

## **Halton Catholic Kids Deserve French Too!**

**Oakville, Ontario** - Early in the week, parents were upset to find out that Halton Catholic Trustees were voting to eliminate the Early French Immersion Pilot program for September 2017 in its four Catholic Elementary Schools. Many parents were not made aware that the vote was occurring that evening. The Trustees were set to pass the motion to eliminate the program at the Board meeting on November 15th. Any children presently enrolled in Early French Immersion (EFI) would continue in the program but there would be no new grade one class entering in September.

The Board's report on "The French Sustainability Study" was presented that evening. The report indicated a number of challenges to the program, including:

- 1) Staffing requirements - they would be unable to fulfill the hires of qualified teachers in the upcoming years;
- 2) Equity of access - the size of the program does not meet demand, and is therefore not fair;
- 3) Early intervention - amount of support available to students who require extra help in either language;
- 4) Transportation - the cost incurred of busing students to the 4 schools hosting the program

"These are all very real concerns," said Gillian Kantor, parent at St. Mary Catholic Elementary. "However, we believe there are solutions to each." Parents would be interested in investigating and adopting models of sustainable EFI programs in the province. We need only to look to the public system to see that an Early French Immersion program can survive.

Parents advocating for the program have a very small window of time to look into and adequately address the four areas in the report. The Board will vote on December 20th, but parents are being asked to present their concerns and suggest alternatives at the December 6th meeting. An online petition has begun as well as a Facebook page. The community can assist in the fight to avoid elimination of the program by signing the petition at the following link: <https://www.change.org/p/halton-catholic-district-school-board-secure-the-future-of-early-french-immersion-in-halton-catholic-board>.

"Catholic elementary school children should have the right to the same gift of language in a Catholic environment. We need our children's voices heard," said Yvette Alonso, parent who currently has two children in the EFI program. Parents from Milton, Burlington, Georgetown and Oakville believe that together they can make a difference and keep Early French Immersion alive in Halton. Show your support by calling your local Trustee and come to the December 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting which will be held at the Halton Catholic District School Board Office.

The public's thoughts, information and suggestions can also be voiced on Facebook – "Secure the Future of Early French Immersion in Halton Catholic."

Yvette Alonso