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Attention:

Joan Green and Michel Paulin, Co-leads  
ST.newvision@ontario.ca

From:

Canadian Parents for French Ontario  
2055 Dundas St. East. Suite 103  
Mississauga, Ontario. L4X 1M2  
Tel: 905-366-1012  
Betty Gormley, Executive Director,  
[bgormley@on.cpf.ca](mailto:bgormley@on.cpf.ca)

**Re: A New Vision for Student Transportation in Ontario**

Thank you for this opportunity to help create a new vision for transportation for Ontario students that is safe, responsive, equitable, and accountable.

Contents:

Recommendation of Canadian Parents for French Ontario – page 2  
About French Immersion/Extended French Programs in Ontario – page 2  
Ontario’s Goals: Framework for French as a Second Language (FSL) Programs in Ontario Schools (2013)  
Ontario’s Commitment: Federal-Provincial Official Languages in Education Program (2013-2018)  
About Canadian Parents for French – page 3

Responsiveness-service levels – page 4  
Equity – accessibility – page 7  
Safety and well-being-safe and respectful transportation environment – page 9  
Accountability – quality assurance – page 12

Comparison Charts of English, French Immersion, Extended French Service Levels – page 14

### **Recommendation:**

In support of equity, inclusion and student achievement in French as a Second Language programs, Canadian Parents for French Ontario recommends that the Ministry of Education:

Develop and enforce a province wide transportation policy that is inclusive of students in French Immersion/Extended programs and gives clear guidelines:

- On walking distances, pick up locations, time limit and distance that any student may be expected to ride a bus or commute on public transit
- On integration of before/after school care and shared custody with transportation services based on need identified by parents
- To ensure that transportation is available at NO COST to students or their parents/guardians

A lack of a vehicle, adult to drive and/or financial means should not be a barrier to participation in French immersion/extended programs which are publicly funded education programs. All students with 2 home addresses and a before/after school address should be accommodated with transportation including students in French immersion/extended programs.

### **About French Immersion/Extended Programs in Ontario:**

French Immersion/Extended programs are Official Language Programs supported through the Official Languages Act, The Official Languages in Education Agreements between the Governments of Canada and Ontario and the Ministry of Education Technical Paper, Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools and Curriculum.

French immersion/extended enrolment: **245 818** (13% of English Board enrolment) \*

Number of Boards offering French immersion/extended: **54** (with 98% of English Board enrolment) \*

Number of immersion students being transported: **124 052** (15% of total transported) +

\* 2015-16 ONSYS data, most recent release from EDU

+2015-16 Ministry of Education Student Transportation Survey unaudited data. NB: data does not specify extended and often, Boards may report extended and immersion together.



**Extended French Programs:** French is the language of instruction for 25-49% of the school day. Extended French programs generally start in Grade 4, 5 or 7. For Grades 9-12, extended students do at least 7 out of 30 credits in French. Boards decide locations, program configuration and starting grade. Curriculum begins in Grade 4.

**French Immersion Programs:** French is the language of instruction 50-100% of the school day. Most French immersion programs start in JK, SK or Grade 1. For Grades 9-12, immersion students do at least 10 out of 30 credits in French. Boards decide locations, program configuration and starting grade. Curriculum begins in Grade 1, as it does for the regular English program. Early full French immersion starting in kindergarten is considered the optimal approach to developing French proficiency and educators follow the Ministry Kindergarten Program 2016, “play-based learning in a culture of inquiry”

#### **Ontario’s Goals: Framework for French as a Second Language (FSL) Programs in Ontario Schools (2013)**

1. Increase student confidence, proficiency, and achievement in FSL.
2. Increase the percentage of students studying FSL until graduation.
3. Increase student, educator, parent, and community engagement in FSL.

