

# **Early French Immersion Feasibility Study for School District #33 (Chilliwack)**

Report to the Board of Education,  
February 12, 2013



## **MAKE A FUTURE**

The primary mandate of Make A Future, Careers in BC Education is to focus on human resource best practices and thereby support the 60 school districts in British Columbia through the complete cycle of the hiring process at all levels of the organization.

As well, we offer consultative and other services that facilitate discussion on organizational sustainability and succession planning. We assist district leaders to analyze issues and develop plans and solutions that target district-specific needs. Through this work we help districts create tactical strategies to plan for the future.



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

School District #33 (Chilliwack) Senior Staff and Trustees have been approached by a group of parents interested in implementing an Early French Immersion Program in their district in the near future. The school district already offers a Late French Immersion program, which has been in place for over 20 years, along with other elementary programs of choice, such as a traditional school and a Fine Arts school. Most surrounding school districts already offer an Early French Immersion option for their students.

A survey provided to parents and other community members garnered 377 responses, 82.1% of which were interested in having such a program available for their children. The majority of respondents came from the areas surrounding Unsworth, Vedder and Watson Elementary Schools on the south side and Robertson Elementary on the north side. While most were very much in favour of beginning an EFI program, concerns were raised by the detractors as to whether providing a “special program” to a small number of students was the best thing for a school district to be doing in tough budgetary times or whether French was the best second language choice. Those in support of the program had questions as to whether there would be before and after school care available, which school would be selected and whether transportation would be provided. Some stated that they would very much like to enroll their children in EFI, but only at a specific school.

Chilliwack is experiencing significant growth, particularly on the south side, and this is creating enrolment and capacity challenges at most, if not all of SD #33’s elementary schools. As a part of their Long Range Facilities Plan, requests to the Ministry of Education have been made for approval to build at least one new elementary school in the Chilliwack area, as well as additions to several existing elementary schools. These requests are to cover the current and anticipated needs of the regular catchment schools and do not include any planning for new programs of choice. Given that an elementary EFI program would need to occupy at least 6 classrooms, there does not appear to be sufficient available space in any centrally-located elementary school site. Similar problems with available space can be anticipated at the middle school level if the intention is to combine both Early and Late French Immersion together at one site.

The combining of the two programs in one site could also be difficult, given Chilliwack’s current middle school structure (gr. 7-9) and the fact that LFI students would only have had one year of instruction in French before blending with their EFI peers in Grade 7. It would be unfair to expect the LFI students to be able to “keep up” with the EFI students in the same classes. This means that they would need to be separated for at least the Grade 7 year, which would mean additional staffing and resource costs.

While the Ministry of Education does provide Federal French funding to all school districts that host French as a Second Language programs, this funding is minimal (in Chilliwack’s case, less than \$140,000 per year) and it cannot be used to pay for staffing. Therefore, the additional costs of implementing an Early French Immersion Program (i.e. additional staffing, resources, etc.) would have to be borne by the school district’s regular annual budget.



Staffing an Early French Immersion Program could prove to be challenging without additional work and support on the part of the school district's Human Resources Department as well as the Curriculum Department. There will be a need to look further afield to hire qualified French-speaking and Immersion-trained staff (i.e. by participating in more national or international job fairs) or conversely, a need to provide additional support and training, hopefully in conjunction with a local post-secondary institution, to graduates of Chilliwack's and other surrounding districts' French Immersion programs who have themselves become teachers and wish to teach in the French Immersion Program.

If an Early French Immersion Program is implemented, it is suggested that September 2014 be the start up date for such an implementation and that the intake be at both the Kindergarten and the Grade One levels. This will allow for sufficient time to select an appropriate school site and resource that school appropriately, to develop policy, to change existing application and registration procedures, to establish an advisory committee, to hire staff and to provide time for community information and consultation.



## BACKGROUND

Following a resolution from a January, 2012 Public Meeting of the Board of Education (Chilliwack), Senior Staff of School District No. 33 was directed to examine the possibility of implementing an Early French Immersion Program in order to be responsive to perceived public interest in such a program. A report back to the Board was requested for January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013. As a result, the Superintendent of Schools of School District #33 enlisted the services of Nancy Brennan, Seconded Assistant Superintendent with Make A Future, Careers in BC Education.

### Objectives

The overall objective of this report was to determine a variety of factors, including but not limited to:

- Community Interest - Whether sufficient interest exists within the community to sustain such a program over the long term and if such interest is localized in any specific/key areas of the district.
- Sustainable Infrastructure Requirements – Identification and assessment of the district’s existing infrastructure and its ability to support such an implementation (available school space, staffing, funding, etc.) and recommendations for required infrastructure changes in preparation for this program implementation.
- Strategic Alignment – An assessment of how such a program supports and aligns with the District’s and Board’s strategic plan as well as existing district policies and processes.

### Actions Taken To Complete Report

#### Interview Consults

In order to meet the Board’s requests and provide a report with recommendations as to the feasibility of implementing an Early French Immersion Program in the district, consultations took place with the following parties:

- The Superintendent of Schools
- The Assistant Superintendent of Schools
- Representatives from Canadian Parents for French (Chilliwack Chapter)
- The Director of Human Resources
- The Secretary Treasurer
- The Director of Operations
- The Director of Instruction
- The District French Helping Teacher
- Various School Administrators



## Survey

An electronic survey was posted on the district website and the information was also sent to all schools in order to ensure that parents and community members were being asked for input. As well, there were articles in local papers to alert the public to the survey, and several Executive members of the Chilliwack CPF let daycares, preschools and others who may be interested know of its existence. The survey was available in both hard copy and electronic formats and was open for response from December 4<sup>th</sup> to December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012. In total, there were 375 responses to the survey.

## Research

Research included an analysis of French Immersion Programs in surrounding districts, district policies related to Programs of Choice, a review of the Federal French funding allocations to Chilliwack and the accompanying expenditures, existing SD #33 application and registration procedures, and finally, consideration of the projected enrolment demographics and the Long Term Facilities Plan presented to the Board of Education by the Secretary Treasurer in October of 2012.

## **FRENCH IMMERSION IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

French Immersion is a Canadian-made educational program in which a child (whose first language is not French) studies in French. Canada saw the opening of its first French Immersion class in 1965, in St-Lambert, Québec. Since then, French Immersion has become available in all provinces and territories. French Immersion began in BC more than 30 years ago in response to parental demand; research shows that it is the most effective way for a child to become functionally bilingual. In BC, Early Immersion starts in Kindergarten or Grade 1. Late Immersion usually starts in Grade 6. The Chilliwack School District opened its first Late Immersion class in the late 1980s. Currently, Chilliwack's LFI program is housed at Sardis and Strathcona Elementary Schools, Vedder and Chilliwack Middle Schools, and Sardis Secondary School.

