

ACTIVITY
REPORT
2023-2024

I belong here!
Ma place est ici!

"Whatever the problem,
community is the answer"
- MARGARET WHEATLEY

LEARN MORE:
ibelong.learnquebec.ca



THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE:
CE PROJET EST FINANCÉ PAR LE :
Secrétariat aux relations
avec les Québécois
d'expression anglaise





PROJECT BACKGROUND

Empowering students to explore their future as bilingual Quebecers through community connections and arts-based learning

LEARN launched this pilot project with aims to:

- Encourage students in Quebec’s English Schools to develop their French communication skills and confidence to work with the majority French-speaking community
- Promote English-speaking youth’s full participation in Quebec society and enable them to feel “completely at home” in Quebec
- Boost confidence through opportunities to write and speak in French

To cultivate a growth mindset and promote the adoption of effective learning strategies, English-language schools across the province were invited to participate in a series of project-based learning initiatives. In collaboration with Teaching Artists from ELAN’s ArtistsInspire program, these projects emphasized artistic expression while concurrently addressing community needs affecting both the French and English-speaking populations. This approach encouraged civic engagement and fostered an appreciation for diverse perspectives.

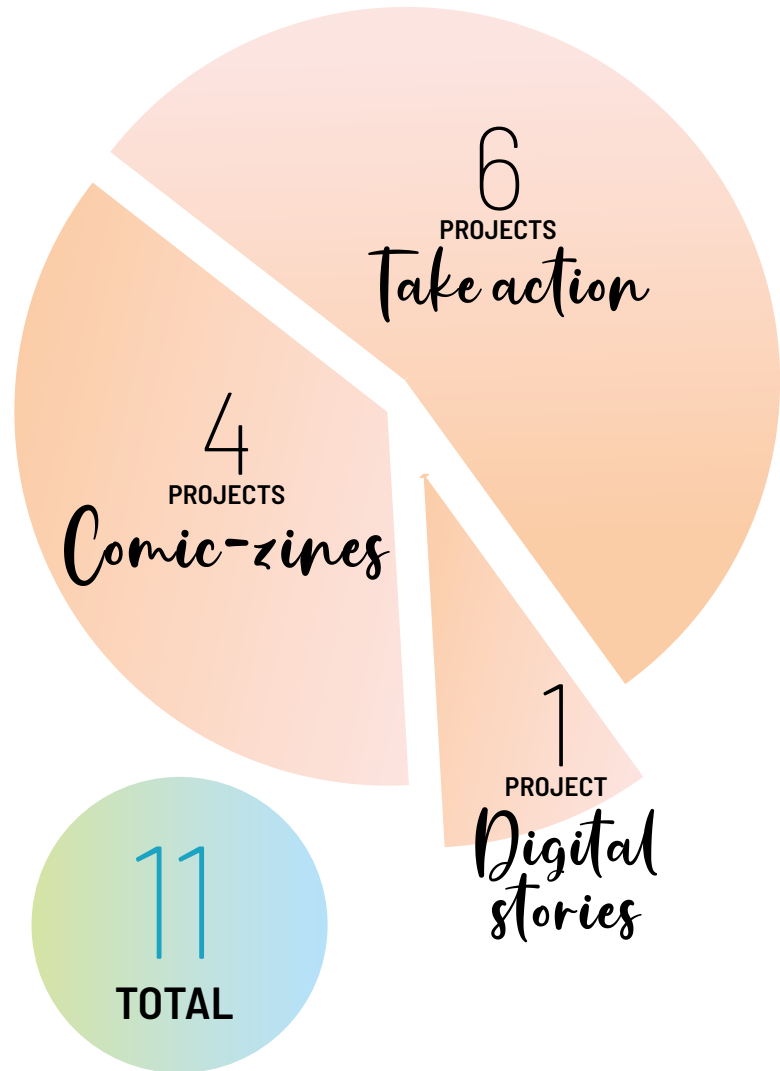
A SNAPSHOT: YEAR 1 PILOT PROJECT RESULTS*

