

Participation in French immersion programs – National trends

Results from the study "Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021"

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French immersion in English-language schools

- **Definition:** French immersion programs in Canada are elementary or secondary programs offered in English-language schools. French is the language of instruction for most of the school day.
- Created in Quebec in the **mid-1960s** through the efforts of anglophone parents—mothers in particular—who were keen on having their children become fluent in French while attending an English-language school.
- Since the adoption of the **Official Languages Act in 1969**, French immersion programs have been offered in many English-language elementary and secondary schools in Canada..
- Because of the ever-growing popularity of immersion programs, the Government of Canada would like to shorten waiting lists to **better meet increasing demand** and educational needs in the provinces and territories with a view to **strengthening bilingualism** in the country.

Questions on language of instruction at the primary and secondary levels in the 2021 Census

13 Did this person do any of their **primary or secondary schooling in French** in Canada (including immersion)?

14 In which type of program was this schooling in French done?

- A regular **French program** in a **French-language school**
- A **French immersion program** in an English-language school
- Go to question 18**
- Both types of programs

Other program — specify:

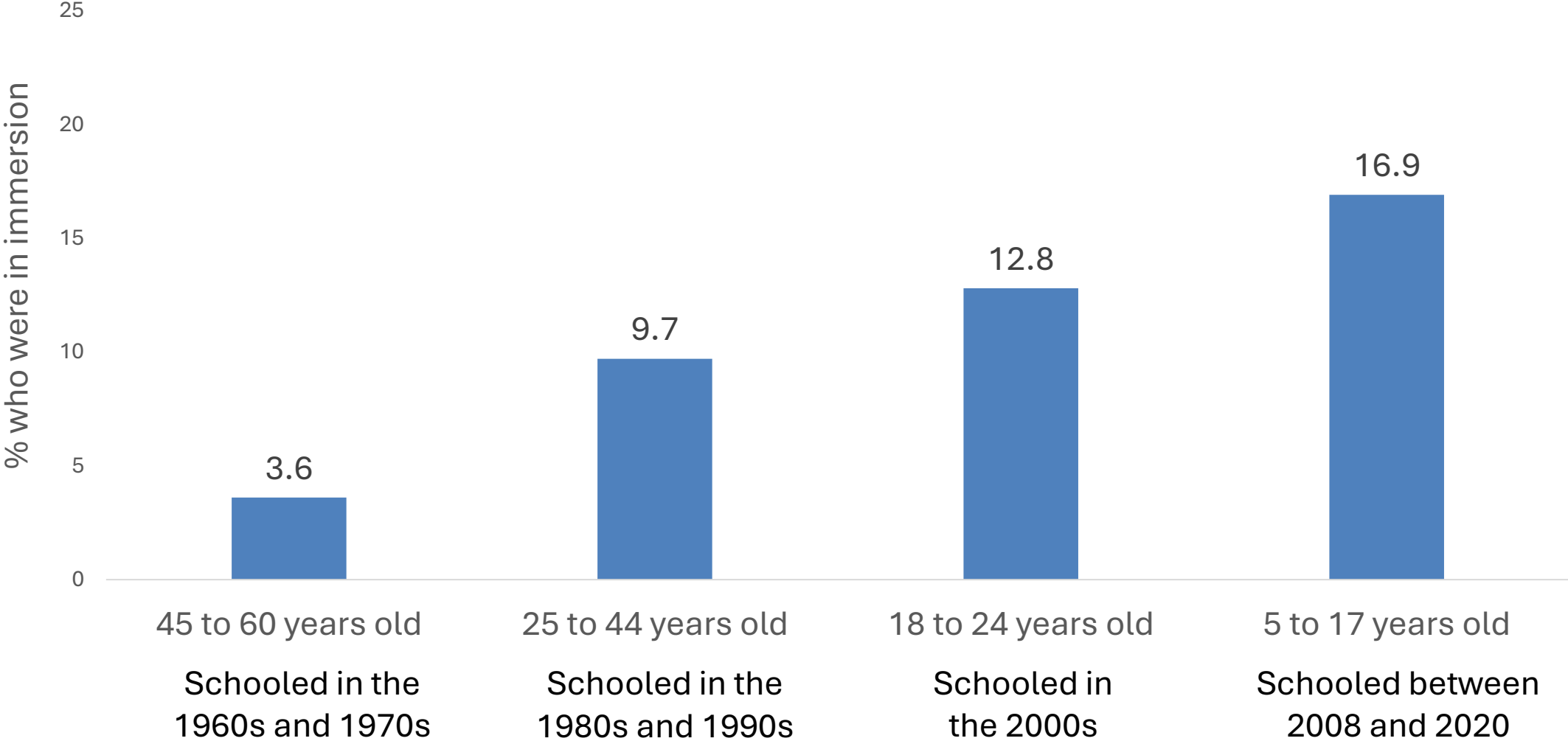
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- These new questions were designed to obtain the number of children eligible for instruction in the minority official language (English in Quebec, French outside Quebec), based on the criteria set out in section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
- In Canada outside Quebec, individuals who reported primary or secondary instruction in French could report current or past participation in a **French immersion program**.
- The Census does not allow us to determine the duration of participation in immersion programs.

Immersion participants whose mother tongue is not French

- In Canada outside Quebec:
 - Almost all (96.5%) school-aged children who were in or had been in French immersion did not have French as a mother tongue in 2021.
 - About 1.6 million adults and children whose mother tongue is not French were in or had been in French immersion at the primary or secondary level in an English-language school during their schooling. This represented 10.3% of people aged 5 to 60 years.
- Participation in immersion programs varied according to region, age, gender, and parents' bilingualism and level of education, among other factors.

Percentage of the population whose mother tongue is not French who participated in an immersion program, by age group, Canada outside Quebec, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

