



# TRAINING THE CITIZENS OF *tomorrow*

The goal of the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM) is to train citizens for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

To do so, it relies on three pillars: academic and educational success, community and identity building.

BY MATHILDE ERRARD

**A**lain Laberge, Superintendent of the DSFM laid the groundwork from the outset: “Our mandate is broader than that of the English-language schools. In addition to academic success, we also have the mission of transmitting a Francophone culture and nurturing a Francophone identity among our students.”

This mandate has been thought of from the very beginning of the DSFM, which was created in 1994 following the adoption in July 1993 of Bill 34 to amend *The Public Schools Act*. And to remain in line with its mandate, the DSFM develops a strategic

plan approximately every five years that focuses on objectives.

## Academic and Educational Success

The DSFM has begun a reflection process to review the definition of academic success: “We want to put the emphasis on the student, adapting our teaching to ensure that each student progresses, regardless of his or her profile, from the very first years, so that the student gets off to a good start,” says Alain Laberge.



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**L'éducation en langue française  
offre une expérience unique.  
Pensez-y!**

René Déquier, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services, agrees. “The part of the brain that controls language grows rapidly between the ages of zero and five. It is also at this age that children begin to develop their emotions and relationships with adults.

“For example, the link between children and French can be forged in the Centres de la petite enfance et de la famille (CPEF), which have been organized in DSFM schools since 2004. Hence the importance of focusing on early childhood with an active offer of services, including full-time preschools in five of our schools.”

## Community and Identity Building

Alain Laberge states that one of the goals of the division is for children to “live the language”. In addition to the CPEFs, the division can count on some thirty community partners whose role is to complement the school curriculum. These partnerships also allow students to live relevant experiences in French outside the classroom.

Training citizens for the 21st century also involves moments such as the Jeunes manitobains des communautés associées (JMCA) leadership camps, “where students can become aware that other young people like them speak French,” explains René Déquier. The number of young people attending JMCA leadership camps has been increasing over the past ten years: in 2009-2010, 20 students participated. In 2018-2019, there were about 240 students.

Some DSFM youth also participate in municipal councils in their regions, a way to “give students a voice and show their pride in being Francophone,” says Daniel Préteau, Assistant Director of Student Services. It’s also a way to train a future generation of leaders who will be able to take their place in the Francophonie.

The DSFM had to initiate a new approach to identity building some ten years ago to better welcome a new clientele, including newcomers and exogamous families.

## A Growing Population

The DSFM’s student population has been growing at a rate of about 2% year over year since 2001, and it has to meet a great demand. The division estimates that 5,993 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 will begin school in September 2020. There were 5,779 students enrolled in the DSFM in December 2019.

While the increase in student numbers allows for enriching diversity, it also brings its share of challenges, such as the need to recruit new teachers and limited available space.

Several expansion projects have been carried out in recent years: a 2,500 square-metre expansion at École Taché in 2015, a new gymnasium and multipurpose room in Saint-Georges in 2013, and another expansion planned for the fall of 2020 at École Noël-Ritchot. Bernard Lesage, Chair of the Commission scolaire franco-manitobaine since 2004, reminds us that capital investment has been and remains a major issue for the Francophone community.

“The growth in our enrollment each year necessarily means physical expansion. Today, there are still too many regions where parents do not have the choice of a French-language education.”

As of September 30, 2019, the DSFM had 23 schools, seven in urban areas and 16 in rural areas. ■

## Important Dates In the History of the DSFM

**1994:** The DSFM is created, followed a few months later by the Commission scolaire franco-manitobaine (CSFM).

The Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* guarantees Manitoba Francophones a maximum degree of management of their French-language schools.

Bill 34, which provided for the creation of a French-language school division, was passed on July 27, 1993.

The first Superintendent was Raymond Bisson and the first Chair of the CSFM, Louis Tétrault.

As of the start of the school year in September 1994, the DSFM’s mandate was to manage French schools and programs. Its network grew gradually over the years, with 20 schools in 1994 and more than 4,000 first students.

Today, the division has 23 schools and a Centre d’apprentissage franco-manitobain pour adultes. The Voie du Nord in Thompson is the latest school to open.