Ideally in French Immersion programs, all activities and learning during elementary grades, except for English Language Arts, are in French. Canada's French Immersion programs have attracted positive attention from many countries around the globe. For the last decade some countries, particularly in Europe and the United States, have been offering Immersion programs often patterned on the Canadian model. 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.

Since the beginning, French Immersion Programs across British Columbia have seen a steady increase in popularity and growth province-wide. From the 2001/02 school year to the 2011/12 school year, the percentage of public school students registered in various French Immersion



Programs in BC school districts has climbed from 4.9% to 8.1%. Last year, 46,392 students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 were completing their education in a French Immersion program. In almost all areas of the province, demand for the program exceeds availability, as many districts are restricted in the number of FI classes that they can sustain. These restrictions are based on a shortage of qualified bilingual staff, limited classroom space, and limited financial resources.

Curriculum and resources are provided by the British Columbia Ministry of Education for both the Early French Immersion (K-12) and the Late French Immersion (6-12) programs, and they follow the same learning outcomes and expectations as those for the same grade level in the English program. The curricular content is identical; it is just the language of instruction that is different.

The availability of French Immersion Programs throughout BC varies greatly (see table). In 14 (23%) of the 60 public school districts, there are no Immersion Programs at all. 21 (35%) of the school districts offer both Early (EFI) and Late (LFI) programs, 18 school districts (30%) have only Early Immersion as an option for families, and 7 districts (12%), including Chilliwack, offer Late Immersion only. Of the 7 that offer only LFI (SD #5, 20, 33, 48, 50, 64, 67), Chilliwack is the largest with over 11,000 students. The next largest, SD # 67 (Okanagan-Skaha) with a 2011/12 student enrolment of 6,230 students, is also currently conducting a feasibility study as to whether to begin an Early French Immersion Program in September 2014. This is SD #67's second effort in recent years to open an EFI program. In 2005, a parent survey indicated strong interest if an EFI program were to be offered, but the two Kindergarten classes and therefore the EFI program itself were cancelled before the school year began due to a drop off in parents who remained interested in enrolling their students in EFI. Some believe that the drop in interest came about as a result of the school that was selected to be the site for the EFI program.

District #	District name	EFI	LFI
5	Southeast Kootenay	Y	Y
6	Rocky Mountain	Y	
8	Kootenay Lakes		Y
10	Arrow Lakes		
19	Revelstoke		
20	Kootenay-Columbia		Y
22	Vernon	Y	Y



23	Central Okanogan	Y	
27	Cariboo-Chilcotin	Y	
28	Quesnel	Y	
33	Chilliwack		Y
34	Abbotsford	Y	Y
35	Langley	Y	Y
36	Surrey	Y	Y
37	Delta	Y	Y
38	Richmond	Y	Y
39	Vancouver	Y	Y
40	New Westminster	Y	Y
41	Burnaby	Y	Y
42	Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows	Y	Y
43	Coquitlam	Y	Y
44	North Vancouver	Y	Y
45	West Vancouver	Y	Y
46	Sunshine Coast		
47	Powell River	Y	
48	Sea to Sky		Y
49	Central Coast		
50	Haida Gwai/Queen Charlotte		Y
51	Boundary		
52	Prince Rupert	Y	
53	Okanagan-Similkameen		



54	Bulkley Valley	Y	
57	Prince George	Y	
58	Nicola-Similkameen	Y	
59	Peace River South	y	
60	Peace River North	Y	Y
61	Victoria	Y	Y
62	Sooke	Y	Y
63	Saanich	Y	
64	Gulf Islands		Y
67	Okanagan-Skaha		Y
68	Nanaimo-Ladysmith	Y	
69	Qualicum	Y	
70	Alberni	Y	Y
71	Comox Valley	Y	Y
72	Campbell River	Y	Y
73	Kamloops/Thompson	Y	
74	Gold Trail		
75	Mission	Y	
78	Fraser Cascade		
79	Cowichan Valley	Y	
81	Fort Nelson		
82	Coast Mountains	Y	
83	North Okanagan-Shuswap	Y	Y
84	Vancouver Island West		



85	Vancouver Island North		
87	Stikine		
91	Nechako Lakes	Y	
92	Nisga'a		
93	Conseil scolaire francophone		

In terms of the school districts that surround Chilliwack, the information related to French Immersion Programs (2010-11) is as follows:

**Fraser Valley:**

SD#	District Name	EFI (number of elementary schools)	LFI (number of elementary/middle schools)	Total Number of Elementary/Middle Schools	Approximate Total Student Enrolment	FI Student Enrolment	FI as % of Total Enrolment
33	Chilliwack	No	Yes (2)	20/6	12,000	482	3.4%
34	Abbotsford	Yes (4)	Yes (1)	30/8	18,500	1195	6.0%
35	Langley	Yes (2)	Yes (3)	30/4	18,000	1373	6.9%
42	Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows	Yes (3)	Yes (1)	20	15,000	1456	9.5%
75	Mission	Yes (2)	No	12	6,000	457	7.1%
78	Fraser Cascade	No	No	7/1	1,800	0	0%



## Lower Mainland

SD #	District Name	EFI (number of elementary schools)	LFI(number of elementary/ middle schools)	Total Number of Elementary/Middle Schools	Approximate Total Student Enrolment	FI Student Enrolment	FI as % of Total Enrolment
36	Surrey	Yes (6)	Yes (5)	99	70,000	3013	4.2%
37	Delta	Yes (5)	Yes (2)	24	16,000	1897	11.5%
38	Richmond	Yes (7)	Yes (3)	38	22,000	2233	9.6%
39	Vancouver	Yes (13)	Yes (2)	90	56,000	4755	8.1%
40	New Westminster	Yes (3)	Yes (1)	9/2	6,000	881	11.7%
41	Burnaby	Yes (8)	Yes (3)	41	24,000	1905	7.4%
43	Coquitlam	Yes (14)	Yes (2)	45/13	30,000	2869	8.7%
44	North Vancouver	Yes (6)	Yes (1)	25	16,000	2266	13.9%
45	West Vancouver	Yes (2)	Yes (1)	14	7,000	826	11.8%

## **MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL DISTRICT #33 (CHILLIWACK) POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Ministry**

In 1996, the BC Ministry of Education issued its **Policy Document: K-12 - French Immersion Program**. This policy document is still current. It states that:

#### *“The K-12 French Immersion Policy*

- *provides information on the Ministry's goals and objectives for the consistent application of French Immersion programming in the education community;*
- *emphasizes the two official entry points for French Immersion; and*
- *ensures that students in French Immersion programs are aware of the requirements that must be met to graduate with both a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation*



*(Dogwood Diploma) and a Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires en Colombie-Britannique).*