#### **Ontario’s Commitment: Federal-Provincial Official Languages in Education Program (2013-2018)**

Provide every student with the opportunity to study FSL and to track and improve:

- student performance-acquisition of measurable second-language skills
- provision of programs
- student participation-recruitment and retention to secondary graduation
- enriched school environment
- support of educational staff and research

**About Canadian Parents for French:** Canadian Parents for French (CPF) was founded in 1977 with the assistance of Canada’s first Official Languages Commissioner. More than 25 000 volunteer parent and stakeholder members across Canada promote and support opportunities for young people to learn French. CPF is the very proud recipient of the Commissioner of Official Languages 2016 Award of Excellence in recognition of outstanding contribution to linguistic duality in Canada.

CPF Ontario serves on the Minister of Education’s Provincial French as a Second Language Working Group and has consulted with the Ministry on the development of all of the current FSL policy and curriculum documents.

CPF Ontario has created and implemented many projects supported by Canadian Heritage and the Ministry of Education, including “O Canada” school performances, Pathways to Bilingual Success Conferences for students, parent webinars in support of parents and their children in FSL programs and our web data base [www.frenchstreet.ca](http://www.frenchstreet.ca) and our annual French public speaking contest, Concours d’art oratoire. Information for parents, data and research on FSL education are shared via our public websites [cpf.ca](http://cpf.ca), [on.cpf.ca](http://on.cpf.ca), facebook and twitter.

## Responsiveness-service levels

### 1. *Do you think that Ontario students are well-served in the current system?*

Some students are well-served but others are not. Some French immersion/extended students receive transportation support using the same parameters as those used for students attending English programs and some French immersion/extended students receive no support at all.

Ontario School Board transportation policies vary considerably for distances that define provision of transportation (yellow bus or transit tickets), for transfers allowed on transit, for walking distances to bus pick-up points and for time allowed on a bus.

Many parents of students in JK-5/6 who want to access before/after school programs have to forgo yellow bus transportation and transport their own children.

### 2. *Which aspects of service are working well to help support students in achieving excellence?*

If transportation is provided on the same basis for French immersion/extended students, as English program students, students are served as well (or as badly) as the general student population. This occurs when a yellow bus is provided for JK-5/6 students whether that school is an English one or a French immersion/extended one and similarly, for grades 7-12 whether it is yellow bus or transit.

### 3. *What's not working?*

Students cannot achieve excellence in French immersion/extended programs if they can't get there.

Policies vary across Ontario and even within consortia (see charts page 14-18):

Waterloo Region DSB and Waterloo Catholic DSB do not provide transportation to immersion.

Toronto Catholic DSB does not provide transportation to immersion unless funds are available. They have been in a deficit in their transportation budget since 2000. Their co-terminus board, Toronto DSB provides transportation to all SK-12 students based on the same distance parameters as the English program.

Peel DSB provides yellow bus to Grade 1-8 immersion students, but no transportation for secondary immersion students unless they are in Caledon. Secondary students in English get transportation. Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB does not provide transportation for immersion.



Upper Grand DSB provides transportation to immersion based on the same parameters as the English program and took care, over 40 years ago, when starting immersion in the rural areas to choose locations which had nearby secondary schools. This meant elementary immersion students could get on an existing bus run as enrolment grew.

Lakehead DSB and Thunder Bay Catholic DSB provide transportation based on the same parameters as the English program.

Students need to arrive at school ready to learn. A young child who falls asleep on the bus or has a toilet accident is not ready to learn. Long bus rides are very hard on students, particularly younger students and their classmates.

Students need access to extra-curricular activities to support their learning in French and other subjects, social and physical development. Long commutes, whether on a yellow bus or on transit, limit opportunities for all students. Early and late bus runs are done in some boards but not across the province.

School bus routes can change from year to year and this becomes difficult to manage, especially where parents who share custody are on two different routes.

Parents can face insurmountable barriers in accessing both transportation and before/after school care.

