of French when talking to students about the possibilities of working at the “federal government level and if [...] planning to work overseas” (David, 159). Lorena indicated that she talks about the RCMP and Page program, and Teri puts forward the benefits of having French in the military. In general, Lorena commented that she will encourage students to pursue French because they will gain “a skill, that is just one more employable item that other candidates won’t have” (Lorena, 125-126). Martha added that anytime a student would come to her with an interest in teaching, she will automatically recommend continuing French as it will likely help them in their job prospects as there is a current shortage of French teachers in Ontario.

**5.4.1.2 New FSL pathways.** Seven participants revealed their hope that new FSL courses they have introduced at their schools will have a positive impact on the retention rates in FSL. This included the development of the Applied/College core French pathway mentioned above to be offered at Kindle’s school, as well as the development of the Grade 9 core French Open pathway. David explained that for students in special education, with the introduction of the Framework (OME, 2013a) “[i]t’s not a quick and easy substitution, telling the parent that they don’t have to take French” (David, 80-81). He added that previous to the Grade 9 Open credit, “it’s just an automatic. You take your learning strategies course and that will automatically be substituted for your French, no [this is no longer true]” (David, 77-78). When speaking about ESL students at her school, Samantha explained that the purpose of the Grade 9 Open credit is “to encourage us to encourage taking French” and she believed that it is beneficial in the area due to a high ESL population (Samantha, 50). Lastly, Janelle outlined how her school chose to offer the Applied/Open French immersion pathway at the school. By offering the Applied/Open pathways, they were

“hoping to be able to support these students who want to continue in French [immersion] but who are struggling with the academic pathway and [...] hopefully, with some positive messaging there, [the school will] be able to get enough students that we can run it” (Janelle, 138-140).

**5.4.1.3 The profile of the student who continues.** Participants used various traits to describe what constituted a student who continued studying FSL. Six participants said it was typically students who were interested or enjoyed the language, or saw value in having an additional language who were continuing. Two of these participants, Lorena and David, predicted that students who are learning French as a third language would probably see more benefits or value to learning an additional language than a student who only speaks English. Lorena guessed this when she said: “I’m gonna go out on a limb here and I’m gonna guess that people not born in Ontario might be more likely to pursue another language than people born in Ontario” (Lorena, 209-210). Finally, another two participants added that the students who continued in French were typically those that followed that Academic pathway.

**5.4.1.4 Parental and peer influence.** As mentioned in previous section 5.1.1, five guidance counsellors brought up the influence parents have when selecting courses. Out of these, only one reference was made specifically to FSL. Teri provided the example: “what’s the decision between [the French and something else] – why are you hovering? If they’re hovering because my mom and dad really want me to take it but I dislike French, then that’s a totally different discussion” (Teri, 244-246). Three participants commented on a similar influence existing with regards to peers, but in a general course selection sense and not specific to French.

**5.4.1.5 Post-secondary FSL opportunities.** Five participants said they would mention the institutions that offer a possibility of continuing to study French at the post-secondary level. Furthermore, they would share opportunities to use French in exchange programs. Andrew summarized this well when he said: “There are also university programs, where in some cases instruction is in French, as in the University of

Ottawa for example. We talk about proficiency in French for programs like York, the Glendon campus. We talk about international exchange programs within the university, where French can be an asset” (Andrew, 76-79).

**5.4.1.6 Immersion specific factors.** All six guidance counsellors who worked at French immersion schools indicated that the French immersion certificate that students received at the end of their studies was a large factor that they used to keep students until the end. Martha reported that she would explicitly talk to students about the end goal, saying: “I talk about the idea that if you continue your French you get a French certificate” (Martha, 141). With the addition of the Applied/Open pathway, Janelle reminds students “there is that ability to continue in the French immersion program and get that certificate without having to be a university pathway student” (Janelle, 164-165). In order to earn the French immersion certificate, students must complete 10 French immersion credits and Chantal was the only participant who explained how she reminds students that the co-op credits, if completed in French, can “[count] as a credit towards their certificate as well” (Chantal, 307).

Three guidance counsellors at French immersion schools shared that they recommend that students take the majority of their French immersion courses in the first two years. By doing this, students have greater flexibility during their Grade 12 year when they need to take the courses required for post-secondary admission. This also ensures that students still earn the 10 required French immersion credits. As explained by David:

we try to front load as many French immersion courses as possible. So that means if they can get as many as 8 French Immersion courses in their first two years of high school, that’s how our school works, fantastic. That means that in Grade 11 and 12 they would just need the one French in Grade 11 and the one French in Grade 12 in order to provide more flexibility. For example, chemistry,

physics, biology, math – those are not French, not in French immersion, but we know those are prerequisites to many university programs. (David, 112-117)

This perspective is shared by Teri and Chantal as well, representing three out of the four participating French immersion schools.

Furthermore, two participants at French immersion schools indicated that “we don’t have that many kids that leave the immersion French program” (Sarah, 128-129) and the majority of them, “they stay in French – no complaints, nothing” (Martha, 253). Three guidance counsellors elaborated that if students do leave the immersion program, they usually tend to continue in the core French. At one school, they are “building in numbers of those students as well [and since] they have a very different background [...] they don’t typically take Grade 9, they go right into Grade 10” (Kindle, 94-95).

**5.4.1.7 Personal growth and exchange opportunities.** Four guidance counsellors identified that they will discuss the opportunities for personal growth or cultural exchange opportunities at the secondary school and university level that come with learning a second language. In addition to the employment benefits of having French, Andrew shared that at his school “we don’t restrict the conversation just to the career benefits of having French. We talk about it from a personal growth – personal breadth of knowledge experience perspective” (Andrew, 58-60). Martha described that at their school, FSL went beyond the traditional grammar class that she may considered others to offer: “We have trips here, but that’s not everything. Like I think the language, learning about the culture, and learning different things rather than the nitty gritty of the vocab and just memorizing the *passé composé* and that kind of stuff” (Martha, 228-230).

**5.4.1.8 Summary of factors affecting retention.** In this section, I have presented seven different broad factors that guidance counsellors identified as ones that encourage retention in their FSL programs. The most common factor was learning French for future employment opportunities. Second, since students at some schools may not have had access to their preferred pathway in FSL, participants elaborated on how

they have attempted to remove those barriers through offering a greater course selection in FSL programs at their schools. When participants added characteristics to the typical student who continues their FSL studies, almost half of the participants described said student as one who was interested in or enjoyed the language, or saw value in learning an additional language. Participants alluded to the influence parents and peers have on course selection decisions, however only one guidance counsellor explicitly linked the parents to influencing the continuation of FSL courses. About one third of guidance counsellors said that they mentioned to students the possibilities of continuing their French at the post-secondary level. Finally, participants described that in the French immersion program, they encouraged students to continue using the French immersion certificate as a tool and when possible recommended that students frontload their immersion credits to keep their senior years more flexible.

**5.4.2 Preventing attrition in FSL.** When participants spoke about preventing students from leaving FSL programs at their schools, they were almost exclusively talking about strategies they would use with French immersion students. Sarah said that she made sure to remind students who were looking to opt out of French immersion about what they would be giving up. She then said she uses the certificate as a motivator, and really encourages students to just complete the requirements for the certificate. Chantal does the same,

[b]ecause with French Immersion, they start at such a young age, is that we want to make sure they've considered the fact that they've spent so many years completing their courses, are they going to regret that later if they change their mind, because they may only have a year or two left. Especially if they're a senior student, if it means just completing one more course sometimes [they] try to encourage them to stay if it's just one more course to be able to just finish [the] program and earn [their] certificate (Chantal, 116-121).

Again, we are seeing the certificate being used as a retention tool.

Furthermore, normally the parents and teacher are consulted if a French immersion student is seriously considering leaving the program. This adds two other sources where the student may be persuaded not to leave the program. This process will be discussed further in Section 5.5.2.

At other schools, guidance counsellors created new courses to respond to the students' demands. As mentioned above, Kindle's school will be offering the Applied and College pathway for core French courses and Janelle's school will be offering an Applied and Open pathway for their French immersion students. Lastly, to appeal to more students' interests, some French immersion schools are offering more diverse French immersion elective courses for students to take. These include Drama, Oral Communication, Travel and Tourism, World Issues, and World Religions.

**5.4.3 Ministry of Education initiatives.** Five participants from different schools explicitly mentioned the recent OME publications, *A Framework for FSL in Ontario Schools* (2013a) or *Including Students with Special Education Needs in FSL Programs* (2015) that highlight retaining more students in the FSL programs. Some references were more explicit, mentioning the document by name, while other references were less obvious, mentioning a 'push' by the ministry or the school board. While Samantha did not mention the Framework document (OME, 2013a), she explained the chain of information at her school. According to her, information was passed down through the head of guidance, who was typically the one to share new initiatives and guidelines with the rest of the department.

Martha shared her happiness regarding the change of policies when talking about Special Education students saying, "I think the new curriculum that says that they can't be [exempted], I think that's a long time coming. I think that will make a difference, for maybe not many, but for some it will definitely kind of be like oh, this is something I like, maybe it's something I want to pursue" (Martha, 292-295).

Jordan offered his perspective on the new guidelines, elaborating on the intentions of the Ministry of Education to offer the Grade 9 Open level credit. For him, “the cynical answer is that the Ministry introduced this because they want to push French down everybody’s throat” (Jordan, 110-112). When commenting on the reality at his school, he offered that “[the school board is] basically saying ‘we would like you to talk to them about this’ but the reality is we’re not forcing it” (Jordan, 90-91).

**5.4.3.1 Group 2 & 3 credits.** Participants unanimously agreed that the fact that FSL credits can be applied towards meeting the Group 2 and 3 requirements was not “a motivating factor” for students to continue FSL (Sarah, 174-175). Lorena echoes this and points out that “[she doesn’t] think that’s really propelling any of them into French, but [her and her colleagues] do ensure that they know that [the FSL course can be applied to all the Groups]” (Lorena, 271-272). Jordan added: “I’m going to say 90%, are not putting French toward the Group 2 or Group 3, [...] They won’t do it. It’s a sell piece, and I just don’t think it’s going to go anywhere” (Jordan, 267-269). Five participants attributed the Group possibilities as bonus to students who were already planning on continuing in FSL, but again expressed that it would not be a ‘motivating factor’ to pursue FSL.