*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....*

*School districts are encouraged to offer French Immersion programs. Once a French Immersion program has been established, districts should develop policy that will serve to maintain and strengthen the program. In order to ensure the delivery of effective French Immersion programs, school districts should develop policies that are consistent with Ministry policy. ....*

*Having established a program, school districts should promote the program and recruit students. Should the enrollment become insufficient, school districts should consult parents to find solutions. If there is no resolution to the problem, the district should give at least one year's notice to parents of any changes contemplated to permit full discussion and to allow parents time to consider alternatives for their children.*

*....If a school district offers Early French Immersion it must be available at the Kindergarten level. Ideally, students enter in Kindergarten, but they may enter in Grade 1 if space is available. Entry to the program at other than the normal entry points should be considered only if there is adequate space and if the student is adequately proficient in French. Adequate proficiency is defined as sufficient language skill to permit the student to be able to comprehend instruction in the subjects taught in French, assuming a period of 4 to 8 weeks of adjustment to the program."*

*In regards to transportation, the Ministry policy states: "For students who wish to enroll in a French Immersion program, provincial transportation funding is based on the distance between a student's residence and the closest school in which there are appropriate grades, whether or not that school offers French Immersion. School districts are free to develop their own transportation policies. If a district chooses to offer additional transportation services to French Immersion students, additional costs will be funded through the district's annual provincial funding or by it levying fees to parents of French Immersion students."*

*Learning Resources and Pupil Services: "Having implemented an Immersion program, school districts should provide equitable learning resources, library books and student services in the same manner they are provided for in regular English programs."*

*Financial Support: "French Immersion programs are eligible for federal funding. Federal funds are to be used for resources, socio-cultural activities, teacher in-service training and, in the case of small programs, for libraries and learning assistance."*

*Teaching Personnel: Language Requirements "In addition to regular certification requirements, teachers in Immersion programs should have a high degree of oral and written proficiency in the*



*French language. Teachers should have a sound knowledge of the culture of French-speaking peoples and should also have completed at least one course in Immersion methodology. For the purposes of communication in English within the school and with parents, teachers in these programs are expected to also have a good working knowledge of English.”*

*Administrators: “The administrators of Immersion schools should be functionally bilingual; this should be a consideration when districts are seeking new administrators. Whether or not they are bilingual, at the very least, administrators should be knowledgeable about, and supportive of, the Immersion program.”*

*Proportion of French to English Instruction: “In Early FI programs, Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2 should be taught totally in French. Beginning in Grade 4 and continuing to Grade 12, English Language Arts shall be provided for all French Immersion students. Other courses may be offered in English: the following chart shows the recommended time allocations:*

<b>Grade</b>	<b>% of French Instruction</b>	<b>% of English Instruction</b>
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

*Whenever possible, the courses that are conducted in English should be taught by someone other than the regular French Immersion teacher and preferably by a teacher with excellent English skills.”*

### **School District #33**

The Board of Education (Chilliwack)’s **Strategic Plan (2010-2015)** lists four goals:

1. Create a community in which parents, staff, and community partners are engaged and value working and learning together to support student achievement
2. Create and implement a Communication Plan that includes strategies to improve interactive communication
3. Create support for all learners in making successful transitions
4. Work and learn through the integration of appropriate technology



Within these goals are specific objectives that are relevant to both the possible implementation of an Early French Immersion Program, and to the steps taken in this feasibility study. Those objectives are:

- develop strategies to enhance engagement
- design and implement flexible learning opportunities for students
- promote opportunities for meaningful ongoing dialogue with our community around significant public education issues
- use technology to improve information-gathering and evidence for formulating policy and making decisions

In addition to the Strategic Plan, there are several Board policies/administrative regulations that will need to be considered when deciding on the implementation of Early French Immersion. These are:

- Policy 101: District Aims, Beliefs and Motto
- Policy and Administrative Regulation 531: School Admission and Choice
- Administrative Regulation 609.1: Community Initiated Programs
- Policy and Administrative Regulation 611: District Magnet Schools, Schools of Choice and District Programs

**Policy 101** states that the primary aim of the district is to have every student prepared for opportunities beyond graduation. It also states the beliefs that a) student literacy, academic achievement and social development are fundamental to everything that the district does and that b) a safe, caring, equitable, accountable and collaborative working and learning environment are essential. Clearly, if the Board decides to implement an Early French Immersion program, after the appropriate consultation, research and analysis, this would in no way contradict the beliefs outlined in Policy 101. Similarly, if the Board, after careful analysis and reflection, made the decision not to start an EFI program at this point, this would still meet the aims and objectives of Policy 101 as any decision would be made in the best interests of the school district as a whole.

In the policy and regulation related to School Admission and Choice (#531), there are several important concepts that the Board should keep in mind when considering the implementation of an Early French Immersion Program.

**Policy 531** (revised May 11, 2010):

*CHOICE: The admission process should maximize the student's and parent's ability to choose the school and educational program which best meets the student's educational needs, subject to the availability of space, programs and resources as determined by the school district.*

*CERTAINTY, STABILITY, CONTINUITY: The admission process should support certainty, stability and continuity for students and families. Siblings will be admitted to the same school wherever*



*possible, subject to the provisions of the School Act, the timelines established by the Board and the wishes of the family.*

*EFFICIENT RESOURCE ALLOCATION: The admission process should enable school and district staff to plan the allocation of space and instructional resources to best accommodate demand and minimize adjustments required at the beginning of the school year. When a parent or guardian requests that their student attend a school outside their catchment area, the parent or guardian will be expected to assume responsibility for transportation and any other costs associated with this decision.*

*The Board will endeavour to provide programs that meet the interests and needs of district students. The Board may need to provide specialized programs at a limited number of sites to meet the diverse needs and choices of students and their families. The Board is required to manage its resources in a fiscally responsible manner.*

In regards to the direction provided in **Administrative Regulation 531** (adopted February 21, 2005), it is assumed that these regulations were written with neighbourhood (catchment) schools and programs in mind. While there is direction in this regulation as to the “Determination of Available Space and Facilities” which includes information on the placement priorities and waitlisting for students, as well as “District Enrolment Timelines” which outlines when registrations and applications can be accepted for the next school year, what is outlined may not fit well with the requirements of an Early Immersion Program and may therefore result in the need (as recommended by the Ministry of Education) for the creation of a separate SD #33 policy and/or administrative regulation specific to French Immersion.