In the Toronto DSB, French immersion/extended bus pick-up points are usually at the English home school that is within walking distance of the child's home. Parents may only access before/after school care at the school their child attends; i.e., the French immersion/extended school. Bus runs are set to arrive when school starts which means if you need to be at work earlier or stay later, you have to transport your child to and from the French immersion/extended school for before/after school care, assuming a spot is available.

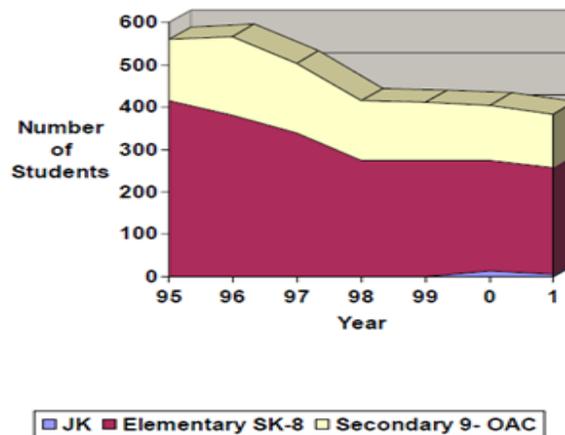
Even if your bus pick-up is at your English home school, you cannot access before/after school programs there. A few pre-amalgamation bus runs do go to non-TDSB daycare sites but it is rare while other boards do have daycare pick-ups; such as WCDSB, TBCDSB. Daycares must maintain the staff-child ratio at all times and meeting a bus is a challenge to organize. There is significant resistance to changing procedures to meet the needs of French immersion/extended students on the bus whether it is by adjusting bus schedules to ease parent burden and making access rules for daycare align with both bussing and immersion.

The logistics of the yellow bus service can negatively impact parent's, mostly women's, ability to seek and hold paid jobs, particularly in rural areas. Different pick-up/drop-off locations and times for elementary and secondary and the total time parents are going back and forth and waiting for 2 buses can easily consume 1-2 hours of a work day.

Reducing transportation service reduces enrolment in French immersion/extended and destabilizes strong programs. When Trillium Lakelands DSB examined their French immersion transportation in 2001, they found that a 1995 move to "Express Bussing" (which was not express at all and meant bus stops that were even further from students' homes) resulted in a marked drop in enrolment.

Transportation was the only factor that had changed. When, the board made a correction to improve service and access to French immersion, enrolment did increase in elementary. However, secondary enrolment continued to decline for a number of years and recovery to a robust secondary program took years.

**FI Enrolment Since Express Bussing Implemented Sept '96**



*Bus Them and They Will Come*, Canadian Parents for French (Ontario) Trillium Lakelands Chapter Presentation to TLDSB French Immersion Review Committee 2001/02



## **Equity – accessibility**

- 1. Do you think that all Ontario students are receiving the transportation services that they need?**

No. French immersion/extended students are not receiving the transportation services they need in every board across the province.

- 2. Does the student transportation system adequately take into account the diverse needs of different types of students?**

No. Transportation policies that exclude French immersion/extended students as a group mean that only children who live within walking distance or have parents with a car and a flexible work schedule can attend. This disadvantages children with single parents, with parents who work shift work and with parents who do not have the financial resources to own a reliable, available vehicle. French immersion programs began where demand was concentrated, often many years ago in established neighborhoods or urban centres. Newcomer and rural areas have fewer programs and without transportation, face an enormous barrier to participation.

When transportation is eliminated or reduced it has a direct impact on student achievement in French, enrolment, retention and in turn the course selection, retention, graduation rates and in turn the viability and sustainability of French immersion/extended programs.

- 3. Do you have any specific examples of situations that show that there is an equity issue that needs to be addressed?**

### **Gaps**

Boards that have French immersion/extended transportation on the same basis as English programs include TDSB, UGDSB, LDSB, TBCDSB, OCDSB, OCSB. Boards that do not have French immersion/extended transportation on the same basis as English include PDSB, DPCDB, WRDSB, WCDSB. (see charts p. 14-18). The gaps in the provision of transportation for French immersion/extended create a province-wide equity issue and undermine the achievement of Ontario, Canada and student/parent goals in French as a Second Language.

