

French boards pursue English pupils ^[1]

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Source: Ottawa Citizen

Format: Article

Publication Date: 26 Jan 2011

EXCERPTS

Ontario's French-language school system is eyeing thousands of students registered at English schools as potential recruits in a growing battle over enrolment.

The French system has launched a high-profile public relations campaign that suggests French-language education is a real option for some Ontario parents struggling to find places for their children in over-crowded French Immersion programs offered at English schools.

The \$1-million blitz, aimed to coincide with the kindergarten registration season, features colourful newspaper ads and a strong online presence. The campaign is funded by Heritage Canada as part of the federal department's responsibility to protect minority language rights.

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The Centre Franco-ontarien de ressources pedagogiques (CFORP) is an umbrella group made up of 12 French Catholic and public school boards, as well as child care providers, colleges and universities, all in business to serve the province's 600,000 francophones.

Gilles Leroux the campaign's spokesman, said many Ontarians don't know the French school system exists or that it could be an option for their family.

His group estimates that between 30,000 and 40,000 children currently registered in English Catholic or public schools would be eligible to attend French schools.

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In Ottawa, the high demand for French Immersion has led to massive overcrowding at some public schools in the Glebe, Old Ottawa South and Kanata.

Leroux said he's concerned some francophone parents or those with the right to enrol their children in French schools aren't doing so. (A rights-holder is a parent or guardian whose first language is French, who attended a French elementary school or who has another child registered in a French school).

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- reprinted from the Ottawa Citizen

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