

January 25, 2011



**School District No. 40  
(New Westminister)  
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V3M 1C4**

# **Review of District Programs, Early French Immersion**

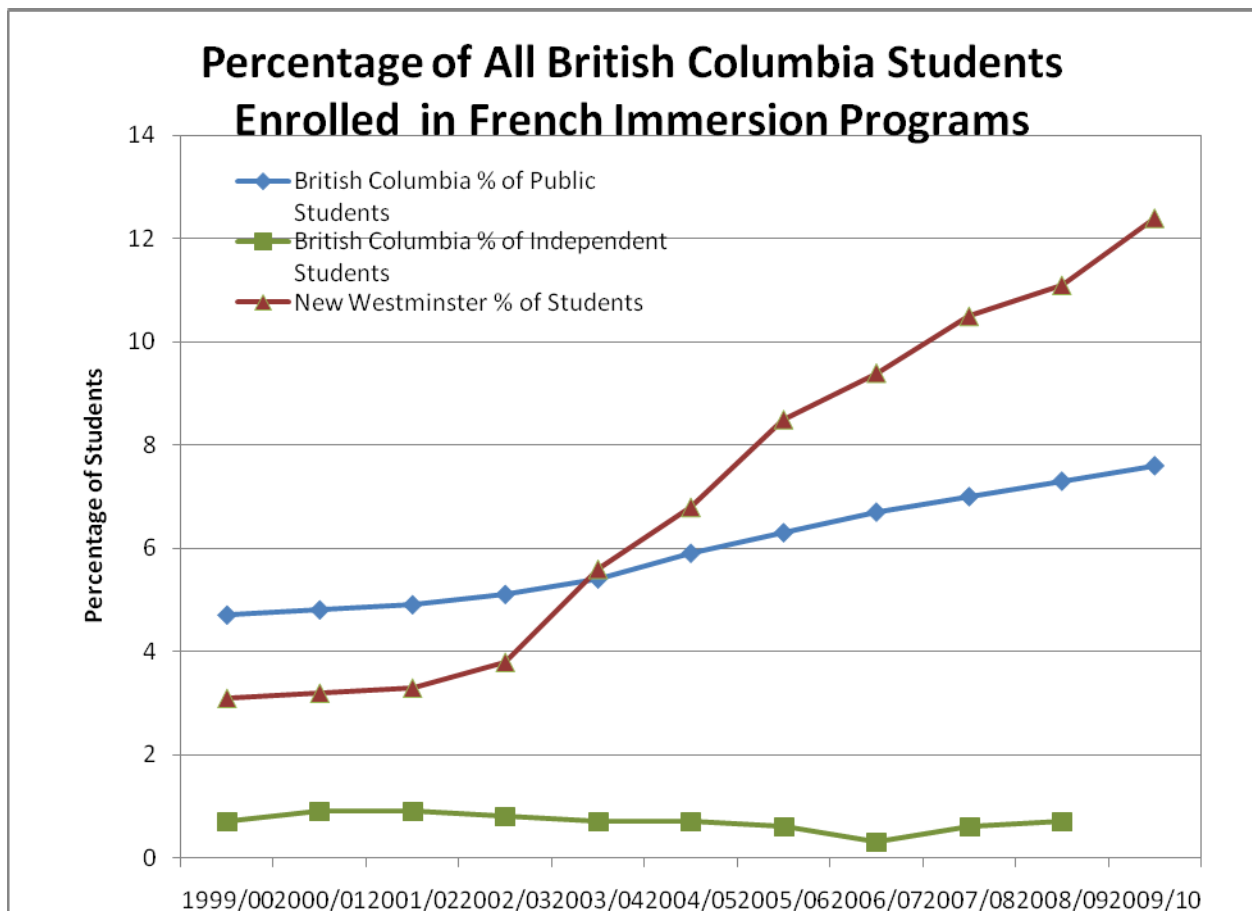
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## Review of District Programs, Early French Immersion

### Introduction

Our District offers three Early French Immersion programs, at Écoles Herbert Spencer, John Robson and Lord Tweedsmuir. Currently, the students from these three programs proceed to grade 8 at École Glenbrook. French Immersion programs in British Columbia are enrolling a small but increasing percentage of students, particularly in the public school system. Parents are crossing district boundaries to have their children in the program. In particular, in New Westminster, the growth of our programs has outstripped that of the province as a whole. In 2009/2010, 12.4% of our students were in French Immersion programs (both Early and Late together). Gone are the old days when this was a selective program enrolling only a tiny percentage of highly performing students.



