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## NY SCHOOLS

# Learning to Be French in Brooklyn

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French dual-language programs, which didn't exist in New York City public schools five years ago, are booming across the city, spurred by lobbying efforts from the French community.

By September 2011, six elementary schools, one middle school and one charter school will have French programs. In Brooklyn, Public School 133 in Park Slope and P.S. 110 in Greenpoint are expected to unveil programs starting this fall.



Students at P.S. 58, the Carroll School in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn, which offers a French language program. *Julie Platner for The Wall Street Journal*

The growing number of French programs reflects the growing number of French. A survey conducted by the U.S. Census found 14,000 French lived in New York City in 2009, up from 12,000 in the 2000. The French consulate in New York says the true number is far higher—approximately 75,000 French living in New York state, most of them in New York City. About 3,000 French families have settled in the Carroll Gardens-Gowanus-Park Slope area of Brooklyn in the last 10 years, said Fabrice Jaumont, the education attaché at the French Embassy.

While there are a handful of private French bilingual schools in the city—Lycée Français of New York; the French-American School of New York; and Lyceum Kennedy among them—the high cost of attendance put them out of the reach for many younger French families.

The French dual-language programs in public schools, by contrast, are free. "There was a lot of thirst among them for programs like this, because four years ago, if you couldn't spend over \$20,000 to send your child to a private school, you didn't have a choice," said Marie Bouteillon, the first teacher hired for Carroll School-P.S. 58's dual-language program in 2007.

That program started with a kindergarten class of 24 students, split evenly between native French speakers and non-French speakers, and with one teacher. It now enrolls nearly 200 students across four grade levels, with eight teachers, and has a growing waiting list for admissions this fall.

Dual-language programs have been offered in city public schools for more than a decade. Eighty of the city's 96 such programs are dedicated to Spanish,

while seven are in Chinese and one each in Russian, Korean and Haitian Creole.

In 2005, French expatriates formed a group, Education Française à New York, to push for French after-school and dual-language programs in public schools. The group began by initially offering after-school classes in neighborhood public schools run by volunteers.

These programs benefited from funding from the French government, which offers special grants to support classes in French as a mother tongue, where no French schools are otherwise available for French citizens living abroad. Mr. Jaumont of the embassy said the French government helped out because the existing French schools in New York City were out of space, and they were too expensive for many young French families to afford.

What began as a gathering of French parents to discuss the educational needs of their children soon gathered momentum.

"Some of us first met other French parents in Carroll Park, and we started meeting more French people in bars and restaurants across the city, and fairly rapidly we were able to get a critical mass of parents who were interested in pursuing French bilingual programs for their children," said Catherine Poisson, president of Education Française à New York. "We started going to principals of various schools trying to establish after-school programs first and then dual-language education."

Meanwhile, the Carroll School and the French Embassy, pushed by a shortage of teachers qualified to teach French dual-language programs, approached Hunter College last year about adding a French track to its existing Master's in early-childhood bilingual-education program. Hunter will begin offering the French track starting this fall.

While a large number of the children enrolled in the public school dual-language programs are French, the programs also cater to children of other Francophone immigrants from countries like Switzerland, Canada and Senegal. The programs include an equal distribution of students who speak French at home and those who speak English or another language with their parents.

Having both native French speakers and English speakers in the classroom has helped both students and teachers, says Ms. Bouteillon. "One example is that of Francophone parents, who recorded themselves reading poems, short stories and spelling tests to help Anglophone parents and students with French homework," said Ms. Bouteillon, who is now the instructional coach at the Carroll School.

For many French parents, the programs have a broader draw than merely raising their children with two languages.

"It's not just learning the language," said Lea Sloan, whose father is French and mother is American and who was involved in efforts aimed at establishing a French program at P.S.110 in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, where her 5-year-old daughter Mia Sloan will begin attending kindergarten this fall. "It's a whole experience, because my kid will want to go to France and have attachment with the country,

the culture and the food through the language."

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