### **Financial Cost**

School boards that require that students pay for transit, whether it is public transit or private, in order to be able to access French immersion/extended, a publicly funded Official Language education program, place a financial barrier in front of them and their parents. For example, the Peel DSB secondary French immersion/extended students are not eligible for transportation. Those beyond the distance parameter

for walking are expected to pay out of pocket for transit in all areas of the Board while a yellow bus is provided for all students in the English program and immersion students in Caledon.

***Before/ after School Care***

*My child asked to be in French immersion when she was in JK. She loved it in SK and I was able to access the before/after school care at the immersion school. But, in grade 1, there was no room in the before/after school care. I looked for another spot in our area and the only one I could find was at our local English school. The school bus did not pick up there and they would not budge. I am on my own and I had to be able to commute downtown to work. In the end, I had to move my daughter out of immersion and back to the English school to access the daycare so I could work.*

*– Etobicoke mom as told to CPF Ontario*

## Safety and well-being-safe and respectful transportation environment

1. ***Do you believe that Ontario is doing enough to support the safety and well-being of students, staff and drivers?***

No.

2. ***What improvements could be made to safety and well-being for students as they are being transported to and from school?***

Make the safety and well-being of students and their families the focal point of transportation policies regardless of English/French program by:

- limiting time on the bus and/or public transit,
- reduce walking distances,
- establishing and monitoring safety standards for pick-up points,
- provide and reinstate driveway pick-up where safety and access issues warrant,
- paying for transit for students who meet distance thresholds but do not get yellow buses,
- integrating transportation and before/after school care, shared custody.

3. ***Do you have any specific examples of situations where safety and well-being is being compromised? What is the biggest risk to safety and well-being?***

Many Ontario boards cover urban, suburban and rural areas and yet, board transportation policies do not always differentiate between student needs in these environments. The time involved impacts student well-being and the safety issues are a constant worry for parents, including French immersion/extended parents.

*I lost bus access for my French immersion kids in 2016 when it was determined that kindergarten students within .08 km of the school were no longer eligible for buses and the walking distance for all students was upped to 1.6 km. Instead my children were expected to walk on one of the most travelled roads in the village with no sidewalks and no crossing guards. In winter, snow banks are not considered an obstacle by our board, so the kids are actually forced to walk down the middle of the road. I can apply for empty seats for my kids, but the bus stop is further from my house than the school.*

– Ottawa area Mom

*My child walks to the local French immersion school which is SK to Grade 5. The school for Grade 6-8 is 11.7 km away. There used to be extra seats available on the school bus for Grade 6 but getting one is not guaranteed. At our Board, Grade 6 students and up are expected to take transit but the trip is going to be a bus, a subway ride, and another bus. We love immersion but the commute is not appealing and I worry about safety on transit and the very busy road without a crossing guard that my child will have to cross. If we had a school bus until the end of Grade 8, it would be much better.*

*– Toronto parent*

*We live on a farm half an hour south of Lindsay. When my oldest child started French immersion, I was a single mother with a young child and an unreliable vehicle. The bus would pick him up at the end of our drive. I could see the bus coming down the road and send him out to meet it. It was safe. He was safe and protected from extreme cold weather, storms, traffic. I was able to focus on my farm work. The bus ride was 45 minutes each way and took both elementary and high school children. The young students sat behind the driver and the older ones escorted to and from the bus. There were 26 busses at the school in the morning and a few cars.*