As of December 2019, close to 5,800 students were enrolled in the DSFM, the only French-language school division in Manitoba.



# Adapting TO NEWCOMERS



MIREILLE KAZADI

*Principal, École Taché.*

BY MATHILDE ERRARD

Since the early 2000s, the DSFM has gradually observed an increase in newcomers among its students.

Little by little, the teams have adapted, beginning with those that meet newcomer students as they take their very first steps in the school system. “At the time of registration, a profile of all students is drawn up,” explains Daniel Préteau, Assistant Director of Student Services at the DSFM. “And for newcomers, we also ask them questions about their school and life in their country of origin.”

In 2018 and 2019, several professional training sessions were organized to understand the realities of newcomers. “The training also allowed us to understand the importance of our choice of words and expressions. We don’t all have the same cultural references.”

Mireille Kazadi, Principal of École Taché, which welcomes students from various cultures, explains that “each case

is unique, and these courses provide the necessary foundations.” Adaptation and cultural inclusion are achieved, for example, through the choice of books. “We want to make sure that the books used in our classrooms and libraries are representative of all our students, so that they can identify with them and find their place.”

Since 2004, the DSFM has also created a full-time Cultural Coordinator position. And for the past three years or so, there has also been a part-time person.

Coordinators travel from school to school. Their duties include discussing with teachers and staff and answering their questions. They spend most of their time in the city, where there is a greater need for support and advice.

## Teachers As References

“In the hallway of our school, it’s a colourful Francophonie! Asia, Europe, Africa, there are more and more people

from all cultures and different religions working in mutual respect. When I arrived 25 years ago, there were few newcomers. Later, a lot of ground was covered with professional sessions and people like me who studied education at the Université de Saint-Boniface.

“A person who has experienced the same realities as the students is a real asset, especially when it comes to building relationships with families. They come from different school systems where sometimes the parent is less involved. So it’s important for them to understand the expectations of the Canadian system and to explain to them how they can get involved in their child’s education. In the end, the student wins.”

**Virginia Valdivia Rodriguez, 36,  
arrived in Winnipeg from Peru  
with her husband and their two sons in June 2018.**

BY MATHILDE ERRARD

“When we arrived in Manitoba, our children spoke Spanish and had only a basic knowledge of French. The DSFM agreed to accompany them and I was able to support them in French. Pedro Pablo, 13, is in Grade 8 at Collège Louis-Riel and Leonardo, 9, is in Grade 4 at École Taché. The DSFM gave them all the tools they needed. I was able to meet with a counsellor to discuss the plan for Pedro Pablo at the Collège.

“At first, it was difficult for Pedro Pablo to fit in with his class because during his first year, he was taking a French refresher course with another group of children of different ages. Because of that, he had few opportunities to participate in group work with his class. He was still able to attend math classes thanks to assistants. The DSFM even found an assistant from Honduras for a few months.

“Today, things are going better; he has made great progress and has been fully integrated into his class since the start of the school year in September 2019. He also knows that, if needed, the counsellor is always available to answer his questions.”



photo: Marta Guerrero

Leonardo Reategui, Pedro Pablo Valdivia and Virginia Valdivia Rodriguez.

**Nathalie, originally from France, and Mark Roche,  
Anglophone, form an exogamous couple.  
They have decided to register their daughters with the DSFM.**

BY MATHILDE ERRARD

“It was obvious to me that my daughters would be living in French,” says Roche. “When Chloe was born, Mark started learning French. He even became a teacher in a two-track immersion school. I truly admire him for that!

“Today, we all speak French every day. But we don’t demonize English. The paternal grandparents and a few friends are English-speaking. Chloe is bilingual and Lea understands us and is starting to say a few words.

“It was important for me to make sure that French was not just practised in the family unit. In an English or immersion school, Chloe would have spoken more English and I imagine that she might have been reluctant to speak French at home.

“Also, I would have felt lonely teaching them French. Now it’s easier. I know that later on, Lea and Chloé will have the choice to study in French or in English.”



photo: Mathilde Errard

Nathalie and her husband, Mark Roche and their daughters, Léa, three years old and Chloé, six years old.