

**School District #22 (Vernon)
Early French Immersion**



A PARENT GUIDE

Adapted from original work of C. Dunbar and D. Stolen, and Manitoba Education, Training, and Youth (Bureau de l'éducation française Division)

What is French Immersion?

French Immersion is a Canadian made educational program in which a child whose first language is usually not French - studies and learns in French.

What are program goals apart from regular education goals?

- To develop language skills enabling students to participate easily in French conversation.
- To provide an insight into the French culture.
- To take French Immersion through to the high school level.
- To be able to take post secondary education with French as the language of instruction.
- To gain employment using French as the work language.
- To achieve skills in all subject areas equivalent to those in the English program.

What does French Immersion offer students?

- . An opportunity to become functionally bilingual in both of Canada's official languages.
- . Extra enrichment and challenges.
- . Learning in French, not about French, therefore no extra minutes added to the school day.
- . On average, higher levels of achievement in English reading and writing skills for most students due to a better understanding of languages.
- . Enhanced career opportunities in our increasingly globalized society.
- . Enjoyment of French books, newspapers, TV and movies.
- . Increased understanding of ethnic and linguistic issues around the world.
- . A feeling of achievement and pride!

How is French Immersion taught?

Students are taught the same curriculum as English students but the language of instruction is French. At first, students have limited vocabulary so teachers concentrate on language. Later as language skills develop the smaller details are filled in.

What about the students' academic achievements?

There is absolutely no detrimental effect on academic performance in any subject area despite learning in a new language nor is a student's English skills diminished. A larger English vocabulary could be a spin-off as French words are often similar to English words. Students are encouraged to continue to read literature in English. Courses taught in the French Immersion Program are generally comparable to those taught in English Track with the exception that no formal English Language Arts Program exists during the first three years of French Immersion. Since students have a limited vocabulary when beginning in French Immersion, the program initially stresses vocabulary themes. This initial emphasis does not have a long-term detrimental effect on other subject areas such as Math, Social Studies, and Science.

How fluent will students become?

“Fluency” and ‘bilingualism’ are difficult terms to define. However, students completing the French Immersion program become comfortable speaking French and be able to understand native French speakers with ease as the goal for immersion is for the student to be able to function effectively in the French language. French Immersion graduates are capable of completing the high school immersion program and go on to work and live in a French environment and study at a French-language university.

What characteristics do students need to be successful?

Motivation to learn

Openness to learning in another language

Eagerness to meet new friends and have new experiences

Willingness to work very hard and accept difficulties

Enjoyment of language activities and a willingness to spend lots of time chatting to friends in class en français!

There is no specific category of students for whom Immersion might not be suitable. However, there are three factors that may influence your decision to have your child attend a French Immersion school: **intelligence; motivation; learning disabilities.**

- a) **Intelligence** -Immersion Programs are not only for the brightest students. It must be understood that learning is on a continuum and that the challenge of learning a second language will be more difficult for some students. In other words, some students have to work harder than others to achieve the same results.
- b) **Motivation** -A high level of motivation is probably an important predictor of success in Immersion. Immersion Programs require concentrated participation and are best suited for children who are motivated to communicate in the language, actively using their language skills.
- c) **Learning Disabilities** –Supports exist within French Immersion schools, as with any school, to support students with learning disabilities.

What commitment do Parents need?

Parents do not need to speak French and most have little or no French skills.

Encouragement: Continual commitment and encouragement are essential.

Willingness to help with homework, letting the student do the translations.

Recognition of their child's wonderful accomplishments!

The Learner

The French Immersion classroom has seen changes to its composition over the years. Although once considered for the elite and more gifted children, it has now evolved to include children with varying needs, challenges and multiple learning styles. Like the English program, it is open to and welcomes all children.

Children for whom many aspects of education come easily will more than likely also develop competence in their second language. With the support from teachers, parents and school, children can develop their talents to the fullest in a French Immersion program.

Time, personal attention, resources and motivation to learn are all key elements in the development of children's potential. To have children remain motivated, their unique needs have to be recognized.

French Immersion is a program for children of every ability. It encourages them to make strides towards becoming their personal best.

The Role of the Parent in Immersion

Today's schools are welcoming parents as never before. They are recognized as important partners in the teaching and learning process. Schools acknowledge and appreciate their contribution to the life of the school and its community of learners. Their contributions as volunteers and partners are seen as crucial to the success of school programs. Parents work in the library, supervise lunches, provide treats, raise money, copy newsletters and write school promotion materials. Not only have they become helpers, workers and home team supporters, but advisors as well. Parents and community members may be invited to participate in the school budget and school planning process, as members of the Parent Advisory Committee, the School Planning Council, or the French Advisory Committee. Besides involvement in the school parent council, parents can be of real help in the classroom. They can be helpers in English reading class and offer assistance in French reading if they speak the language. They can participate in special classes, math clubs, and science fairs. They can also be tutors and members of support groups for each other. Most schools have a roster of parents who come regularly to the classroom to assist teachers and students. Some prefer to contribute by working at home preparing visuals and teaching aides to be used in the classroom. Parents with particular skills can be invaluable resources for classroom or subject area enrichment. Demonstrating a skill in computers, or fine arts and career shadowing can help to extend learning opportunities for students. Participating in chaperoning school activities, and coaching, are other examples of parental contributions.

The role of parents in the Immersion program is one of active participation from the start. Parental involvement is a fundamental ingredient to the educational success of their children. At home, parents can provide extended opportunities to enrich their children's first and second languages. These may include reading, music, art and cultural events.