The most common reason as to why this ‘sell piece’ was not taking hold in schools was the number of alternative ways that students could fulfill the Group 2 and 3 credits. Andrew shared his school’s approach:

there are so many other ways of getting their Group 2 and Group 3 that it doesn’t factor in very much. We point it out when we do those classroom visits that I mentioned – we point out all of the ways of getting their Groups 1, 2 and 3. We point out that French is in each one of them, so that it offers that flexibility. But I think within those groups there are so many different options to get those groups, it’s not – especially in a large school like ours

where we offer a really wide variety of courses, students have a lot of choice. (Andrew, 147-152)

David elaborated, “[students] have so many other viable options and so when they’re making that decision [...] and we [have] never as an education system been given directive to push one elective over another” (David, 244-246). In addition, four other guidance counsellors shared this same point of view, where students have many other options to fulfill the Group credits.

Both Teri and Michelle shared the same sentiment that perhaps for a less math- or science-destined student, these options may convince students to take a second look at a French course to fulfill one of the Group credits. Michelle offers her opinion on the topic as well, first saying that “[i]t wouldn’t motivate them to take the course to avoid taking something else[,]” and then pausing to reflect adding that maybe “[i]t could. Maybe [the French could count towards] the tech/science component if they were very focused in writing, English, humanities, that sort of thing. They might take the French so they would avoid taking the science or tech” (Michelle, 148-151).

Finally, four out of the six participants working at French Immersion secondary schools added that for their immersion students, the Group credits definitely did privilege their students. “A ton in terms of [...] French Immersion [students take advantage]” (Teri, 419). Teri usually finds that French immersion students never have a problem getting the Group 2 credits, and may choose to apply the immersion credits to their Group 3. In her experience “[Teri has] never had a French Immersion student in Grade 12 not have one of their Groups done. Because they can use their Grade 10 and 11 French Immersion course to fill in two of those Groups and they’re going to have one of their electives in Grade 9 or 10 fill in the other one” (Teri, 426-429).

**5.4.4 Summary.** In summary, guidance counsellors elaborated many reasons for which they believe that students should stay in FSL programs. The most popular of which was for future job or employment purposes, followed by the recent changes schools have made to their course selection offerings. Participants described to me a system that paid more attention to the French immersion students when they were considering leaving the program, where parents, teachers and guidance counsellors were involved in the decision. Lastly, the OME attempted to encourage students to continue in FSL by allowing the language course to fulfill each of the Group credits. Participating guidance counsellors unanimously agreed that this was not necessarily motivating students to continue, however it was helping French immersion students to fulfill the Group credits with little planning effort.

## **5.5 Attrition in FSL**

Guidance counsellors also had many comments as to why students choose not to continue studying FSL after the mandatory Grade 9 credit. The following section presents some of the reasons students are not continuing FSL, according to the participants.

**5.5.1 Reasons for attrition.** As over 15 factors that contributed to attrition were identified by guidance counsellors, I will present in the following section only the ones that were mentioned by at least four participants. Some of the factors with fewer participants have been consolidated into slightly broader subtitles. A complete list of the factors can be found in Appendix G.

**5.5.1.1 The value of French.** The most common factor that eight participants emphasized was that students themselves did not see the benefit, nor the value of learning French. Michelle did not “think many view it as being necessary or valuable. They might not view it as a job

advantage” (Michelle, 133-134). Lorena added that students at that age have not necessarily been exposed to a world in which another language could be seen as valuable. Some students at her school, “they’re afraid to even leave [*the town*]<sup>16</sup>. They’re afraid to go into the unknown. So language isn’t going to be an issue for them. So they don’t really see the point” (Lorena, 216-218). Samantha, who worked at a school in a different neighbourhood, repeated the idea that many students have not left the city, so French did not seem relevant to them right now. She added though, however, that other languages may have seemed more useful to students at her school (i.e. Tamil or Mandarin).

**5.5.1.2 The science and math centred student.** Eight participants also noted that French becomes difficult to justify when students today need five or six courses for university admission. Five of the eight guidance counsellors observed that it is generally the students who are pursuing math and sciences who were the first to discontinue their FSL studies in the senior Grades. Janelle explained “that the math, science oriented students are going to be often in my mind the first ones to opt out of the French program because they have got so much of their timetable that they have to fill with math and science. And so many of those programs that require math and science, they don’t require just one - they require multiples” (Janelle, 294-298). An additional three participants mentioned that they often find just university bound students, and not just science and math students “needing to take the 3 sciences, plus the 2 maths, plus the English[. S]ometimes there’s just not any room [for French]” (Sarah, 55-56). In this case, Sarah referred to French immersion students and reinforced the need to encourage students to take the highest number of French immersion credits within their first two years, as this can offer students more flexibility in Grade 12.

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<sup>16</sup> Location details were omitted from transcription to protect the anonymity of participants and the school board.

**5.5.1.3 Academic difficulties.** Understandably so, seven participants identified the fact that students who are struggling in the language tended to discontinue their FSL studies. This was seen in both the French immersion program and in core French. Simply put, for “some of them I think just find learning a second language is difficult” (Chantal, 274-275). Martha adds that “the majority of those kids, not very often, but those kids are really struggling and they’ve always been struggling” (Martha, 61-62).

**5.5.1.4 Parental influence.** The other factor mentioned just as often as students struggling in immersion was parental influence. Five participants spoke specifically of parents discouraging their children from pursuing FSL, often because parents did not see the value of French, like the students themselves. Parents seemed to have a hard time with their children pursuing French and more frequently encouraged the science and math pathway. Teri explained, “I don’t think that some of the parents value French the way they would value science or math” (Teri, 341-342). This supported what Teri mentioned earlier on academic pathways, as some of the parents she knows do not favour a Bachelor of Arts, which is what a student would pursue if they continue studying French at the university level. Teri attributed this belief to parents being unable to see “exactly what that career [or] job is going to be” (Teri, 356) if their child were to pursue French at the post-secondary level. For example, it is oftentimes easier to understand that a degree in engineering will likely lead to a career in engineering, but a degree in French is less concrete. In sum, parents and students alike often don’t see the value in learning French for not only its employability purposes, or the “monetary value of French or having another language” (David, 224), but also its cultural and personal growth benefits.

**5.5.1.5 French and post-secondary.** As three participants described, students who were not interested in pursuing French at the post-secondary level chose to discontinue their FSL studies.

Furthermore, seven guidance counsellors went on to share that students who believe that a French course in their Grade 12 year may affect their post-secondary admission average may also choose to discontinue their FSL studies. Teri was one of five participants who said that students may be concerned about workload in their final year and the effects of a French course on their other courses. Another group of students wondered if the French mark would not be high enough to count as one of the ‘top 6’ needed for university admission and may then choose to take an ‘easier’ course. Teri summarized these themes well when she said: “Unfortunately, so much emphasis, especially when it comes to university, is placed on marks. So sometimes French loses out because the student doesn’t feel it can be one of their top marks. And if it can’t be a top mark, then you look at the pros and cons to why you’re in it” (Teri, 376-380). Andrew adds that at an academically focused school, like the one he works at,

there’s a lot of concern about getting a high average for their college and university applications – it’s becoming more and more competitive every year. And a lot of students are worried that, it may, they may not perform as well, and it may affect their overall average. Unfortunately, in such a competitive atmosphere, students often don’t choose the courses that would necessarily be their first choice course. They tend to be more strategic in their choice and choose a course that they feel they can score higher marks in. (Andrew, 122-127)

In this case, Andrew was referring to French, indicating that students are looking for an ‘easy’ course during that final Grade 12 year.

**5.5.1.6 ‘One and done’ phenomenon.** One participant coined the term ‘one and done’ for a student who arrives at the secondary school knowing that they only have to take one French course and then they are done. While other participants did not use this term exactly, a total of

six guidance counsellors described this phenomenon. Elementary students know coming into Beth's secondary school that they need one credit and so they can just "get it over with" (Beth, 76). When questioned further about that behaviour, Beth theorized that it may be because in the past, many substitutions were made to exempt students from French. When students know that it is a possibility to be exempt, it supports a lesser of the importance of learning FSL. Martha suggested a different perspective:

in elementary, this is what I've seen, this not necessarily the case, but [students] come from elementary and they don't like French. Because the way it is in elementary, especially with the [core French] kids, is they get it once a week. Sometimes it's a teacher they don't really know and [...] not to say that all teachers don't make it interesting, but when it's once a week [and] what you're doing is the vocab [...] it's not as much fun as it could be [...] So when they get to Grade 9 they just want to get it done and over with. (Martha, 77-82; 83-84).

**5.5.1.7 Uninterested in French.** Students may also choose not to continue studying FSL simply because they are not interested in French, as five participants described. In Michelle's experience, "generally most kids don't take it after Grade 9, they don't like it, they don't want to take it. They just do the compulsory and [they're] over it" (Michelle, 64-66). Similarly, Andrew saw students that "will do the Grade 9 French to get the compulsory requirement and they're quite content to not continue French after that" (Andrew, 138-140). This is different from the 'one and done' phenomenon because students developed this attitude in elementary school.

**5.5.1.8 Less time for electives.** Lastly, four participants discussed the emerging theme of the limited time available to students in high school. Jordan spoke of this when referencing the removal of Grade 13, explaining

that the number of years students are spending in high school has decreased from 5 to 4. With the new curriculum, 90 some odd percent of our kids are out of the building in 4 years. What that has done is it has forced students to make some decisions based on careers as opposed to ‘I think that’s kinda neat, I think I’ll take that’. So what that means is elective courses such as music, French, have taken a hit. (Jordan, 47-51)

Students are being forced to really stick to the courses that they intend to pursue at the post-secondary level and “there are many disciplines who have suffered because of that. [...] That extra year, for lack of better words [eliminated] the opportunity to take more courses for interest sake. So when students used to take French for interest because they wanted to continue in the languages that really isn’t available” (Teri, 386-387; 394-396).

**5.5.1.10 ESL disengagement.** Even though this topic was discussed in the previous section (5.4.1.3 *The profile of the student who continues*), I have chosen to discuss it here as well, as it contradicts what was discussed in that section. Whereas in *The profile of the student who continues*, three participants described the student who continued as one who speaks an additional language other than English or French, in this case, two different guidance counsellors expressed that some ESL students who already speak another language may decide that they already have enough and will not continue in French. David presented both sides<sup>17</sup> of the argument for families who speak an additional language at home, said that some of the “parents tend to say that their child already has one an additional language, and that French may not be as valuable to them unless they plan on working in Quebec, Eastern Canada, France, or the federal government” (David, 220-222). In addition, Teri framed her discussion of the value placed on

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<sup>17</sup> David’s other perspective is on page 61 (section 5.4.1.3).

