



The French Bilingual Revolution

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Two New York City public schools have been selected by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to receive the newly created “FrancEducation Label” which recognizes their outstanding efforts to promote and develop the French language. These schools, PS58 in Brooklyn and PS 84 in Manhattan will join a select group of eight schools world wide to receive this prestigious honor. The “Label” (pronounce it like “La Belle”) FrancEducation is a formal accreditation provided to schools that offer a French bilingual program without following the French National curriculum. These schools will be able to benefit from this official recognition by the French government, an endorsement that helps showcase their achievements. The FrancEducation Label will also provide additional access to such resources as teacher development programs, special grant programs, and partnership opportunities.

For me, this is especially good news as this officially recognizes the French bilingual revolution that has taken place in New York City and other urban centers in the United States over the past eight years. In New York,

there are six regular public elementary schools and one public charter school that offer French-English Education beginning in kindergarten. There is also one middle school that will host a French bilingual program in Fall 2013 in Brooklyn. Additionally, there are currently eleven private schools offering education in French from pre-K through high school, and an increasing number of impressive early childhood centers offering French. This is a considerable accomplishment amidst the widespread decline in the availability of foreign language instruction in elementary and middle schools nationwide especially in schools serving lower socioeconomic status families.

There are more than 130 schools in 27 states and 80 cities that offer instruction in both French and English in public schools in the United States. These include French immersion bilingual programs for non-French speakers and dual language education programs for both Francophones and Anglophones. Both of these programs are offered in public and charter schools. Additionally, there are 50 bilingual programs in private schools that serve mainly expatriate families but also include local families who can pay the often high tuition and fees. Finally, there are other forms of home language support for Francophone students, including French Heritage Language programs for Francophone students in public schools and community-based organizations.

Hopefully, the Label will encourage the creation of more French bilingual and dual language programs in the United States. The involvement of multiple partners, from the departments of education to the schools to families and community organizations is of critical importance in developing these programs. In New York alone, there are more than 300,000 Francophones, and only 5,000 children are currently benefiting from a French bilingual education in the public and private schools. Recent waves of immigrants from West Africa as well as from Haiti represent a significantly increased Francophone presence in New York, and other urban centers, including Miami and Boston, although much of this growth remains largely hidden in official statistics. Combined with a significant demand from French expatriate and American families for access to bilingual public elementary and middle school programs, these newer French-speaking communities can help to mobilize support for bilingual school programs in French and English, programs that are so essential to the long-term survival of these bilingual communities.

In addition to the two New York City public schools that were chosen for the first year of the Label program, four schools in the Czech Republic, one school in Finland, and one school in New Zealand will also participate. To apply for the accreditation, schools have to meet rigorous criteria including a minimum of 33% of subjects taught in French, highly qualified and certified teachers who need to be fluent in French, a strong professional development plan and a commitment to quality education, participation in official language tests, an environment that fosters an interest for all things French, a library with books in French, and so on.

PS84 has approximately 125 bilingual students in its French program, and is located in Manhattan on 92nd Street and Central Park West. The school offers a French dual-language program with 50 % of the time spent in French. It will be offering a 5th grade class in September 2012. PS58 in Carroll Gardens Brooklyn has 250 bilingual students in its French Dual-Language program with 50 % of teaching time spent in French. The school will also open a 5th grade in September. Students in both French programs have scored extremely well in the 3rd Grade standardized tests, both in Maths and English Language Arts. This echoes Yudhijit Bhattacharjee's recent New York Times article [Why Bilinguals Are Smarter](#). Parents from both schools are also working on opening a middle school program in their neighborhood.

Finally, there is strength in numbers. As more grades are added each year and more schools are offering these programs in New York City and other places the critical mass of learners and teachers in the field will receive closer attention from school authorities, editors and researchers alike.

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Heritage Languages in a Global City. Multilingual Matters : New York. 2012.

Here is the list of all public and private schools offering a French bilingual program in the US.

[cartographiedesecolesbilinguesauxUSA.xls](#)

New York's French public and private schools are featured on [NewYorkinFrench.net](#)