PEOPLE:



433 STUDENTS PARTICIPATED!

PROJECTS:



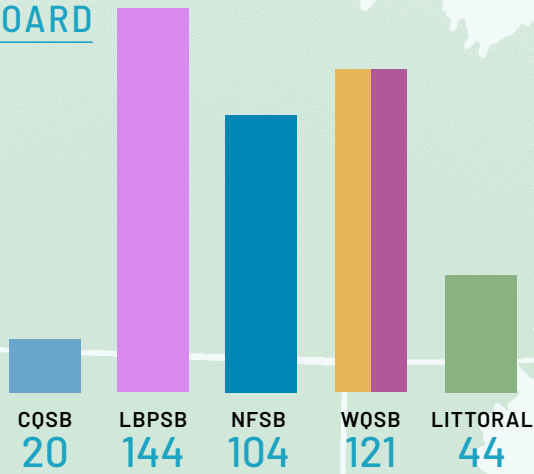
SCHOOLS:



*PLEASE SEE APPENDIX A FOR A DETAILED LIST OF SCHOOLS AND PARTICIPATION NUMBERS

PARTICIPATION RATE / 2023-2024

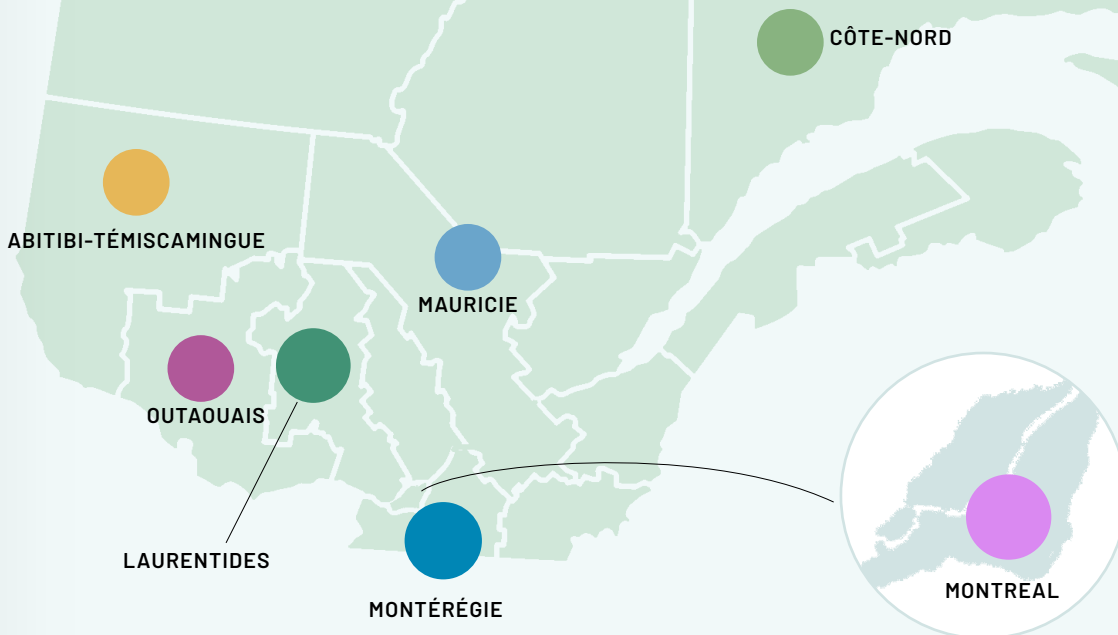
STUDENT BY SCHOOL BOARD



REGIONS, SCHOOL BOARDS

- Montreal (6)**
LBPSB
3 schools
- Mauricie (1)**
CQSB
1 school
- Côte-Nord (9)**
LITTORAL
2 schools
- Montérégie (16)**
NFSB
3 schools
- Outaouais (7)**
WQSB
1 school
- Abitibi-Témiscamingue (8)**
WQSB
2 schools

SCHOOL REGIONS



Digital Storytelling

Students explored and expressed the relationship between bilingualism, identity and sense of belonging to their local community through digital storytelling with guidance from digital media experts.

