

FRENCH PROGRAM CONVERSATION

BOARD COMMITMENT:

Continue to provide a French language program which enables students to graduate with strong French Language skills.

PURPOSE OF THE CONVERSATION:

Consider ways to increase the number of students who graduate from a strong French language program in Golden.

MOVE TO LATE IMMERSION MODEL WITH FRENCH IMMERSION GRADE

6 - 12

PROS:

- Students would be older, thus possibly more involved in making the choice to go into FI. A genuine interest in language learning bodes well for being successful at it. This may limit the number of students who leave the program due to lack of motivation or interest to learn French.
- The district will only ever have to replace qualified, intermediate and secondary French Immersion trained teachers. Finding qualified FI trained teachers at all levels has historically been difficult to do if additions or replacements to the program are needed.
- Students with learning difficulties would be more quickly assessed and supported, rather than exacerbated by the second language.
- Students would learn primary math skills in their first language, and not have language difficulties which can create problems in that area as well.
- Parents are able to play a more active role supporting their child's learning in English through the important elementary years.

- Students with academic ability would be able to challenge themselves at this entry.
- Have children absorb their first language upon which to build their second language.
- In high school FI students are receiving the English awards.
- Would give an opportunity to students from Nicholson and Field (at the expense of everyone else).
- Good for all students – opportunity to join late.
- If you haven't had the chance to enroll at an early age, you can make the decision yourself.
- Change Nicholson to K–5, make a middle school, 6–7–8 and then offer late immersion in addition to existing FI program. Good option for kids who couldn't start in gr. 1 or move from elsewhere, might stick all the way through if the child had individual choice about entering the program.
- Providing child is interested and parents supportive, child should be able to enter FI at any grade.

CONS:

- Students may not be as fluent by the end of gr. 12
- Some students may find a second language more difficult to learn at an older age.
- Layoffs for current K–3 FI teachers who do not have requisite English skills and usually less seniority.
- Language development is easier at a younger age, based on brain-based research.
- More exclusive program as children with learning difficulties unlikely to switch to it, more streaming.
- Only 9% of students in late FI achieve advanced proficiency, but 42% of students in early FI achieve advanced proficiency. 46% of LFI students

achieved intermediate plus proficiency but 85% EFI students achieved intermediate plus proficiency. (from The Case for EFI, NB, 2008)

- Too many distractions at this age – puberty, the opposite sex, extracurricular activities.
- Research shows in Canada that students who begin immersion programs as late as grades 4,7,9, overall achievement level of these students were lower than those children who started younger (from Parents' Press 2003)
- Learning must be early, earlier the better. Retention decreases the later you learn.
- Why would be complicate a more demanding school year (gr. 6,7, etc.) by adding a new language to make it an even harder year.
- Only 9% graduate fully bilingual compared to 46% in late immersion.
- Many families would leave town
- Learn basics in elementary school
- Loss of funding from FI
- More elitist than early immersion.
- Loss of teachers that have worked in Golden for years because they believe in the program (EFI)
- Less early brain development; capturing kids when their learning ability is the highest.
- If not mandatory, there would be few students entering at gr. 6 level.
- Peer pressure may affect numbers of enrolling at gr. 6 level.
- By gr. 6 level, there may be less student interest.
- Absorption rate is greater in earlier grades
- Level of French much higher when starting at K immersion level, with corresponding much lower English skills.
- It doesn't solve the attrition problem. It is still elitist to the strong students only it will only cause lower enrolment numbers. What gr. 6

students do you know want to leave his friends unless they have a great number of students.

- Six less years of the best time for a child to learn a second language.
- Those who move to English at high school due to whatever reason will have a lot less French.
- Not equivalent to FI
- Limited course options at high school level (more options needed for FI)
- Not enough French language instruction after first year of program.
- Early immersion offers more gradual exposure, more time to learn/feel/absorb culture along with language, with less intensive focus on all studies.
- In gr. 6 you are less motivated and can make up your own opinion about whether you want to join.
- Only the academically strong will attempt that, “try it for a year” will not work..an easy out if it is difficult.
- Won’t be bilingual – only 46% reach advanced proficiency compared to early immersion – 85%
- We need more information such as stats from late immersion programs so we can actually compare the % graduating before we can have this conversation.
- Takes more commitment on the part of the child to learn the language.
- If there are factors preventing students from continuing with French Immersion in high school, why would these factors not also limit the numbers entering a late immersion model.
- How is entering FI in gr. 6 any more likely to keep kids in FI?
- How will this have any effect on high school choices?
- Lot of research in that second language is better learned and more easily recalled when taught in early years.

- Early immersion provides a better understanding of terminology in other programs such as chem., sciences, math.

COMMENTS:

- Immersion 6–12 versus Intensive French 6–12 still does not address the problem of class size with all subjects in French.
- Table consisted of parents with below school-aged children – future demand for EFI exists.
- Our country needs to spend more of its GDP on early learning (Canada spends the least on early learning and it's most important).
- If the cap was removed in K and our program was more promoted, the number could be the same. It would be so sad to regress.
- Some students who are not academically strong benefit from early immersion because they have 2 languages, an asset in the real world.
- More efforts need to be made to open a gr. 4 late immersion. We have kindergarten info. night to encourage enrolment; we need to do this at the gr. 4 level to accommodate students who want to enhance their education.
- You can't learn language skills (unless you are exceptional) at this age. Language skills need to be learned young when the neural networks are still building.
- In FI you think in French whereas in French 2nd language, you think in English and translate making speech unrythmic – no flow gives you bad accent.
- The younger you learn French, the language gets engrained into your brain and it becomes almost a part of you. One then grows up with the language and come to love the language.
- #1 way to increase the number of students graduating in FI is to increase the # of students allowed to enter FI, Kindergarten or at any gr. Level.
- If the goal is to have bilingual graduating students, in what ways are we measuring that in the choices presented?

- Being a graduated student from the French Immersion program and competing in French essay competitions and competing against students who have had this, even at age 12, you notice how much ahead you are than them.
- At a meeting 2 weeks ago (re FI) I was at a discussion table with 7 adults representing 7 different families. The question was asked “who would leave Golden if Early Immersion were eliminated?” I was surprised when 3 hands went up, not mine, but 3 out of 7!
- English attrition from gr. 1-12 this year is 40%, French Immersion is 53%. English is supposedly okay. At what point does the school district consider attrition a problem? We’d like to know this number so that pro. French Immersion people have a goal to work toward so that we don’t lose our program. Promoting French Immersion could easily bolster our program a few %.