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Early French Immersion in our District began at the strong request of parents in 2003 at both Écoles Herbert Spencer and Lord Tweedsmuir. École John Robson was added in 2007, again through parental request and demonstration of interest.

Students in Early French Immersion in our District are now in Kindergarten to grade 8. This is the first year that Early and Late Immersion streams are mixed at the grade 8 level. Next year is the first year the Early Immersion students will attend grade 9 at NWSS.

Students enter through the continuous registration process, whereby parents can apply for their child to enter the program at any time after birth. Most parents who apply for their child to enter Early French Immersion do so at all three schools and also apply for Montessori programs. The only selection criterion is parental interest.

### **Goals/Objectives of Program (Academic/Social-emotional)**

The British Columbia Ministry of Education recognizes that French Immersion programming benefits the cognitive and social development of students, as well as their opportunities for career advancement. Research demonstrates that students who successfully complete a French Immersion program attain functional bilingualism while doing as well as, or better than, their unilingual peers in the content areas of curriculum, including English Language Arts.

It is the policy of the Ministry to support the establishment of French Immersion programs within the public school system. French Immersion programs parallel the regular English program in structure and content (see Ministerial Order 295/95 the Required Areas of Study in an Educational Program Order). The major goal of French Immersion is to provide the opportunity for non-francophone students to become bilingual in English and French.

British Columbia Ministry of Education,  
[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/french\\_immersion.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/french_immersion.htm)

The goal of the French immersion program is to graduate students who are functionally bilingual. This means graduates are able to communicate effectively in French as well as in English.

Canadian Parents for French  
<http://www.cpf.bc.ca/site3/index.php/faq/what-is-late-french-immersion>

The primary goal for all French Immersion programming is to graduate students who are functionally bilingual in English and French, who are able to undertake further studies and work in

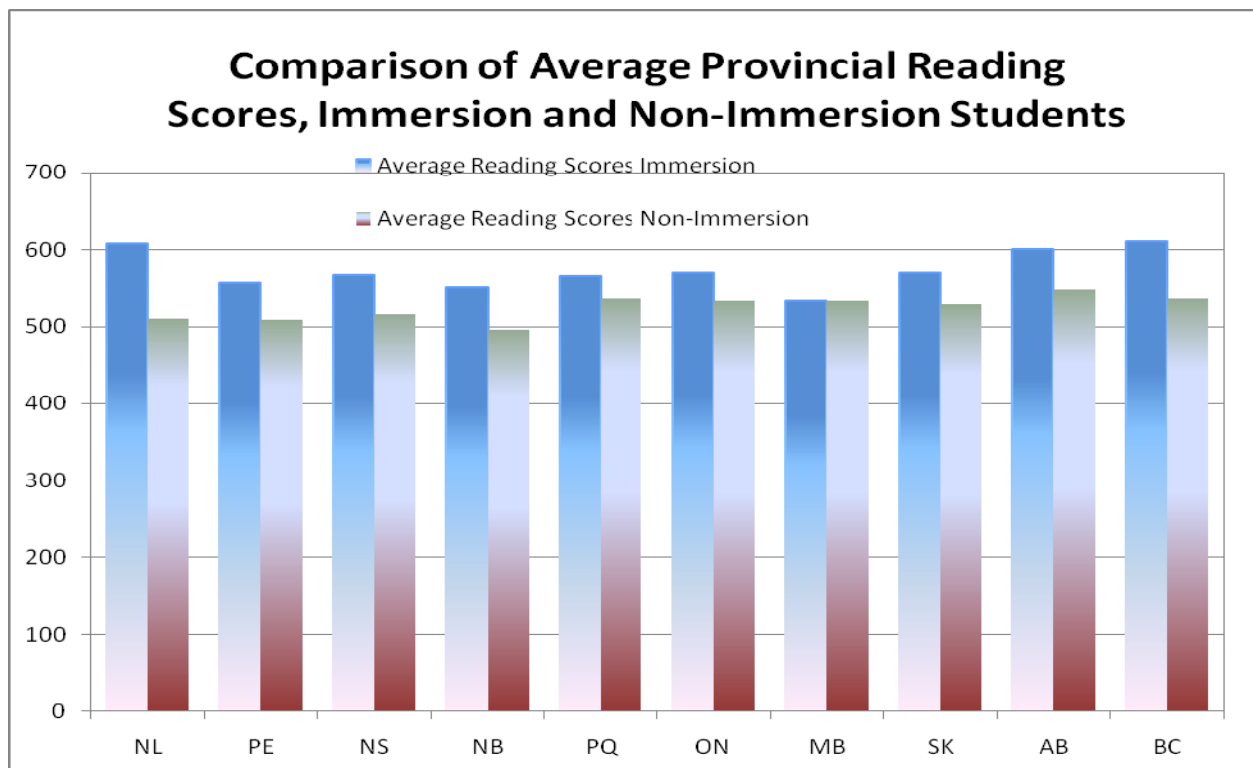
French and English. Having said this, when French Immersion programming became supported by federal and provincial governments, a secondary goal was to assist young people to understand and develop positive attitudes towards both official language groups in Canada.