This option was undertaken by one school, and consisted of three sessions of up to twenty-five grade 4 students participating in each group. The artist did a blitz of camera angles to get the students started on thinking about movies and then taught them about storyboards. The students were encouraged to make storyboards in French. They were broken up into groups of four (on average) and ended up with 12 films in French on a wide range of inclusion-related themes such as football, bullying, and the zombie apocalypse!

It is worth noting that schools applying for this project option wanted to include students from grade 4 while the Artists were only comfortable with grade 6 students and up, so a new Artist had to be recruited. This option was piloted with grade 4 classes this year and the model worked very well which goes to show that it can work with all age groups.



“This was a FANTASTIC project. Please do it again. If I’m told about it, I will make a point of submitting for it every year.”

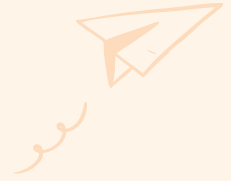
Lindsay Woodman, Teacher, Pontiac HS - WQSB

ABOUT THE TEACHING ARTISTS

Alyssa Kuzmarov, Productions Oracle with Jean-Michel Sauri: Through Productions Oracle, Alyssa & Jean-Michel have developed a unique, collaborative process that merges fun and laughter with learning and meaning. Alyssa’s background is in social work and has been working on creative projects with youth using writing & video for over 25 years in schools & in the community.



**Il était une fois...
6 personnages**



**C'est toujours mieux
De travailler ensemble**



**C'est mieux de jouer
Ensemble, non?**



Take Action

Students engaged in projects that led to hands-on community service learning experiences where they had an opportunity to engage in meaningful activities in their community that motivated them in developing their oral and written French.

PROJECT DESCRIPTIONS

Riverview Elementary's 'The Class Quilt' project aimed to represent unity, curiosity for cultures and ideas different from our own. La Francophonie was promoted by encouraging grades 4 and 5 students to autonomously learn about countries worldwide where French is also spoken. They worked collaboratively to accomplish the shared goal of piecing together a quilt representing what they learned from their research.



The **Chateauguay Valley Career Education Centre's** project objectives included promoting and encouraging their Health, Assistance and Nursing students to use French language in their learned profession. The students hosted a French conversation café, did a selfie challenge, shared a coffee break and lunch, and practiced teaching medical topics in French. This created key connections between future colleagues in the English and French learning communities.



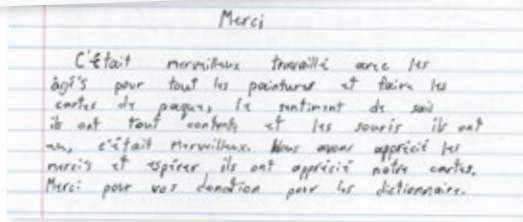
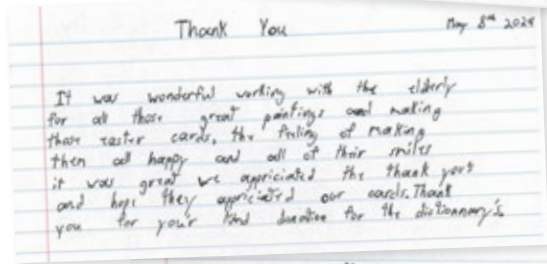
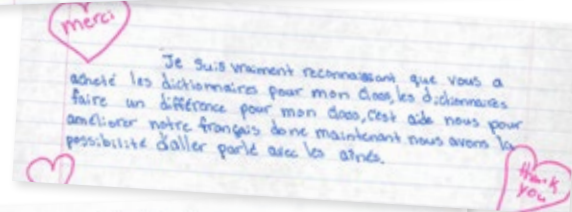
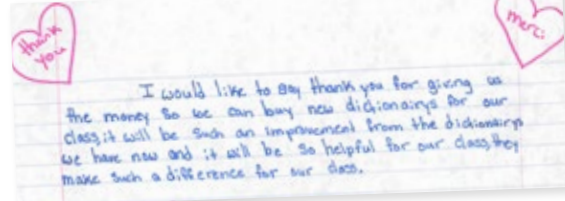
A notable and unique feature of a project organized by cycle 3 students from **Mountain Ridge School** was that it included K4 to cycle 2 students in the school as the participants. The activities included four stations consisting of an obstacle course, fruit kebab making, games, and art. Using French throughout the process, the cycle 3 students explained the task at hand in each station, and the participants had to carry it out.