French within a discussion of the large diversity at her school, noting that parents tended to place less value on languages and more on math and the sciences.

**5.5.1.11 Summary of reasons for attrition.** While guidance counsellors presented over 15 factors, I have described 10 in greater detail. One of the most frequent factors that guidance counsellors identified as affecting attrition were that students did not see the value of learning an additional language. Eight participants also shared that at their schools, they typically see the students who need the math and science courses in Grade 12 as the first to drop the French. Participants also mentioned that there were students who were struggling in FSL or simply not interested in pursuing it. One participant named this phenomenon ‘one and done’ for when students arrive at high school with the idea that they only need to complete one more FSL course. Finally, four participants expressed that they felt students had less time to take courses for interest sake and needed to be more aware of their post-secondary destinations while selecting their courses.

**5.5.2 Process of attrition from French immersion.** Three participants working in French immersion schools shared with me the details on how a student goes about discontinuing their immersion studies. They all indicated that a meeting with the parents was necessary in order for the student to leave the program. Following this, participants had to confirm that the student would be able to continue to attend the school by looking at school boundaries. If the student fell out of these boundaries and the student would like to stay at the school, the student would have to apply for a school transfer. Sarah summarized the process at her school in the following quote and described how she further reminds students what they are giving up on after their years of hard work.

So they opt out of it, but it's not that easy. Like we need parent consent before they do that. We have to make sure they're in our regular school boundaries and not in our immersion school boundaries. So a couple of steps need to be put into place before we just automatically have them opt out. And then we have the conversation with them about the fact that they've been taking it since Grade 1. Are they sure they want to give up on it so late and not complete their French Immersion certification because we encourage them to do that because they put so many years of instruction and effort into the program. (Sarah, 56-62)

Janelle added that they “see it as a last resort to be even putting [opting out] on the table” (Janelle, 119) and that she “would only be having that discussion if [they] saw that there was a distinct struggle with the French and not with the other subjects” (Janelle, 116-118).

## **5.6 Attitudes and Beliefs**

Over the course of the interviews, there were a few participants that tended to share more of their attitudes and beliefs about French and FSL programming than others. I noticed three overall themes on which multiple participants seemed to comment: previous FSL experience, opinions about the Grade 9 Open credit, and the accessibility of French in the area.

**5.6.1 Previous FSL experience.** With regards to previous FSL experience, David was the only participant who talked about his own positive experiences in prior FSL courses. Both Martha and Samantha went over their poor previous experiences in French. For Martha, “when [she] was in elementary school [she] didn't love it. [...] I think because French was all about like vocabulary and all about nouns and passé composé and all that stuff, it wasn't made fun” (Martha, 218-223).

She suggested that still today, “a lot of the time French is kind of negative up until [students] get to Grade 8” (Martha, 224-225). Furthermore, Samantha confided that when counselling students, she also used her previous personal experience in learning French. She took core French until Grade 10 and felt like it just focused on conjugating verbs and that there was not a focus on conversation. She understood that things have changed in the French classes since she was a student, but it still left her with a negative view on French. These negative views about their prior FSL experiences did not seem to affect the way they advised students.

**5.6.2 Grade 9 Open FSL course.** Two participants showed strong, negative, opinions towards the new Grade 9 Open credit. Both Martha and Jordan had issues with Special Education students being required to take the course. In Martha’s case, this negativity was because at her school the course was taught to students “who have never spoken French in their entire life, who have never been exposed to it and are also second language learners already, so it’s again at a much slower pace” (Martha, 286-288). She proposed instead that “whereas a Special Ed student [...] they should have to take the French course and just take it at the Applied level. Which I believe is a fair thing because – and they may love it” (Martha, 288-291). On the other hand, Jordan disliked the idea that the new course would now take away another elective from Special Education students as “all of a sudden, two of their electives are gone. And so they have fewer choices within tech and those kinds of courses. [...]. In addition to that, [they] have ESL students that are coming in from other countries. And those students are coming in here with very very limited language skills as it is. And are we going to have them take French?” (Jordan, 82-89). The reality of the situation is that at Jordan’s school, while he said they were encouraging the course, they were not forcing it.

**5.6.3. Accessibility of French.** Finally, four participants alluded to the fact that in the area, there was nowhere for students to be able to use French. For Martha, French was most strongly associated with the Federal government. When addressing why there were few students who do not complete a co-op in French, she explains: “Other than like government buildings really, French may not be a primary language in many of those other areas but they may want to be in a hospital, I don’t know how that would work in French. A French speaking hospital, especially in Ontario” (Martha, 396-398). Janelle shared this opinion with regards to French co-op, saying that she was “not aware of other co-op placements around here in French speaking environments. [...] If a student were to live in North Bay or you know? It would be a different story, or in Ottawa” (Janelle, 365-367). Again, Sarah and Kindle shared the belief that there was a low availability of French in the area.

**5.6.4 Summary.** The findings from the 14 interviews with the guidance counsellors advance six main themes, beginning with describing the course selection process and finishing with the attitudes and beliefs that appeared throughout the analysis. Within the course selection process, participants explained that the annual course selection occurs in the winter. To prepare students, participants described using presentations and other resources, such as Career Cruising to help students make decisions about the courses they should take. Guidance counsellors describe their role during the course selection process as one who teaches, not necessarily one who advises; Janelle most clearly defined this role and believed that she was still a teacher first, teaching students how to use the resources available to them. Within the various pathways that students can follow during their time in secondary school, guidance counsellors expressed the previous

FSL pathways did not support Applied or Open level learners, and that in general students may not be in their correct pathways. Furthermore, guidance counsellors identified over 20 different factors that they believe contributed to students continuing or discontinuing the study of FSL<sup>18</sup>. Here, participants also described that there was a specific procedure that needed to be followed in order for a student to leave the French immersion program. Finally, some participants shared their attitudes and beliefs about FSL, which have the potential to alter the way they encourage students to pursue further FSL studies.

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<sup>18</sup> The complete list of these are in Appendix F and G respectively.

## 6. Discussion and Implications

Now that I have presented the findings, I will explore the research questions in relation to the findings, referring back to the literature when relevant. As this study is an exploratory case study, there were some large gaps in the literature; however, some similarities and differences did arise between what was presented in the literature review and the findings. I will discuss some of these similarities, as well as explore the emerging themes that arose during data analysis.

### 6.1 Research question #1:

The first question I asked at the beginning of this research project was: *How do guidance counsellors describe the process of course selection, with regards to FSL in particular?* It was not surprising to note that the participants each described this process very similarly, as they were all from the same school board. Where the differences appeared was in the methods used to prepare students for their annual course selection, apart from giving presentations. This research question was one of the most under-researched; therefore, it was challenging to make links to existing research in my comparison.

**6.1.1 Annual course selection.** All participating schools mentioned that they give presentations on course selection to prepare their students for the annual selection. This finding mirrors the tasks that guidance counsellors are supposed to do as suggested by the OME and the association governing school counsellors in Ontario (OME, 2013a; OSCA, n.d). Furthermore, Malatest (2009) also identified these practices as being common for guidance counsellors across

the country. These presentations can act as a first point of contact between the guidance staff and the students, especially for Grade 8 incoming students. It is possible, however, that some students make appointments with a guidance counsellor before these presentations, especially some of the 'keener students', as Chantal mentioned.

The prevalent use of Career Cruising at participating schools is also documented in previous work by Dietsche (2013) and the OME guidelines (2013c). From the description participants provided me, the web-based portal was used with a great deal of success among their students. In the portal, students have a to-do list and are encouraged to check off tasks as they complete them. Students also use Career Cruising during the Careers course in Grade 10, to take career aptitude tests. Furthermore, the Career Cruising portal is directly related to the course selection, as students are submitting their annual course selection through the website. If students are missing a prerequisite course, the website will give students immediate feedback, preventing them from submitting their selection. Lorena did state that the portal will occasionally add French as a recommended course for some career pathways.

Out of all strategies guidance counsellors used during course selection, the use of backwards planning was discussed by half of the participants. Backwards planning, in this case, meant choosing the post-secondary program that students would be interested in, followed by looking up the admission requirements and selecting courses based on those requirements. Starting with Grade 12 and working backwards, the guidance counsellor and the student could potentially plan all the way back to Grade 9. Teachers often use this method to plan course objectives and assessments throughout their courses (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). It is unclear if guidance counsellors favour the backwards planning strategy due to their experience as teachers, or whether it is a practice that they have learned in the field from other guidance counsellors. The

promotion of backwards planning when students are planning courses matches the ‘guided practice pedagogical strategy’ – teachers who employ this strategy first model the practice, then do it with students, and finally ask them to complete it on their own (Rosenshine, 1983). Lorena modeled this practice when she completed a draft course selection with her students. This is also reflective of current teaching practices elaborated in the *Pathways to Success* document (OME, 2013c) and creates autonomous independent learners.

I found Lorena’s backwards planning the most interesting. In the first week of February, Lorena and her department are in every Grade 9 class, asking them to complete a draft annual course selection. Instead of the “mad rush” when the course selection is due, Lorena finds that this initiative, completed a month ahead of the deadline to submit the annual course, prepares students and gives them practice. Students are also able to take this planner home and decide between other courses that they may have been considering. By employing this strategy, schools will encourage students to meaningfully reflect upon their annual course selection and students will have something to take away with them.

The focus on post-secondary plans when selecting courses demonstrates the impact these have on students’ course selection decisions. This emphasis is not necessarily surprising; however, it is surprising to discover just how much of an emphasis post-secondary admission requirements do impact course selection decisions. Jordan suspected that French departments across the board were not the only departments feeling the effects of this emphasis on post-secondary plans. At his school, many other departments that offer traditionally elective courses, such as history, physical education, and music were also experiencing lower enrollment trends.

**6.1.2 Encouraging FSL.** While 11 participants said that they would encourage students to pursue future FSL courses, they did not always share the same encouragement levels. Ten of these participants had an ‘if’ clause attached to their encouragement, specific to FSL courses. Of these 10, the vast majority (i.e., nine) said that they would encourage the pursuit of FSL courses if the student ‘did well’ in the Grade 9 course. The other ‘ifs’ guidance counsellors elaborated on were if students enjoyed French and if students were interested in French. With such an emphasis placed on marks, it is no surprise that students are unlikely to continue due to the possible effect on post-secondary admission average.<sup>19</sup> To provide an idea of the importance of marks in certain post-secondary programs, King and Colleges Ontario (2009) compared the admissions averages for students admitted into different types of university programs. The Arts and Business programs showed a wide range of admissions averages, however, the Engineering programs required higher secondary grades (King & Colleges Ontario, 2009).