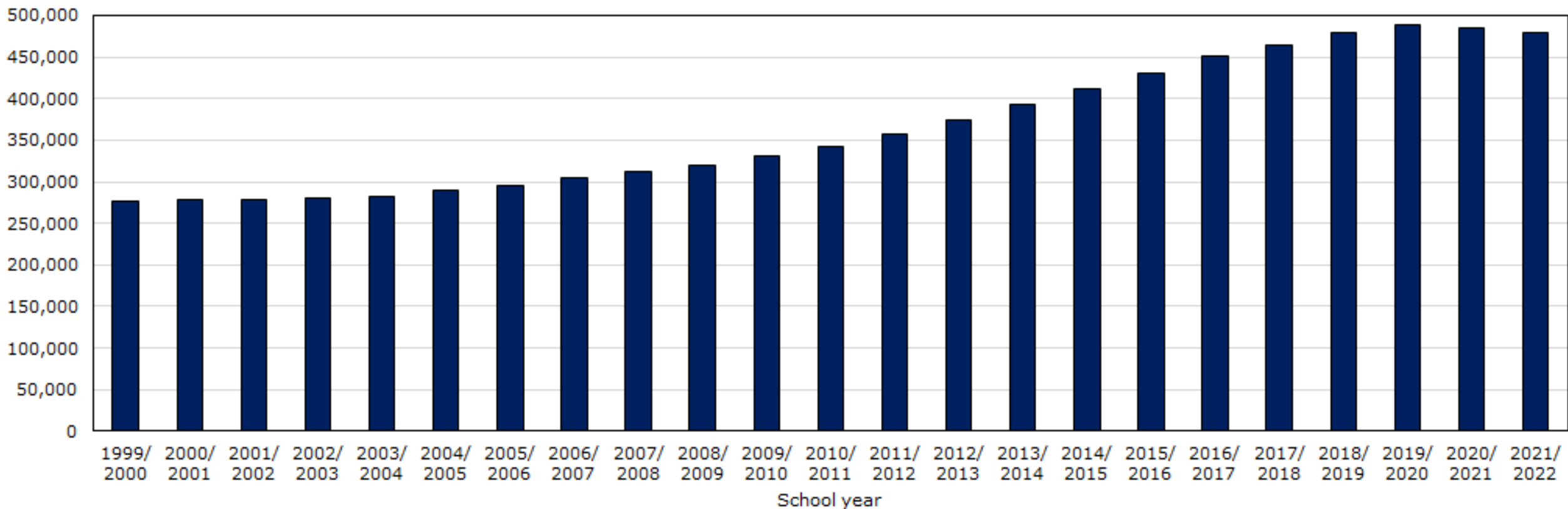


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Chart 1

In Canada outside Quebec, enrolment in French immersion programs has increased strongly since the early 2000s

number

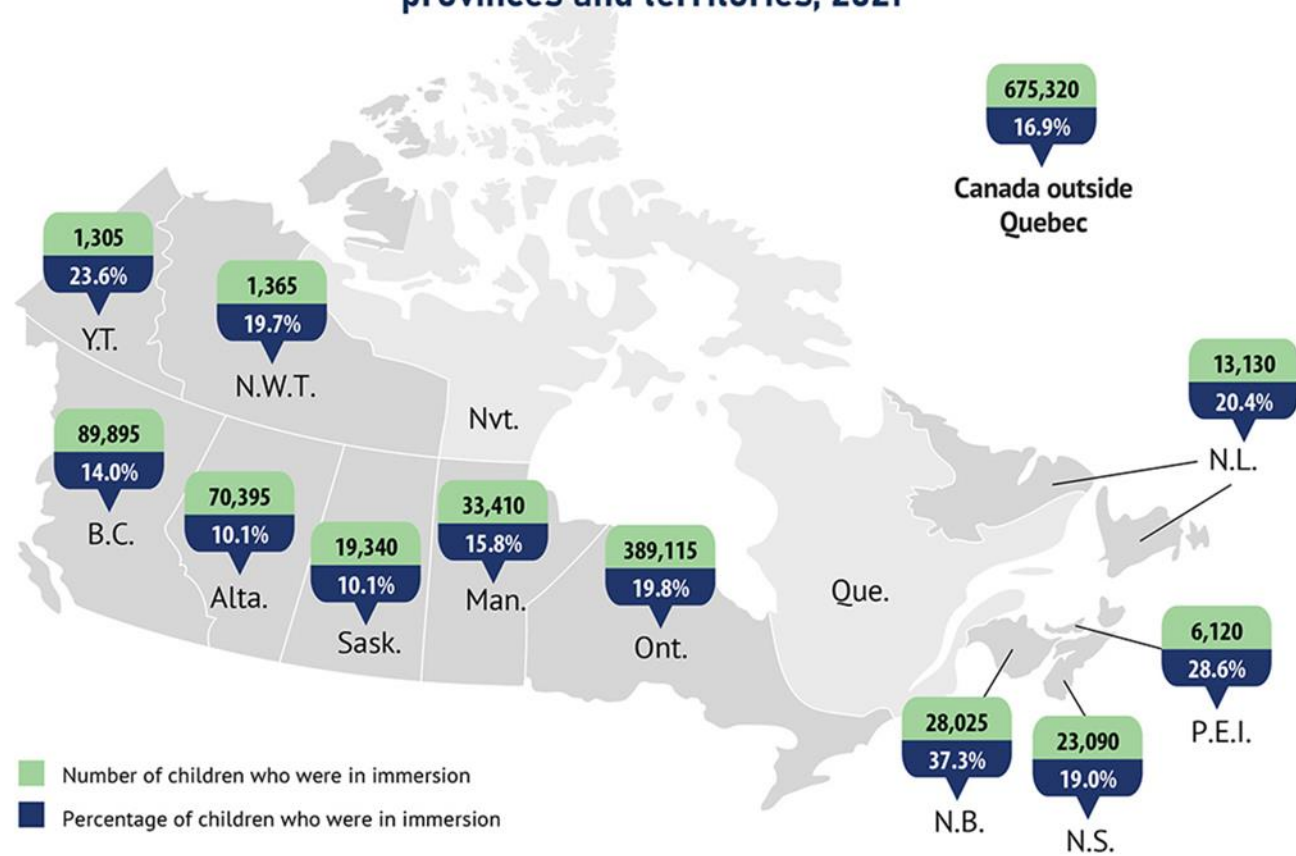


Source: Statistics Canada, Elementary-Secondary Education Survey, 1999/2000 to 2021/2022.

The proportion of school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in French immersion was higher in New Brunswick (37.3%) and Prince Edward Island (28.6%) and lower in Alberta (10.1%) and Saskatchewan (10.1%)

Map 1

Children who were in French immersion among school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French, Canada outside Quebec, provinces and territories, 2021