Involving over one quarter of their village's small population of 200, **Netagamou School's** elementary students from grades 2 to 6 participated in a school French club with project goals to unite students and community members with a common interest in the French language and culture. Students hosted community activities including a French table/restaurant service where poutine was served and a game night with senior citizens where French was spoken and encouraged.



Another project's theme was bilingualism and was endeavoured by **Shawinigan High School's** (a combined elementary and secondary school) grade 6 students who worked with two cartoonists to develop comic strips about this subject. The students worked in pairs.



"We have decided that we will continue Netagamou French Club next year (requested by the students)."
Crystal Rowsell - CDA Netagamou CLC

Lastly, grade 7 and 9 students from **Pontiac High School** made bilingual personalized holiday cards (for Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Easter) and delivered them to the residents and staff of the long-term care centre of a local Hospital, a CHSLD, and Veterans Affairs Canada. Students' social and language skills were developed by interacting with the elderly, learning of their experiences, and socializing with staff, patients, and residents in French and English. Students gained confidence in their speaking skills, and the intergenerational interactions instilled understanding and respect amongst the different age groups involved.



Comic Zine Creation

Students were guided to create Comic Zines that share how they connect with their second language learning. A bilingual comic artist or graphic novelist collaborated with teachers virtually and visited schools to facilitate the creative process with students.

Teaching Artists each facilitated sessions at high schools that required travel, so they worked with the students intensively over a two-day period. They also each facilitated a multi-week creative process with elementary students. The artist's 'no mistakes' and 'no talent' approaches encouraged students to have fun while enjoying the process of storytelling and drawing, and engaged students in generative reflection and creative processes to motivate them in their French second language learning.

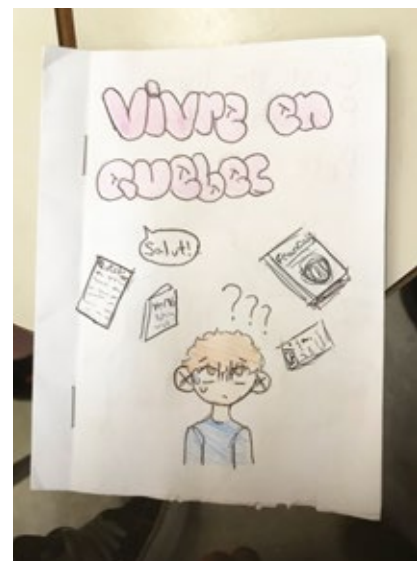
ABOUT THE TEACHING ARTISTS

Laurence Dea Dionne is an artist who promotes bilingualism and wellness. Equipped with a bachelor's degree in art



education from Concordia University, Laurence teaches comics in the public system and in the community, sharing the magic of art and speaking to the importance of wellness throughout the world.

Scott MacLeod is a multimedia artist, art educator, and filmmaker. He holds a BFA in fine arts from Concordia University, specialization in drawing, painting, murals & photography, and an MA in Art Education.





PILOT PROJECT RESULTS

Teachers' Feedback

Satisfaction with Artists

With an average satisfaction rating of 90% (or 4.2/5) across the project options with Artist involvement, teachers were happy with the Artist's facilitation, with their ability to collaborate with them and to engage students in a creative process. The Artists were described as being very engaging, approachable, and adaptable to the needs of the students. With regards to the lower scores given (though, still 'satisfied'), this was due to expectations around the project being done in French when a lot of it was actually done in English, citing the need for better collaboration with the Artist on this aspect. Other feedback was around confusion with regards to the *I Belong Here* subject of the project and the zine aspect, suggesting that a more positive subject for this level of language learners may be helpful.

