

# RESEARCH *Insights*

Supported by the Barrie Region MISA Professional Network Centre

## Qu'avez-vous dit? *Investigating Secondary Students' Perceptions of French as a Second Language*

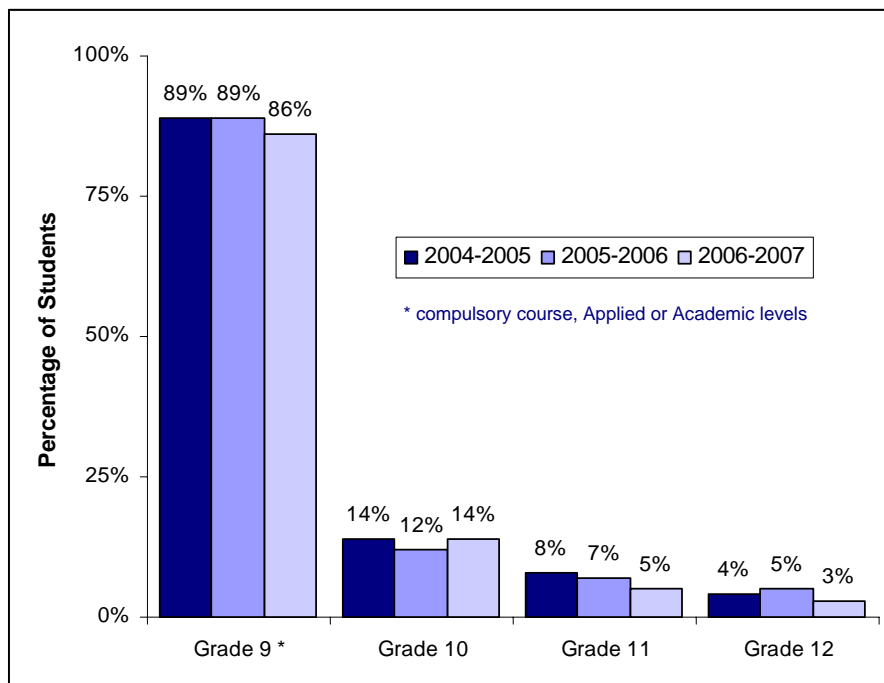
In February 2007, the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board conducted a survey with secondary school students enrolled in French as a Second Language (FSL) courses. The purpose of the survey was to investigate students' perceptions of, and attitudes toward, FSL courses and the French language, in general.

The survey was completed by 1062 students enrolled in FSL courses. The achieved sample represented 48% of all secondary students within the district who were enrolled in an FSL course during the 2006-2007 school year.

The survey was administered to students during French classes using scannable paper forms designed with Cardiff Teleform. The forms were collected, scanned and analyzed by Amie Presley and Shonna Caldwell, two students from Georgian College's Research Analyst Program.

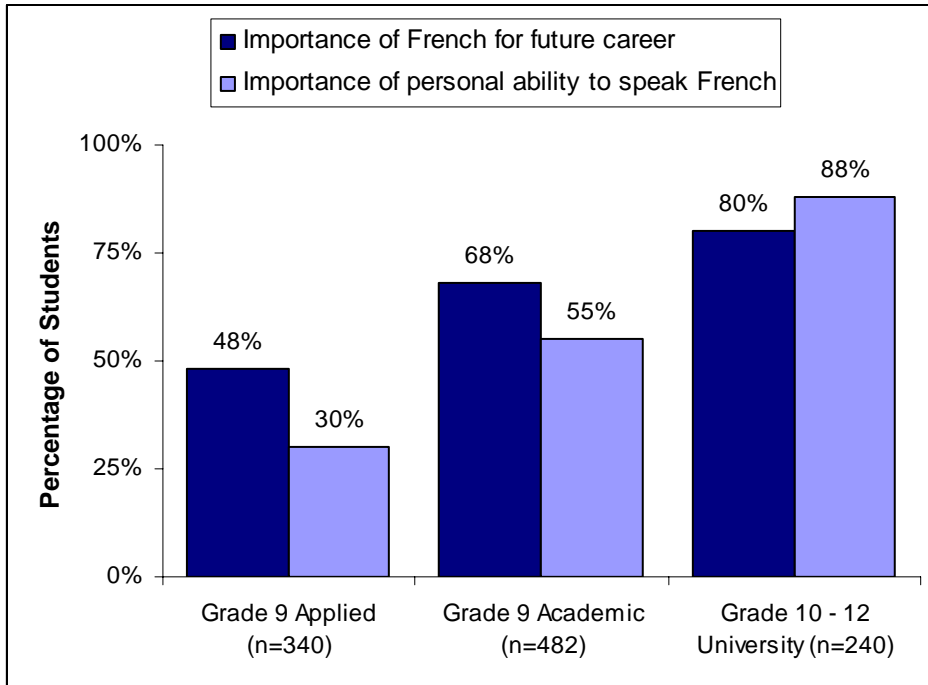
A presentation and full report on the FSL survey project was delivered by Ms. Presley and Ms. Caldwell to representatives of the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board and the Barrie Region MISA Professional Network Centre in April 2007. The following report represents a brief summary of their findings.