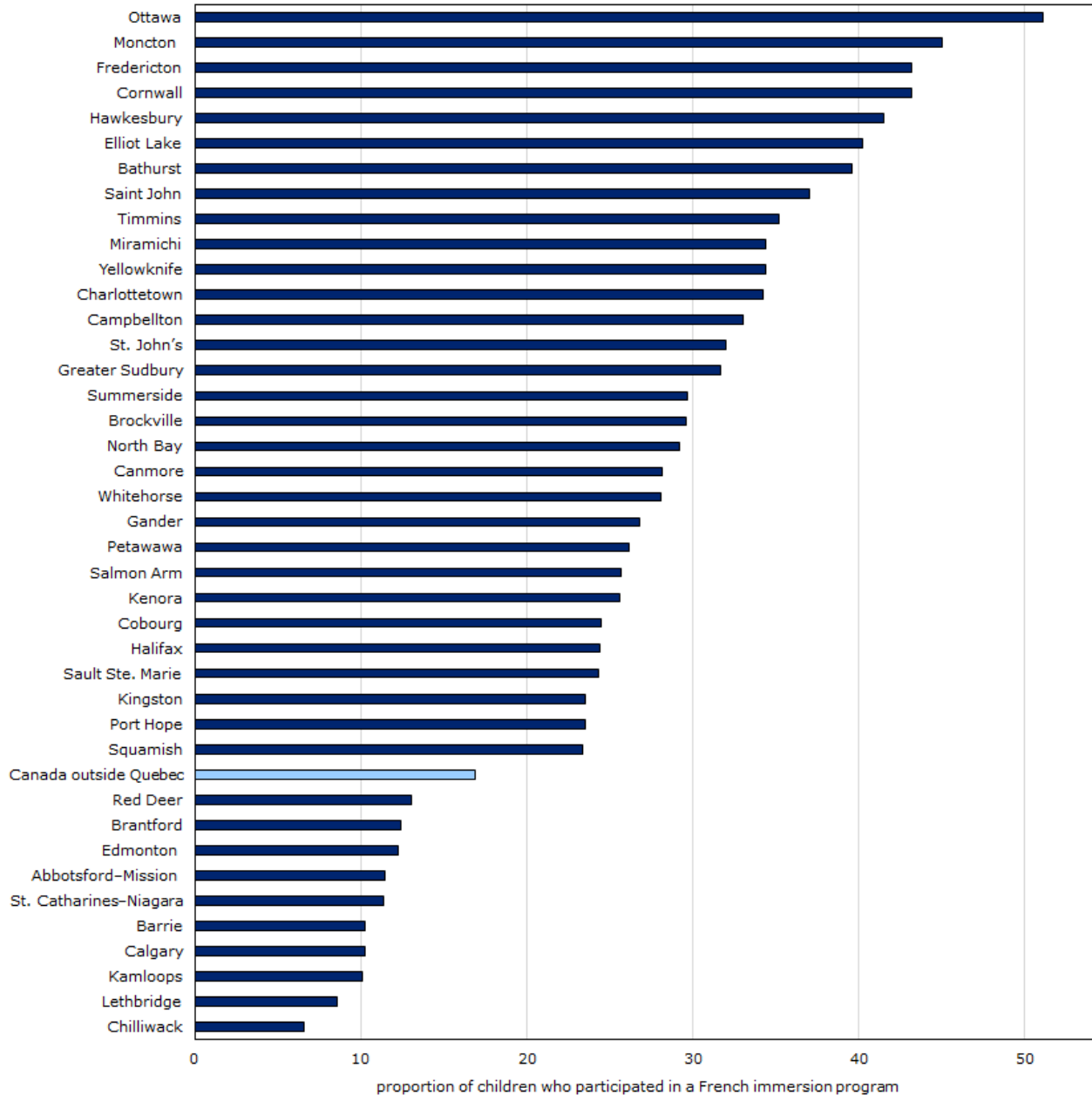


Notes: Children who were in or had been in French immersion in Canada among children whose mother tongue is not French and who were 5 to 17 years of age on December 31, 2020. The census does not collect information on participation of Quebec residents in immersion programs. These programs are not offered in Nunavut.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In 2021, approximately half of children whose mother tongue is not French living in Ottawa and Moncton had been in French immersion, compared with 1 child in 10 or less in Chilliwack, Lethbridge, Kamloops, Calgary and Barrie.

Chart 2
Top 30 urban centres with the highest participation in French immersion programs and top 10 large urban centres with the lowest participation, Canada outside Quebec, 2021



Note: Among urban centres (CMAs and CAs) with more than 1,000 school-aged children whose mother tongue is not French, who were in or had been in French immersion in Canada.
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.



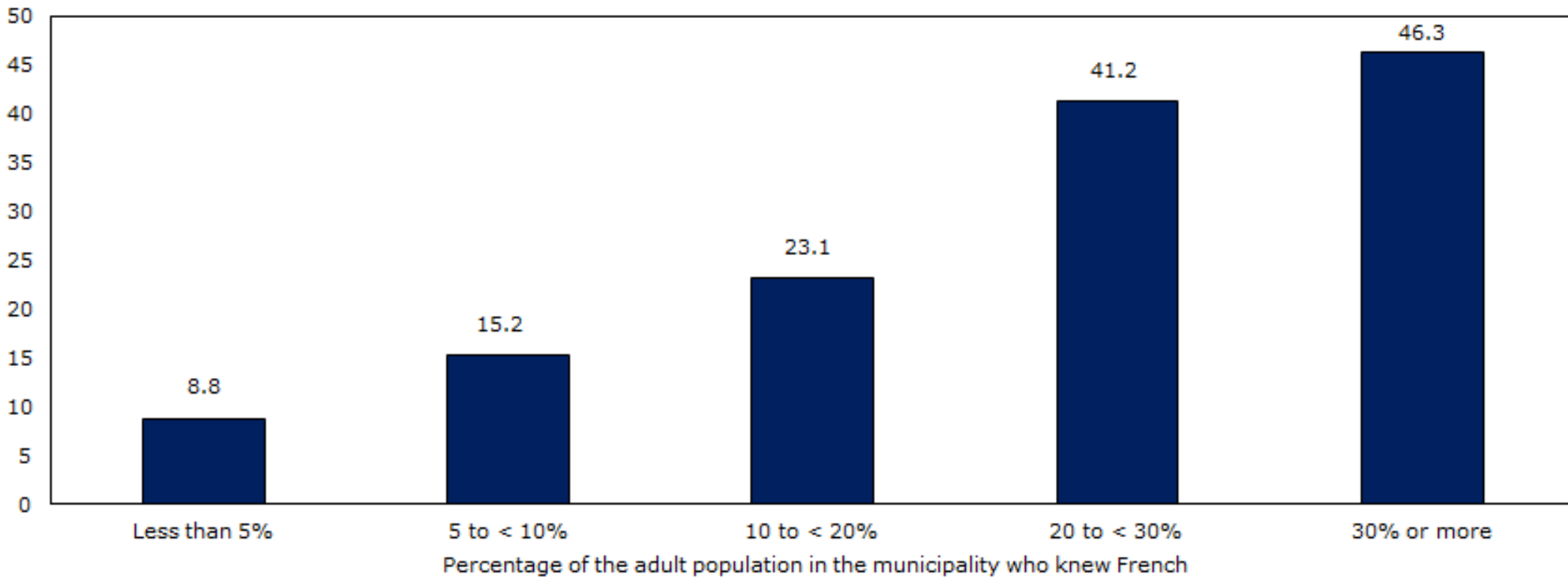
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In municipalities where at least 30% of adults know French, around half of 6-year-olds whose mother tongue is not French were in immersion