The *I Belong Here* Theme

With regards to how teachers approached the theme with their students, some used the reflection questions provided, and others adapted them or made their own. Some students responded well to the theme and others struggled with it. In general, students who struggled with French struggled more with the theme and were reluctant to do the activity in French, and others who were Francophone responded more positively because they were already confident with their ability to work and live in French. Regardless of whether the questions were used, the exercise sparked discussions that allowed teachers to address concerns, correct myths about bilingualism and offer suggestions. In short, it got them talking.

Key Learnings on How to Engage/Support FSL Students

Overall, teachers communicated that by engaging with the French language through fun activities (involving sport or food, for example), conversation, and games, it did not feel like work and made students more receptive. Giving students opportunities to develop their sense of self through activities is important as, unfortunately, the experience of learning French as an English-speaking child in Quebec can feel forced to some. Incorporating autonomous work can help to counteract this and build confidence. Additionally, enabling situations or gatherings where students can interact with those they have similar challenges to made it pertinent (i.e., nursing students engaging with others in the same program, and in remote areas with



the arrival of more and more immigrants, students are no longer the only ones to be bilingual).

Achieving Desired Project Outcomes

On average, 80% of teachers reported that the project theme had a positive impact on students' motivation to learn French. On a rating scale of 1-5, where 1=no positive impact and 5=highly positive impact, nine out of eleven respondents, or 82%, gave ratings of 4 or 5. Only one respondent indicated that they did not think there was any positive impact, and another gave a neutral response (3), explaining that they didn't feel that French was promoted enough throughout the project. The project option with the highest ratings in terms of positive impact was Take Action, followed by Digital Storytelling, and then Comic Zine.

Many teachers expressed that they would want to pursue this grant next year in order to continue to promote French in an engaging manner. Some mentioned that they noticed an increase in confidence for speaking, reading, and writing in French, and also had a positive impact on social skills. 91% reported that they have already or intend to share insights about the project with other teachers and/or employees of their school boards.



"I learned that many don't feel they belong."

Emily Araujo, FLS Teacher, Clearpoint Elem - LPBSB

"I told everyone at school: Admin, teachers, support staff, and the janitors. At the board level, I also told my FSL consultant."

Lindsay Woodman, Teacher Pontiac HS - WQSB

Artists' Feedback

Reflections

Students expressed to **Laurence** (comic zine option) that they would like to use technology a lot more as they said this would help motivate them to learn French. A specific example they gave would be using apps and gaming. The high school students seemed to feel like outcasts (being Anglophone) and had to work hard to fit into a community, whereas elementary students (Grades 3 and 4) seemed to feel lighter about their experiences with learning and speaking French. **Scott** (comic zine option) noted that a good number of students were well aware of the Bill 96 laws and the political and language issues in Quebec and expressed their awareness of the implications through the zines they created. Many also celebrated bilingualism and saw the advantages of two languages. Others chose a more satirical approach to their zines, playing with English and French definitions of words. Students embarked on the creative process, enjoyed the art making, and didn't engage in the political aspects of language. A key takeaway was that the students really enjoyed getting to be creative and 'belonging' with the artwork they did, and using their imaginations.

From **Alyssa's** (digital storytelling option) experience, youth in English schools are used to having many French teachers who are Anglophone and switch to English when needed.

What was interesting was that the students in **Jean-Michel's** (digital storytelling option) group were forced to speak French because he does not not speak English. This made a big difference in their experience and confidence, as did having a Francophone role model on board for the project. The key learning was that if teachers can turn students on to having fun in French, this is the most effective intervention to get them engaged and wanting to learn.

