

Study: The school closest to home: Proximity of French-language elementary schools and enrolment in the Maritime provinces

Released at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time in The Daily, Wednesday, February 14, 2024

In 2021, in the Maritime provinces, nearly three-quarters (72%) of elementary school-aged children eligible for instruction in French were attending or had attended French-language elementary school. This proportion was higher among children with at least one parent who spoke French most often at home (92%) and among those who lived closer to a French-language school than to an English-language school (89%).

The results are based on a new study released today, "[The school closest to home: Proximity of French-language elementary schools and enrolment in the Maritime provinces.](#)"

Using data from the 2021 Census and the 2022 Open Database of Educational Facilities, the study examines the role played by English and French school proximity in the enrolment in French-language schools in the Maritime provinces. Since elementary school is a pivotal place for learning and socialization in the lives of young children, attending French-language schools is important for the intergenerational transmission of language and the preservation of the language.

Most children eligible for instruction in French reside within 10 km of a French-language elementary school

The location of the school in relation to the family home plays a central role in the choice of a school, as it has an impact on commuting time, as well as the mode of transportation. Proximity of schools is the most frequent reason given by parents to explain why children eligible for instruction in French outside Quebec attend an English-language school.

In the Maritime provinces, the majority of children eligible for instruction in French lived near a French-language elementary school. In 2021, three-quarters (75%) of these children lived within 10 km of the nearest French-language elementary school, and nearly one-quarter (24%) lived less than 2 km away.

A larger proportion of children eligible for instruction in French lived closer to a French-language elementary school (51%) than to an English-language school (49%). This was particularly true in municipalities where at least half of the population had French as their first official language spoken. In these municipalities, 89% of these children lived closer to a French-language school than to an English-language school.

Children were also more likely to live near a French-language elementary school when parents spoke French at home or had attended a French-language school themselves. For example, children with at least one parent who spoke French most often at home were nearly four times as likely (69%) to live closer to a French-language elementary school than to an English-language school, compared with children whose parents did not speak French at home (18%).

Enrolment in French-language schools is strongly influenced by the language of instruction of the elementary school closest to the family home

In 2021, in the Maritime provinces, the majority (72%) of children eligible for instruction in French were attending or had attended a French-language school. The remaining children had studied in a French immersion program (10%) or had not received education in French (18%).

A higher proportion of children eligible for instruction in French had attended a French-language school when the elementary school closest to home was French (89% compared with 56% when the closest school was English).



The distance between home and the nearest French-language school had little impact on enrolment in French-language schools when the nearest school was French. However, the enrolment rate decreased considerably when the school closest to home was English. For example, the proportion of children eligible for instruction in French who had attended a French-language school was 87% when the nearest elementary school was French and located less than 2 km from the family home but was 69% when another elementary school—an English-language one—was even closer, within the same 2 km boundary.

The language spoken most often at home by parents is the factor that most affects enrolment in French-language schools

Although enrolment in French-language schools was strongly influenced by the language of instruction of the elementary school closest to the family home, the language spoken most often at home by parents was the factor most strongly associated with enrolment in these schools.

In fact, the vast majority (92%) of children eligible for instruction in French had attended a French-language school when at least one parent spoke French most often at home, compared with less than one-third (29%) of those whose parents did not speak French at home.

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Note to readers

Data sources

Information on eligible children and their parents comes from the 2021 Census of Population short-form questionnaire and covers persons living in private households in occupied private dwellings. The location of elementary schools and their language of instruction were determined from Statistics Canada's Open Database of Educational Facilities (2022). This database contains information on the language of the school authority to which each public school belongs.

Target population

This study focuses only on children eligible for instruction in a minority official language according to one of the following criteria of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: having a parent with French as their mother tongue or having a parent who attended a French-language elementary school in childhood.

The study focuses specifically on children who were of kindergarten or elementary school age. In Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia, these are children who were 5 to 11 years of age on December 31, 2020 (born between 2009 and 2015), corresponding to kindergarten or elementary school age up to Grade 6. In New Brunswick, this refers to children aged 5 to 10 on December 31, 2020 (born between 2010 and 2015), corresponding to kindergarten or elementary school age up to Grade 5. The number of years of elementary school is different in the English and French school systems in this province. Therefore, this study focuses on New Brunswick children considered to be of elementary school age in both systems.

Methodology

Attendance is the percentage of eligible school-age children who were attending or had attended a French-language school in Canada for at least one year between the time they reached elementary school age and the collection of 2021 Census data.

The distance between eligible children's place of residence and the closest schools corresponds to the distance between the midpoint (centroid) of the block (dissemination block) where the child lives and the exact coordinates of the closest public schools. These distances were calculated using Geographic Information System software and produced by following the road network, using Statistics Canada's Road Network File. Children whose place of residence is not connected by road to either an English-language or French-language elementary school (for example, the place of residence is on an island not connected by bridge to the rest of the province) are not included in the study.

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers 3901 and 5301.

The article "[The school closest to home: Proximity of French-language elementary schools and enrolment in the Maritime provinces](#)" is now available in *Insights on Canadian Society* (**75-006-X**).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).