**Administrative Regulation 609.1** (adopted November 24, 1998) provides guidelines for school board decision making related to community-initiated programs. It states:

*The Chilliwack School Board is committed to providing, consistent with the School Act and relevant provincial legislation, quality educational programs for all students of school age. The Board’s primary goal is excellence in academic achievement for students in a clean, safe and caring environment. The Board anticipates that parents will periodically propose alternative educational programs. The Board, in considering any proposal, will be guided by existing district policies and principles noted in Section A and the degree to which proposals meet the criteria described in Section B.*

#### **SECTION A: BOARD POLICY & POSITION STATEMENTS**

*Any Board decision with respect to proposed alternative programs will be guided by:*

- 1. The District Long Term Plan*
- 2. Board Goals*
- 3. School District Educational Philosophy (101 P)*



## SECTION B

The criteria for evaluating any proposal will include at least the following:

- 1. Objectives for the program beyond creating a more homogeneous school environment.**
- 2. Philosophy and mission statement.**
- 3. Uniqueness of the proposal in terms of teaching and learning styles and needs that are not currently met by other schools in the district in supporting the intellectual, social and career growth of students.**
- 4. Education research to support the proposed program.**
- 5. Evidence of parent and community support.**
6. Availability of resources within the district to facilitate the program's development.
- 7. Conformity with provincial curricula and where appropriate local curricula.**
8. Evidence that the program can be delivered at funding level equal to that at other schools of comparable enrolment including facilities, resources and services and excluding reliance on transportation assistance from the school district.
- 9. Conformity to the School Act, provincial legislation, collective agreements and district policy.**
- 10. Accessibility (that the program be open to application from all district students).**
- 11. Accountability mechanisms including the evaluation of for program delivery and quality.**
- 12. Implementation timeline and specified period for review.**
13. Availability and suitability of an existing district school and impact on that school.
14. Ability to facilitate alternative school or program placements of students displaced from the existing school.
15. Ability to transfer staff to another assignment who do not support the program.
- 16. Be free of any religious, political or ethnic affiliation or bias.**

The majority of this criteria (those in bold) have been met through presentations by interested parents and through local knowledge derived from both SD #33's past experience with the Late French Immersion Program as well as the knowledge gained from other school districts and their experiences with Early French Immersion. The remaining criteria (# 6, 8, 13, 14, 15) will be looked at more closely within this report, but the final decision will be made by Trustees and Senior Staff.

**Policy 611** (adopted April 26, 2005) provides definitions of District Magnet Schools, Schools of Choice and District Programs. Given that Late French Immersion is considered to be a District Program (*"District Programs provide a specific education program and will normally have the entire District as a catchment area"*), it is assumed that Early French Immersion, if implemented, will be the same.

Policy 611 is very similar in its objectives to Administrative Regulation 609.1, discussed above, in that it also states:



*The Chilliwack School District is committed to providing a high standard of quality educational programs and schools for all students. Although the Board believes the neighbourhood school is central in meeting the educational needs of students, the Board recognizes and encourages the development of choice for students, parents and staff. The Board believes that district magnet schools, schools of choice and district programs, provided in a safe and caring environment will lead to greater satisfaction and student achievement.*

*The Board has an important role in determining the direction of education in the community. The Board can initiate and establish a District Magnet School, Schools of Choice and District Programs. The Board anticipates that parents and/or schools may wish to propose alternative programs or schools of choice. The Superintendent will provide application protocols to initiating groups. The Board, in considering a proposal, will be guided by existing district policies, the principles in Section A and the degree to which proposals meet the criteria described in Section B. District Magnet Schools, Schools of Choice and District Programs require Board approval.*

#### **SECTION A: BOARD POLICY, LEGISLATION AND POSITION STATEMENTS**

*Any Board decision with respect to Magnet Schools, Schools of Choice or District Programs will be guided by:*

- *The School Act*
- *The District Strategic Plan*
- *The District Education Philosophy (101 P)*
- *Available Resources*

#### **SECTION B: CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION**

*The criteria for evaluation of a proposal will include at least the following:*

- *Objectives of the program or school*
- *Philosophy and mission statement*
- *Uniqueness of the proposal in meeting student intellectual, social or career needs that are not currently being met in other programs or schools*
- *Educational research supporting the proposal*
- *Evidence of support*
- *Availability of resources within the district to initiate and support the program*
- *Conformity with provincial curricula and where appropriate local curricula*
- *Commitment to and process for monitoring student achievement in relation to Ministry of Education outcomes*

**Administrative Regulation 611** (adopted April 26, 2005) outlines the procedures for establishing a district magnet school, school of choice, and district programs:

*1. Prior to any consideration being made, proposals must:*

- a) have a clearly articulated philosophy and mission statement*
- b) acknowledge parental desire for programs with a particular emphasis*
- c) fulfill a recognized educational need*



- d) conform with collective agreements*
  - e) be consistent with Board policy*
  - f) be housed in suitable facilities where space permits*
  - g) be maintained without transportation assistance from the Board*
  - h) be subject to the normal planning schedule established for the district*
  - i) articulate a process for assessing student achievement in relation to Ministry of Education outcomes*
- 2. Any group seeking to have the Board establish a District Magnet School, School of Choice or District Program should submit an initial proposal to the Board and Superintendent and then work with District administration to develop the philosophical, organizational and/or curricular intent for the proposed District Magnet School, School of Choice or District Program. This would be submitted to the Board for consideration or approval in principle.*
- 3. Following Board approval in principle, the Superintendent will establish a Development Team to conduct a feasibility study*
- 4. The Development Team will consider the following issues in preparing the feasibility report for Board consideration.*
  - a) overview of proposed program including uniqueness, need and primary objectives*
  - b) student, parent, staff and community support, including enrolment estimates and entrance requirements*
  - c) staffing, facility and resource considerations including:*
    - if an existing school is to be considered, then consultation with the administration, staff and PAC of that school*
    - any additional financial resources required*
    - staffing issues*
    - marketing plan*
    - catchment area issues*
    - transportation*
    - implementation timeline*
- 5. The Board will provide final approval to the proposal after a review of the feasibility study and in consideration of the criteria outlined in Section B of the policy.*
- 6. Upon Board final approval, the Superintendent will establish an Implementation Team to work towards the establishment of the Magnet School, School of Choice or District Program.*