Chart 3

The more adults in a municipality who knew French in 2021, the more likely the children in that municipality were to be in French immersion as of Grade 1

Percentage of 6-year-olds who were in French immersion

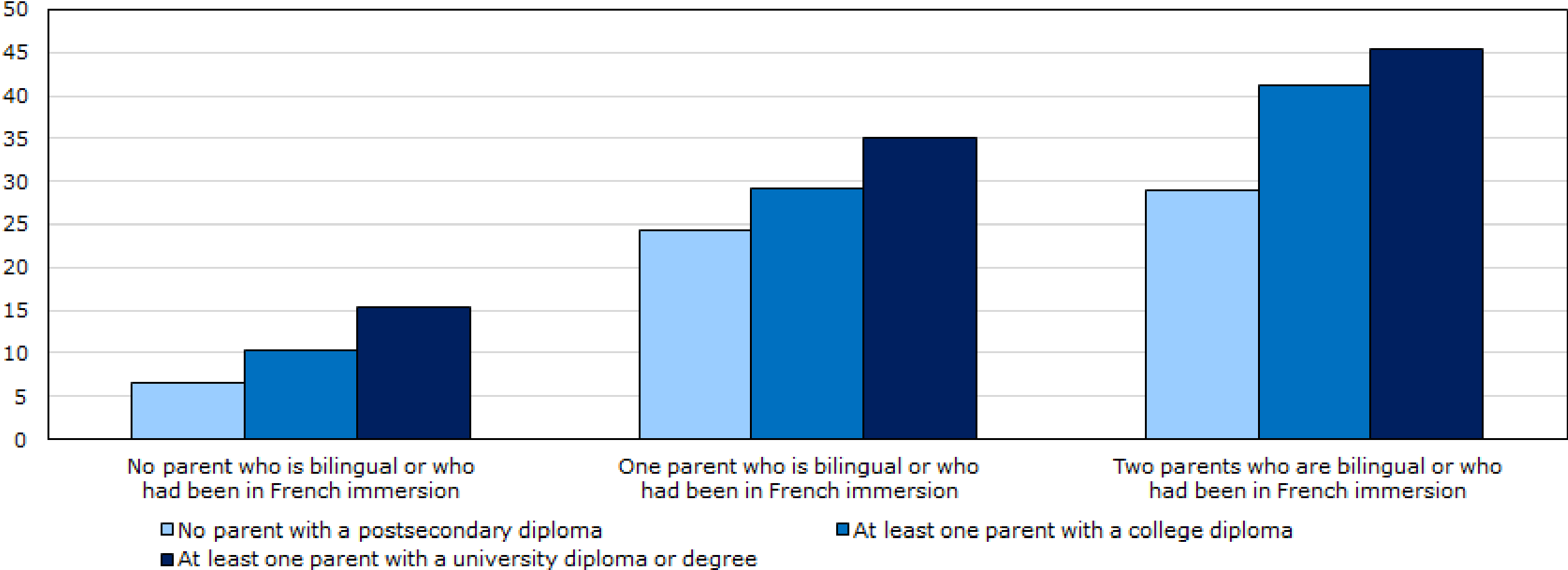


Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

Chart 4

Children with parents who are bilingual, have a higher level of education or had been in French immersion are more likely to have also been in French immersion as of Grade 1

Percentage of 6-year-olds who were in French immersion



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.



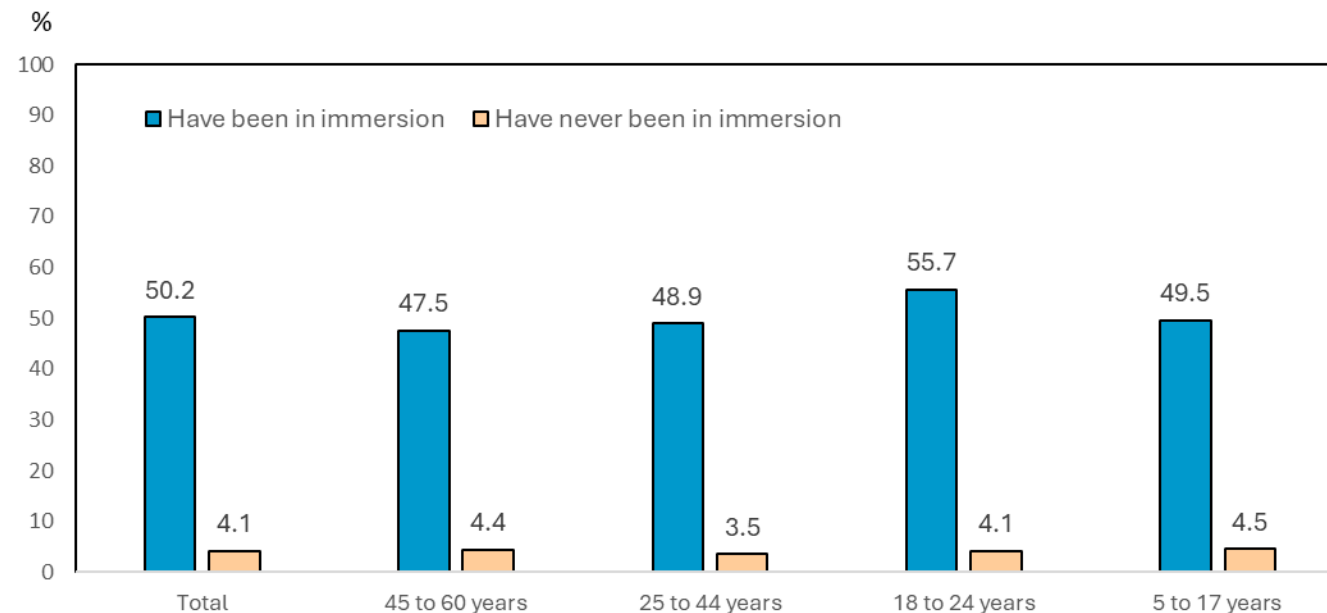
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Diversification of children who attend or have attended immersion

- **Children with an immigrant background accounted for almost half (47.0%)** of the school-age children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in immersion.
 - In particular, children born in Canada to a “mixed couple” with a parent born outside Canada (19.1%) were more likely to attend a French immersion program than other school-age children whose mother tongue is not French (15.8%).
- **Girls accounted for just over half (52.7%)** of school-age children whose mother tongue is not French and who were in or had been in immersion.
 - Girls (18.3%) were slightly more likely than boys (15.4%) to be in or have been in French immersion.