**Percentage of Secondary Students Enrolled in at Least One FSL Course, by Grade and School Year, SMCDSB**



**Impetus for Research:** Enrolment data from the past three school years illustrates a significant decrease in the percentage of students throughout the school district who have taken FSL courses following Grade 9. While upwards of 86% of students have taken compulsory Academic or Applied FSL in Grade 9 in each of the past three years, the chart above illustrates that only 12% to 14% of students have taken FSL as an elective course in Grade 10; 5% to 8% of students have enrolled in FSL courses to Grade 11, and only 3% to 5% of students have taken FSL courses to Grade 12. The recognition of declining enrolment in FSL courses provided, to some degree, the impetus for conducting the survey project described in this report. Within the context of an overall three year initiative aimed at renewing FSL programs within the district, the survey was conducted to provide some baseline data related to students' perceptions about FSL.

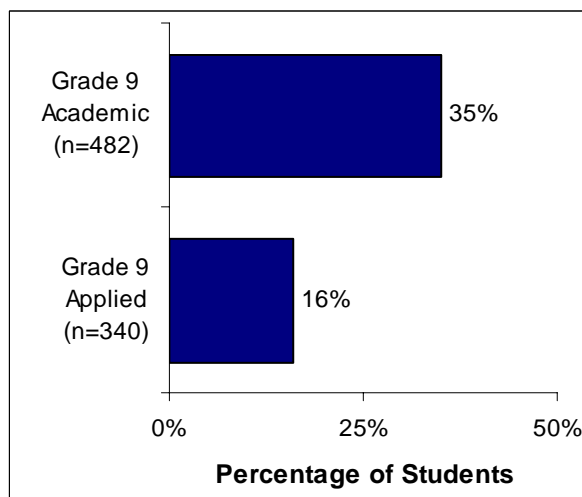
## Percentage of Secondary Students Rating Aspects of Learning French as “Important” or “Extremely Important”



**Clear Differences:** A predictable finding from the survey was the extent to which students in different FSL programs assigned importance to learning French. Less than half (48%) of students enrolled in Grade 9 Applied French thought that speaking French would be important for their future careers, compared with about two-thirds (68%) of students enrolled in Grade 9 Academic French, and 80% of students enrolled in Grade 10 - 12 University French courses. Similarly, less than a third (30%) of students in Grade 9 Applied French reported that having the ability to speak French was important to them, compared with just over half (55%) of students enrolled in Grade 9 Academic French, and 88% of students enrolled in Grade 10 - 12 University French courses. These findings lead to a question for future consideration: what experiences of learning French do students enrolled in Grade 10 - 12 courses have that motivate them to value French to such a great extent?

## Percentage of Grade 9 Students Indicating Intent to Enrol in Elective FSL Course After Grade 9

**Conversion Rates:** Grade 9 students were asked about their intentions to enrol in elective FSL courses after Grade 9. While 27% of students overall indicated that they did (16% Applied, 35% Academic), actual enrolment data from the past three years suggests that the actual conversion rate into Grade 10 FSL is about half that percentage, 12% - 14%. An interesting question to investigate is what factors prevent students from following through with their intention to take French beyond Grade 9?



## Next Steps: *Tell Me More*

The State of French-Second-Language-Education in Canada 2004 report, published by Canadian Parents for French, indicated that secondary students felt that they should be able to speak French more fluently after four years of study. Students also suggested that their enrolment would increase if French was more conversational. Students' opinions in the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board's survey project matched these findings.

In response to these findings, the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board struck an FSL Renewal team to explore some options for improvement. One of the approaches explored was Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). CALL involves the implementation of computer-based, interactive, communicative activities through web sites or through software. The team recommended purchasing an interactive web-based language lab program, *Tell Me More*.

*Tell Me More* was designed by a team of language-teaching specialists after several years of research and development. The CALL method spans all the areas essential to learning a foreign language: spoken and written expression, comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

Featuring dialogues inspired from real-life, *Tell Me More* includes a pronunciation module, thousands of exercises and several videos. The essential aspect that makes *Tell Me More* uniquely interactive is its powerful speech recognition engine: students can talk into their PC in a foreign language; it will understand any pronunciation, analyze their accent and record student progress. Students are also able to practice at home using the Internet, as well as in the school lab.

*Tell Me More* software is currently being used in all nine secondary schools in Simcoe Muskoka in order to enhance second language learning. A follow-up survey will be administered at the end of the school year to further investigate student perceptions of this program.