

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.

CONTINUE WITH CURRENT MODEL OF K TO 12 FRENCH

IMMERSION

PROS:

- Children absorb info more effectively when they're young
- FI enrolment numbers show max capacity at K level and no attrition (in fact program grows) until gr. 4, therefore leave K-3 alone. Attrition from Gr. 4 + can be managed via split classes and/or actively promoting FI to new and existing students
- Board's commitment is reinforced by the fact that FI brings more dollars per student into the Board's coffers than English students. FI also brings enhanced opportunity and knowledge to students who choose to enroll.
- Some studies report that students learn language best the younger they are. K-12 FI offers those opportunities.
- Frequent repetition over time is a very effective learning strategy. K-12 FI offers students more time to learn a second language.
- School district will not have to lay off current FI teachers, many of whom have low seniority.

- Early language development has been shown through a great deal of research to be more effective than later development.
- People both move to this community and stay in this community based on the availability of K–12 FI.
- The students that do leave the program are still bilingual.
- 85% of EFI are intermediate plus and 42% advanced proficiency. Late immersion only 46% intermediate plus and only 9% advanced. Intensive French achieve only basic–low level.
- Early immersion is accessible to all students of all abilities.
- It works – kids are bilingual as early as gr. 2
- Brain–based research shows that the more experiences a child receives such as learning a new language increases the connections in brain. These neural networks are made rapidly during early years and fused by puberty (Clyde Hertzman). By age 6 or 7, the child simply does not distinguish sounds with connections as quickly or effectively. Most research shows that learning a language at an earlier age is the best time, between birth and age 7. EFI is open to everyone because kids with learning disabilities haven't been recognized yet and because learning a language improves overall school performance, EFI may benefit these children.
- Absolutely! It is great! Earlier exposed, the better.
- Golden within very close range with provincial average whereas on pg. 4. The English is not.
- Finishing existing FI gives our children good French language skills that they can build on later through Intensive, etc. if they desire.
- SD6 should be as proud as families are to have the only French K–12 program in SD6. You should respect our community and keep our program thus support our community.
- Studies show that children younger than gr. 3 have the highest aptitude for learning languages.
- The only program that produces truly bilingual adults.

- Higher academic scores in English when measured at age 15.
- Federal government funding is available.
- Fully bilingual
- Federal funding is greater for French bonus for school district.
- Students at a young age absorb language better, plus for starting in K.
- No attrition in K–3 so why change the program.
- Gr. 4 + to manage attrition split gr. classes.
- Promote the program more to help manage attrition.
- It's working! Canada is bilingual; we live in Canada.
- Younger children pick up the second language more easily.
- Starting a second language at a young age is the most important time due to fine motor skills development, brain development to learn without an accent. Starting a language after gr. 4 will not have the same accent as children will, may no longer be able to make the sounds.
- Open young minds to a different way of thinking.
- Need to promote global citizens
- Minimum qualifications for tourism based jobs – ex–mountain guides where do we live? Federal level jobs, etc.
- Economic benefits – attracts people to Golden
- Travel
- Brain development
- Appreciation of different cultures
- Program is already in place; why reinvent the wheel?
- Kids who start early immersion continue to have strong French speaking skills even if courses in post secondary are not available. They are graduating bilingual.

- Ability to pick up other languages easier.
- Canada is known as a bilingual country and for government jobs you need a 2nd language.
- We have some wonderful French teachers in Golden now and it would be a tragedy to lose them from the program and the community.
- Cognitive benefits – enhanced problem solving skills – see studies research in Canada during the past 40 yrs. has shown that French Immersion students outperform English students in regular core French programs in all types of French language tests.
- Early Immersion is easier for kids to learn at this level and can do many fun primary things.
- Best quality of program = best result for our students.

CONS:

- More administration than running English only.
- Students whose language skills are weak to start with and/or not auditory learners start off their schooling at a disadvantage. These deficits are not always easily detected early on. Over time, this deficit, if not sufficiently addressed in the classroom, can develop into a disability. Few FI students diagnosed with a language learning disability have remained in the program.
- Few classroom teachers have been trained to identifying suspected learning disabilities. Most who are able, do so from experience. Historically, French Immersion teachers have had less experience identifying and addressing learning problems due to lack of experience teaching learning disabled students within less diverse classrooms.
- Students who leave FI often feel as if they have failed and that they are dumb. This is of great concern, for school should never make a child feel dumb.
- Students who are unsuccessful with the French language will be less likely to learn non-language content (e.g. math) and if they eventually

leave the program they will have global deficits in all subject areas, especially if leaving at the gr. 4 level.

