



FACT
SHEET

10

PERFORMANCE IN THE COMPULSORY FRENCH EXAMS IN GRADE 6 OF FRENCH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1 CONTEXT

Skills in reading comprehension, especially in the final years of elementary school, are essential to performing well in high school. In adulthood, good reading skills are associated with the employment rate, higher income and a better health status. Developing writing skills also constitutes an asset for future success.

SOURCE

This fact sheet is a brief summary of the results presented in the following fascicle: DESROSIERS, Hélène, and Karine TÊTREAU (2012). "Les facteurs liés à la réussite aux épreuves obligatoires de français en sixième année du primaire: un tour d'horizon," *Québec Longitudinal Study of Child Development (QLSCD 1998-2010) – From Birth to 10 Years of Age*, Institut de la statistique du Québec, Vol. 7, Fascicle 1 (in French only). <http://www.stat.gouv.qc.ca/statistiques/education/prescolaire-primaire/reussite-epreuve-francais.html>

Note that the QLSCD has been following a cohort of children who were born in Québec in 1997-1998.

2 HIGHLIGHTS

Among children in the regular stream and in Grade 6 of French elementary school:

- Three quarters (75%) passed the compulsory French language exam in reading, while 85% passed the compulsory French language exam in writing (marks 60% and higher);
- Nearly 9% failed both exams.

Approximately 20% of children had not mastered the basic spelling skills needed for high school, namely were at risk of cumulative delays and failure.

The passing rates in French were lower among boys compared to girls. Other factors related to child, family, school or neighbourhood characteristics were associated with passing the French language exams.

The passing rate in reading comprehension or writing was lower in children:

- From a family with low socioeconomic status.
- Living in a single-parent or step-parent household.
- With at least three brothers or sisters.
- Whose parents had lower educational aspirations for them.
- Whose parents ascribed less value to their academic performance.
- Who reported they were less close to their mother or father
- Whose health status was perceived as "Good" or "Fair" rather than "Excellent" or "Very good" by their parent.
- Who said they did not engage in physical activities during their leisure time.

Passing the compulsory exams in the French language was strongly associated with teachers' assessments of the children's performance in all subjects.



2 HIGHLIGHTS (continued)

- Who had more behavioural problems such as hyperactivity, inattention, physical aggression or opposition or who manifested more emotional problems or symptoms of anxiety, as reported by their teacher. Among these problems, those related to attention seemed to be the most determinant.
- Who were less attached to school or participated less in class, namely were less autonomous, cooperated less or who posed fewer questions when they did not understand.
- Who were less motivated to read or felt less competent in reading and/or writing.
- Whose academic aspirations were lower, in other words they envisaged obtaining a high school diploma or less.
- Who had a less positive relationship or one with more conflict with their teacher.
- Who attended a school in a neighbourhood considered disadvantaged.

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In both boys and girls, the time spent reading for pleasure was positively associated with passing the compulsory French reading comprehension exam. It was also associated with the writing exam among boys.

School readiness and the preschool experience

Passing the compulsory French exams in Grade 6 of French elementary school was also associated with certain characteristics prior to school entry. The passing rate was lower among children:

- Who were not read to by an adult daily around the age of 1½ years.
- Who were considered vulnerable in at least one domain or another of their development in kindergarten (see Fact Sheet 2), such as experiencing more cognitive, attention-related or social difficulties.

3 OF NOTE

Among the cognitive skills assessed in kindergarten, basic knowledge of mathematics such as counting up to 20 or recognizing geometric shapes were those that best predicted passing compulsory French exams at the end of elementary school.

Among children who failed the exams, approximately 40% had not received any of the three forms of non-parental assistance, namely help with homework at school, help from a tutor, or remedial instruction.

INTERVENTION PATHS

The results underline the importance of continuing efforts to instill interest in reading well before formal learning occurs at school. Ensuring children receive the support they need in overcoming learning difficulties in reading comprehension and writing, in particular those from low socioeconomic status families, would be important from kindergarten on. It would also be important to help children become autonomous readers by letting them choose materials that interest them, for example. It is essential that students be supported and helped in organizing the knowledge they are acquiring – the role of the teacher would be essential in this regard.