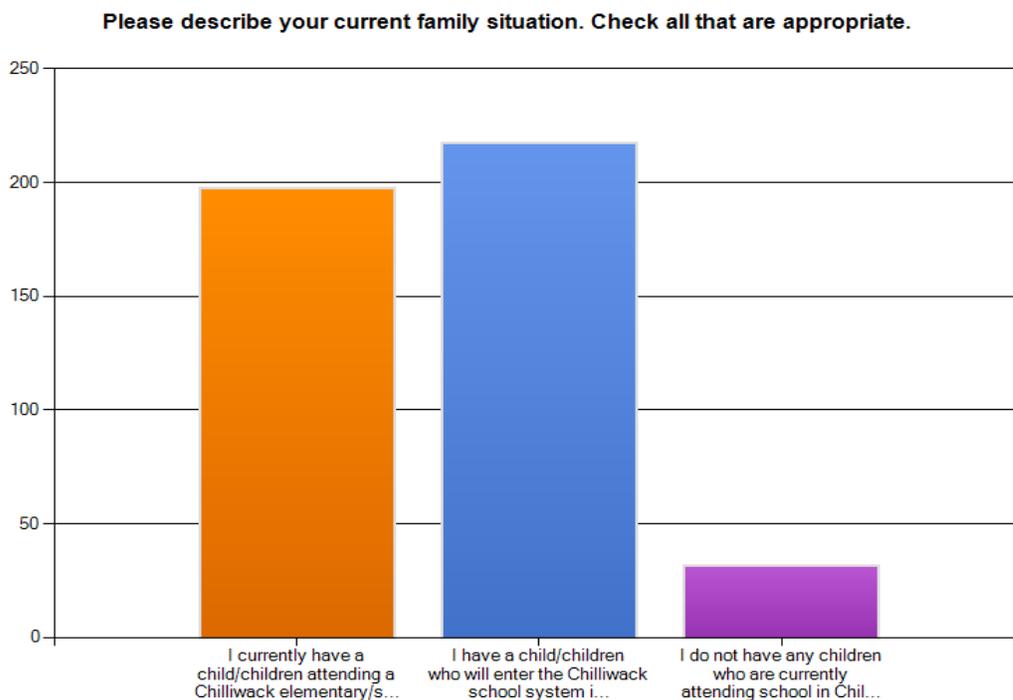
This report meets the overall requirements of administrative regulation 611, Section B, #3 and 4. Steps #5 and 6 will happen at the Board's discretion, following the presentation and discussion of this report.

## **COMMUNITY CONSULTATION/SURVEY FEEDBACK**

An important part of this report was the survey that was prepared and made available to the community from December 4<sup>th</sup> to December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012. The survey was available electronically



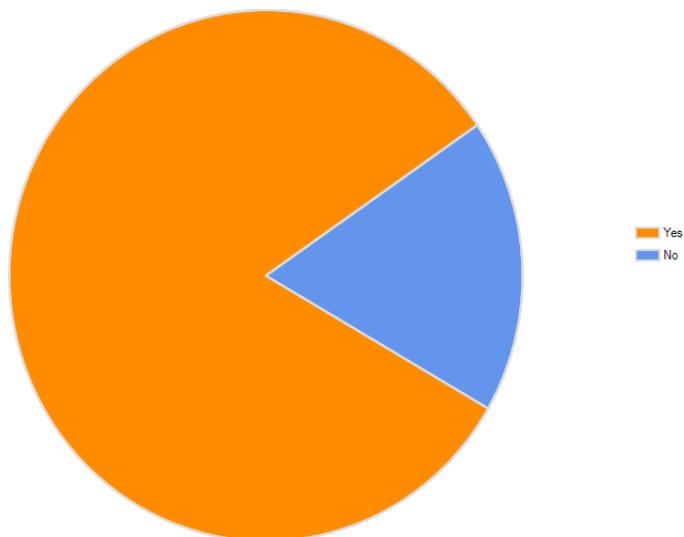
through a link on the school district website, as well as hard copies that were made available at school and district sites. In total there were 377 responses, 52.5% from parents with students currently in school, 57.9% from parents of students about to enter school in the next 1-5 years, and 8.3% from interested community members with no students currently attending or about to register in schools.



Survey results indicate overwhelmingly (82.1%) that those who responded to the survey would like their children to have to opportunity to attend an Early French Immersion Program in Chilliwack. Several cited personal experience as a French Immersion student, and many noted dismay that EFI was not already an option in Chilliwack. Some people commented that they were considering a move to another city, application to another school district, or enrolling their child in the local CSF school (école La Verendrye) if an EFI program were not made available to them through SD #33.

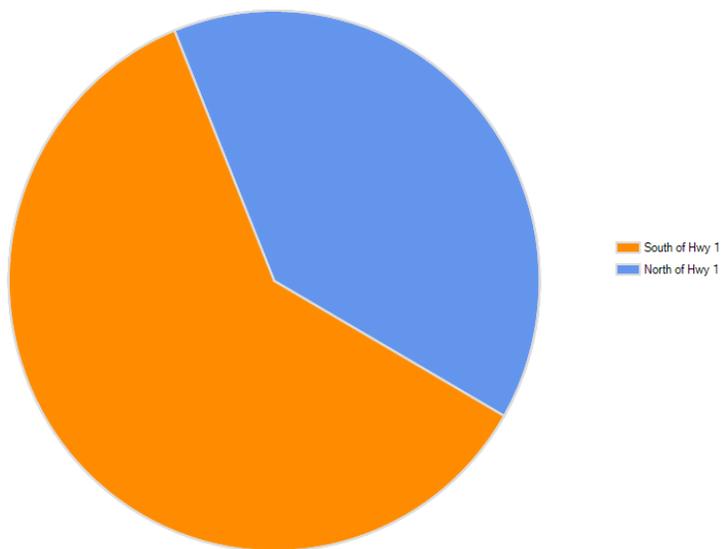


I would like my child(ren) to have the opportunity to attend an Early French Immersion Program in the Chilliwack School District



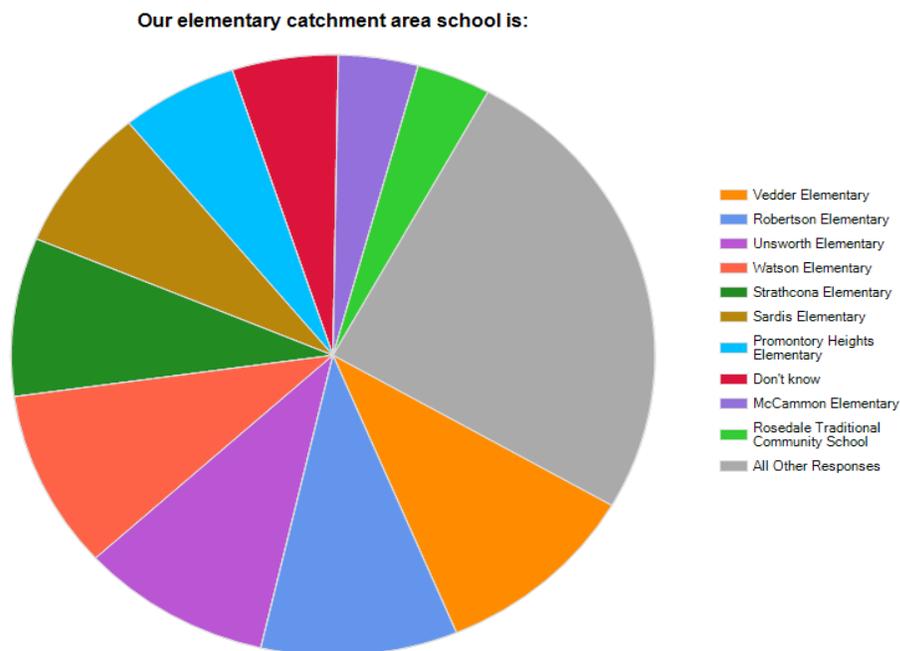
60.5% of the respondents noted that they live south of Hwy 1, 39.5% live to the north.