Parents' reasons for placing children into French Immersion programs centre around two clusters of reasons: instrumental and personal growth. Instrumental reasons include increasing opportunities for employment and travel. Personal growth opportunities are those related to the cultural enrichment of knowing two languages and the relative ease of learning third and subsequent languages when bilingualism is attained.

Research has shown that bilingual individuals build strong critical and creative thinking skills and increased problem-solving and coping skills. They also develop stronger emotional intelligence skills in comparison with comparable peers.

### Evidence of Goal Attainment (Academic)

Even as early as 1992, the Canadian Education Association could say “No educational program has been so extensively researched and evaluated in Canada as has French Immersion. The effects of the program on the acquisition of French-language as well as English-language skills and the academic achievement of French Immersion students have been well documented and research has shown that the program works.”



**Source:** Mary Allen, 2004. "[Reading achievement of students in French immersion programs](#)". Educational Quarterly Review, Volume 9, number 4, pages 25-30. Catalogue 81-003-XIE and on-line at Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/200406/6923-eng.htm>.

Numerous studies have documented the relatively higher achievement of French Immersion students in comparison with all students and many reasons have been provided for this difference. Similar results have been shown across all assessed subjects, Language Arts, Mathematics and Sciences. The chart above compares the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reading scores from each province for immersion and non-immersion students. It is typical of achievement results of students in the program.

This particular study accounts for socio-economic background and educational levels of parents, as well as the fact that there are more girls in the program, and girls in general have improved achievement over boys. It considers that there may be a selection bias on the part of parents. It may be that parents do not select the program for students with relatively weaker skills and or that students whose skills are weaker are often returned to the regular program because parents perceive that it is easier for them to assist the students if they do not speak French. However, this process happens less than it did in past years. Research has shown that students' achievement levels do not markedly improve when returned to the regular program, however, the parents are able to assist more in a language they speak.

Parents frequently worry about students' English language skills. Comparison of provincial results on achievement testing in Alberta and BC confirm that students in French Immersion programs equal or exceed the achievement of students in the regular programs in reading and writing. It should be noted that students in French Immersion programs have about twice as much Language Arts instructional time as students in the regular program, split across English and French Language Arts. Since skills transfer across languages, this provides time for additional instruction in Language Arts. For example, once taught to organize an essay in either language, the student can do so in both languages. That leaves time to go on to something else in the other Language Arts period.

## **Program Descriptions, include Entrance/Exit Criteria**

Early French Immersion is a program in which students follow an equivalent program of studies to the regular program, and in addition, learn this program through the French language. English Language Arts is introduced in grade 4 once students have a strong foundation of French Language Arts skills. There is a gradual increase in English language instruction as students proceed through the grades. At the high school level, 50% of the courses across grades 10-12 must be in French.

Typically, more of these are completed at the grade 10 level, fewer at grade 11 and sometimes only one French Language Arts (*arts langagiers*) is taken at the grade 12 level. Completion of this program entitles the student to a *British Columbia Certificate of Graduation* (Dogwood Diploma) and a *Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires en Colombie-Britannique*.