Additionally, there seemed to be a discrepancy between participants as to whether to encourage French over other electives.<sup>20</sup> Three participants mentioned that there was a push at the school board level to encourage students to stay in French; however, four participants said that they would not promote one elective over another. One participant gave me a copy of a memo that was circulated within the board, outlining their new recommendations in regards to offering FSL, more specifically the new Grade 9 Open course (see Appendix H<sup>21</sup>). The memo made reference to the OME document *A Framework for FSL in Ontario Schools* (2013a) and mentioned explicitly that one of the Framework’s goals is to retain more students studying FSL

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<sup>19</sup> To be explained further in question three.

<sup>20</sup> During the interviews participants were asked to describe times where students have come to them seeking advice about continuing FSL courses, but not explicitly if or how they encourage students to pursue French. Participants were also not asked whether they encouraged other electives, for example physical education or the Arts.

<sup>21</sup> In the memo, the Grade 9 Open course is referred to through its course code (FSF10).

until graduation. Interestingly, the memo was provided to me by a participant who shared that they had never been given direction to push one elective over another. Perhaps this disconnect between participants shows a greater problem of communication between OME policies and the practices of guidance counsellors.

On a more positive note, when it came to encouragement, guidance counsellors said that they were encouraging students to speak with their French teachers if they had questions about continuing FSL courses. This evidence helps to validate the role of the FSL teacher in motivating students to pursue optional second language courses (Chambers, 1999). The limited experience that these participating guidance counselors had with the French curriculum may explain this recommendation. Equally important, the two participants who described their previous negative experiences as FSL learners did say that they would advise students to speak with the French teachers, suggesting perhaps that their negative experiences may not influence the students' decision.

#### ***6.1.2.1 Differences between FSL programs.***

Finally, the findings suggest there is a difference in how guidance counsellors will encourage students to continue, depending on their FSL program: core French versus French immersion. According to the OME (2014), guidance counsellors should provide the same encouragement regardless of what FSL program the student is in. After analyzing the responses guidance counsellors provided, there seemed to be a trend for guidance counsellors to offer more encouragement to the French immersion student. If a French immersion student was trying to decide if they should continue to study FSL, participants disclosed that they would use certain strategies to prevent them from leaving the program or follow certain procedures before attrition

could occur. Strategies included reminding students about how many years they had already completed, or that they only needed 10 credits in secondary school to receive their French immersion certificate. All participating guidance counsellors mentioned this certificate and two explicitly said they used it as a tool to try and motivate their students to complete the required 10 French immersion credits.<sup>22</sup> If a student chose to discontinue their French immersion studies, guidance counsellors explained that they would need their parents' permission to do so, unless the student was 18 years old. Parental permission was required because a parent or guardian's signature is needed on the annual course selection submission.

**6.1.3 Summary: Research question #1.** In brief, guidance counsellors described the course selection process as one that was directly related to post-secondary plans. Participants frequently encouraged students to use backwards planning to help plan their annual course selections. Students need to know where exactly they are headed to be able to do backwards planning properly, which reinforces the importance of guidance counsellors probing students about their post-secondary plans. With regards to the encouragement of FSL programs in particular, the majority of participants expressed that they would encourage students to continue studying French. Most of these participants also had an 'if' attached to their encouragement, based on grades, interest level, and enjoyment. Lastly, the findings showed that there seemed to be a difference in the ways that students were encouraged, depending on their FSL program of study. Guidance counsellors appeared to pay more attention to French immersion students when they were considering whether to withdraw from French immersion. Parents also needed to be involved in this process, signing off on the program change.

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<sup>22</sup> This theme will be explored further when discussing question three, examining the factors that affect attrition and retention.

## **6.2 Research question #2**

In my second research question, I asked: *How do guidance counsellors view their role in the course selection process?* All but one participant expressed that counseling students on course selection issues was one of their main responsibilities. Participants also described themselves as teachers or facilitators, while others explained how they performed corrective actions with students, such as reversing an incorrect pathways choice.

**6.2.1 Spending the most time on course selection.** First and foremost, I looked at the qualifiers that guidance counsellors used to describe the frequency of student inquiries regarding course selection. Through this, I inferred that inquiries the most common interaction that guidance counselors had with students was focused on course selection. This is supported by Malatest (2009), where participants identified that the majority of the activities guidance counsellors did in a day related to individual career planning. Some participants in Malatest's (2009) study also considered discussions related to post-secondary planning as being related to course selection because of the heavy emphasis that post-secondary plans have on course selection.

**6.2.2 Getting to know the students.** Participants expressed to me how important it was for them to get to know the students to be able to best respond to their specific needs, and that a standard answer to every student who walked in was not sufficient: "There is no standard that you would use, it's really understanding" (Teri, 288).

With the current average ratio of guidance counsellors to students being 384 to 1 (People for Education, 2015), it is surprising how many students a guidance counsellor could see in a day, especially during the rush of students making appointments around course selection time. With so few guidance counsellors to serve the needs of students, I asked myself if it is possible to be able to effectively counsel that many students and whether students are at a disadvantage, by no fault of the guidance counsellor. According to People for Education (2016), with the new OME policies and the introduction of the IPP, guidance counsellors may have too many roles at the schools with too few counsellors to provide optimum support. In some cases, the survey indicated that the ratio rates of counsellors to students were as high as 1 to 600; however, this was more often seen in rural areas. Janelle described her feelings and shared her school's solution to the problem when she said: "There aren't enough counsellors to provide individual counseling to everyone; that's for certain. And I think our Ministry of Education recognizes that and so we do as much as we can to teach them in groups" (Janelle, 202-204). Janelle was the only participant to share that her department provided lesson plans for teachers to follow and opened a drop-in career centre where students can come in and ask questions to be able to teach students in groups. This offered the chance for a teacher (either the one delivering the lesson or a guidance counsellor) to be able to get to know each of the students better, acknowledging that there are not enough guidance counsellors to always provide individual counselling.

When guidance counsellors saw themselves as the ones who taught students how to use resources, fostering independence in students, they were acting in line with how the Ontario School Counsellor's Association describes the role (n.d.). Acting more as teachers, guidance counsellors provided students with links to online resources, helped navigate post-secondary

admissions requirements, and gave presentations to prepare students for the annual course selection, teaching students to independently use the resources available to them.

When it came to guidance counselors correcting issues for students, getting to know students was the most frequent comment made regarding students they counselled who were choosing the wrong pathways. Participants identified that many of the students were ones who were in the university pathway when perhaps they do not have the skills for that post-secondary destination. A tough decision that guidance counsellors must make in such cases is whether to advise students to choose a different pathway or to allow them to continue. Sometimes parents were the ones who favoured university as a post-secondary destination and students selected Academic or University level courses, even if the courses were not favourable for their learning style. This type of parental preference or bias for university studies has been reported in other research (e.g., Labrie et al., 2009). As an example, Jordan's solution is to encourage students to carefully reflect on their previous grades and examine the post-secondary admission requirements.

**6.2.3 Taking action based on student demand.** One of the findings that surprised me the most was just how much guidance counsellors reacted to the demands of the students at their schools, especially regarding the FSL courses offered. Five participants described the different initiatives that they were currently employing or planning on testing out the following academic year. Participants were not asked explicitly about current initiatives in their schools, so I cannot assume that just because only five participants mentioned this, this means the other schools were not responding to the demands of their students. Three of these initiatives aimed to encourage

more students to continue in FSL programs at their schools, while the other two helped students better prepare for their futures and make better decisions regarding course selection.

**6.2.3.1 FSL initiatives.** The two initiatives that three schools were employing to encourage retention in their FSL programs were creating new FSL pathways and adding more French immersion electives. Before the OME's development of the Open level pathway in core French, it was much more routine to substitute the FSL credit with something else. Two schools, responding to their demographics, had created a Grade 9 Basic French Level course to encourage French among those who may not have succeeded in the Applied course. Another school said that in consultation with students who were struggling in French immersion and their parents, they decided to offer an Applied and Open pathway for their French immersion students until Grade 12. This pathway included the courses taught in French, like Geography in Grade 9. The department was trying to find ways to keep struggling French immersion students in the program. The third initiative at another school involved a study of the school's most popular post-secondary destinations. Similar to findings from Labrie et al. (2009), at Kindle's school, they found that the majority of their students were opting to pursue the College post-secondary pathway, instead of the 'traditional' University pathway, favoured by parents. In response, starting the following year, the school will be offering the Applied and Open level core French courses all the way until Grade 12. Time will tell if these last two initiatives will be successful in retaining more students in FSL programs until graduation.

**6.2.3.2 Course selection initiatives.** I found that two schools were being proactive when it came to preparing students for the annual course selection process. As mentioned above, at Lorena's school, all of the Grade 9 students completed a draft annual course selection with the guidance of staff weeks prior to the deadline to submit the annual course selection. This extra

time gave students the time needed to reflect upon their choices and to make an appointment to speak with a guidance counsellor one-on-one if they felt the need. Lorena also suggested that this initiative encouraged students to make smarter course selection decisions. Lastly one school organized a career centre for students where they could drop-in to ask a quick question or to have brief counselling session with their friends. This strategy was framed as beneficial to students, as they could accompany a friend who may have a question that the student would not have thought to ask. This could trigger another question in the students and they would get a response to a question they had not even considered up until that point.

**6.2.4 Summary: Research question #2.** Guidance counsellors seem to discuss three roles that they have during the course selection process. The first being that they spent the most time with students about course selection and post-secondary planning. Secondly, guidance counsellors described that their primary responsibility was to get to know the students. Finally, evidence showed that schools across the board were actively responding to the demographics at their schools when they chose to offer pathways options and services based on demand.

### **6.3 Research question #3**

The third research question asked: *What do guidance counsellors identify as factors that contribute to students continuing (or not continuing) the study of FSL past Grade 9?* To address this question, I asked participants to discuss why (based on their experiences) they thought such a significant trend of attrition existed in Ontario's FSL programs, especially after Grade 9. Results show guidance counsellors are aware of many factors that contribute to retention and

attrition in FSL programs. I will first comment on some of the factors participants believed help to retain students, then talk about the factors that affect attrition.