Our family lives:





The largest number of respondents came from Vedder (10.4%), Robertson (9.9%), Watson (9.6%) and Unsworth (9.6%) Elementary Schools, with Strathcona (8.5%) and Sardis (7.7%) being the next largest group of respondents.



68.4% of respondents say that they are willing to transport their students to another school for Early French Immersion, however there were a number of individual responses to the last question of the survey (*“other comments about Early French Immersion that I would like the district to consider”*) that stated that they would not be willing to go from south to north, that they would not be willing to travel more than 10 minutes by car, that it would be largely dependent on the school site selected, and on whether there was before and after school care available at the selected school. Some parents stated specifically which school they would like the program to be located in, and others requested busing as an option.

While the full list of open-ended comments can be viewed at the end of this report, there are other common concerns that were mentioned repeatedly in the answers to question #7. These include:

- The concern that a “special program” would be taking district funds away from other areas of need or away from educational opportunities for all students
- The concern regarding the need for children to first master the English language before French, and what possible negative impacts Early Immersion could have on a child’s learning
- The concern that the district be able to hire a sufficient number of qualified staff
- The concern that the implementation of an EFI program would mean the end to the existing LFI program



- The concern that perhaps French is not the appropriate second language choice.

The type of concerns voiced here show the need for additional community consultation and information sessions, should the District decide to implement an Early French Immersion Program.

## SCHOOL SPACE REQUIREMENTS

Any decisions that the Board of Education (Chilliwack) makes concerning the feasibility of implementing an Early Immersion Program should take into account the **Long Range Facilities Report** and the accompanying **Planning Principles** that were presented to the Board in October of 2012. These principles are:

- Enable implementation of the Board's **goals and priorities**
- Create and maintain viable and quality programs that **support all learners**
- Support on-going **community use**
- Maintain appropriate-sized facilities that will **accommodate changing enrolment** and educational programs over the next 10-15 years
- Strive for **increased efficiency** in operational and capital costs
- **Optimize administrative costs** within available funding

The SD #33 Long Range Facilities Plan for 2012, which is a requirement from the Ministry of Education for every school district in British Columbia, shows that there is steady enrolment growth predicted in Chilliwack as a whole over the next 10-15 years, and it is anticipated that most, if not all elementary schools will be at or above capacity by that time. As well, after experiencing a slight decline at present, most middle and secondary schools will begin to experience growth in enrolment, however this growth is not expected to exceed capacity in any of these Grade 7-12 schools. There are certain areas of the district that are growing more rapidly than others. This is particularly true of the south side of Chilliwack where even now there are 17 portables in use as full-time classrooms at various elementary schools.

The Long Range Plan shows that there is south side residential development anticipated around Promontory, Garrison Crossing, Webster Road, the Canada Land Company Peach Road and the Coqualeetza Lands. This development would impact the surrounding elementary schools as well as cause some overflow to other nearby south side schools. The report also states that elementary schools in the Sardis area are already all at or above capacity. Another area expected to see significant growth is the Eastern Hillside.

In order to deal with these expected increases, Chilliwack's Capital Plan includes making application for:

1. Additions to Evans Elementary, Sardis Elementary, Watson Elementary, Promontory Heights Elementary, as well as to G.W. Graham Middle Secondary



2. Permission and funding to build two new schools in the Eastern Hillside area, one a Kindergarten to Grade 6 school, and the other a Kindergarten to Grade 9 school.

These additions and new buildings are needed to allow space for existing and anticipated students in the neighbourhood programs. It does not include plans for the additional space required for any new programs of choice. In speaking to various members of District staff, as well as visiting schools, it is difficult to see where there would be space for the number of elementary classes needed to implement an EFI program, as outlined below.

### **Elementary Schools**

If the Board decides to implement an Early French Immersion Program, perhaps the first decision that will need to be made will be whether a single or dual track elementary school is the model to be followed. Both models have their pros and cons as outlined below.

A “Single Track French Immersion School” is one where there is no neighbourhood English program, and the entire school functions in a French milieu. While the primary advantage to this model is a 100% Francophone environment in which students learn, the difficulties for school districts are in finding French-speaking staff (administration, clerical, support staff, etc.) to maintain the French environment, and most importantly, displacing the neighbourhood students who are no longer able to attend this school for English. This often means having to redraw catchment area boundaries to have the displaced neighbourhood students attend another school which may or may not be within walking distance.

SD #33 already has single track schools such as F.G. Leary Fine Arts Elementary School, and McCammon Traditional Elementary School. These schools have not caused a substantial disruption to the community because the programs that they offer are still taught in English and are not therefore significantly different from a regular neighbourhood program. Instead, there is a focus on Fine Arts within the regular curriculum, or a traditional method of teaching the regular curriculum. In the case of a single track Early French Immersion school, students would learn the same curriculum, but in another language, which is a significant difference from regular instruction and may not be the preference for some families currently living within the school’s catchment boundaries.

A single track school is a good option for a district that has a school site that is already closed or is scheduled for closure, is central in location, and is still in good physical condition. The single-track model does not create the worries of having adequate space to house two separate programs, as can happen in dual track schools. The Vancouver School Board has some single track French Immersion schools (Ecole Jules Quesnel and Ecole Bilingue).

“Dual Track” schools, as the name implies, house both a neighbourhood program and a program of choice, in this case, French Immersion. The Chilliwack School District already has two dual track elementary schools where there is both a neighbourhood program and Late French Immersion Program (Sardis and Strathcona Elementary). These two programs work well in a dual track format because the LFI program does not usually take up more than one or two



classrooms, and does not overcrowd the neighbourhood program which needs to always retain room for catchment area students. Many school districts opt for a dual track format for their French Immersion schools, as it causes less disruption to the neighbourhood, but it can also lead to overcrowding if the French Immersion program is allowed to grow too quickly and there are not limits placed on the number of French Immersion Kindergarten classes that will be enrolled each year.

In some districts, where space allows, there are even “triple track” elementary schools, housing EFI, LFI and the neighbourhood English Program. This is considered by some to be advantageous as it allows the EFI and LFI programs to combine resources such as library and classroom materials, and allows for greater interaction between both groups of French Immersion students. This is particularly positive for the Grade 6 Late French Immersion students who as it stands right now are rather isolated in their one or two classrooms in a predominantly English school.

