

French Immersion

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

Durham District School Board
Canadian Parents for French (Durham Chapter)



Parents and Caregivers

Dear parents and caregivers:

Congratulations! You have taken the first step towards providing your child with a bilingual education through the French Immersion program of the Durham District School Board.

French Immersion, which has been offered in our board for over 30 years, is one of the most effective methods known for teaching French as a Second Language (FSL). The early immersion program introduces French when children are particularly receptive to learning a new language. The program works well because young children face new challenges with an open mind and enjoy mimicry, repetition and active learning. Early immersion also results in students being able to express themselves with greater ease, confidence and spontaneity.

You are welcome to attend a French Immersion information session during the month of February at your French Immersion elementary school. There will also be a central information session at the Education Centre in Whitby during the last month of April.

For general inquiries regarding the French Immersion program, contact the French Facilitator at 905-666-6389, or check out the French Immersion section of our website at www.ddsb.ca (under "Programs", "Elementary").



The Goals of Immersion

The goal of the French Immersion program is to enable students to communicate in French with a high degree of proficiency. Upon graduation from the program, students should be able to use their French with confidence in a wide variety of real life situations.

Students in the immersion program are not expected to attain the fluency of native speakers; however, they will achieve a high level of bilingualism, enabling them to function with ease in both English and French.

The Benefits of Learning a Second Language

“Knowledge of an additional language strengthens first-language skills. The ability to speak two or more languages generally enhances cognitive development, as well as reasoning and creative-thinking skills. It also enhances the student’s confidence as a learner, facilitates the learning of additional languages, and contributes to academic achievement. As their strengths develop, French language learners become more flexible and adaptable in new and unforeseen situations. For example, second-language learners tend to be more divergent thinkers, with improved memory and attention span.

Positive outcomes for students in the FSL curriculum include:

- increased mental flexibility;
- improved problem-solving skills;
- a better understanding of aspects of a variety of cultures;
- a greater awareness of global issues, including those related to the environment and sustainability;
- expanded career opportunities.

The ability to speak both of Canada’s official languages helps prepare students for their role as active and engaged citizens in today’s bilingual and multicultural Canada. Moreover, the language learning strategies that students develop in the FSL program can contribute to an interest in learning languages throughout their lives and provide them with the skills to do so. Such abilities benefit the individual; but Canadian society—as well as the global community—also stands to gain from having plurilingual citizens.”

The Ontario Curriculum: French As a Second Language, 2013



Durham's Bilingual Approach

While the French Immersion program focuses on French skills, it also provides opportunities for students to develop their English language skills and to follow a full and balanced program in other areas of the curriculum.

In Grades 1, 2 and 3, most instruction, including reading, writing and mathematics, is delivered in French. The children will explore a wide variety of themes which reflect the curricula of the Ministry of Education. Communication skills are emphasized and the children improve and develop increasing confidence at expressing themselves in French.

In Grade 4, English introduced. With the emphasis on the acquisition of the French language, a slight lag in some areas such as English spelling or reading may be apparent; however, these lags are quickly overcome and usually disappear by the end of the junior grades.

In Grades 4 to 8, French and English instruction is balanced to offer, as near as possible, a 50/50 ratio. In a French Immersion program, French is not simply taught as a subject, but becomes a medium of instruction for all or most of the curriculum. The curriculum content taught in the French Immersion program is identical to the English program. When French is the language of Mathematics, Geography or Music, students have opportunities to use the vocabulary and structures they have learned immediately. Studies show that such meaningful communication activities are of great importance to second language learning.

Several board-wide events such as "Le concours et festival d'art oratoire" (a French public speaking contest) allow French Immersion students to celebrate their accomplishments. In addition, trips to Quebec, student exchanges and special events may be organized by schools to further bring the Francophone culture to life.