**6.3.1 Retention.** While there were many factors that guidance counsellors described that contributed to students continuing their FSL studies past the mandatory Grade 9 credit, there were four factors that five or more participants mentioned (Appendix F outlines a list of all factors mentioned). The first being employment, followed by the creation of new courses, the French immersion certificate, and finally French post-secondary options. Furthermore, half of the guidance counsellors in French immersion schools were using two specific French immersion strategies.

**6.3.1.1 Employment.** Findings showed that 11 out of 14 participants identified employment as a reason to why students stay, or why they should stay in French. In some cases, this was specific to students who wanted to be teachers, workers at the Federal Government, or in one instance, a student who wanted to go into travel and tourism. Arnott, Romero, and Fairbrother (2015) identified that, for students, employment was a driving force in their intentions to register for the Grade 10 FSL courses. Also, both Makropoulos (2010) and Massey (1994) identified employment as a factor that helped retain students in FSL courses.

**6.3.1.2 New FSL pathway opportunities.** As mentioned in my response to the second research question, schools are using the new curriculum (OME, 2015) to provide more course offerings to their students in FSL. The schools, with input from the guidance counsellors, identified that the lack of diversity in the FSL course offerings, especially when it came to pathways, may be preventing some students from continuing. Participants expressed that they hoped that these courses would help to increase the number of students studying FSL until

graduation. For example, one school opted to offer the Applied and Open pathway in French immersion, while another school opted to offer Applied and College level core French courses until graduation. The changes were being made to the upcoming school year, so the ramifications of this strategy are unknown. As the opportunities to introduce new courses into the FSL pathway have only recently become more widely known, especially since the Ministry published the FSL Framework (OME, 2013a), I was unable to locate any other literature to support these findings.

On the same topic, it was surprising that two participants had a negative opinion towards the new Grade 9 Open credit, that aimed at retaining more students in FSL, but each for different reasons. As Jordan elaborated, by making it more difficult for students to opt out of the Grade 9 course, students now lose an elective that could be a course that they are genuinely interested in taking. Special Education students traditionally will take a Learning Strategies course in Grade 9 as their elective and now that the OME made it harder to substitute the French for the Learning Strategies, Jordan felt like they were doing a disadvantage to the students by not allowing them to take more interest-based courses. Martha also shared her dissatisfaction that Special Needs students were recommended to take the French Open credit, since at her school, they teach the French Open course like they would a French as a Foreign Language course and it is mostly recommended for newcomers and students studying at the school on a study permit.

**6.3.1.3 French immersion certificate.** With five participants reporting that they use the French immersion certificate as a tool to retain students in the French immersion program, it leads me to ask, why is there not a certificate for students in core French? If the core French student continues until graduation, the student will have spent nine years learning French. To me, it seems as if there needs to be some recognition that core French students could receive if they

study FSL all the way until graduation. This way, guidance counsellors could use that as a bargaining chip with them as they already do with the French immersion certificate. In 2007, the Ontario Public School Board's Association [OPSBA] also made the recommendation to introduce a core French completion certificate to recognize the efforts of students. This recommendation was not introduced in the participating school board.

It is important to note that some school boards across Ontario (i.e. OCDSB) are promoting the *Diplome d'études en langue française* (DELFF), a standardized French proficiency exam, that Grade 12 students may challenge, regardless of the FSL program of study. Emerging evidence, gathered in 2012 (Vandergrift, n.d.), showed that parents believed when school boards offered the DELFF in the Grade 12 year, this would motivate their child to continue studying French. Parents in the study viewed the DELFF as a tool to build confidence in their French abilities.

**6.3.1.4 French post-secondary options.** Some students may be unaware that they are able to pursue FSL or programs taught in French at the post-secondary level without necessarily registering in French Studies. To give students that option, five participants said that they would mention these options to students when they are counselling them about the post-secondary destinations.

**6.3.1.5 Front-loading French immersion credits.** Three participants (representing half of the participating immersion schools) described how they encourage students to front-load their French immersion credits – i.e., to take up to eight of the ten required courses before Grade 11, leaving only the language classes in Grade 11 and 12. Guidance counsellors encouraged this with students because of the freedom it gave them later on when they would need specific courses for post-secondary admission. While this strategy could benefit French immersion students in their post-secondary pursuits, one could speculate that such an approach might have a negative impact

on students' proficiency levels. In fact, Chantal reacted to such a possibility by recommending that students take an elective French immersion course every year to maintain their French skills.

**6.3.1.6 Preferential treatment for immersion students.** Three guidance counsellors, working in French immersion schools, described the procedure they would have to follow if a student in French immersion wanted to leave the program. All three participants expressed that not only do students' parents need to get involved, but also sometimes their teachers.

Participants described a system where they are explicitly treating students differently depending on the program they are involved in, to the point where one group of students could be considered to be privileged. Janelle reinforced this type of preferential treatment given to French immersion students when she described how their school was planning on offering a new Applied pathway for French immersion students, but then immediately dismissed the idea of offering the core French Applied pathway due to issues regarding timetabling when offering too many course options.

**6.3.1.7 Summary: Reasons for retention.** As discussed above, some of the factors identified by participating guidance counsellors as affecting retention rates in Ontario's FSL programs have been documented in previous research. Three new factors that have not yet been explored widely in the literature are the attitudes towards the new Open level credit, the recommendation of a core French completion certificate, and the trend to advise students to front-load their French immersion credits. Finally, French immersion students seem to have a 'safety net' in place to catch students leaving the program. None of the participants described an instance where core French students were protected in this same way. These findings are noteworthy as the Framework (OME, 2013a) identifies retention in all FSL programs as one of their three goals. With the use of the French immersion certificate, the encouragement to

frontload French immersion credits, and the inclusion of parents when students are considering leaving the program, French immersion students are at an advantage.

**6.3.2 Attrition.** Many of the factors that guidance counsellors described were consistent with existing literature on FSL persistence. For example, half of the participants talked about how students who struggle were more likely to discontinue their French studies, supporting Cashman's findings (2002). I will discuss in this section some of the other factors that guidance counsellors identified, that are supported by previous research. I will also discuss some of the contradictory evidence discovered, particularly with regards to newcomers and teacher influence.

**6.3.2.1 Factors coinciding with existing literature.** Most of the factors that guidance counsellors identified as factors that impact a student's decision to continue their FSL studies were previously found in research. Firstly, the effect that the FSL course can have on grades was brought up by half of the participating guidance counsellors, mirroring findings from previous studies (e.g. Cashman, 2002; Makropoulos, 2010; Massey, 1994). Furthermore, Cashman (2002) identified timetabling as a barrier for some students and five participants mentioned this same barrier, whether it be the FSL courses conflicting with another course, or simply the courses not being offered. Lastly, in 2007, the OPSBA described the small number of electives available in the timetable as contributing to fewer students continuing FSL classes. Three participants also alluded to this, with two referencing how Ontario previously offered a Grade 13, allowing students to take more electives based on interest, instead of how today's students were focused on meeting post-secondary admission requirements.

**6.3.2.2 Factors contradicting existing literature.** There were a few surprises that arose during data analysis, particularly with regards to newcomers in FSL classes and teacher influence

on attrition. The findings did not support the existing literature put forth in the earlier literature review.

*6.3.2.2.1 Allophones learning French.* Previous research has indicated that allophones in Canada are continuing French for employment, to adopt a more Canadian identity, and because they felt it was part of a good education (Mady, 2010a). It is important to note that two participants did say that students who were learning French as a third or fourth language would probably see more value in learning another language, supporting Mady (2010a). Two other participants however made statements suggesting that an additional language would prove to be too much for some allophones to handle (which has been disproved by Mady, 2010b). This was also disproved in the board memo (see Appendix H) that aimed to dispel common myths about language learning.

*6.3.2.2.2 Teacher influence.* No guidance counsellor associated the French teachers at their secondary schools with students leaving FSL programs. The two participants who did talk about the possible negative impact of teachers were both making reference to elementary school teachers. This finding contradicts results of Chambers (1999), nor Makropoulos (2010) in the sense that it was not the current teachers at the high school who were negatively impacting students' attitudes towards French. Chambers (1999) identified teachers as the primary input of the target language and ones who could influence the attitudes that students adopt towards the target language. Makropoulos (2010) also described that French immersion students choose to leave the program due to poor student-teacher relationships. A possible explanation for this finding could be that guidance counsellors did not want to speak poorly about their colleagues at the school, and it was more preferable to speak about the elementary school French teachers that they would be unlikely to know personally. When five guidance counsellors recommended that

students speak with their French teachers, this also suggests that participants do not believe that it is the secondary school teachers who are discouraging or negatively affecting the continued pursuit of French.

*6.3.2.2.3 Value of French.* What was not explored in the literature review, but presented itself frequently in the findings, was the concept of the value or benefit of learning a second language. From the guidance counsellor perspective, eight participants suggested the idea that students were not continuing French because they did not see the value or benefit to being able to speak French. I, unfortunately, did not ask follow-up questions regarding what participants meant by value. However, as almost all of them cited employment as a factor that pushed students to continue to study French, I can assume here that many may have been referring to the instrumental value of learning a language, that is learning a language to further academic or career goals (Brown, 2000). Research in other contexts (in this case, learners of French and Spanish in English-speaking England) (Oakes, 2013) demonstrated that Anglophone learners predominantly expressed that they were learning the foreign language for its instrumental value, notably, employment in this case.

It is difficult to make predictions in this case, as I did not gather any data from students. I would, however, venture to say that due to the false belief that there are little to no opportunities to use French in their immediate community, students may be shying away from French and unable to see the day-to-day benefits of speaking it. While it is true that French is in a minority context in the area studied, the Francophone population is growing in southern Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2014b).

Furthermore, it is important to discuss the implementation of the new FSL curriculum released in September 2015 (OME, 2014). Previous to this edition, the Grades 9-12 FSL

curriculum had not been updated since 1999 (OME, 1999). In the 1999 curriculum, learning objectives were organized by language strand: Oral Communication (listening and speaking), Reading, Writing, and a table of Language Structures outlining the grammar objectives. The learning objectives were formulated as observable tasks, allowing the teacher to determine if students had successfully met that objective (OME, 1999). The updated curriculum is similarly organized, using the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), while leaving out the Language Structures table that was present in the 1999 edition (OME, 2014). In core French, for example, the learning expectations are the same for each Grade, but the curriculum provides different examples for each Grade and pathway level. Also, in each of the strands, listening, reading, writing, and speaking, there are learning expectations related to culture. Hopefully, this focus on intercultural awareness will encourage French teachers not to limit themselves to the teaching of the French language itself, but also to seek out the francophone communities in their neighbourhoods and highlight opportunities to use the language.

