

## **Starting or Expanding a French Immersion or Extended French Program in your Area**

### **Step-by-Step Planner**

#### **Why start a French Immersion program in your area?**

If you want your children to have a bilingual education, if you see a second language as an asset in today's global economy, if you value Canada's English and French heritage, if you would like to have a choice in deciding what kind of education you want for your children, then establishing a French Immersion program in your school board may be the answer. If you have an Early French Immersion program, adding a Late French Immersion program would augment your school board's overall enrolment, making the program stronger with more options available to students.

#### **Why doesn't every school board offer French Immersion or Extended French?**

French Immersion is an optional program. It is not mandated by the federal or provincial governments like Core French which must be taken by every student in Ontario from grade 4 to grade 9. Like other programs of choice such as Outdoor Recreation, Music or Elite Sports, parents must take the lead. Once a school board agrees to open a new program, your work isn't done. New students must enter the program every year to keep it viable and you need to take the lead in making that happen.

#### **Where do you start?**

There are over 125,000 students enrolled in either French Immersion or Extended French in Ontario in 2006-2007<sup>1</sup>. You are not alone! In order to start a new program you need to have five main features: a supportive school board, supportive teachers, administrators, and trustees, dedicated parents and students, acceptance for the concept in the community and, most importantly, a population base large enough to attract full class sizes each year.

Your first step is to research all the facts about French Immersion. The ideal place to start is with the CPF Ontario website ([www.cpfont.on.ca](http://www.cpfont.on.ca)) and our CPF National website ([www.cpf.ca](http://www.cpf.ca)).

There are publications available, either online or through our office, that can help answer your questions.

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<sup>1</sup> The State of French-Second-Language Education in Canada 2008, published by Canadian Parents for French

Before you approach the school board, find out what kind of support is out there from parents in your community. No board will start a program that isn't financially viable. Ideally, you need at least one full class. With Early French Immersion, entry into the program can take place in kindergarten or in grade 1. A best case scenario is a full kindergarten and grade 1 class but, in these days of declining enrolment, that isn't always possible especially in smaller communities. You can find out the level of interest by talking informally to parents, by speaking at School Council meetings or preschools or you can send out a survey (if you have the approval of school administrators).

Once you have determined support is sufficient, the next step is to start working on relationships with school board trustees and district staff, school administrators, teachers and the community as a whole.

### **Preparing a Brief**

Trustees meet at least once a month and welcome presentations from parents, students and other stakeholders. You do need to give them at least two weeks notice before you can make a presentation. Your first presentation could provide them with information about French Immersion – what is going on in Ontario and across the country and what you have learned from speaking with parents. Having supportive parents with you carries considerable weight – remember trustees are elected and represent their constituents.

Back up your presentation (max. 10 minutes) with a few key, succinct documents and state your goal (i.e. to see a French Immersion program initiated in XX town or at XX school by September (+ 2 years). This is also a good time to identify someone of profile (MP, business leader) who can reinforce your message. Gather statistics on enrolment figures for your district. Financial information on funding for French as a second language can be found on our website under the Reports & Agreements section.

### **Realistic Expectations**

The target date you are hoping for should be realistic. If you start working with a school board in November, don't expect a new program to start the following September.

### **What about the media?**

When is it a good idea to alert the media to your intentions? When you make a presentation to the school board, inviting the media to come and being available for an interview can jump-start the process. The caution is to ensure that you have your facts straight and are prepared to answer a variety of questions. The bottom line is that you need to have a succinct message. Identifying what it is you hope to achieve will make the interview successful.

## **Who are the decision-makers?**

In Ontario decisions regarding educational programs are usually made by the individual school boards.

## **Follow-up**

Once a school board has agreed to open registration for a new program, you must continue to work on attracting parents to the program because, in the end, it always gets down to funding. If the program is not self-sustaining, it is in jeopardy. Remember: French Immersion is not mandated – it is an optional program.

Generally speaking, younger siblings will also end up in French Immersion but it should never be assumed that this is the case. This is where you have an opportunity to educate prospective parents and students through information sessions, presentations at School Council meetings, and school newsletters.

Another way to keep the program flourishing is to be a regular attendee at school board meetings. If an issue arises that affects French Immersion or Core French programs, ask if you can be involved on a working committee. Find out if there is a French Second Language Advisory Committee that includes parent representation; ask if you can join the committee. If there isn't, offer to establish one. Talk to our office to find out more about how to set up a French Advisory Committee.

When municipal elections are held, prepare a list of questions for trustees and send your questions to each one. Then publish the results in your local newsletter or display them on school notice boards. Our office has prepared a list of questions so, if you are having difficulty deciding what to ask, we may be able to help.

Don't be afraid to call on parents for help if a serious issue surfaces. Put yourself in their place – wouldn't you want to know if there was an issue that would affect your child?

Finally, use our office. There is no such thing as a silly question and our staff is here to help.

Good luck!

## **Starting a New French Immersion or Extended French Program**

### **Step 1**

- Identify your goal
  - ✓ Start a new French Immersion program in XX community at XX school by 200 X?
  - ✓ Research French Immersion issues, policies, government data
  - ✓ Advise the CPF Ontario office

### **Step 2**

- Do you have support?
  - ✓ From parents?
  - ✓ From your school council?
  - ✓ From administrators, teachers and trustees?
  - ✓ From the community?

### **Step 3**

- Let your school board know your intentions
  - ✓ Meet one on one with trustees
  - ✓ Meet with the superintendent of educational programs
  - ✓ Formally request time to make a presentation at a board meeting
  - ✓ Provide background information a few days before your presentation
- Prepare your brief; carefully research the financial aspects
  - ✓ What are your AV requirements?
  - ✓ Send press releases and hand-outs to the media
  - ✓ Follow up with a thank-you letter to the board copying the superintendent and trustee

### **Step 4**

- Hold well publicized information sessions (community centres, public libraries, preschools, schools, newspapers, cable TV, etc.)
  - ✓ Have CPF brochures and research material on hand
  - ✓ Provide paper and crayons for toddlers
  - ✓ Try to have a French Immersion teacher there to talk about the program
  - ✓ Try to have a representative from the school board
  - ✓ Have a parent “sign up” sheet for contact information
  - ✓ If you have really keen parents, try to get them to do some leg work for you
  - ✓ Have someone take pictures at each event to keep a visual record of your efforts
  - ✓ Keep every newspaper article, brief, copies of letters sent, promotional material advertising information sessions, etc.

### **Step 5**

- Follow up each board presentation or school information session with a thank-you letter to trustees/superintendents/administrators and anyone else that has helped you.

### **Step 6**

- Once a board agrees to open registration, prepare a follow-up plan to continue recruiting parents to the program.
  - ✓ Send out a press release to announce the new program
  - ✓ Make sure to plan an event in September to celebrate the new program and invite the local media
  - ✓ Stay involved with the school board by joining relevant committees and by getting to know the trustees individually
  - ✓ Encourage parents to become members of CPF