The problem for all school districts and specifically for the Chilliwack School District is in finding enough classroom space in one elementary school location. Even if the district were to begin with one Kindergarten and one Grade 1 class at a school site, there would be a need for a minimum of 6-7 classrooms in that particular location in order for the program to continue through to the end of Grade 6. This is to say nothing of additional access that will be required to other rooms and facilities, such as the gym, the library, and the Learning Assistance Centre. The school would also need to accommodate the increased number of staff and the increase in parent parking and car traffic, because as is the case with most district programs of choice, many students will come from outside of the catchment area. As was noted in the survey responses, many parents also commented on the need for before and after school care, and if such a service is not currently available in the school, this may need to be added, taking up still more space.

If an Early French Immersion program were to begin in School District #33, and there was to be a single Kindergarten and a Grade One class as mentioned above, this would mean an initial enrolment of a maximum of 46 students (22 at the Kindergarten level and 24 at the Grade One level). Although class sizes are allowed to increase to 30 at the Grade 4 level, it can be safely assumed that the Intermediate classes would never actually reach that size (without combining two grades in one classroom, which is always a possibility), because rarely are students able to join an Immersion class after Grade One due to their French language skills being so far behind those of their peers. Therefore, with one entry point at the Kindergarten level each year, schools could anticipate reaching a maximum EFI enrolment of 166 students. In reality, the numbers would be lower, as there is often an attrition rate of at least 1 or 2 students (5-8%) per grade per year, leading to enrolment numbers that may be closer to 120-140 students. In the example of a school organization below, where only one or two students leave the program each year after Grade One, there is still the need for at least 6, probably 7 classrooms for the EFI program.



Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
5/6						10	17
4/5					20	8	
3				22			
2			23				
1		24					
K	22						
							<b>146</b>

In terms of program sustainability, it would perhaps be better to begin a program with two Kindergarten and one or two Grade One classes, as doing this would be helpful in eliminating the issue of very small classes at the Intermediate level. This is because even with attrition, the district would still be able to sustain classes of 26-30 at the higher levels. Please see the example below:

Grade	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total in class
6							26	26
5/6						21	8	29
4/5					15	14		29
3/4				7	21			28
3				24				24
2/3			17	7				24
2			23					23
1		24						24
1		23						23



K	22							22
K	22							22
Total	44	47	40	38	36	35	34	<b>274</b>

Unfortunately, while this is better for the strength of the program itself, as well as from a financial perspective (larger class sizes mean a more fiscally sound student to teacher ratio), it creates the need for 11 classrooms which can not be found in any centrally-located elementary school in SD #33.

People may argue that the students who are enrolling in the Early French Immersion program are already Chilliwack students who are accounted for through demographic forecasting and Ministry funding, and they would have to be accommodated at one of the district schools regardless. Therefore, it is argued, it should not really be a need for increased space, but just the replacement of space previously allocated to a neighbourhood program now being “transferred” to a district program. While this may be true in a strict numbers sense, we know that those children who enroll in a French Immersion Program at School A may actually be supposed to attend Schools B, C, D, and E, which leaves some available space at each of those four schools, but the students who actually live in the catchment area for School A still want to attend School A’s neighbourhood program. This is especially problematic in areas that are scheduled for future growth and expansion, such as those south side schools that are listed in the Long Range Facilities Plan as being at or above capacity or are scheduled for a much-needed addition due to the already increased use of portables.

From the results of the survey, we can already see that the majority of respondents live on the south side of the district and while they indicate a willingness to transport their child to a school outside of their catchment area, there were individual survey comments indicating that they would not be willing to go too far (i.e. from south to north). In meeting with Chilliwack parents to discuss their thoughts on this issue, some did say that their willingness to transport their children to another school would be dependent on the actual school selected, and all expressed a desire to be able to walk their students to school. One therefore wonders if, as was believed to have happened in School District #67, parents who were initially interested in enrolling their children in EFI might change their minds once the actual school location was selected and announced.

Given that anticipated enrolment growth is already a problem in the south side schools, along with any Board of Education’s reluctance to begin a new program that they know in advance will end up in portables, it would seem at this time that there is no one centrally-located elementary school site in Chilliwack that could accommodate the Early French Immersion Program from Kindergarten to Grade 6 without causing significant overcrowding and disruption to existing catchment area boundaries.



## Middle Schools

The Chilliwack School District follows the K- Gr. 6 elementary school/ Gr. 7-9 middle school/ Gr. 10-12 secondary school format. This means that for Chilliwack students in the Late French Immersion Program, they spend their first year of Late Immersion (Grade 6) at the elementary school and then move to the middle school for the rest of their program. If Chilliwack were to implement the Early Immersion Program, EFI students would spend Kindergarten through Grade 6 in the Elementary EFI program, and then move on to continue in French Immersion at the middle and secondary school levels. Traditionally in school districts that offer both programs (EFI and LFI), the two programs come together and create one program after elementary school. The program therefore, is no longer termed “Early” or “Late” Immersion, but simply the Secondary French Immersion Program. In districts with elementary schools that go to the Grade 7 level, it means that the LFI students have two years (Grade 6 and 7) of intensive French instruction at the elementary level before they join their EFI peers in Grade 8. This is a common practice and has always proven to be highly effective, both in terms of the matching the language fluency and comprehension levels of the students in the two programs, and from a financial standpoint, as the two programs can be blended into one cohort group, thereby creating efficiencies of size (a higher student to teacher ratio).

If the Board of Education (Chilliwack) were to approve the implementation of an EFI program and intend that the two French Immersion programs would share space at the same middle and secondary schools, a separation of the two programs would still have to continue, at least for the Grade 7 year. Given that the LFI students in Chilliwack would have had only one year of French Language instruction, it would not be fair to them to place them in the same classroom as their EFI peers, as their language abilities are at nowhere near the same level after only one year of instruction in French. In an analysis of the 10 school districts with a middle school format and the two types of FI programs, this appears to be the case in 9 out of 10 of the instances. Furthermore, 8 of the 10 districts listed below have a Grade 6-8 middle school format, meaning that the Late French Immersion students do not begin their program (Grade 6) at one school and then move to another for the next year. The ability to have both levels of LFI together in a building creates a much stronger French ambience and a larger cohort group to build a true French “community”.