Another added benefit is that parents who are informed about the French Immersion program in their children's school are able to share that knowledge and their experience with other parents who are considering the program for their children. As well as being advocates for their children and their program, parents can be supportive of high quality French second-language education for all students.

Parents and Homework

Parents are usually concerned about whether they will be able to play an active role in their children's homework. They worry that their lack of French-language skills may make them unable to understand or help. The parents' role in homework can be summed up in three words: opportunity, motivation, and encouragement. Every child needs a homework friendly place to do assignments, free from distraction and interruption, with adequate light and space. Children also need time to complete their assigned task. Parents can help by negotiating with their child a specific homework period, so that there is quiet, stress-free time to do the work.

A homework book or agenda is a useful tool to remind your child of forthcoming events, assignments, library book due dates, personal appointments and activities. If the need arises, teachers may ask parents to initial the homework book on a regular basis. Older students are encouraged to use a regular agenda, with timetables and a calendar for assignment due dates, as well as tests, reports, long term projects and extracurricular events.

Parents can participate in homework in other ways. English reading and writing are part of the child's homework that English-speaking parents can help with. Looking up words in a French dictionary, finding definitions and writing simple sentences are good opportunities for teamwork while doing homework in French. Parents can help with Math problems even if they do not understand French. The children can explain the task to the parent. The concepts are the same in English and French, whether it's subtraction and addition or division and multiplication, scientific formulas, algebraic equations or chemical reactions, etc. An added bonus is that a lot of learning happens as children explain and teach to parents.

An important part of learning to read is being read to and reading to others. Children benefit from discussing what they read. Feedback and encouragement from an adult when they are reading can be very powerful as a motivation tool for further reading. Children are consumers of knowledge and information. They love having the opportunity to ask "How come?" This gives a parent the chance to teach and to learn with the child as they find out together how something works or what a new word means. Some Immersion families have made a definite plan to incorporate French videos, music, books, magazines and games into their home entertainment to support language acquisition and to demonstrate and value French cultures and language. The fun of watching a French movie together and sharing a laugh are all good family learning experiences.

Schools recognize that parents and guardians want to be involved in their child's homework. Some may provide workshops that give parents strategies to deal with homework in French and to make them aware of curriculum outcomes and expectations. More articles on this issue are available on the Canadian Parents for French websites <http://www.cp.bc.ca> and <http://www.cpf.ca>

What is Canadian Parents for French?

Founded in 1977, Canadian Parents for French (CPF) is the national network of volunteers which values French as an integral part of Canada and which is dedicated to the promotion and creation of French second-language learning opportunities for young Canadians. With approximately 200 chapters across the country, CPF offers concerned adults the opportunity to work with others who are committed to enhancing the quality of French second-language education.

French Immersion is an *optional program available at the discretion of local school boards*. CPF Chapters advise and assist parents to work co-operatively with school administration.

After French Immersion, What Next?

Post-Secondary Choices

Once a student graduates from a French Immersion program, what's next? Students who finish Grade 12 in French Immersion have the choice of continuing to study in French, choosing a University or College where there are French courses available, or entering a postsecondary path in English.

The World of Work

The employment structure of the western world has evolved tremendously in recent years: long gone are the days of one career, one employer, and one work place. Today's conception of employment includes fewer boundaries, more independent workers, and increased communications. It is conceivable to view these developments as continuing and perhaps accelerating as we progress in the 21st century. French Immersion graduates who can communicate effectively in English and French have an added attractive quality for employers. Employers don't necessarily hire graduates for a specific job, but for a set of skills. They value communications skills, innovative approaches to problems and the ability to adjust to changing conditions. The skills that make French Immersion graduates valuable additions to the work force of any company are:

- . the ability to cope in various environments;
- . the resourcefulness, having had to devise new ways of dealing with learning situations;
- . the flexibility, having had to look at problems in two ways;
- . the confidence and positive self esteem;

The employment possibilities awaiting the Immersion graduate are many and varied, and in an ever-increasing variety of fields. Many of them involve good communication skills, both in English and in French, and many of them in more languages. Here are some of these sectors:

Business, Law, Information technology, Public relations, Medicine, Media, Education, Tourism, Government, International Development, Research

The importance of the French language in the world of work is not to be diminished. French is an official language of the European Union, the second largest trading bloc in the world. French is spoken in two of the G7 countries. French is the official language of many African countries and international organizations such as the Olympic Movement and the United Nations.

More and more companies are hiring first for interpersonal and communications skills, then training their employees to do a specific job. Immersion graduates have the skills to succeed in many fields here in Canada and around the world.

Other Questions and Concerns

You are invited to contact any of the individuals listed below if you have more questions or concerns about the SD#22 French Immersion Program.

FOR REGISTRATION AND / OR INFORMATION, SCHOOL INFORMATION, OR TO ARRANGE A SCHOOL VISIT CONTACT

**École Harwood Elementary
4320 20th St.
Ph: 250-542-5385**

**Principal: Brian Smyth bsmyth@sd22.bc.ca
Vice Principal: Rita Tedesco rtedesco@sd22.bc.ca**

**École Beairsto Elementary
3302 27th St.
Ph: 250-542-1388**

**Principal: Wendy Varley wvarley@sd22.bc.ca
Vice Principal: Brendan Robertson [brobertson@sd22.bc.ca](mailto:broberson@sd22.bc.ca)**

Canadian Parents for French

**Marilou Parchomchuk
parchomchuk@shaw.ca**

or

**Debra Pool
dpool@cpf.bc.ca**

or visit their website at www.cpf.bc.ca