*By the time he was in grade three, he had an hour and a half ride each way. The board had gone to double bussing and pick-up points. Like my neighbours, we drove to a pick-up point at the intersection of a busy arterial road and our rural side road and a train crossing. No sidewalk, no light, and the speed limit - 80 km/h - a suggestion. Hundreds of us sat in our idling cars all over the region trying to stay warm and dry, waiting with our babies and preschoolers strapped in their car seats for the school bus while heavy dump trucks, snowplows and traffic went flying by at 100 km/h. It was dangerous and nerve wracking for all of us. The changes meant many more families in their cars either on the side of the road or at the school and considerably fewer busses at the school in the morning.*

*By the time my youngest started school, four years later, the bus ride was two hours each way...a four-year-old on the bus for four hours a day. After weeks of heated discussions with the school board, the ride was reduced by adding a second bus, but it was still over an hour each way and they arrived late every day.*

*When my son started high school, we went through the same ritual for two different bus times an hour apart. We had to be at the stop 10 minutes before bus time, sometimes waiting for twenty minutes or more for late buses or we would miss the pick-up or drop-off.... Four trips a day for a half hour each time, an hour apart.*

*Both my children were in bus accidents. One was never reported to the school until I drove by and saw my child's bus in the ditch with a hole in the side. The students had been transferred to*

*another bus and dropped off at school with no word to the school administration. My other child's bus was rear ended on a very cold day on an icy bridge. We were called to go pick them up. The children had to wait in the bus with the engine turned off while the driver waited for the OPP and parents to pick the children up.*

*My youngest graduated 3 years ago, but the situation is no better for families in my rural area today. The bus rides are longer, the pick-up points are further away and more dangerous than they were for mine. It is not conducive to learning readiness or good health. It is not good for the environment and it takes away work time for the parents*

*– Trillium Lakelands (Kawartha Lakes) Mom*

**4. How can we enhance safety and well-being in the transportation environment to ensure that it supports students' preparedness for learning during the school day?**

Ensure students arrive on time, safely, rested and ready to learn by developing clear provincially led criteria and policy for:

- Transportation for French immersion/extended programs for every JK-12 student in the programs at every school board on an equal basis to the transportation provided to English programs.
- Safe pick-up/drop-off points and provision for driveway pick-up/drop-off where safety standards cannot be met
- Safe walking routes
- Walking distances
- Maximum time on the yellow bus
- Maximum time of commute on public transit
- No cost to students, family, guardians
- Non-transferable dedicated funding
- Reporting, auditing, compliance

## Accountability – quality assurance

### **1. Do you believe that we are receiving good value for the money spent on student transportation?**

Generally, yes. Many efficiencies and innovations have been implemented over the years but they are often at the expense of students. The funding is mostly based on historical funding not current realities. And, Boards can use the funds for other expenses. One size does not fit all – geography, availability of public transit, proximity to school, population density all factor into transportation models.

### **3. When it comes to delivering responsive, equitable, and safe student transportation, what roles and/or responsibilities do you feel Ontario, school boards and transportation providers should have?**

School board transportation is a form of public transportation that is as important to public education as the teacher and the building. It is essential in meeting our Official Languages goals for French immersion/extended students.

Without school board provided and paid for transportation access to public education is compromised. School board transportation should pick up and deliver all children safely, ready to learn in both the regular English and French immersion/extended programs. Transportation needs to be safe and inclusive. The responsibility for the safe transportation of the students begins at the pick-up/drop-off points, not just when the child boards the bus.

Currently, the province provides funding but it is a school board decision as to whether they provide transportation at all and with what parameters. Routes, pick-up points and eligibility are set by the board in consultation with the school bus companies and the consortiums and are not always based on the needs of students and families.