**6.3.2.4 Summary: Reasons for attrition.** In summary, when guidance counsellors identified factors that contributed to the attrition rates at their schools, some of the factors were supported by previous research, while others were not. The findings in this study support research conducted by Cashman (2002), Makropoulos (2010), and Massey (1994) with regards to the primary factors affecting attrition being students struggling in the language, the impact on post-secondary admission averages, and timetabling conflicts. Two factors relating to attrition were initially identified in the literature but were not confirmed in this study. The first related to allophones learning French, where two participants reflected the same findings as Mady (2010a), but two others described the opposite. The second factor, regarding teacher influence,

participants only referred to earlier elementary teachers as being possible sources who contributed to attrition and not current secondary teachers at their schools. One notable factor that has yet to be described in detail in the literature includes the lower value placed on French, by both students and parents. Emerging research (Marshall, 2012) identified that while parents considered learning a second language to be important, the attitude towards the learning of French was negative. Marshall hypothesized that the lack of a local French community could contribute to this negative attitude (2012).

**6.3.3 Summary: Research question #3.** The overwhelming majority (n = 11) of guidance counsellors identified that employment was the main reason as to why students continue studying FSL. With French immersion students, it seemed like there were more factors to retain students than in the core French program. One of these factors was the awarding of a certificate to French immersion students when the student has taken the required FSL courses. To encourage retention by core French students, the OPSBA (2007) recommended that schools award a similar certificate to core French students. When French immersion students were considering leaving the program, counsellors described a process where parents and teachers would need to be consulted before the student could leave the program. Core French students who were considering discontinuing were not given this same type of treatment.

When participants were asked to put forth factors that they believed contributed to attrition, many of the factors that they presented were ones that were discussed in prior research. Two factors that have been contradicted by existing research were the cases of allophones learning French, and teacher influence. Guidance counsellors had conflicting views on whether allophone students would typically persist or discontinue their FSL studies. A factor that was not present in my original literature review was the topic of

the value placed on learning French. Eight participants explained that they felt students who did not see the value of learning French were often the ones who discontinued their FSL studies.

## **6.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and discussion presented here, I list below some recommendations that guidance counsellors, school boards, and the OME can consider when looking to improve the annual course selection process and help retain more students in optional FSL courses.

**6.4.1 Course selection.** As mentioned earlier, two schools were employing different strategies to help support their students: 1) using a draft course selection and 2) creating a drop-in consultation centre. Both participants expressed that these strategies encouraged students to reflect upon their decisions, and gave students more access to guidance counsellors if they were uncomfortable or too intimidated to book individual appointments. I suggest that schools explore these strategies to better assist students on course selection matters throughout the year.

Furthermore, schools could do a micro-level data study at their schools to help select appropriate offerings for the annual courses selection. The data can be used to determine if schools should offer a wider variety of French Immersion elective credits or offer the Applied/Open pathway for core French.

**6.4.2 Retention in FSL.** Over the course of the interviews, the information that participants shared has led to the following suggestions for Ontario school boards and the OME to help retain more students in FSL programs, both core French and French immersion. These recommendations may help schools in meeting the targets set out by the Framework (OME, 2013a).

**6.4.2.1 Promoting French.** The first suggestion is to promote the use of French in more contexts, including the usefulness of French in trades positions. Guidance counsellors shared that, in their experience, the student who continues studying French is one who is destined for university. Schools should promote the benefits of French in careers needing a college degree, and apprenticeship training to help fight this trend. Advancing the usage of French in careers needing a college degree or apprenticeship training can also help to demonstrate the value of continuing French. Now that the OME has introduced the Applied and Open pathways in French immersion, students need to be taught about the variety of situations that French could serve them in their day-to-day lives.

Generally speaking, these findings suggest that when French teachers and guidance counsellors are interacting one-on-one with students, they could use this opportunity, and the annual course selection presentations, to teach students about the values and benefits to learning French. These can include employment opportunities, but also how learning French can help them grow mentally and culturally. Some of this information could be presented in the annual course selection process presentations that schools reported giving to their students. Fostering connections with the local Francophone community through volunteer or co-op placements can also help build cultural connections and investment.

**6.4.2.2 Core French certificate of achievement.** I would also recommend, like OPSBA (2007), that the OME creates a certificate of achievement to award to students graduating with Grade 12 core French. As was demonstrated in the findings, guidance counsellors frequently used the French immersion certificate as a retention tool to motivate students to continue. Based on the success of the French immersion certificate, this tool could also be offered for students in the core French program as it would reinforce the value and importance of continuing French until graduation. Perhaps the DELF (as explained presented on page 95), being used in other school boards as a *diplôme* to prove French abilities at the end of their

schooling, could also serve as this type of retention tool for all students, core French and French immersion. for all students, core French and French immersion.

**6.4.2.3 Pass or fail option for FSL.** Seeing as many guidance counsellors identified grades as a barrier to continuing FSL courses, I would recommend that students have the possibility to opt for a Pass or Fail grade in Grade 12. While this is quite a drastic change, and would require coordination on many levels, findings from this study suggest that more students might opt to continue if they had the assurance that the French course would not affect their admission average. For example, after midterms, students could submit a form, indicating that they would like to have the grade appear as a pass or fail on their student records. If they do not submit this request, students will automatically receive a numbered final grade, and students would not be able to know their final grade before deciding how they would like it to appear. If this recommendation were to be put into effect, post-secondary destinations would also need to be supportive of this decision, for if students opt for a pass or fail grade in their Grade 12 French class, it would not be used towards their six courses traditionally used to calculate their admission average.

In summary, when looking at the three research questions, along with the findings, it is clear that guidance counsellors are heavily involved in the course selection process and are aware of many factors that affect retention and attrition in FSL programs. Guidance counsellors are constantly advising on course selection and preparing their students using a variety of techniques. The most popular technique was to give presentations on how to select courses and what the OSSD requirements are. If students came in to ask for advice about their course selection and the need to continue in French, 11 guidance counsellors said that they would encourage students to continue in French, but a majority had conditions that needed to be met for them to encourage French.

The majority of participants believed that students who continued studying FSL were doing it for future employment, while others specifically identified the French immersion certificate as being a motivating factor for students. In addition, when participants were identifying reasons for attrition, some of the reasons identified were supported by the literature reviewed earlier. A surprising finding was the number of guidance counsellors who believed that students just did not see the value in learning French.

These findings led me to propose three recommendations to guidance counsellors, school boards and the OME. The one that I believe is the most easily implementable is to promote the benefits of being able to speak French. Other suggestions include offering a certificate of achievement to students who finish Grade 12 core French, and offering a pass or fail option to Grade 12 FSL courses.

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter presents some of the major findings, elaborates on some of the limitations of the study, and identifies direction for future research. These findings shed light on the role of guidance counsellors during the course selection process, both the annual course selection and when students are modifying their timetables throughout the year. Furthermore, the findings also reveal some of the reasons guidance counsellors believe contribute to students continuing or not their study of FSL past the mandatory Grade 9 credit.

### 7.1 Major findings

At the beginning of this study, I set out to answer the following three questions, from the guidance counsellor's perspective about the course selection process and the factors that affect attrition and retention in FSL programs.

1. How do guidance counsellors describe the process of course selection, with regards to FSL in particular?
2. How do guidance counsellors view their role in the course selection process?
3. What do guidance counsellors identify as factors that contribute to students continuing (or not continuing) the study of FSL past Grade 9?

Some of the main findings include the lengths that guidance counsellors went to help prepare students to complete their annual course selection. Participants often described a personal approach on how to advise and prepare students; however, all schools shared that they used presentations to incoming or current students to help prepare them. Using handouts and consulting websites with students were two other methods that guidance counsellors used to prepare students to make good course selection decisions. With

regards to French, a majority of participants shared they would explicitly encourage students to continue studying FSL, however, this encouragement often only came if the student was interested in French, good in French, or if they brought up the idea of French first. Some major differences emerged between how core French and French immersion students were counselled, with the French immersion students receiving more attention if they were having doubts about continuing in the program.

Participants informed me that one of their main roles was to counsel students during the course selection process. During these counselling sessions, it was especially important for the participants to get to know the students in order to best respond to their needs. Furthermore, guidance counsellors sometimes described themselves as facilitators or teachers, not advisors, as they are ones who teach students how to use the resources available to them. Lastly, participants explained to me how they are responding to student demands at each of their schools. They all followed the OME guidelines to offer the Grade 9 Open French credit, but two are going further, offering new the Applied/Open French immersion pathways, or beginning to offer more Applied/Open core French courses until Grade 12.

Finally, when it came to guidance counsellors identifying some of the factors they believe affected attrition and retention in FSL programs throughout the province, participants described a lot of what is already seen in the literature. For example, guidance counsellors identified future employment as the number one factor contributing to retention. Some other factors that were unique to the French immersion program were the certificate that students graduated with after the completion of 10 French immersion credits and the ability for students to take as many of their French immersion courses as possible during Grades 9 and 10. The most common factor that guidance counsellors identified as affecting attrition was that students do not see the value in learning French.

## 7.2 Limitations

This research had its limitations. The first is that I did not seek the opportunity to ask follow-up questions with participants in my ethics approval. As themes came up in later interviews, I was not able to go back to inquire about such themes with previous participants; but, my semi-structured interview protocol allowed me to ask questions to future participants. An example of this would be when participants started to tell me which FSL courses that were currently in the timetable for the current academic year. With some of the earlier participants I had interviewed, I did not have the chance to confirm whether schools were offering the Grade 9 Open level core French for 2016-2017.

The second limitation is that as an exploratory case study with a small sample size, this study is not generalizable. This study only brings forth the perspectives of 14 guidance counsellors at eight schools within one school board, in one provincial jurisdiction. However, we can learn from these participants the strategies that they employ at their schools. Readers can evaluate them to determine if they may be appropriate in other settings. Listening to new perspectives can provide us with pieces of information that may lead to a modified strategy or idea that would be more suitable in our educational context.

The third limitation for this study was that I did not field test my interview protocol with the target participant group. I was able to field test it with educators, but not guidance counsellors, as that was the population that I had access to. This more specific field testing could have reduced the misinterpretations and helped to identify changes to the wording of certain questions, to ensure that I was eliciting the required information. For example, the question eliciting information about retention and attrition in FSL programs was phrased as ‘Why do you think that there is a trend for students to discontinue their French studies?’, favouring a discussion about attrition and not retention. This formulation of the question could have favoured the number of attrition reasons and limited the number of positive retention reasons. By field

testing the protocol with guidance counsellors, I could have identified this early on and made arrangements as needed, prior to the interviews.