Immersion in Grade 1

In Grade 1, the French Immersion program is identical to the English program. The only significant difference is that French is the language of instruction. After gradually introducing the new language, the teacher will soon be able to conduct all lessons completely in French.

To overcome the initial language barrier, French Immersion teachers are creative and energetic in their approach. The extensive use of mime, drama, music and body language is evident. In order for students to flourish, teachers strive to create a learning environment where children feel happy and secure.

Communicating a positive attitude toward the French language and the immersion program is an important key to success. If your child is eager to speak French at home, offer encouragement, but do not pressure him/her to do so. Some students are very shy to express themselves in French outside the classroom, especially to their family members.

Children will adjust to the French Immersion learning environment at their own pace. In the early stages of the program, their level of comprehension is much higher than their ability to express themselves. By the end of the year, children are able to comprehend a wide range of vocabulary and are using words and sentences to communicate. They are also able to follow the teacher's instructions, understand conversations and stories, and read and write simple texts.

If possible, it is always a good idea to get involved personally in some of the class activities. The teacher will certainly appreciate your assistance and your interest in the class. A "meet-the-teacher" evening is held in most schools early in the school year to present the year's program and give you an opportunity to discuss it with the teacher.



Directory of French Immersion Schools

Ajax

Ajax H.S.	905-683-1610	ajaxhs@ddsb.ca
Cadarackque P.S.	905-428-2347	cadarackqueps@ddsb.ca
Pickering H.S.	905-683-4760	pickeringhs@ddsb.ca
Michaëlle Jean P.S.	905-686-4440	michaëllejean@ddsb.ca
Southwood Park P.S.	905-683-5230	southwoodparkps@ddsb.ca

Brock

McCaskill's Mills P.S.	705-432-2601	mccaskillsmillsps@ddsb.ca
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Oshawa

David Bouchard P.S.	905-725-8271	davidbouchardps@ddsb.ca
Jeanne Sauvé P.S.	905-728-7997	jeannesauveps@ddsb.ca
R.S. McLaughlin C.V.I.	905-728-9407	rsmclaughlincvi@ddsb.ca
Walter E. Harris P.S.	905-728-4532	waltereharrisps@ddsb.ca

Pickering

Dunbarton H.S.	905-839-1125	dunbartonhs@ddsb.ca
Frenchman's Bay P.S.	905-839-1131	frenchmansbayps@ddsb.ca
Maple Ridge P.S.	905-420-4103	mapleridgeps@ddsb.ca
Sir John A. Macdonald P.S.	905-839-1159	sirjamacdonaldps@ddsb.ca

Port Perry

Port Perry H.S.	905-985-7337	portperryhs@ddsb.ca
R.H. Cornish P.S.	905-985-4468	rhcornishps@ddsb.ca

Uxbridge

Uxbridge P.S.	905-852-9101	uxbridgeps@ddsb.ca
Uxbridge S.S.	905-852-3391	uxbridgess@ddsb.ca

Whitby

Brooklin Village P.S.	905-655-8959	brooklinvillageps@ddsb.ca
Captain Michael VandenBos P.S.	905-665-2001	captainmichaelvandenbosps@ddsb.ca
Donald A. Wilson S.S.	905-665-5057	donaldawilsonss@ddsb.ca
John Dryden P.S.	905-434-7400	johndrydenps@ddsb.ca
Julie Payette P.S.	905-668-2225	juliepayetteps@ddsb.ca
Sinclair S.S.	905-666-5400	sinclairss@ddsb.ca
Meadowcrest P.S.	905-655-3731	meadowcrestps@ddsb.ca

Questions and Answers

Is French Immersion suitable for my child?

Research shows that the French Immersion program is suitable for a wide range of learners. While the program has multiple benefits for students, every child is different and his/her individual needs should always be taken into consideration. In general, the level of success a child demonstrates in the English program will be similar to his/her level of success in French Immersion. For more information, consult your child's teacher and your area's French Immersion school.

Will my child learn the same things as students in English classes?

The Ontario French Immersion curriculum is the same as the English language curriculum except that the language of delivery is French. In French Language Arts, students follow the French as a Second Language, French Immersion Grades 1–8 curriculum document.

Will my child be behind in English if he or she takes French Immersion?

While there are certain lags in English language skills for the first few years of the program, the children in Immersion catch up quickly once English is introduced and often demonstrate enhanced English language skills by Grade 6.

How can I help my child?

From the early stages of the program, adults at home can be of great assistance by being supportive of the program. They can read regularly to the child in their home language or simply talk to the child about new experiences. In this way, the child's home language vocabulary will be enriched and his/her self-confidence will grow. If a child is experiencing difficulty in a particular subject area, the confusion often lies with the concept, not the language. Discuss and explain the concept in your home language. Adults at home can provide valuable assistance in the preparation of projects and assignments, especially in the areas of research, planning and presentation of materials.

What type of French will be taught in the classroom?

Standard French vocabulary and structures are taught. A variety of accents exist in all languages; during a school career a child will be exposed to teachers from various parts of the world who are models of well-spoken, grammatically correct French.

Is bussing provided for French Immersion students?

Currently, under the transportation policy of the Durham District School Board, French Immersion students (Grades 1–8) living more than 1.6 kilometers from their designated French Immersion school are entitled to transportation service to their school.

What if we are transferred or move to another district or province?

French Immersion is available in most urban centres of Canada and in many smaller localities as well. A full directory of programs available across Canada is published by Canadian Parents for French and information is available from the Durham Chapter of CPF or from the Durham District School Board's French Program Department.

What if my child experiences difficulties in French Immersion?

Children who may have difficulty learning to read in English may also have difficulty learning to read in French. It is generally the actual reading skills that children have trouble with, not the language. The Special Education Resource Teacher (S.E.R.T.) may be consulted and the school team will decide upon a plan of action and offer the necessary support. Parents and caregivers can also access a number of French language resources to assist their children. Computer programs, internet sites, television, radio, newspapers and magazines provide the child with a means of making authentic intercultural connections to the French-speaking world. These resources can also support teaching and learning in the classroom while providing a child with tools, strategies and practices that increase student interest and proficiency.

Do parents and caregivers of children in French Immersion have to be able to speak French?

Absolutely not. The French Immersion program is designed for children who do not speak French at home. It is not expected that parents and caregivers will be able to speak French therefore communication and reporting are done in English.

Suggestions for Parents and Caregivers

1. Teach your child the traditional stories, songs and folklore of his/her own culture since students may not be in contact with the customs and traditions of their own heritage during the first few years of the French Immersion program.
2. Be supportive and speak positively about the program and the teacher. Your attitude will influence your child. The success of the program depends largely on the efforts and the mutual support of all involved.
3. Let your child know that you are pleased with his/her progress, but do not expect your child to provide you with an account of each day's activities. Children take the routines of school for granted and often want a change of subject when they reach home.
4. Do not worry about formally teaching your child to read English. Your child will readily transfer reading skills to English once they have been mastered in French. Reading should be approached in a relaxed and enjoyable manner.
5. If your child is eager to speak French at home, encourage him/her but never force your child to do so.
6. Do not attempt to correct your child if you are uncertain of the correct expression or pronunciation. Give your child the benefit of the doubt and let your child teach you!
7. Take advantage of situations that increase your child's exposure to French language and culture: French television programs, cultural events, records, French bookstores.
8. Do not compare your child's progress with the neighbour's children, whether in the French Immersion or the regular program. No two teachers and no two students work at the same rate.
9. Assist your child in completing class assignments or projects by helping with organizational or presentation skills, locating appropriate resources for research or explaining specific concepts in English.
10. The Durham District School Board has developed resources for parents and caregivers to assist you and your child during the first few years of French Immersion education. These resources are also available on the Durham District School Board's website:
 - **A Treasure Chest for Families New to French Immersion:** A compilation of advice, resources and information for French Immersion families. It includes a reference guide to basic vocabulary and expressions. The Web version of Treasure Chest allows you to click on the French words and hear how they are pronounced through embedded audio files.
 - **Fun with French:** A collection of fun songs and terms used in primary French Immersion classrooms for you and your child to listen to.

