

November 18, 2013

Ms. Amy Collard
Board of Trustees Chair
Halton District School Board
PO Box 5005 STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON
L7R 3Z2

Dear Ms. Collard

On behalf of the thousands of parents who are members of Canadian Parents for French, and the many thousands more who have their children in Early French Immersion programs across the country, I urge you to maintain Halton District School Board's Early French immersion (EFI) program. Decades of research and on the ground results indisputably demonstrate that EFI remains the most accessible and welcoming French Second Language program for all types of learners. The reasons for this are many, including:

1. Highest French-language proficiency:

A basic finding regarding immersion variants is that students who start earlier (early French immersion) will reach a higher level of oral competency in French than students who start in delayed entry programs (Middle French immersion) or late entry programs (Late French immersion).

2. Appropriate for the widest range of student abilities:

The longer the entry to immersion is delayed, the more the group becomes select.

Late French immersion is a demanding program due to the complex subject matter that has to be learned in French from the outset. This program is more attractive to students who are academically inclined, or who are highly motivated to master the second language despite the academic challenge presented.

While complex subject matter does not affect Middle Immersion programs as strongly, enrolment is still influenced by students' performance in English in the early grades. Students with identified learning difficulties are less likely to participate in these programs.

Given the option of just one program, the Early immersion option presents the most advantages. It is the least likely to be affected by academic ability and therefore the most inclusive of all learners.

3. Pedagogical suitability:

Early immersion is also the most "pedagogically friendly" version because of the naturalistic approach to language learning based on the ability to express oneself fluently in speech and to understand a spoken language. These teaching methods correspond to the developmental levels of

these young learners, as do the materials and resources. Early immersion students learn French in the same way as they learn English.

Furthermore, it cannot be said that the Intensive French program – which is how FSL experts describe the New Brunswick ‘model’ - has been a resounding success, witness the current provincial government’s decision in 2011 to review the program and its own task force’s recommendation to return to an EFI program with a grade 1 entry point at the earliest opportunity.

Finally the elimination of an entire program with a proven track record of success is not to be undertaken lightly. When the New Brunswick government announced its decision to eliminate EFI with a minimum of consultation with parents and other stakeholders, it opened the door to a successful legal challenge by a group of parents. The government was then forced to delay implementation of its plans and go through a ‘fair and open’ consultation process before proceeding with its original plans. It is widely acknowledged that this mismanagement of a crucial public process, and the general public outcry over its decision to eliminate EFI in the first place, contributed to the defeat of the sitting government in the provincial elections of 2010.

For all these reasons then, it is my sincere hope that you and your colleagues will not entertain a motion from the floor to amend your FSL Review Report’s recommendation to eliminate EFI, but instead will strive to maintain and expand your current EFI program and provide additional entry points so that all Halton District schoolchildren may learn their other official language.

Yours very truly,



Robert Rother
National Executive Director

cc:

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