The Ministry of Education needs to take the lead by developing clear criteria and policy for:

- Transportation for French immersion/extended programs for every JK-12 student in the programs at every school board on an equal basis to the transportation provided to English programs.
- Safe pick-up/drop-off points and provision for driveway pick-up/drop-off where safety standards cannot be met
- Safe walking routes
- Walking distances
- Maximum time on the yellow bus
- Maximum time of commute on public transit

- No cost to students, family, guardians
- Non-transferable dedicated funding
- Reporting, auditing, compliance

School boards need to:

- acknowledge the frustration of the public and the obligation to provide equitable access to public education
- adjust service to current realities of before/after school care and shared custody arrangements
- Seek and include parent input in transportation decision making

Transportation providers, including school bus companies and public transportation, need to:

- provide detailed meaningful input into the discussion on safety, routes, service levels and costs of providing safe, reliable, equitable transportation to publicly funded education.

## **2. What changes would create a more accountable and transparent transportation system?**

Adequate funding needs to be provided to meet improvements in service standards in urban, suburban and rural areas. The current funding is transferable, is not based on criteria or need, and there is no accountability.

Require accounting and public reporting on the following costs, service, efficiency and results:

- Locations of pick-up, including driveway pick-ups/drop-offs where safety or accessibility standards cannot be met
- Times of pick-up/drop-off
- Time on yellow bus, time on public transit
- Walking routes
- Walking distances
- # students transported
- # of students who commute on public transit
- Costs of public transit commutes
- Cost of school bus transportation
- # Late buses
- # Road and weather condition reports
- #Accidents
- Equity in transportation

‘Achieving Excellence’ says that ensuring equity means that “all children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with **access** to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood.” The Ministry of Education in partnership with school boards, and transportation providers can provide better, safer, equitable transportation for our children.

TDSB-TCDSB Consortium Service for English, French Immersion, Extended French

	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Secondary	
TDSB-English	Yellow Bus- 1.6 km						Transit tickets-3.2 km*				Transit tickets-4.8 km	
<b>TDSB-FI</b>	n/a	Yellow Bus- 1.6 km						Transit tickets-3.2 km*				Transit tickets-4.8 km
TDSB-Ext	n/a				Yellow Bus- 1.6 km			Transit tickets-3.2 km*				Transit tickets-4.8 km
TCDSB-English	Yellow Bus-1.5 km										<b>None</b>	
<b>TCDSB-FI</b>	<b>None</b>											
<b>TCDSB-Ext</b>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Transit tickets*	Transit tickets*	Transit tickets*	Transit tickets*	<b>None</b>	

Notes: TCDSB allows for transportation for FI from SK-8 in their policy at the same distance level as English. However, there is a caveat that this is only when funding is available. Since 2000 transportation budget has been in deficit, so no FI students are transported unless they have some kind of hardship as assessed by the principal. JK is now the starting point. Anomaly in TCDSB transportation policy – TTC tickets are provided for extended students but not immersion students.

\*TTC-Toronto Transit tickets are now free to age 12. Thus, ticket provision does not begin until age 13.

PDSB – DBCDSB-UGDSB - Dufferin-Wellington County Consortium Service for English, French Immersion, Extended French

	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Secondary
PDSB-English	Yellow Bus- 1.0 km			Yellow Bus -1.6 km			Yellow Bus – 2.0 km				Yellow Bus – 3.8 km
<b>PDSB-FI</b>	n/a	n/a	Yellow Bus- 1.0 km	Yellow Bus -1.6 km			Yellow Bus – 2.0 km				<b>None</b>
PDSB-Ext	n/a							Yellow Bus – 2.0 km		<b>None</b>	
DPCDSB-English	Yellow Bus-1.0 km			Yellow Bus-1.6 km		Yellow Bus-1.6 – 2.0 km depending on consortium				Yellow Bus-3.2 km where no public transit	
<b>DPCDSB-FI</b>	n/a	n/a	<b>None</b>								<b>None</b>
DPCDSB-Ext	n/a						<b>None</b>		<b>None</b>		
UGDSB-English	Yellow Bus -1.6 km							Yellow Bus-3.2 km		Yellow Bus-3.8 km	
<b>UGDSB-FI</b>	Yellow Bus -1.6 km							Yellow Bus-3.2 km		Yellow Bus-3.8 km	
UGDSB-Ext	n/a										