Continuing Immersion in Secondary School

During the intensive part of the Immersion program at the elementary level, students develop a sound competence in the French language. The aim of the Immersion program at the secondary school level is to develop and refine students' ability to communicate in French as well as to expand their knowledge of the language through the study of Francophone literature.

The Durham District School Board offers in Grade 9 and succeeding years enough courses to permit French Immersion students to take a minimum of ten credits (or the equivalent) of their secondary school program in French. Courses to be offered in French include French, science, history and geography, and may include other options depending on enrollment and qualified staff.

The Durham District School Board offers a Certificate of French Immersion Studies. The requirement for the Durham Certificate of French Immersion Studies is the equivalent of ten credits including the Grade 12 literature course, FIF 4U.

Enrichment Opportunities

Although enrichment activities and experiences are not essential for students to be successful in French Immersion, they provide further meaningful opportunities for children to increase their language proficiency beyond that required for academic work.

Extra-curricular Activities

Extra-curricular activities are an excellent way to enrich any academic program, whether the program is in French or English. Activities such as drama, music, sports and excursions can be initiated within the school and completed after school hours. Such activities may also be found through local recreation centres, libraries, or Francophone associations. Canadian Parents for French offers many opportunities to enhance children's learning as well.

Student Exchanges

Student exchanges are organized through various agencies to provide opportunities for students from Grade 7 and up to meet native French speakers in a Francophone community. These exchanges provide excellent opportunities for improving fluency and for learning everyday, non-academic French. They also are great rewards and motivators for adolescents and help maintain their enthusiasm for French. For more information please contact your school.

In addition to enhancing language skills, the experience of living in a French community and feeling the excitement of being able to work and play in more than one language leads to valuable personal enrichment and increased understanding of a Francophone culture.

CPF

Canadian Parents for French (CPF) was founded in March, 1977 by 35 parents. It now has more than 10,000 members and maintains regular contact with hundreds of other interested parties such as educators, administrators and educational researchers. CPF maintains local, provincial and national-level organizations.

CPF chapters assist parents and caregivers to establish and maintain the best possible French programs in their own school board or district. They arrange special out-of-school events such as camps, story hours and guest performers to enrich and expand school programs. They maintain effective channels of communication between parents, caregivers and local teachers and education officials.

CPF provincial chapters produce newsletters and publications about matters under provincial jurisdiction. They collect and share information about enrollment and available programs. They monitor and maintain communication with provincial departments of education, home and school groups, Francophone organizations, etc.

CPF holds an annual national conference and publishes a national newsletter. A national board represents each province and territory. CPF maintains a national member list and sets national policy and objectives. CPF also maintains communications with federal government officials and other national organizations, including seeking sources of grants for special projects.

For more information about CPF Durham, contact your school CPF representative.

Some Background About CPF

CPF is a strong voice for parents, caregivers and those who support French second language education throughout Canada.

CPF works with teachers and school officials to create and improve opportunities for French second language learning.

Membership in CPF Durham gives you:

- Access to the latest information and research on French second language learning
- The chance to network with other parents, caregivers and school board administration
- Information on opportunities for children to use French outside the classroom
- The opportunity to be involved in your child's education
- Subscriptions to CPF national and provincial/territorial newsletters.

You can join by calling 416-422-3554 in the Toronto area or toll free at 1-800-667-0594. Help us make our voice stronger. Annual fees are \$25 per family. Ask your School Community Council about CPF or check the website at www.cpfont.on.ca or the Durham Chapter at www.cpfdurham.ca.