

You are about to make a most important decision about your child's education. You are thinking of enrolling them in a French immersion program. You want them to get the most out of their education. If you are an English-speaking parent, you may have questions about the programs and what the outcomes are? Or you may not be sure how to help your child with his or her schoolwork.

What is the French Immersion program?

French immersion is a Canadian-made educational program in which a child whose first language is not French studies in French. It began over 40 years ago in response to parental demand; research has shown that French immersion is the most effective method for a child to become functionally bilingual.

Programs are named for their entry points:

Early French immersion starts in grade primary in Nova Scotia.

Late French immersion starts in grade seven in Nova Scotia.

In French immersion programs all activities and learning during the elementary grades, except for English language arts, are in French.

Should I register my child in Early or Late immersion?

It is estimated that about 80% of all French immersion students are enrolled in early immersion programs. Studies have shown that it is easier and more natural for a child to learn another language at a very early age.

While it is natural for children to learn French in the Early Immersion programs, it requires motivation to work much harder when immersion starts at the later grade. Late immersion students will want their opinion to count in the decision to enter the French immersion program and the decision will be dependent on their attitude to, ability in and perception of French.

Is my child going to lose out in English or in subjects taught in French?

Research has shown that throughout Canada, students in French immersion perform at least as well in many aspects of English language achievement as those who are enrolled in the English program.

Various studies have shown that immersion students perform as well as students in the English program in all school subjects such as math, science, etc.

FRENCH IMMERSION

FAQs

How good will my child's French be?

The level of French will vary from one child to another in the same way as performance in mathematics, for example, will vary from child to child. Some students speak French making mistakes while others might be taken for French First language speakers.

We must remember that French is, for these students, their second language and that English is the predominant language in their environment.

French immersion teachers and parents should constantly seek out opportunities for the children to use their French with Francophones. These opportunities for interaction should help students to improve their socio-linguistic skills.

Is French immersion for all children?

Studies have shown that there is no reason why immersion programs should not be suitable for any child. Children with above average academic abilities generally have an advantage in most forms of learning, in the case of immersion programs, in the development of reading and writing skills. However, high academic ability is not related to performance in French speaking skills.

Children with learning difficulties will experience some problems in trying to cope with the French immersion curriculum, but they are the same problems that they would encounter in the English program. Learning assistance should be provided to them, whether they are in immersion or in the English program.

The level of learning assistance, with in the English program or French immersion program, varies from school board to school board, and sometimes from school to school. Depending on available resources, children who are in need of learning assistance in French immersion should normally receive the same level of help as that available in the English program.

Should a child ever be transferred out of French immersion?

Transferring a child out of French immersion should be a decision that is made first of all by parents, usually in consultation with the immersion teacher and school staff. The existence of this option of transferring the child out of immersion sometimes encourages a parent to transfer the child too hastily.

How can I help at home?

At home, your child should be free to read for pleasure in French or English and be encouraged to talk about his/her experiences at school. Showing interest in what your child is doing at school and providing encouragement and support is of the utmost importance.

Homework Tips

- Establish a regular homework routine.
- Create a distraction-free environment.
- Be a role model: read a book, write or pay bills while your child is working.
- Ask the teacher for appropriate books or resources to support your child at home.
- Ask your child to explain the meaning of the words if they are having trouble understanding a question.
- Encourage your child to be an independent learner, help your child with homework, but do not do it for him/her.

Helping your child to learn French

- Show a genuine interest in what your child does at school.
- Participate with your child in French cultural and recreational activities.
- Keep a good French-English dictionary at home. Make sure that your child has one for school as well.
- Purchase or borrow French resources including books, CDs, DVDs and games.
- Subscribe to a French children's magazine.
- Listen to your child read in French (even if you don't understand).
- Encourage your child to listen to the radio and to watch television in French.
- When your child uses French words, repeat them and ask questions like "what does that mean?"

Helping your child in Math

Technical terms used in math are very similar in French such as "minus/moins", "plus/plus" and "equals/égale". A number of words are spelt exactly the same way, such as "addition" and "fraction". This facilitates the transfer of math skills from one language to another.

Helping your child in Science

Since the language of science developed from Latin and Greek roots, the vocabulary is very similar in both languages: "biology/biologie", "cell/cellule" and "carbon/carbon". Students who learn science in French therefore will have very little difficulty transferring the knowledge into English.

Creating a great relationship with your child's teacher

- Remember that the objective is for you and the teacher to become partners in supporting your child's education.
- Think about what you want to learn when you meet with the teacher. Write down a list of questions and comments.
- If you are not sure what the teacher means, ask questions. If there is not enough time to discuss everything that you think is important then make another appointment with the teacher.
- After a parent-teacher conference, discuss the interview with your child. Talk about his/her strong points in each subject, and how other areas can be improved.



Canadian Parents for French

In your province

Canadian Parents for French – Nova Scotia Branch Office works with the Department of Education, teacher organizations, and other groups concerned about education to ensure that there is support for French second language education.

Canadian Parents for French – Nova Scotia organizes French language activities for students from across the province.

In your community

CPF Chapters organize in-school activities -- such as winter carnivals, performances by French speaking artists and a myriad of activities that support and enhance learning French.

CPF sponsors out-of-school programs -- such as winter and summer camps, exchanges, educational visits and weekend workshops for all students learning French.

CPF fundraises to support these activities and to provide enrichment materials.

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