### Ministry of Education Guidelines for Proportion of French to English Instruction

Grade	% of French Instruction	% of English Instruction
K-(2 or 3)	100	0
(3 or) 4-7	80	20
8-10	50 - 75	25 - 50
11-12	no less than 25	no more than 75

[http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/french\\_immersion.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/french_immersion.htm)

### Entrance Criteria

There are no entrance criteria for this program. Any parent can apply for and accept a placement for their child in the Early French Immersion Program. Because the students are not screened in any way prior to entry into the program, there is a large range of student ability in the classes. Since parents apply for the program sometimes many years prior to school entry, they often have little indication of the child's academic abilities prior to Kindergarten entry. Thus, students entering the program include those with various Special Education designations and varying academic abilities. That said, it may be that parents with developmentally delayed children often do not accept an Early French Immersion placement, and some children who are identified as having a challenge in language learning skills (not including articulation issues such as stuttering) are less frequently placed in French Immersion.

### Exit Criteria

The exit criterion for Early French Immersion is graduation with a 'Double Dogwood,' which is a diploma indicating function bilingualism attainment. Students who remain in the program through grade 12 take half of their classes in high school in French and half in English. Often more of the French courses are taken in grade 10, and more of the English courses are in grade 12. Students in our Early French Immersion program are currently in Kindergarten through grade 8, so none of our students have reached NWSS as yet.

Some students leave the program prior to grade 12 due to a variety of reasons. Besides moving to another district, some students leave the program for reasons of learning difficulties. Each of these cases is handled individually through school-based teams in the normal way that all student learning

difficulties are handled. Students would follow the normal sequence that any child with learning difficulties follows in our District, with classroom adaptations occurring before referral to school-based team, and then expanded school-based team as appropriate. The parents/guardians of the child make this decision after much discussion and consultation with school and District staff.

## **Cost of Program Delivery**

Staffing costs for Early French Immersion are similar to those for the regular program. At Spencer and Lord Tweedsmuir, class sizes in Early French Immersion exceed those in the regular program in Kindergarten to grade 3. The classes are slightly smaller at grades 4 and 5, because the program cannot add students after grade 1—they must move into the French Immersion program from another French Immersion program. Typically, Francophone students moving into our province or country attend the Conseil Scolaire Francophone, or the Francophone School District rather than the Immersion schools.

In most programs of choice, attrition increases as the students go through the grades. Thus, typically, the older classes are smaller than those in the regular program. This is managed through the use of classes with combined grades, as at Lord Tweedsmuir, where there is a triple grades 5-7 class. John Robson currently has slightly lower class sizes in French Immersion than in the regular program, largely due to students moving to Spencer and Tweedsmuir when spaces become open in those schools. In some cases, there is also movement from Lord Tweedsmuir to John Robson. However, with an increased number of grades at Robson, more possibilities for combined classrooms will ensure comparable class sizes in the French Immersion program.

Glenbrook has a higher average class size for Early French Immersion than the regular program at that school. It is fully subscribed. With the addition of grade 8 students from Lord Tweedsmuir, there has been a desire on the part of some families to have students attend Glenbrook Middle School for all of grades 6-8. In New Westminster Secondary School, class averages for French Immersion are 26.4 for grade 9, 25 in grade 10, 23.3 in grade 11 and 20.7 in grade 12. As increasing numbers of students come through from Early Immersion, these class averages will increase.

The district is grateful for the assistance of federal funds for the French Immersion. The French federal funds provided through the provincial government cover the incremental cost of French resources (that is, where an English text might cost \$50, and the comparable French text costs \$70, the difference (\$20) would be covered by the federal funding. These funds also supplement costs for the cultural component of the program, such as attendance at French events. The District receives approximately \$154,000 from federal funding for both French Immersion and Core French Programs. This funding ensures that the French Immersion programs are not more costly to run than would be comparable regular programs.

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## **Conclusion**

Our Early French Immersion program is a popular program among our parents, and students in this program do well on provincial and District assessments. While there is some attrition as students move through the grades, combining the Early and Late Immersion streams at grade 8 ensures that the program remains cost effective while meeting its goals.