

## French Language Instruction in Alberta

### References:

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/3115178/frimmhandbook.pdf>

<http://fnscf.ca/education-en-langue-francaise-elf/droits-de-gestion-scolaire/causes-phares/>

<https://fpfa.ab.ca/la-fpfa/histoire-de-la-fpfa/>

### 1890s

While the earliest schools established in what is now Alberta used both English and French as languages of instruction, by 1892 the Council of Public Instruction of what was then the Northwest Territories abolished the use of French. It later gave permission for French-speaking students to study French grammar, reading, composition and literature for approximately one hour per day.

### 1920s-1960s

The 1921 School Act permitted instruction in French in grades 1 and 2 with one hour per day at each grade level thereafter, but the Department of Education did not identify learning resources. The teaching of French continued to be offered this way in many of Alberta's francophone communities until 1968.

### 1960s-1970s

Amendments to the School Act in 1968 and 1970 increased the use of French as the language of instruction in Alberta schools and permitted boards and private schools to offer instruction in French from Grades 1 to 12.

By 1976, provincial regulations allowed French to be used as the language of instruction for a maximum of 80 percent of the school day from Grade 3 to Grade 12.

In 1978, the Language Services Branch of Alberta Education was established. In the same year, parents established the Alberta Branch of Canadian Parents for French (the national association having been established a year earlier). Enrolment in Alberta's French immersion programs was approximately 7,600 students.

### 1980s-1990s

In Alberta, as in other parts of the country, parental interest in immersion programs grew slowly in the late 60s and early 70s, gaining momentum and spreading throughout the province during the 80s and early 90s.

By the mid-90s, immersion enrolments had grown to over 28,800 students. A decline was experienced in the second half of the 90s and by 1997-98, enrolments had fallen to just over 26,000. However, the last few years witness a small but steady increase.

As for francophone education, the coming into force of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, and more precisely section 23 guaranteed the right to education in the language of the minority. Thus, in the early 1980s, francophone parents asked Alberta Education to create a francophone elementary school in Edmonton. After an initial refusal, they obtained a francophone school, but under the authority of an anglophone school board.

Considering that section 23 includes the right to manage their own educational institutions, parents brought an action against the Government of Alberta for violating their right to a Francophone-run education system. *Mahe v. Alberta* (1990) is known as a leading decision of the Supreme Court of Canada. The ruling is notable because the court established that parents of the official-language minority have the right either to be represented on the school board, or to have a school board of their own, in order to provide adequate protection for the education rights of their children.

The Fédération des parents francophones de l'Alberta also has its beginnings in the same period. In 1986, this non-profit organization that is recognized as the official voice of francophone parents and school councils by Alberta Education is created as a result of an initiative by several parents.

### 2017

Today, there are 60 school boards in Alberta, including 4 French-language school boards and 41 school boards that offer French immersion programs. There are 41 Francophone schools and 215 schools offering French immersion programs.