



French as a Second Language Advisory Committee

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May 27, 2014

Re: Report on Enrolment in French Immersion/Extended French Programs 2014/15

Dear Trustees,

The Enrolment report is an invaluable tool for assessing the growth, distribution and capacity of these French programs at the TDSB. It was first presented in 2005.

The FSLAC is very pleased to see that there will be 5 new SK French Immersion sites and 2 new Grade 4 Extended French sites in September. Adding new sites is helping to meet demand, it is making the distribution of programs across the system more equitable, and it is fulfilling commitments made by the Board at amalgamation.

It takes a concerted effort by trustees and staff to bring new opportunities into our communities for our students. Trustees Dandy, Gough, Hastings, Cary-Meagher, Rodrigues and Manougan have been instrumental in getting these new sites going. Central coordinating principal, John Tancredi and FSL program coordinator Kirsten Johnston have done an outstanding job working with planners, principals, superintendents, trustees and parents to get spots for every on-time applicant.

The FSLAC thanks trustees and staff for your leadership and for being responsive to the benefits that official language bilingualism will bring our students— increased brain power, improved job opportunities and the ability to fully participate in the public life of our country. Who knows, maybe there is a future Prime Minister starting at Melody Village in Rexdale this Sept!

While the report has many success stories, it also shows areas where there is room for improvement.

French Immersion and Extended enrolment from SK- Grade 12 is now more than 24 000 students – an increase of 10 000 students in the past 10 years. While the growth is impressive, the uptake for SK French immersion is lower than many other Boards. In September 2014, 16% of our SK enrollment will be in French Immersion. Other Ontario school boards are successfully encouraging and managing much higher enrolment rates for early French immersion: Upper Grand (Guelph) is at about 30% uptake, Halton is at about 42 % and in Ottawa-Carleton, 88% of SK students are choosing the French Immersion program.

Many of our existing sites received more applicants than were anticipated again this year. As a result, about 1 in 8 applicants to SK Immersion, or 439 students, were redirected to another immersion school. 72% of the redirected students accepted the unexpected placement elsewhere. Since no follow up is done with those who decline their placement, we cannot be sure of why the remaining 28% chose not to accept their placement. However, anecdotally, we know that parents decline placements because they have difficulty coordinating before and after school care, they do not want long travel times and they feel no community connection with the receiving school. We have also heard that parents may not apply at all as they are learning that the location of the placements is unpredictable year over year.

So while it is true that every on-time applicant gets a spot, are we truly focused on the needs of students and their families?

Another troubling development highlighted by the report is the use of lotteries at immersion schools where there are no feeders. We now have several SK French immersion schools that are only taking students from within their English catchment area. These schools are very full and as a result, 3 of these schools subjected their own applicants to their own immersion program to lotteries.

The lottery "winners" were guaranteed a seat in a French Immersion classroom in the school in question and the "losers" are guaranteed a seat in an English classroom in the very same building. It is the same student, the same size seat, the same school and the same basic cost to TDSB in both cases.

Is it any wonder that applicants find this practice unfair?

With the gradual conversion of Winchester and now Melody Village to French Immersion centres, we can see that as one possible solution. There may be other solutions as well, but we must be diligent in seeking them and we must be open to changing the configuration of schools to meet current and future needs. However, as we make changes to the program and its sites, we need to be very aware that we can severely damage previously strong programs by moving them; for example, Extended 7 at JR Wilcox.

The FSLAC is looking forward to September when phase 2 of the Strategic Planning in French (SPIF) discussions will start so we can continue to address 'hotspots' and equity. We also want to take a close look at our secondary programs with an eye to ensuring that they are responding to the growth and to the needs and aspirations of our 21st century French program students.

On behalf of the FSLAC, congratulations to our FSL staff and thank you to senior staff and trustees for the great team effort that will mean 5 new SK French Immersion sites and 2 new Grade 4 Extended French sites in September.

Sincerely,

Kristina Laperle
FSLAC Parent Co-chair