

November 18, 2013

OPEN LETTER TO DAVID EUALE, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
AND AMY COLLARD, CHAIR AND TRUSTEE, HALTON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

FROM CANADIAN PARENTS FOR FRENCH (ONTARIO)

RE: Report 13150: Halton District School Board French Second Language Programs Strategic Direction 2014-2018

Dear Director Euale and Chair Collard,

The Ontario Branch of Canadian Parents for French (CPF) has thousands of members and thirty local chapters in the province. We provide research-based information on French Second Language (FSL) programs to the public and support all parents with children in these programs.

CPF Ontario has been following the development and deliberations on Report 13150 on the Halton District School Board's French Second Language Programs Strategic Directions for 2014-2018 that will come before the Board of Trustees on November 20, 2013 for approval. At the request of our Halton CPF members, we are responding to the report and to comments made in the media.

Report 13150 is a well-considered and well-researched report. It sets the path for strong, growing and vibrant FSL programs for all Halton students.

However, it has come to our attention that the elimination of Early French Immersion as experienced in New Brunswick may be considered at your meeting on November 20, 2013. The choices made by the NB government of the day were not founded on best practices in language acquisition, were not respectful of all stakeholders, contributed to the defeat of the government and are now being reconsidered.

The New Brunswick government's choices on the elimination of Early French Immersion do not align with the Halton District School Board's Strategic Plan 2012-16:

Student goal #4: *Every student will receive research-based instructional strategies differentiated to the needs of students.*

The Ministry of Education's new [Framework for FSL in Ontario Schools](#) states that:

“Research informs decision making by all stakeholders...research that reflects current thinking on effective practices in FSL education” (page 11)

With that in mind, we offer further evidence why adoption of the recommendations in Report 13150 is in the best interests of students and families in Halton.

Recommendation 1 - Continuance of the grade one French Immersion entry point

The Early French Immersion program is the most equitable and inclusive French Immersion program. All students in this program can succeed with the appropriate support and all students can benefit from learning an additional language (*Framework*, page 10). There are no tests or screening questions that can predict a student’s success in learning French.

Earlier is better for learning a language – see attached research report by J. Netten.

A grade 1 or kindergarten entry point allows children to reach a level of proficiency in French prior to the introduction of more complex subjects that will be taught in French throughout the middle elementary years.

A **Grade 3 entry point** would be a **one-off program in Ontario** with no ready-made resources and no basis in research-based best practices.

The vast majority of Early French Immersion programs offered in Ontario provides 100-75 percent French instruction in the first three years of the program. This ‘front-end loading’ is considered the best practice in developing proficiency in French and these students receive approximately 6710 hours of French in K/1-8 – see attached chart. Halton’s Early French Immersion program at 50 percent French just meets the Ministry’s minimum at 3800 hours of French in grades 1-8 and is already a compromise.

Recommendation 2 - Student engagement in Core French and teacher recruitment

There is no evidence to support improved student outcomes by introducing Core French in grade one with only forty minutes of weekly instruction in French or for spreading the minimum of 600 hours in grades 4-8 over grades 1-8. However, for now we do not see any harm and it may generate enthusiasm for FSL learning down the road.

There is a surplus of teachers with FSL qualifications in Ontario according to the Ontario College of Teachers’ report on [Transition to Teaching 2012](#). A strong long-term recruitment strategy and professional development opportunities will ensure a supply of qualified, proficient teachers in Halton.

Much larger immersion programs such as those in the Ottawa-Carleton DSB and the Toronto DSB have strong recruitment strategies to fully support their Early French Immersion programs beginning in Senior Kindergarten with 100 percent to 90 percent French-language instruction through to grade 3 with qualified teachers.

Recommendation 3 - Extended French - Grade 5 entry point

This additional entry point in Extended French, an established and responsive program, provides a much needed opportunity for new residents or for students who take Core French and are motivated to do more. This strategy may have the added benefit of strengthening the secondary FSL programs.

Recommendation 4 - Low English enrolment in dual track schools

Parents in the community will continue to contribute to this ongoing discussion and CPF Ontario trusts that accommodation issues are not being misconstrued as program issues. Experience across Canada shows that capping French Immersion programs creates more problems than it solves. Capping makes school boards become overseers of rationing spots as opposed to creators of great learning opportunities.

It is important for all parents to understand that strong and vibrant FSL programs benefit all children in Halton. Furthermore, Halton's 50/50 program offers English and French programs concurrently. New research may be needed to understand why some parents do not choose this value-added program for their child's education. Perhaps, parents have specific concerns or misperceptions that need to be addressed.

Recommendation 5 - Consistency in French Immersion admission procedures

The HDSB Early French Immersion program remains inclusive and accessible to all, with no assessment required for admission and no enrolment capping. Allowing access to French Immersion for families arriving in Halton after the French Immersion registration deadline and providing an opportunity for those with French proficiency to access the appropriate program is very responsive to the needs of students and their families.

Note – New Appendices

Context and detail matter in retention analysis. The Halton District School Board's (HDSB) retention numbers are on par if not better than many other school boards across Ontario. Further investigation is needed to understand how and why demission occurs, particularly looking at student achievement data. Retention in FSL programs has been identified as a key priority by the Ministry for the next four years and increased support and leadership in this area is forthcoming. The accrued benefits of immersion belong to the student and will contribute to achievement in the Core French program and other subjects through grade 12 and beyond. We have to be prepared for and accept the fact that some students may exercise their choice and will not always follow a program to completion despite our investments in them and the program.

Providing transportation to French programs ensures equity so that all students, regardless of income level, may participate and receive the benefits of immersion programs. The transportation estimates do not identify how many of the 166 potential students on the bus would be on one if they remained in the English program. Also, it does not reference the additional FSL grant that HDSB would receive per student to offset some of the investment needed to offer this new program.

The *Framework for FSL in Ontario Schools* highlights the many benefits that the HDSB programs will be providing students in the Halton District School Board.

“Research on brain development affirms the cognitive advantages of acquiring an additional language for learners of all ages. Studies consistently identify quantifiable benefits from learning an additional language (Wachowicz, 2002; Bialystok, n.d.; Cummins, 2007; Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009; Netten & Germain, 2005). Specifically, benefits can be seen in increased intellectual potential, higher overall academic achievement, higher achievement in first-language competency, a heightened sense of respect for and valuing of cultural diversity, improved career opportunities and greater earnings potential, and better retention of mental acuity in older individuals (Saskatchewan Learning, French Education and Languages Branch, 2005).”

We are most appreciative that the Halton District School Board values the development of proficiency in French through its Core, Early Immersion and Extended programs. We trust that the trustees will vote to accept the recommendations put forward in Report 13150 and will continue to support growth and excellence in French programs.

Sincerely,

Mary Cruden
President, Canadian Parents for French (Ontario)

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Links and Attachments:

1. Link to the Ministry's Framework for FSL in Ontario:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/amenagement/frameworkFLS.pdf>

2. The Case for Early French Immersion, Joseph Dicks, 2008

3. A Clash of Cultures, Values and Education Policy: The Scrapping of French Immersion in New Brunswick, Max Cooke, Canadian Education Association

4. Graphs: Minimum Hours of French Instruction in FSL programs in Ontario

5. Optimal Entry Point for French Immersion, Joan Netten, University of Moncton Review, p 5-22, 2007

6. Link to the Ontario College of Teachers report:

http://www.oct.ca/~media/PDF/Transition%20to%20Teaching%202012/T2T%20Main%20Report_EN_web_accessible0313.ashx