Persons who were in immersion were 12 times more likely to be bilingual in English and French than non-participants

Rate of English-French bilingualism according to participation in French immersion programs and by age group, population whose mother tongue is not French, Canada outside Quebec, 2021

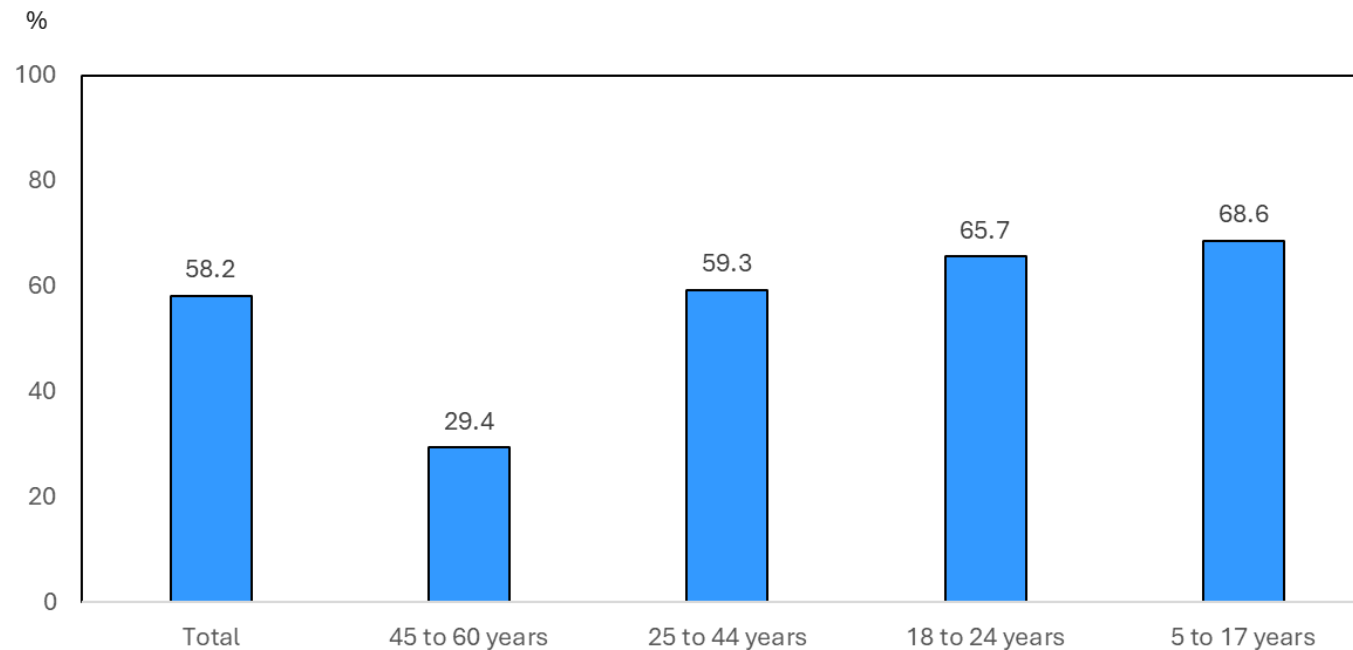


Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.



Nearly 3 out of 5 English-French bilinguals whose mother tongue is not French have been in immersion

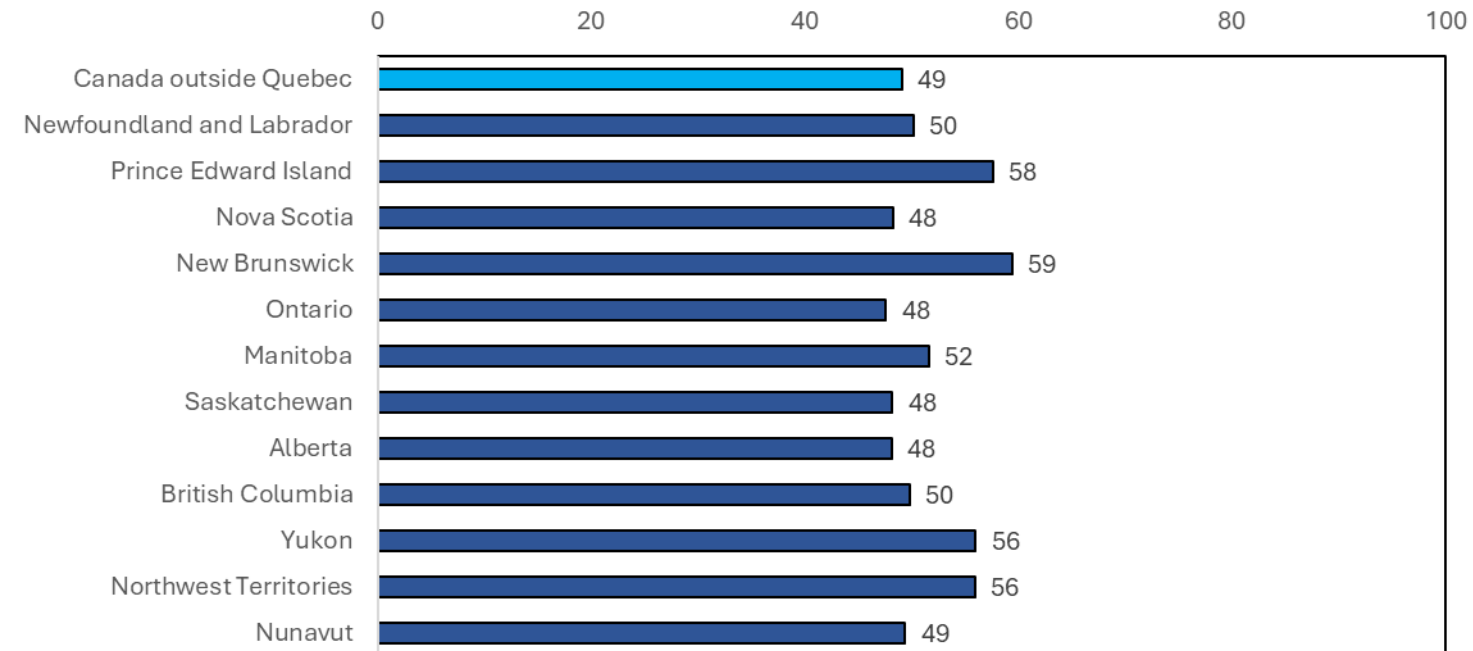
Proportion of English-French bilinguals whose mother tongue is not French who participated in a French immersion program by age group, Canada outside Quebec, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In all provinces and territories of Canada outside Quebec, about half of persons aged 25 to 54 years who have been in immersion are bilingual

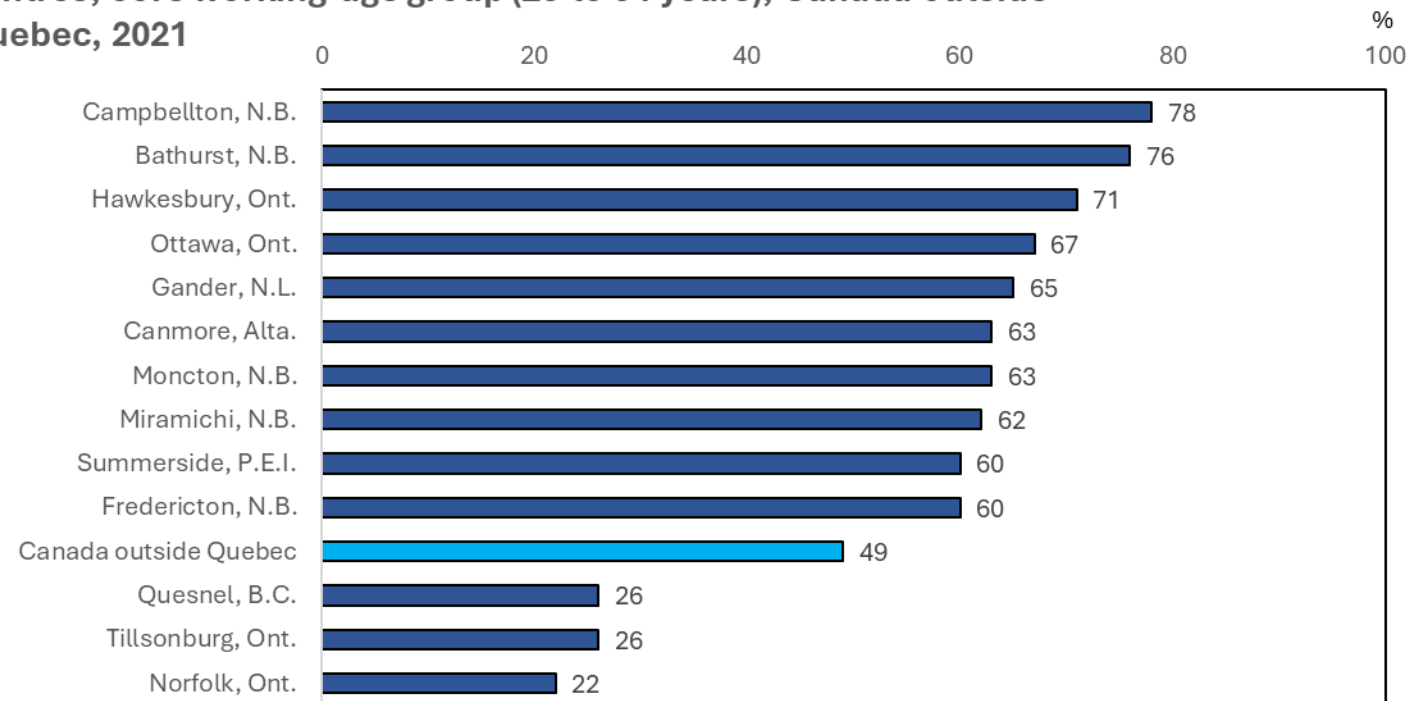
Rate of English-French bilingualism among former immersion participants whose mother tongue is not French, by province and territory, core working-age group (25 to 54 years), Canada outside Quebec, 2021



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

The bilingualism rate of former immersion participants aged 25 to 54 years varies by urban centers

Rate of English-French bilingualism among former immersion participants whose mother tongue is not French, selected urban centres, core working-age group (25 to 54 years), Canada outside Quebec, 2021



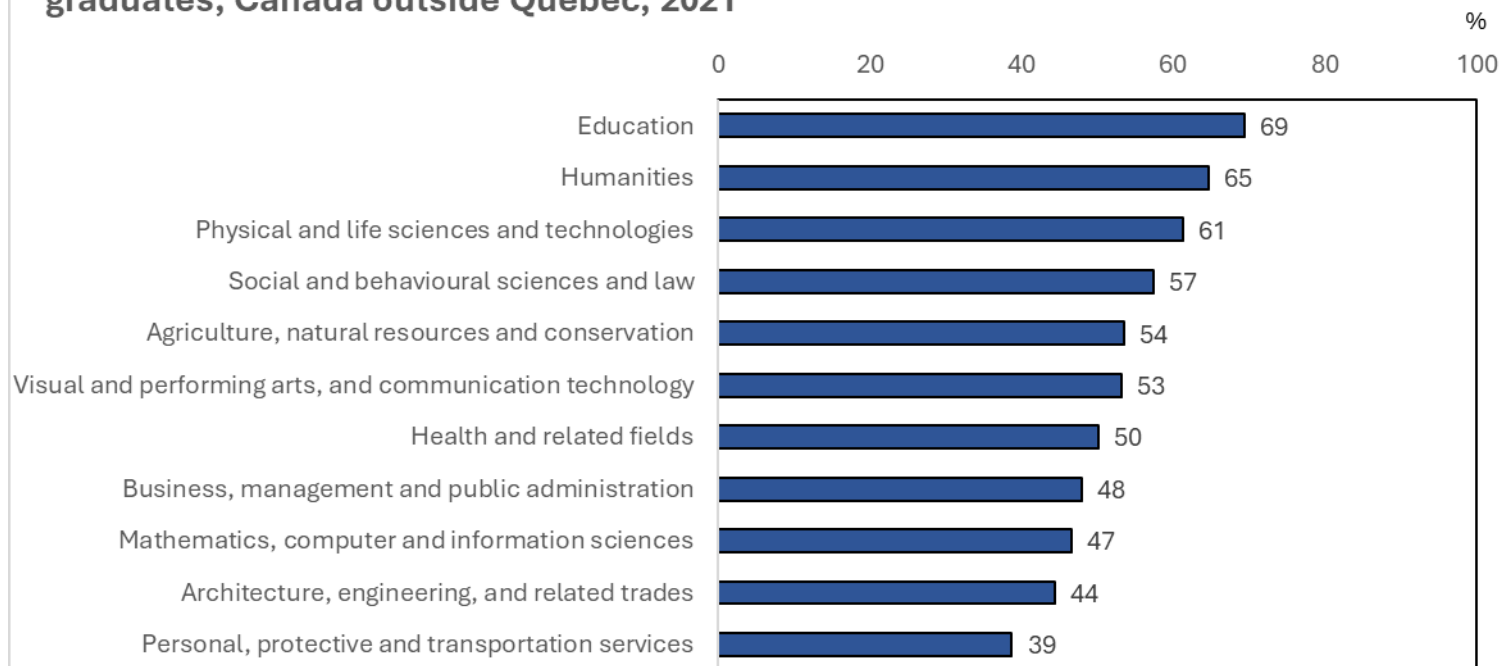
Note: Urban centers refer to census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.



The bilingualism rate of former immersion participants aged 25 to 54 years varies by major field of study at the postsecondary level

Rate of English-French bilingualism among former immersion participants whose mother tongue is not French, by major field of study, core working-age group (25 to 54 years) postsecondary graduates, Canada outside Quebec, 2021

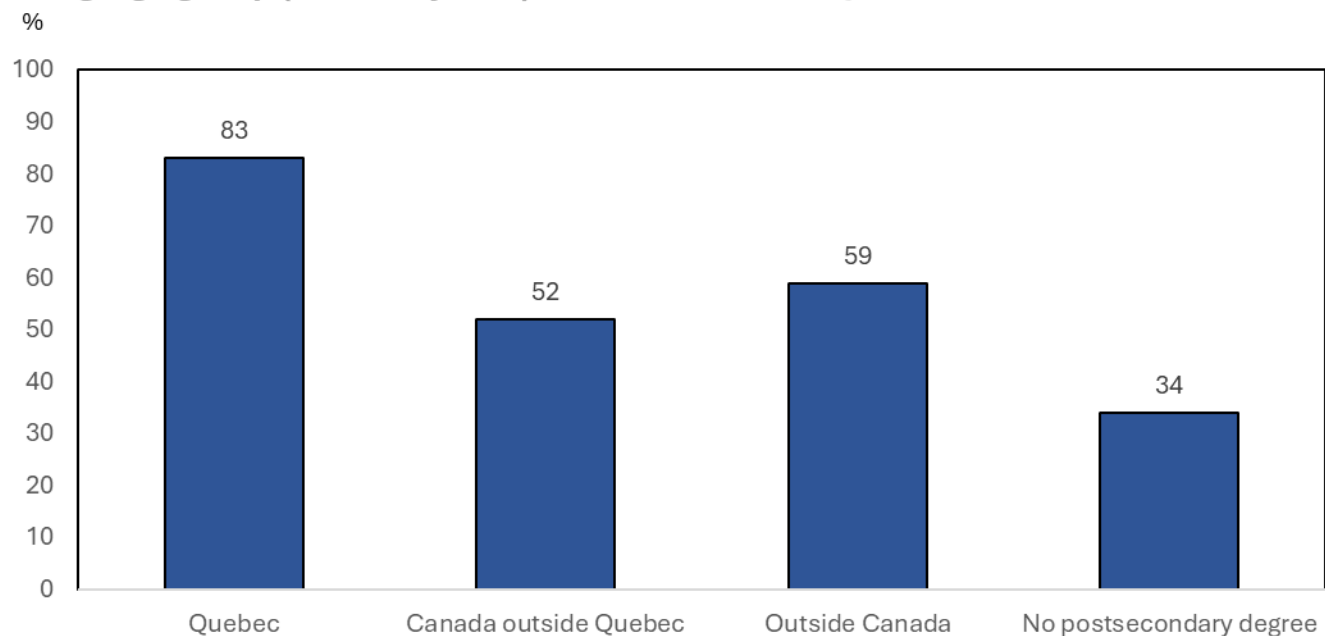


Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.



The bilingualism rate of former immersion participant varies according to where they completed their postsecondary studies

Rate of English-French bilingualism among former immersion participants whose mother tongue is not French according to the location where their highest postsecondary degree was granted, core working-age group (25 to 54 years), Canada outside Quebec, 2021



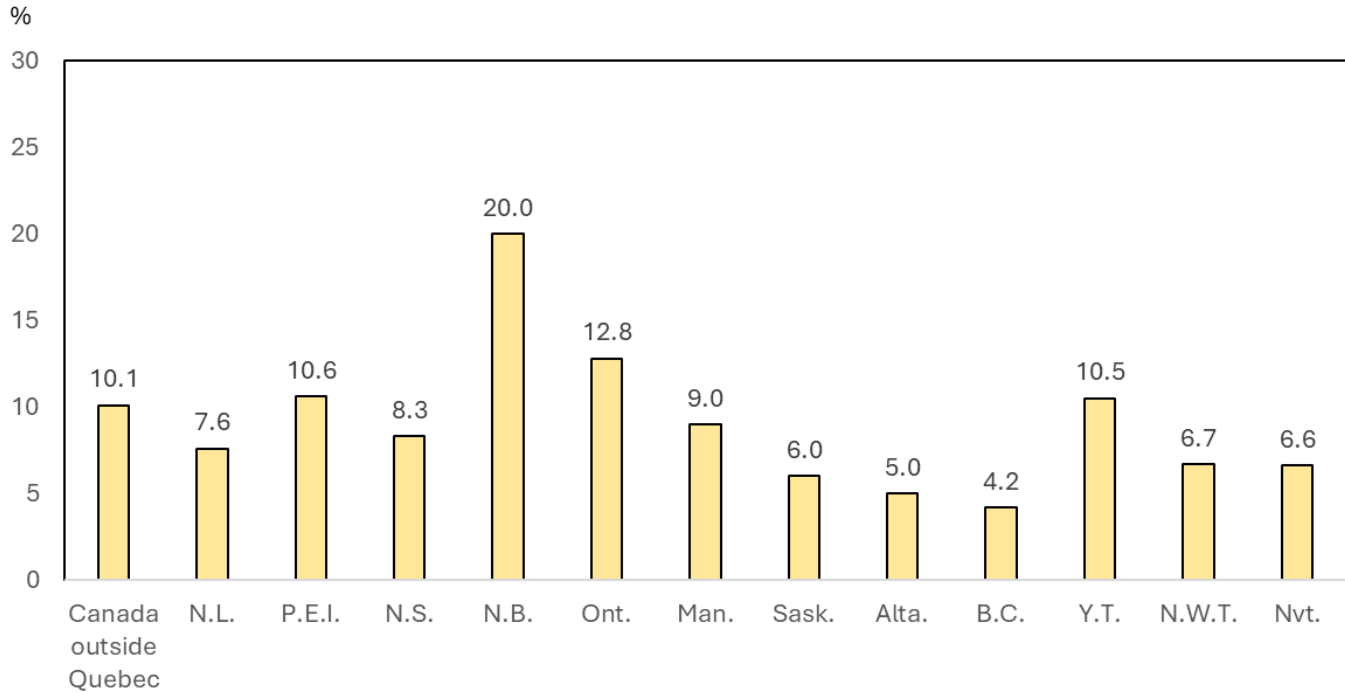
Note: Residents of Canada outside Quebec.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.



About 1 in 10 workers who have been in immersion use French at work at least regularly

Use of French at work on a regular basis among workers whose mother tongue is not French and who had followed an immersion program, Canada outside Quebec, provinces and territories, 2021



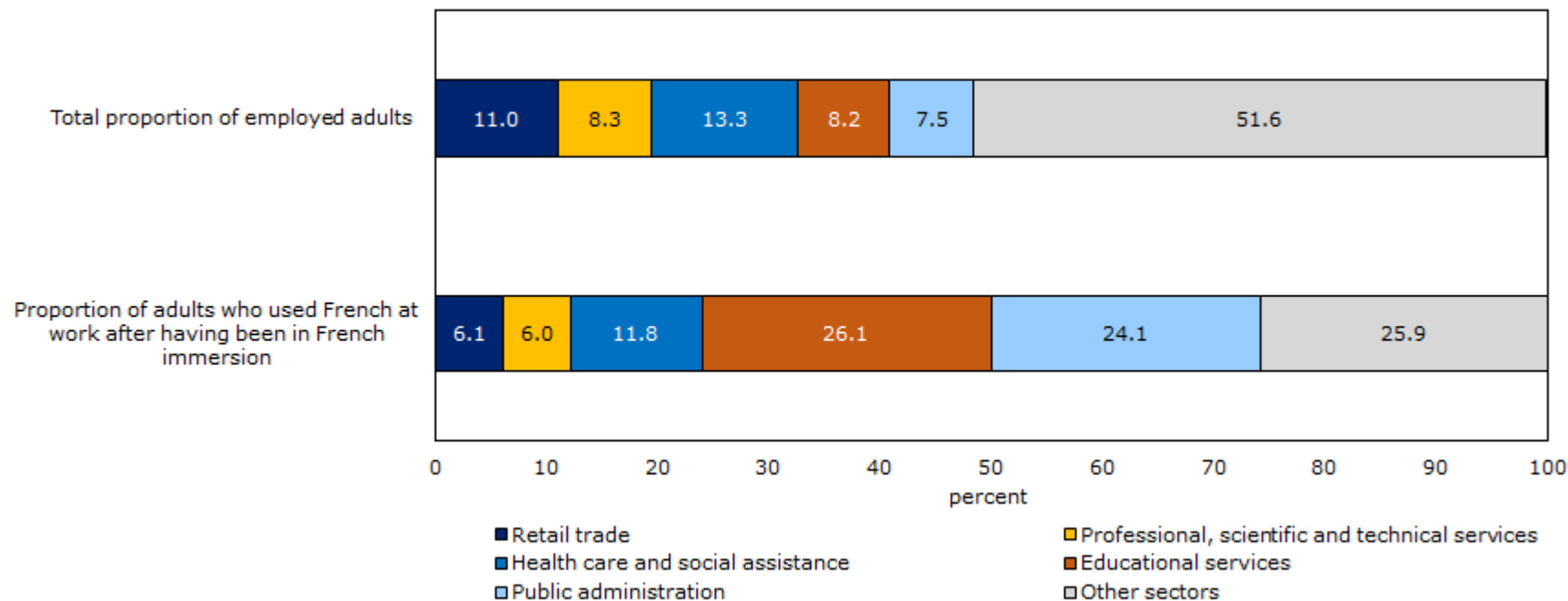
Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.



About half of former immersion participants who use French at work are in public administration or education

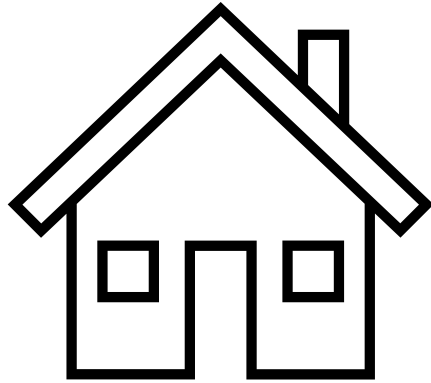
Chart 6

In 2021, half of adults who used French at work after having been in French immersion were employed in educational services or public administration



Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

More than 100,000 children and adults who were in or had been in immersion spoke French at home in 2021



- In Canada outside Quebec, among people aged 5 to 60, almost 1 in 6 people who spoke French at home at least regularly in 2021 was a person whose mother tongue was not French, and who had followed an immersion program.
 - About 1 in 3 people in Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan and British Columbia.
- Among adults speaking French at home after participating in immersion programs:
 - 40% also used French at work.
 - 22% were in a union with a person whose mother tongue is French.
 - 27% had school-aged children who were or had been in immersion themselves.



Conclusion

- Over time, an increasing proportion of children whose mother tongue is not French participate in French immersion programs.
 - Participation varies by region and according to the characteristics of children and their parents.
- In adulthood, former immersion participants were more likely to be bilingual in English and French than non-participants.
 - The bilingualism rate of former immersion participants varies by region and according to the field of study at the postsecondary level.
- Former immersion participants were more likely to use French at work.





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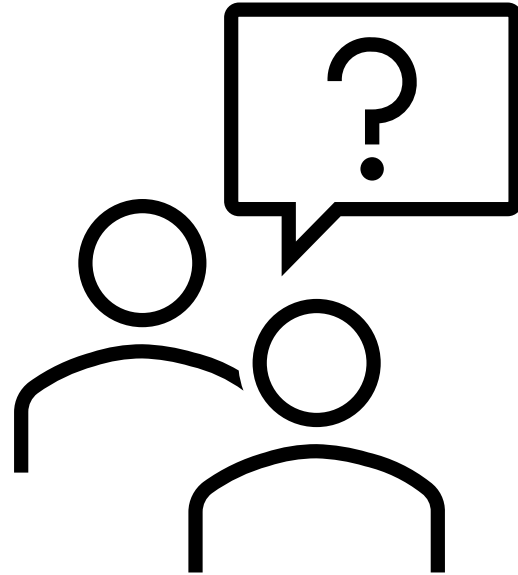
Looking ahead

- The Open Database of Educational Facilities:
 - Addition of immersion programs offered in English-language schools
 - Release in 2024
- Survey on the Official Language Minority Population:
 - First release at the end of 2024
 - Immersion intentions and preferences of parents of eligible children
 - Reasons for eligible children's participation in immersion programs
- Opportunities and needs for future immersion analyses?

Questions / comments?

Contact the Language Statistics Program:

statcan.languagestats-statlinguistique.statcan@statcan.gc.ca



References and relevant links

- [Participation in French immersion, bilingualism and the use of French in adulthood, 2021](#)
- [897,000 children are eligible for instruction in the minority official language in Canada](#)
- [The Open Database of Educational Facilities \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)
- [Survey on the Official Language Minority Population \(SOLMP\) \(statcan.gc.ca\)](#)