- Current program seen as elitist and unfair as a vast majority of students with learning difficulties or behavior problems drop (are forced?) out of FI and corresponding classrooms in the English program have a far greater percentage of needy and difficult students.
- The capping of French Immersion kindergarten.
- Not allowing students to opt in to the FI at any grade level.
- We don't have enough high school teachers who can teach the complete variety of subjects so they opt out so they can take other courses.
- Same teacher for 4 subjects.
- Electives are only available for FI students in French, therefore they can't take shop, woodwork, art, etc. because they must take French electives to get a full complement of credits.
- Cons? Are there any cons? There are perhaps for students who have only core French and do not have the opportunity to become functionally bilingual. We can work together to increase French programming for all students, create mentoring programs with FI and English students, increase cultural learning together. Hopefully this can also decrease any sense of alienation that may exist between FI and English program students and families.
- There are none! It is a choice program that does not affect the English program.
- Number of electives for high school are minimal or nil.
- Special needs students need better services in the Immersion program to thrive.
- Need extra support in the transition to English once students leave FI to be successful in English.
- More administration.
- Caps on enrolment in kindergarten keeps numbers low and limits graduates.

- Not enough francophone teachers to ensure consistent language instruction.
- Lack of support in primary grades for children experiencing difficulties.
- Lack of substitute teachers and tutors.
- Unclear support of French resources from the school
- If you are going to do a program French Immersion, do it well. We need true French speakers to teach our children.
- What can Golden do to entice French speaking teachers.
- High school level FI options to student compromised, i.e. FI students could not take auto this year because did not fit into their FI schedule/timetable.
- Having to drop out of French due to limited number of choices at post secondary level.
- Segregation of the English and French students and parents.
- Primary FI students miss out on direct teaching of English phonological awareness that has a lasting impact on their independent spelling skills.
- Continued elimination of jobs for skilled classroom teachers in the English system, despite high seniority.
- Non-French speaking parents are frustrated by the inability to help their child's learning at home.

COMMENTS:

- With declining enrolment and subsequent decrease in funding, the district can no longer afford this program especially at the secondary level. At present, with the immersion program there is an inequity. How many students with learning problems, behavioural problems, etc. are in the immersion program? How many are in the English program? Everybody knows students with difficulties demand more teacher time so for children without difficulties are being short changed teacher time. This is an inequity and as funding is based per student this is an injustice.

- The problem is not French attrition; it is enrolment wide regardless of program choice. To reduce attrition at elementary level we need to take cap off kindergarten enrolment. Remove lottery enrolment accommodate parent wishes to reduce attrition at gr. 7–8 entrance – commitment by staff to encourage students remain in program. To reduce attrition at gr. 10 level.
- Drastic overhaul of scheduling procedure at high school level to accommodate higher level academics and options.
- Need to increase educating and informing parents that even if they enter immersion at gr. 4 they can pick up the language quickly and be as successful as those entering gr. K–1. This would not happen if they enrolled in Intensive French.
- Honest communication to parents that late enrolment is available and not turn them away at any grade.
- Set up an open evaluation procedure for placement. Class numbers should not dictate enrolment.. “oh the class is full; you cannot go into the program at this late stage”.
- We are very fortunate to have such a successful program in such a small district. We don’t have enough population for science, soccer, drama schools (as are available in larger centres).
- Early immersion – easier for kids to learn at this level and can do many fun primary things.
- If the district went to a late Intensive FSL program, there may be less kids who sign up for the program and we would have less than are in FI now. Kids in gr. 6 may be more shy about learning the language than those in K.
- Improve FSL program, perhaps start it at K level or hire itinerants to teach a strong FSL program in addition to the immersion – a more defined, sequential FSL program, NOT Intensive French because this doesn’t reach all students.
- Need at least a year to make this decision.