Challenges

Elementary students expressed to **Laurence** that they didn't understand the importance of bilingualism as they were under the impression that they were already bilingual. It should be noted that these students were mostly Anglophone with very limited French, but because they were required to be taught in French, they were (wrongly) under the impression that they were bilingual. **Alyssa** learned that the level of French competency of the students was very low, and she had to coach them on how to speak French. What resulted was that she had to keep switching to English so they could communicate. Teachers expressed to **Scott** that they felt the project could be structured differently in that they wanted engagement directly with bilingual adults or youth in the workforce to explore belonging in Quebec society (which was not possible during this pilot project year).





OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Timing of Projects During the School Year:

Most art-based projects are better done earlier in the school year as opposed to the end. The most important reasons for this are that the nature of these projects are very group focused and allow for social and emotional learning and growth to take place early on. Also, having projects take place earlier in the year will allow for teachers to see the shift in students with regards to what engaged them most, and then be able to strategically carry that into the rest of their teaching year.

Communication and Planning

More focus should be put on setting expectations in general and what happens before the artist comes to the class (for the first time and in between sessions) i.e., what teachers should be working on in the background to help students prepare. Thinking through how to build into the planning process a way to capture student reflections and experiences is key as this feedback will contribute to improving future iterations of the project and outcomes for students.

Teacher Engagement

Orienting teachers and artists for cohesive purposes and ensuring there is 'buy-in' from the teachers to do this work is key to project success. They have to be ready to participate to set a leadership example for the students. Additionally, teaching artists with no training cannot be responsible for classroom management - teachers must be present and involved at all times.

Student Engagement in Their French Learning

Formally orienting students to the project and theme as it relates to their futures living and working in the province of Quebec may help to reinforce the importance of its goals

and motivate them to take a more active role in their learning. It may also help set the stage for how they approach this work, and address the evident misconceptions some have about what it means to be bilingual, for example. Activities and resources centered around 'fun' was reported to be a key motivator and preferred theme for students, often resulting in a sense of community, feelings of belonging, and pride with regards to their accomplishments.

Finding the Ideal Language Balance:

More thought should go into what the right balance is of English and French in the project, to ensure students understand the task at hand conceptually and at the same time build on their French skills. Part of that is making sure teachers know that switching back and forth between languages may need to happen to make sure students understand the work.

Building on the enriched experience students had with a Francophone artist who mostly spoke only in French with the project participants - forcing them to try to do the same in order to communicate - makes the case for seeking out Francophone partners (i.e., artists) involved in future iterations of this project who understand ahead of time that they must limit switching to English. This may help lessen the need for switching back and forth from English to French during the project activities, and will ideally transfer to the classroom environment after the project wraps up.

Documentation Process

More structure is required to capture key documentation such as photos, artifacts, etc., that will work at a much larger scale as the project expands to involve many more schools next year (at least double). For example, we received up to 60 photos from one individual school alone.



APPENDIX A

LIST OF SCHOOLS AND PARTICIPATION NUMBER

NAME OF SCHOOL, BOARD	LOCATION, REGION	# TEACHERS	# TEACHERS' AIDES	GRADES	# CLASSES	# STUDENTS	PROJECT OPTION
Shawinigan, CQSB	Shawinigan, Mauricie	1		6	1	20	Take action Comic-zines
Riverview, LBPSB	Verdun, Montreal	2	2	4&5	2	47	Take action
Mountain Ridge, Littoral	Vieux Fort, Côte-Nord	4	3	5 & 6, K4 to Grade 3		36	Take action
Netagamiou, Littoral	Chevery, Côte-Nord	1		2 to 6		8	Take action
Chateauguay Valley Continuing Education Centre, NFSB	Ormstown, Montérégie	2	1	Adult Education	2	23	Take action
Pontiac*, WQSB	Shawville, Outaouais	1		7&9	4	105	Take action
Allion Elementary*, LBPSB	Lasalle, Montreal	1		3&4	3	51	Comic-zines
Chateauguay Valley Regional High School (CVR), NFSB	Ormstown, Montérégie	2		Secondary Cycle 2		29	Comic-zines
Clearpoint Elementary*, LBPSB	Pointe-Claire, Montreal	1		6	2	46	Comic-zines
*Noranda School, WQSB	Rouyn-Noranda, Abitibi-Temiscamingue	2		Sec 1 & 2	1	16	Comic-zines
St. Willibrord, NFSB	Chateauguay, Montérégie	4		4	3	52	Digital Storytelling
TOTALS		21	6		18	433	11

*NON-CLC SCHOOLS

PARTNERSHIPS - ELAN & Y4Y

The project's success was due to strong partnerships with ELAN and Y4Y, who provided essential expertise and resources.

Arts and Education are natural partners. Collaborating with ELAN was a perfect fit for this project, as arts-based projects enhance learning and boost student engagement and motivation. Projects like *I belong here!* also cater to different learning styles and abilities, providing opportunities for all students to succeed. Arts-based learning fosters a love for languages and the arts, which can lead to lifelong learning and appreciation.

Initially, Y4Y partnered to recruit English-speaking youth for post-secondary or workplace success. However, a different approach was needed. Y4Y suggested filming a panel of eligible youth to share their experiences. Despite offering compensation, most applicants were ineligible for English public schools. A panel of six eligible youth was assembled, but the videographer hired by Y4Y couldn't produce the inspiring video needed to launch the project. To address this, DST Artists are creating a film using the youth panel footage and Year 1 materials.

RECOMMENDATIONS



For Teachers & Administrators

- Teachers can try to get a grasp on students' interests (that are not tied to French), and find resources in French to try to suggest to them. For example, if students like comic books, books, video games, music, cooking, find them in French. Find motivating and fun ways to engage with French culture and language.
- Ensure that in French class only French is spoken as this would be great practice.
- More exposure to French speakers/role models aside from teachers coming to speak to students about their career paths and jobs
- Organize language exchanges/field trips with the French schools (and CEGEPs/Universities for older students) to make friends and speak the languages together



For Students

- Read and/or watch television in French. Finding books and tv shows can be an opportunity to do something relaxing and hear/learn the slang/expressions that you wouldn't normally get from the classroom environment. Focus on having fun in French.
- Inquire about cultural exchange programs.
- Get informed in order to make decisions about career paths that require a certain level of French (i.e. choosing between the langue maternelle French program or lower French program)

- Understanding that to be part of any professional order in Quebec, you have to pass a component in French in exams.
- There are certain programs that are only offered at French universities. Being bilingual opens doors and provides you with options to stay in the province, for example.



For Parents

- Make sure kids are in French spaces and that they are completely immersed. So, if they go to school in English, send them to camp in French, or have them do their extra curricular activities or something they love in French.
- Learn it with them - be vulnerable as an anglophone parent and speak French at home with your kid and show it is OK to make mistakes. Or, facilitate having role models in the child's life who can speak French with them (e.g., babysitters, another family member or trusted adult).
- Creating balance in the home environment in terms of language especially when the kids are young (i.e., kindergarten). Have one day a week where you only speak in French and be consistent.



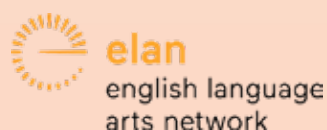
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In collaboration with the English Language Arts Network (ELAN) and Youth for Youth Quebec (Y4Y), LEARN launched *I Belong here/Ma place est ici !*, a new project to encourage students in Quebec's English Schools to develop their French communication skills and increase their confidence in their future as bilingual Quebecers.

The *I Belong here/Ma place est ici !* project is supported by the Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise.

The success of LEARN's *I Belong here/Ma place est ici !* project wouldn't have been possible without the leadership of participating teachers, community development agents and featured artists.

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Secrétariat aux relations
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d'expression anglaise



LEARN – Head Office
4190, rue Garand Suite 201
Laval (Québec) H7L 5Z6
T: 450.622.2212 / 1.888.622.2212
F: 450.622.1460

learnquebec.ca

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