A further limitation related to the specific educational jurisdiction is that, in Canada, each province and territory has its own requirements for guidance counsellors, some like Ontario requiring teacher training and additional qualification courses, and others requiring Master's degrees in Counselling. Hence, this further limits generalization to other jurisdictions.

Lastly, the true factors that students felt regarding the factors that influence them to continue or not in FSL may not be accurately represented, as I only sought the voice of guidance counsellors about the various factors affecting attrition.

### **7.3 Future research**

While this study helped to fill a large gap in the research relating to how guidance counsellors report they are counselling students during the course selection process, especially regarding FSL programming in Ontario, there are still many areas of research that arose over the course of this study that I recommend be investigated further. The topics I recommend are as follows, in no particular order of importance:

1. **Speaking with students about the value they place on French.** According to guidance counsellors, some students did not value learning French. Due to the fact that this thesis did not originally focus heavily on reviewing the literature or studying the value of learning French as a second language, a study using student voice to discuss the value of French would be useful in developing future resources to teach students about the value of French. The impact of developing future resources could help retain more students in FSL programs.

2. **Examining the role of perceived language status.** Expanding on the previous point, the interest (or disinterest) to learn a new language can stem from language ideologies present in an individual or his or her community (Marshall, 2002). This leads me to ask: To what degree are these ideologies impacting student retention in FSL? What actions are school employees, parents, and community members taking to imply or infer this lower status of French? Using the exploratory data from this study, future research can approach this topic using a specific theoretical framework to explore the complex role of language status in relation to the impact of encouragement (or discouragement) from guidance counsellors.
3. **Extending the study to include more participants from across the province to have a broader perspective on encouragement in FSL.** As this study showed that encouragement to continue studying FSL often came with an ‘if ...’ clause, it would be valuable to know if this was similar across the province, or only in this school board. This could involve replicating the study and analyzing the data through the lens of a specific theoretical framework and/or a more detailed literature review to expand our understanding of values and motivation in this context.
4. **Investigating the differences in encouragement between core French and French immersion students.** Guidance counsellors shared that when a French immersion student was considering leaving the program, guidance counsellors invited parents and/or teachers to a meeting with the student. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure that the student was certain that they wanted to leave the program. While some may see this procedure as excessive in core French, it does go to prove that there may be more value placed in one program over the other.

5. **Exploring the role of a third language in the desire to pursue French.** Guidance counsellors were split on the role that a third language would play in encouraging or discouraging a student to continue with their FSL studies. While previous research (Mady, 2010a) suggests that newcomers do see a benefit, two guidance counsellors in this study stated that bilingual students (Other language–English) did not see the value of learning a third language. Further research should continue exploring how guidance counsellors are counselling bilingual students.

Overall, this study contributes to the discussion regarding course selection and guidance counsellor encouragement to pursue FSL past the mandatory credit. As seen above, there are still many areas that should now be investigated, helping to clarify certain details. Now that school boards are required to report to the Ministry of Education how they will meet the goal of retaining more students in FSL programs, this study can serve to offer some suggestions. The easiest one that schools can put into effect immediately would simply be to promote French both in the schools and beyond, to both core French and French immersion students. Beyond the schools, students should be reminded that French is useful in all pathways options; open and college pathway students may not see the value of French in their future, as traditionally courses are not offered in these pathways. At the schools, promoting the value of French can be accomplished through offering a variety of pathways, discussing the value during the course selection presentations, or by hosting Francophones from the community as guest speakers. A simple playing of ‘Oh Canada’ in French and advertising opportunities to use French in the community may help show students that French really is all around them and not a phenomenon that only exists outside of their communities. The guidance counsellor plays an essential role when it comes to course selection and offering suggestions or advice to students when they are considering whether or not to pursue elective FSL courses. In addition to

students being taught the benefits of speaking a second language, perhaps guidance counsellors should be informed of these benefits as well so they are able to pass them on to students who are questioning the place of French in their futures.

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# Appendix A: Individual Interview Guide

Guidance during the course selection process: The counsellor's perspective in the decision to continue FSL

## Interview Questions

Thank you for making time to talk with me today. As I mentioned earlier, all information will be kept confidential, and you can decide not to answer a question or stop this interview at any time. When you are describing your experiences please avoid using the names of other teachers, staff, or students, as we want their information to be confidential also.

- a. Has a student ever come to you asking for advice on their course selection process?
- b. Describe a time when a student came to you asking for advice on their course selection process.
  - a. How often does an interaction like this happen?
- c. Has a student ever come to you asking for advice about continuing core French or French immersion?
- d. Walk me through how you would advise a student coming to you for the first time, unsure about their future in French.
- e. How do you make decisions on how to advise students when it comes to selecting French as a second language courses?
- f. How knowledgeable do you think students are about the effects of their course selection may have on their future academic careers?
- g. Why do you think that there is a trend for students to discontinue their French studies?
- h. Thinking about the OSSD requirements, how many students would you say take advantage of the fact that FSL credits can now count towards Groups 2 & 3?
- i. Has a student ever requested to conduct their CO-OP placement or complete their volunteer hours in French? What followed?

Thank you very much for participating. After this interview has been transcribed, you will receive an email from me with the transcript from today. I will ask that you take a few minutes to highlight certain quotes or themes that are most important to you, as well as to add statements or clarify statements made, using track changes. You will have a week to complete this step and it is optional. Just to let you know, that if you would not like to do this, or unable, I will still be using the data collected during this interview. Do you have any questions for me?

## Appendix B: Themes and subthemes used in findings

1. Course selection process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Description of the course selection process</li> <li>b. Timeline of the course selection process</li> <li>c. Resources used during course selection</li> </ul>
2. Role of the guidance counsellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Advising students on course selection</li> <li>b. Incorporating new courses into the course selection</li> <li>c. Other duties performed by guidance counsellors</li> <li>d. Co-op program and its suitability in French</li> <li>e. Volunteer hours completed in French</li> </ul>
3. Secondary pathways	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. General pathways</li> <li>b. FSL pathways</li> <li>c. Academic/University pathways</li> <li>d. Applied/College pathways</li> </ul>
4. Retention in FSL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reasons for retention</li> <li>b. Preventing attrition in FSL</li> <li>c. Group 2 &amp; 3 credits</li> </ul>
5. Attrition in FSL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Reasons for attrition</li> <li>b. Process of attrition from French immersion</li> </ul>
6. Attitudes and beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Previous FSL experience</li> <li>b. Grade 9 Open FSL course</li> <li>c. Accessibility of French</li> </ul>

# Appendix C: Four-year course planner

## High School Personal High School Option Plan

Grade 9 / Year 1 8 Credits	Grade 10 / Year 2 8 Credits	Grade 11 / Year 3 8 Credits	Grade 12 / Year 4 7 Credits
English	English	English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	
Science	Science		
Canadian Geography	Canadian History		
Physical Education	0.5 Civics / 0.5 Careers		
French			

### Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements: 30 credits total = 18 compulsory plus:

- A minimum of 12 optional credits\*\*\*
- Complete a minimum of 40 hours of community involvement
- Successfully complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test or in special circumstances, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course

### Other Compulsory Credits:

- 1 "Arts" credit (visual arts, music, drama)
- 1 credit from Group 1 -- 1 additional credit in English, or French as a second language, or a classical or an international language, or a social sciences and the humanities, or Canadian and world studies, or Guidance and Career education, or cooperative education\*\*
- 1 credit from Group 2 -- 1 additional credit in health and physical education, or business studies, or the arts (music, art, or drama), or French as a second language\*\*, or cooperative education\*\*
- 1 credit from Group 3 -- 1 additional credit in science (Grade 11 or 12), computer studies or technological education (Grades 9-12), or French as a second language\*\*, or computer studies, or cooperative education\*\*

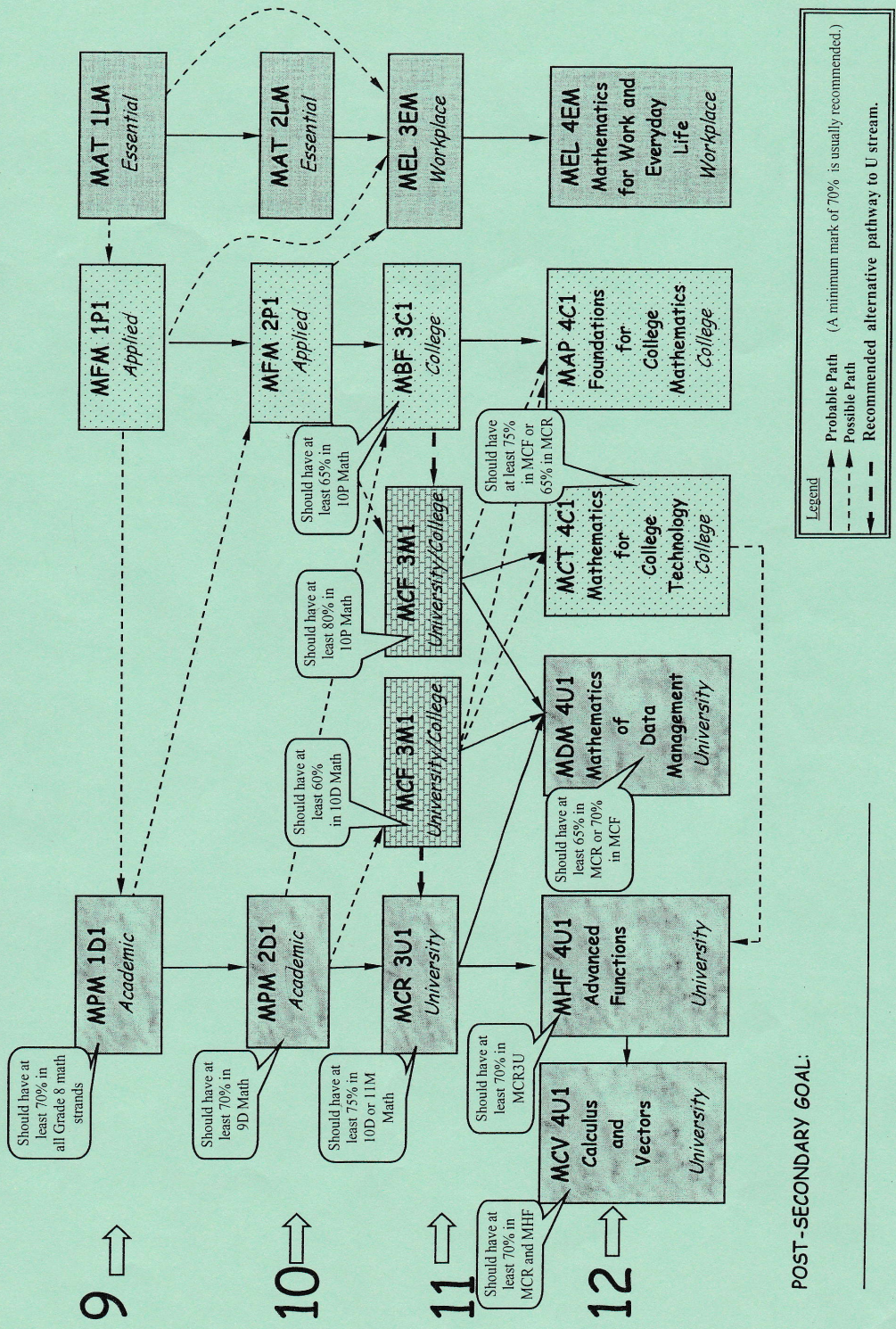
\* A minimum of 3 credits in English as a second language (ESL) may be counted towards the 4 compulsory credits in English, but the fourth must be a credit earned for a Grade 12 compulsory English course. \*\* A maximum of 2 credits in cooperative education can count as compulsory credits. \*\*\* May include up to four credits achieved through approved Dual Credit courses.

# Appendix D: Math planner

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pathways to Mathematics Success

**Instructions:** Circle each course (code) you have successfully completed. Place a star \* beside courses you intend to take.  
**Note:** To graduate, a student must have at least 3 credits in mathematics, with one of the credits at the grade 11 or 12 level.



POST-SECONDARY GOAL: \_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix E: French immersion planning sheet

## French Immersion Personal High School Option Plan

Grade 9 / Year 1 8 Credits	Grade 10 / Year 2 8 Credits	Grade 11 / Year 3 8 Credits	Grade 12 / Year 4 6 Credits
French Immersion*	French Immersion*	French Immersion*	French Immersion*
English	English	English	English
Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics	
Science*	Science*	Geography* (1 of 2 optional credits)	
Canadian Geography*	Canadian History*		
Physical Education	0.5 Civics* / 0.5 Careers*		
Business Studies* (1 of 2 optional credits)			

\* Please note French Immersion course: Ten French Immersion credits are required for the French Immersion Certificate including FIF4UF.

Students can choose from one of two optional elective courses: Grade 9 BIT10F (Info. and Comm. Tech) or Grade 11 CG30F (Travel and Tourism) to complete the 10th subject requirement.

**Ontario Secondary School Diploma requirements: 30 credits total including 18 compulsory plus:**

- A minimum of 12 optional credits
- Complete a minimum of 40 hours of Community Involvement
- Successfully complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test or in special circumstances, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course

**Other Compulsory Credits:**

- 1 "Arts" credit (visual arts, music, drama)
- 1 credit from Group 1 -- 1 additional credit in English, or French as a second language\*\*, or a classical or an international language, or a social sciences and the humanities, or Canadian and world studies, or Guidance and Career education, or cooperative education\*\*\*
- 1 credit from Group 2 -- 1 additional credit in health and physical education, or business studies, or the arts (music, art, or drama), or French as a second language\*\*, or cooperative education\*\*\*
- 1 credit from Group 3 -- 1 additional credit in science (Grade 11 or 12), computer studies or technological education (Grades 9-12), French as a second language\*\*, or computer studies, or cooperative education\*\*\*

A maximum of 3 credits in English as a second language (ESL) may be counted towards the 4 compulsory credits, but the fourth must be a credit earned for a Grade 12 compulsory English course.

\*\*A maximum of 2 credits in French.

\*\*\*A maximum of 2 credits in cooperative education can count as compulsory credits this may include up to four credits achieved through approved dual credit courses.

## Appendix F: Reasons for retention mentioned by participants

N. of Participants who mentioned the reason	Reason for Retention
11	Jobs or employment
7	School has created new courses to support students continuing
5	Parental influence (general for course selection and specific to French)
5	French Immersion certificate
5	French post-secondary options
4	Personal and cultural growth (including opportunities for exchange)
3	Interest and enjoyment
3	Getting good grades
3	Peer influence
3	Bilinguals see the benefits of a 3 <sup>rd</sup> language
3	Previous immersion students continuing in core French
3	Completing French immersion courses early (Grades 9 and 10)
2	Keeping options open
2	Teacher influence (the teachers are promoting continuing)
2	French immersion students just stay
2	Academically inclined students stay
2	Students do not need convincing; they will select on their own

## Appendix G: Reasons for attrition mentioned by participants

N. of Participants who mentioned the reason	Reason for Attrition
8	Students who do not see the value
8	The 5 typical Grade 12 courses (English, 2 Maths, 2 Science) for the science and math student
7	Students struggling in FSL
7	Parental influence (general for course selection and specific to French)
7	Course load is time consuming and could impact admission average
6	Students know they only have to get one credit ('one and done')
5	Stacked classes ('split' Grade)
5	Not interested in FSL
4	Students do not intend to pursue FSL
4	Less room for elective credits and many other options
3	Timetable conflict
3	Only the academic pathway available in FSL
3	ESL students already have another L2
2	Courses do not run (not enough enrolment during course selection)
2	Peer influence
2	Negative elementary school experience

## Appendix H: Board circulated memo, outlining new FSL policies

**DATE:** November 26, 2015

**REFERENCE:** FSL Course Offering and Selection Considerations

In light of the *Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools (2013)* and the provision of the new FSL course, FSF 10, there have been many questions from schools regarding FSL course offerings and the impact of these shifts on credit substitution. We hope the preamble and FAQs below provides some direction and clarity on these matters.

### **SETTING THE CONTEXT OF FSL EDUCATION IN ONTARIO**

"The Ministry of Education's commitment to improving the effectiveness of FSL education in Ontario is strengthened by an awareness and appreciation of the many proven benefits of learning an additional language....[Second Language Learning] is known to enhance first-language and overall literacy skills." (*A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools*, 2013, page 3) The commitment is mirrored in the Ministry's direction that the study of French as a second language "is compulsory in elementary school from Grade 4 to Grade 8, and secondary school students are required to earn at least one credit in French as a second language to graduate." (*Ontario Schools: Kindergarten to Grade 12 Policy and Program Requirements*, 2011). To this end, schools are required to offer "at least core French programs from Grade 4 to the end of Grade 12" (p.29)

Further, French as a Second Language (FSL) programs **should reflect the diversity of the student population, including students with special education needs and English language learners.** *A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools Kindergarten-Grade 12*, 2013 states that **FSL educators strive to meet the diverse needs of all students through the use of differentiated instruction and by providing accommodations and/or modifying expectations if necessary** (p.10).

## FAQs

### FSF 10

#### ***Does my school have to offer FSF10 in our local course calendar?***

Among the three goals of the Framework is an “Increase in the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation...Regardless of their anticipated post-secondary destination- apprenticeship, college, university, or the workplace- all students stand to benefit from staying in FSL until graduation and stakeholders must consider all options to make that possible.” (page 9)

The intention of the inclusion of FSF10 is to provide another pathway option. This allows more students to take French in high school. The eligibility requirement for this course is that a student has acquired fewer than 600 hours of French instruction in elementary school. The decision to offer FSF10 remains a local one based upon the needs and demographics of the students entering the school.

When determining if the school demographics warrant the offering of FSF 10, communication with elementary partner schools regarding the number of ELLs who have had fewer than 600 hours by the end of grade 8, and the number of students identified with special education needs who may benefit from access to an introductory course will assist in determining the demand for the course. Also, secondary schools may take into consideration the number of international students entering grade 9.

#### ***Who takes FSF 10?***

Students entering secondary school who are no longer exempt from Core French under the Exemption Procedures [redacted] and students new to Ontario, both of whom may have fewer than the requisite 600 hours of French instruction, may access FSF 10 provided enrolment warrants it running.

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#### ***Do International Students need to take an FSL credit toward the satisfaction of OSSD requirements?***

Fee paying international students entering [redacted] in grade 9 can enrol in FSF10 to satisfy the compulsory FSL credit. FSF10 is an introductory Core French course offered to students with fewer than 600 hours of French instruction. Although a credit substitution is possible (as defined by Ontario Schools, 2011), the nature of the substitution is **best decided on a case-by-case basis** to serve the best interest of the student. The compulsory core French course requirement should not be the automatic target for substitution. International students in grades 10 or beyond will be granted an equivalency credit based on the student's specific profile.

## EXEMPTIONS

***Can students be exempt from FSL compulsory course credit? Who may be exempt?***

The study of French as a Second Language (FSL) is compulsory from Grade 4 to Grade 9. Participation in FSL programs should reflect the diversity of the student population, including students identified with special education needs and English language learners.

Any consideration for an exemption from Core French for a student requiring extensive modifications to the Ontario curriculum expectations must be addressed on a case-by-case basis through the In-School Team process. The guideline can be found in Procedure [REDACTED]

## **SUBSTITUTIONS**

### ***Can a credit substitution still be made for a grade 9 students who will be taking the Learning Strategies course?***

Yes, however it should not be automatic or assumed that the appropriate substitution is the FSF course. As per Ontario Schools, “in order to provide the flexibility to tailor an individual student’s program to the student’s needs and to support his or her progress through secondary school, principals may substitute up to three compulsory credits...No more than one learning strategies course may be used through substitution to meet a compulsory credit requirement (63). It is important to note, that **the Ministry’s FSL Framework advocates for the continued study of French** and “it is expected that all students in English- language publicly funded schools will have access to FSL programs” (Including Students with Special Education Needs in French as a Second Language Programs, 2015, p.14).

In many cases, continued study of French is beneficial. All decisions to make a credit substitution must therefore be made on a **case-by-case basis**. Where it has been determined that it is in a student’s best interest to take GLE, then the in-school team needs to decide what the most appropriate credit substitution is based upon the individual student’s strengths, needs, interests and pathway. In cases where it makes the most sense for the substitution to be the French credit, this is still allowed. Any grade 9 courses, however, may be considered for the substitution. Principals are invited to review the timetabling of FSF1 courses in relation to the learning strategies course sections, such that students identified with special education needs have access to both.