- The process is making some of the FI teachers unsure of their security here; I'd hate to see them leave for a permanent job elsewhere while there is unrest.
- The late Intensive French program can't be compared to the Immersion program.
- Keep up and increase assistance, special ed., enrichment, etc. to keep students in program through all grades. – pen pals or exchanges with district or Alberta for younger grades. – more opportunities to speak French in community.
- Keep program as it is, but how can we accommodate other kids who may want to enter it later, up to gr. 4 – perhaps they can be welcomed to it with support.
- Re late intensive: info. and success from this is needed from other districts where it has run for a number of years. It has just begun in Invermere – are the end results the same as from immersion?
- If Intensive French is introduced in addition to Early French, make it for all students..all English.
- Immersion in the French language during the entire school day is even more important when the rest of your non-school hours are immersed in English. There is no proper comparison that can equal total immersion.
- Smaller classes so we have better communication/relationships with our French teachers than any English teacher.
- Please continue with current model of early FI and implement Intensive French as well starting in gr. 6.
- We cannot make any decisions about French Immersion programming based on concerns about attrition if we don't understand well the reasons for attrition. There must be a series of discussions with students and families that have chosen to leave French immersion. Personally, it is necessary for us (our family) that the French Immersion program continue. We moved here recently because of this program and we will have to leave if it is cancelled.
- A French Immersion principal in Winnipeg commented on how my two children had excellent French speaking skills.

- We need to see BC provincial stats on what percentage of early FI kids graduate in FI in grade 12 to know how Golden stats are to be interpreted and how Golden measures up compared to the provincial average. In order to logically compare the other 3 choices, we need to see the same stats for other programs.
- number of students leaving program is due to transient nature of jobs/families. If there is no French Immersion in the community they move to the student automatically becomes non-French; there is no choice.
- In high school, many French students are restricted in the courses they can take because of the French hours required.
- Why do bright children need to take courses by correspondence and have tutors because the classes they need to graduate are not available in their language of choice?
- Math 8–12 should be offered in French.
- We need more bilingual teachers to ensure that more courses can be offered in both languages. With bilingual teachers they can be better utilized in all classrooms.
- Golden needs to keep French Immersion; we are very fortunate to have such a strong program in our small community.
- The board and/or superintendent should not be meeting with high school students without their parents. Many students are intimidated and won't share their honest opinions.
- Bring high school students from FI (for example, after their trip to Quebec) to gr. 5 or 6 to communicate with students their passion/experiences/talk French, etc.
- Allow more to enter kindergarten French, as desired, as it seems that the number will fall off within a few years, then you can focus on keeping kids.
- If the concern for attrition isn't about money, what's it about. If the money's there, aren't 2 bilingual graduates better than none?
- Active recruiting at all universities to get new/more immersion teachers.

- What about opening a French private or charter alt. school?
- Take numbers of interest in FI over the next 5 to 10 years.
- Core French needs improvement – true French to teach core – French speaking.
- Immersion and Intensive French are a great complement. This is the only option that truly improves the French literacy of all Golden graduates. Immersion and Intensive French offer strong French language skills for all Golden students.
- Create a 2nd kindergarten class for excess students who are sent to the English program (a waiting list only so many kids make it).
- Since we haven't seen the success of Intensive French, why would we want to be the guinea pigs for this kind of program when we have seen the success of early French Immersion?
- More support for parents who don't speak French and need some help – phone numbers – contacts of who can help – start help group for parents and children. Have older students currently in French program visit younger classes to speak with them and promote the benefits of French – good role models.
- I would love to see the existing FI program stay in Golden enhanced with a Core French program starting in Kindergarten like in Kimberly. At a future date, depending on the uptake of this program, I would then like to look into the viability of Intensive French to augment this core program, in addition to French Immersion.
- I would also like to see true promotion of French Immersion as an option in our school system by the Board and administration and then kindergarten registration to take place at a neutral location like the school board office. I would also like to see the written policy as to how a wait list is kept for FI interest and how people on the list are followed up with once spaces come available. I think positive promotion of the FI option would greatly enhance numbers at the entry level. Support of special needs students and their parents at the elementary level would enhance retention there. Creative partnerships with the College of the Rockies and other community members with expertise in teaching and

French language may help address the switching of streams at the high school level.

- If the goal is to graduate more bilingual students rather than some French, French Immersion is the program that will achieve this far more effectively than Intensive French. This is due to the continued exposure to French FI offers. There is no cultural exposure to French in BC. Intensive English success cannot be a yardstick for the decision because in Quebec there is still so much external exposure to English which contributes to its success.