

CAPPING FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAMS

THE ISSUE:

- As enrolment in French Immersion grows, school administrators are tasked with managing growth. One way to stop growth is to cap the number of spots in the program. Limiting access to French Immersion by capping is a politically charged, very controversial issue.
- As enrolment in French Immersion in a dual-track school grows, split grades occur less often and more French teachers are needed. The corresponding decline in enrolment in the English program can lead to an increase in split grades and a decline in the need for English teachers.
- Finding solutions that do not limit the choices of parents and provide an excellent education regardless of program requires a deep understanding of school organization and resources and a willingness to compromise on the location of programs to ensure that there are enough students to run great ones.

WHAT CAPPING DOES:

- Capping forces prospective French Immersion students to stay in English programs, often down the hall from the French Immersion program they wanted. It creates 'winners' and 'losers' in public education with 'winners' having the full breadth of future opportunities that require bilingualism.
- Capping requires considerable staff administrative effort and time to determine, execute, and manage the process including parent complaints while it simplifies organizing school space and staffing.
- Capping enrolment caps the Ministry of Education's French Second Language (FSL) grant funding for French Immersion and undermines the goals the Ministry of Education and the federal government agreed to in the Official Languages in Education Protocol.

HOW IT IS DONE:

- School administrators decide on the number of spots that will be allocated for French Immersion in the school and/or across the board and choose a selection process for filling those spots.
- The selection process may include a rule that automatically gives younger siblings a spot, which is family friendly and allows for equity of opportunity within families, but reduces the spots available to firstborns.
- Cut-off dates are set; the selection process is carried out.
- Newcomers to the community, who arrive after cut-off dates or who arrive mid-year from French Immersion elsewhere, are usually subject to different rules.

SELECTION PROCESSES:

Lotteries

- Applications are submitted by parents and winners of a spot in French Immersion are chosen by school administrators using a computer program or by picking names out of a hat.

- Once all spots are filled, other applicants are put on a waiting list in the order the names were drawn. School administrators manage the list and, as winners move from the area or change their minds, students move up the waiting list and may get a spot. School administrators usually select a date, such as the first day of school or the end of the first term, to stop filling vacant spots.
- Initially, lotteries are perceived as fair and humane but parents who don't get a spot put the process under intense scrutiny and complain to staff and trustees that there should be a spot for every child.

Lining Up

- Lineups are perceived as a litmus test for commitment to French Immersion. Those who make the most effort and have the strongest commitment win a spot. In person, lineups frequently include camping outside the school while phone or computerized lineups are extremely stressful.
- Lineups are unfair to those with limited flexibility such as single parents and shift workers, those without extended family support and those without access to phone/computer technology.

BEST PRACTICES IN PROVIDING EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE ACCESS TO FRENCH IMMERSION:

- Parents' choice of French Immersion or English is respected and supported by fellow parents, staff, and trustees in consultations and decision-making.
- Permanent French Second Language Advisory Committees (FSLACs) where parents, staff, and trustees work through the policies and administrative details of planning and supporting growth in French Immersion.
- Collecting data on inclusion in French Immersion and taking action to support inclusion.
- The ability of all students to succeed in French programs is respected by fellow parents, staff, and trustees and is supported by proactively welcoming and including English-language learners and students with special needs.
- Transportation to French Immersion is provided free of charge on the same basis as transportation to English programs.

CPF ONTARIO RECOMMENDS:

- That the opportunity to achieve the highest level of proficiency in French through French Immersion be open to every student in English-language school boards across Ontario.
- That school administrators plan for and support growth in French Immersion as they do for changes in general school enrolment.
- That capping and all barriers to access and inclusion be eliminated.