Notes: PDSB Walk to bus stop: Kindergarten students 0.4 km; Grade 1 – 6 students 0.8 km; Grade 7 – 12 students 1.2 km

UGDSB Walk to bus stop: JK-grade 3 students 0.8 km; Grade 4-12 students 1.2 km

UGDSB Maximum time on bus, where possible: JK-Grade students 45 minutes; Grade 7-12 students 60 minutes

OCDSB-OCSB Consortium Service for English, French Immersion, Extended French

	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Secondary
OCDSB-English	n/a		Yellow Bus-1.6 km								Transit or Yellow Bus 3.2 km
<b>OCDSB-FI</b>	Yellow Bus- 0.8 km		Yellow Bus- 1.6 km								
OCDSB-Ext	n/a										
OCSB-English	n/a		n/a			Yellow Bus-1.6 km					Transit or Yellow Bus 3.2 km
<b>OCSB-FI</b>	Yellow Bus-0.8 km		n/a			Yellow Bus-1.6 km					
OCSB-Ext	n/a		Yellow Bus-1.6 km			n/a					

Notes: At OCDSB, every JK/SK student is in FI. Program can be English or FI in Grade 1. They also have Middle French Immersion in Grade 4.

OCSB, JK/SK the program is FI, Grade 1-3 it is Extended, Grade 4 on it can be FI or English. All of the programs are at the home school.



WRDSB - WCDSB Consortium Service for English, French Immersion, Extended French

	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Secondary
WRDSB-English	Yellow Bus-0.8 km		Yellow Bus-1.6 km								Transit or Yellow Bus 3.2 km
<b>WRDSB-FI</b>	n/a		<b>None</b>								<b>None</b>
WRDSB-Ext	n/a										
WCDSB-English	Yellow Bus-0.8 km					Yellow Bus- 1.6 km					Transit or Yellow Bus 3.2 km
<b>WCDSB-FI</b>	n/a		<b>None</b>								<b>None</b>
WCDSB-Ext	n/a										

Notes: WRDSB and WCDSB will transport to French immersion if it is at your neighbourhood school and you meet the distance criteria. If your neighbourhood school does not have French immersion, parents are responsible for transporting their children to French immersion.

WCDSB: rural areas, they have laneway pick-ups or .5 km bus pick-up point; travel time limited to 1 hour; daycare pick-ups; no courtesy transportation; walk to bus (JK/SK 0.5 km, G1-8 1 km, G9-12 1.6 km)

LDSB-TBCDSB Consortium Service for English, French Immersion, Extended French

	JK	SK	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Secondary
LDSB-English	0.4 km		0.8 km			1.6 km			1.6 km Transit or yellow bus		1.6 km Transit or yellow bus
LDSB-FI	n/a	0.4 km	0.8 km			1.6 km			1.6 km Transit or yellow bus		1.6 km Transit or yellow bus
LDSB-Ext	n/a										
TBCDSB-English	0.4 km		0.8 km			1.6 km			1.6 km Transit or yellow bus		1.6 km Transit or yellow bus
TBCDSB-FI		0.4 km	0.8 km			1.6 km			1.6 km Transit or yellow bus		1.6 km Transit or yellow bus
TBCDSB-Ext	n/a										

Notes:

TBCDSB: Policy 704 “transportation may be provided from up to two permanent pick-up points, and to one permanent drop-off point, within scheduled routes, to and from the student’s designated home school.” Consortium policy: [https://www.ststb.ca/application/files/2114/8958/7457/STS-ELG-003\\_Alternate\\_Address\\_Requests.pdf](https://www.ststb.ca/application/files/2114/8958/7457/STS-ELG-003_Alternate_Address_Requests.pdf)

Consortium includes the French board, Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales