French Immersion handbook for parents.

**INTRODUCTION**

French Immersion programs are designed to provide non-francophone children with a high degree of proficiency in the French language.

While any exposure to a second language is beneficial, French Immersion broadens and deepens that exposure. In Immersion programs, French is not only a subject, but a language of instruction and a means of communication.

In Immersion programs, much of the regular school curriculum is taught in French. Immersion goes beyond learning about French, to learning through French.

Immersion students retain their own language and culture while gaining an appreciation and use of another.

French Immersion programs have flourished across Canada since first introduced in the late

1960's. The benefits and opportunities of learning more than one language are recognized as never before. Research confirms that knowledge of a second language strengthens first-language skills and that the ability to speak two or more languages generally enhances problem-solving and reasoning skills, the capacity for creative thinking, and the ability to respect and understand other cultures. Second language learning strengthens students’ ability to communicate and participate effectively in the workplace and the global community. It also increases their ability to understand themselves and other people, and helps them to appreciate the power of words and the many

different uses of language.

The purpose of the French Immersion program is to provide anglophone children with the opportunity of achieving a meaningful level of functional bilingualism. To expect all students to attain the fluency of native speakers is, however, not a realistic aim even for an Immersion program. **What the children will achieve is a high level of functional bilingualism, enabling them to function with ease in both English and French.**

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT FRENCH IMMERSION**

The following are some common questions and concerns that parents often ask when their child is in the French Immersion program.

*1. What is French Immersion?*

It is the most effective method known for learning a second language. It provides more time to work in second language learning situations... and more time results in more learning. Essentially, children will learn the language as a vehicle of expression in other curriculum areas rather than learning about language in isolation. Our aim is functional bilingualism. This means that at the end of their secondary studies, the students can take further education in a French setting and receive training and employment in French, after some period of adjustment.

*2. Do parents of children in French Immersion programs have to be able to speak French?*

The program is designed for children who normally speak English at home. It is not expected that parents will be able to speak French. Teachers are aware of this when they send home notices or assign homework. Reporting is in English.

*3. How do I know if my child is suitable for the French Immersion program?*

Children who are enrolled in the French Immersion program demonstrate a wide variety of characteristics such as:

Language

• enjoys language;

• listens effectively (e.g. can retell or explain a story or event in proper

sequence);

• plays with language (e.g. enjoys rhyming and opposite games);

• enjoys new words (e.g. repeats and uses new vocabulary appropriately).

Learning Skills

• focuses on a story, conversation and activity for at least five to ten

minutes;

• handles new situations using positive coping strategies;

• is able to communicate his/her difficulties when necessary;

• demonstrates curiosity and a willingness to explore, experiment and

make new connections;

• demonstrates a positive attitude toward challenging tasks.

These are only some of the characteristics of French Immersion students and every child is unique!

*4. Will my child learn the same things as students in English classes?*

The curriculum must follow the guidelines of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. Teaching and learning resources in French cover the same basic program as in English, although perhaps in a different sequence. Students work toward the same academic goals regardless of the language of instruction.

*5. Will my child be behind in English if he or she takes French Immersion?*

Evaluations of Immersion programs across Canada have indicated that although there are certain lags in English language skills for the first few years of the program, the children in Immersion very quickly catch up and keep pace with children in the regular program, once English is introduced. It is important that you read stories in English at home and expose your child to English songs, nursery rhymes and books that will enrich his/her first language experience.

*6. What if my child experiences difficulties in French Immersion?*

For example, children who may have difficulty learning to read in English may have difficulty learning to read in French. It is generally the actual reading skills that these children have trouble with, not the language. Begin with your classroom teacher. Have conversations about how you may better support your child at home. Ongoing communication between the school and the home is beneficial to your child’s progress.

*7. How can I help my child?*

From the early stages of the program, parents can be of great assistance by being supportive of the program. You can read regularly to your child in English or simply talk frequently to your child about new experiences. Reading for pleasure should be encouraged in both French and English. In this way, your child’s English vocabulary will be enriched and his/her self-confidence will grow. At a later stage, certain portions of the program are conducted in English, and parents can be of direct assistance here.

Most often, if a child is experiencing difficulty in a particular subject area, the confusion lies with the concept, not the language. Discuss and explain the concept in English. Parents can also provide valuable assistance in the preparation of speeches and projects, especially in the areas of research, planning and presentation of materials.

**SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD**

**IN THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM**

Parents have a vital role in their child’s learning. Today, more than ever before, parents have access to information through books, pamphlets, speakers, workshops, the media, and the Internet on how to effectively support their child’s education.

In order to support your child in French Immersion, it is important to read regularly in English or simply talk frequently (in English) about new experiences. Reading for pleasure should be encouraged in both French and English. In this way, your child’s English vocabulary will be enriched and his/her self-confidence will grow.

The following are suggestions for parents with children in the French Immersion program:

• be positive about the program and the teacher;

• show interest in your child’s daily activities;

• check newsletters for special events;

• check backpack or agenda for homework;

• communicate with teachers your concerns, questions or suggestions;

• listen to your child read in French and English;

• read daily to your child in English;

• access French books, subscriptions, tapes, games, software, videos, television and radio;

• purchase a French/English dictionary for home.

**HELPFUL HINTS WHEN IT’S ALL IN FRENCH!**

**Homework**

Homework has three main purposes:

• to finish work not completed in school;

• to provide practice and extension of concepts presented in class;

• to allow for student preparation in upcoming class lessons.

Early in the school year, you should find out what the expected amount of homework will be in your child’s class from his/her classroom teacher. French Immersion students should expect to have roughly the same amount of homework as their counterparts in the English program. Teachers are sensitive to the content of the homework which is sent home. Teachers outline the expectations of homework assignments in order for the students to successfully complete them.

**Practical Tips for Providing a Successful Study Environment for Your Child**

**Preparation:**

Schedule time for homework or studying. Provide a quiet secluded place with:

• good overhead lighting;

• a firm chair and table or desk;

• no distractions;

• no radio or TV!

**Hints:**

Your child should know that homework starts at school and by LISTENING to the teacher’s instructions, he/she will know:

**• WHAT** to do;

**• WHEN** the assignment is due;

**• WHERE** to get information;

**• HOW** to write the project.

Your child can:

• review notes and relevant textbook sections;

• correct mistakes;

• make a study outline.