District #	District name	Grade configuration	EFI	LFI	Merge of EFI and LFI at which grade?
5	Southeast Kootenay	Gr. 7-9	Y (Cranbrook)	Y (Fernie)	programs in different towns
34	Abbotsford	Gr. 6-8	Y	Y	Grade 8
35	Langley	Gr. 6-8	Y	Y	Grade 8



40	New Westminster	Gr. 6-8	Y	Y	Grade 8
43	Coquitlam	Gr. 6-8	Y	Y	Grade 8
61	Victoria	Gr. 6-8	Y	Y	Grade 8
62	Sooke	Gr. 6-8, Gr. 7-9	Y	Y	Grade 8
70	Alberni	Gr. 6-8	Y	Y	Grade 8
71	Comox Valley	Gr. 7-9(1)	Y	Y	Grade 8
72	Campbell River	Gr. 7-9(1)	Y	Y	Grade 7
83	North Okanagan-Shuswap	Gr. 6-8	Y	Y	Grade 8

If the two programs were to remain separate for Grade 7, and it is recommended that they should, there will be an additional staffing cost to the district. If the LFI students had already had two years of French instruction, and depending on class size numbers, it would have been possible to combine both groups for their French subject areas (Français Langue, Sciences Humaines, Sciences Naturelles, Mathématiques). With the significant difference in language abilities, there will have to be separate blocks for each of the subjects: Français Langue 7 EFI, Français Langue 7 LFI, Sciences Humaines 7 EFI, Sciences Humaines 7 LFI, Sciences Naturelles 7 EFI, Sciences Naturelles 7 LFI, Mathématiques 7 EFI, Mathématiques 7 LFI. Again, there would certainly be a smaller class size ratio, and therefore increased costs.

As mentioned in the section regarding elementary schools, it is usually preferable to have both EFI and LFI programs in the same school, as this can lead to the sharing of French library and classroom resources. It also helps to have a larger French student cohort group and therefore a larger French presence in the school. When considering staffing, the advantages of housing the two programs at the same school are especially true at the middle and secondary levels. Because French Immersion teachers, particularly with the specialty teaching areas such as Math and Science can be very difficult to find, it is easier to attract one full time French Immersion Math and Science teacher who has a full teaching course load at one school site, then it is to try and find two teachers with these specialties and offer them only half time jobs, or jobs where they have to teach in other subject areas or in both English and French. An example is shown below:



Middle School A (EFI and LFI)  
Teacher A:

Sciences Naturelles 7 EFI,  
Sciences Naturelles 7 LFI,  
Mathématiques 7 EFI,  
Mathématiques 7 LFI  
Sciences Naturelles 8  
Mathématiques 8  
Mathématiques 9  
Prep Block

Middle School B (EFI only)  
Teacher B:

Sciences Naturelles 7 EFI,  
Mathématiques 7 EFI,  
Sciences Naturelles 8 EFI  
Mathématiques 8 EFI  
Mathématiques 9 EFI  
**2 more courses**  
Prep Block

Middle School C (LFI only)  
Teacher C:

Sciences Naturelles 7 LFI,  
Mathématiques 7 LFI  
Sciences Naturelles 8 LFI  
Mathématiques 8 LFI  
Mathématiques 9 LFI  
**2 more courses**  
Prep Block

While it may be preferable in terms of staffing and size of cohort group to have all French Immersion students go to the same middle and secondary schools, the district will need to look at available space in its middle and secondary schools to see whether this option is even possible. According to the Long Range Facilities Plan and projected enrolments (2010-2026), Vedder and Chilliwack Middle Schools, the current location for French Immersion, are already at or above capacity, as is the case for all of Chilliwack's secondary schools. The Long Range Facilities Plan does state the need to look at A.D. Rundle and its declining enrolment, and the District may therefore want to consider moving at least one of the middle school Immersion programs to this location, but the first step would still have to be to decide on the feasibility of finding a suitable elementary school site.

## **FUNDING AND ANTICIPATED COSTS (RESOURCES AND STAFFING)**

All school districts in British Columbia are eligible for annual funding from the federal government for French as a Second Language Programs. This funding is based on "per pupil FTE" that is derived from the annual 1701 Ministry student counts, and its purpose is to support all K-12 students enrolled in any type of FSL program. The amount of funding that SD #33 (Chilliwack) received from the 2011/12 grant was just under \$138,000 and will likely be the same for the coming years, as funding for the start up of new programs only begins after the students have actually been registered.

According to the **French Funding Program Guide** for 2011-2012:

*All federal funds for second language must be spent entirely in support of French Immersion, Intensive and Core French programs.*

*The federal French funds are allocated and can only be spent in the following categories:*

E-Learning :French software, internet access, access to on-line resources, databases and/or subscriptions, licensing fees, peripheral devices, use existing hardware to adapt wireless connection, wireless connection(s)



*Learning Resources Grant:* *The Learning Resources Grant assists districts with the higher cost of buying French resources, for the library as well as the classroom, for students in French Immersion programs.*

*Core French Grant:* *The Core French Grant provides material needed to deliver the Core French programs in participating school districts where the minimum instructional time of 4 percent (4%) is met.*

*French Immersion Grant:* *The French Immersion Grant has for purpose the maintenance of French programs. School Districts may use the money for supplies, materials or to supplement other funding categories i.e. learning resources, e-learning etc.*

*French Immersion Growth:* *The French Immersion Growth Grant has for purpose to support new classes or program expansion. This Grant is based on increases in Full Time Equivalent (FTE) enrolments in French programs from the preceding year as reported by the district on form 1701.*

*Teacher Professional Development Grant:* *The Teacher Professional Development Grant has for purpose to support teacher's participation in activities such as in-service/program implementation for Core French and French Immersion programs which may be offered to individual or groups of teachers, and may include workshops, on-line learning, conference attendance and post-secondary courses.*

*Cultural Activities Grant:* *This grant is intended to assist districts in providing opportunities for students to be exposed to Francophone culture, by sponsoring various French cultural activities that could include visiting musicians/authors or children's theatre groups, field trips or special "days".*

*If a school district has a French Advisory Committee, best practice would suggest that the allocation of funds be discussed with the committee.*

*School districts have the flexibility to move federal funds between the allocated funding categories and must report the reallocation of federal funds in the Financial Report they submit at the end of the school year.*

*School districts may apply federal funds to 20% of their total federal contribution or a maximum of 0.4 FTE position whichever is higher for French Immersion or Core French teachers' salary or at the district level for a coordination position for second official language activities.*

While this funding is appreciated by districts and schools, and is used every year, it will not fully cover the additional costs that will be incurred with the implementation of a new Early French Immersion Program. The "French Immersion Growth" funding is allocated based on an amount of \$395 per student FTE at the Kindergarten to Grade 7 level, \$1437 per student FTE for Grades 8-10, and \$1795/student FTE for Grades 11-12. If the Chilliwack School District were to go ahead with an EFI program that started with one Kindergarten and one Grade One class (46 students in total), that would generate approximately \$18,000, which the funding guidelines do



not allow to be spent for staffing purposes. This amount could be used primarily to purchase new classroom and library resources but would probably not cover these costs entirely either, as past experience indicates that it costs between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per new classroom, just for the most basic of resources. The federal funds can be moved from one category to another, and therefore more money could be allocated to the “FI Growth” category, but as the District already fully expends the money allocated each year, it would mean making cuts to other schools’ FI budgets. Also, if the District were to consider opening a program in two separate schools, it would mean the need to resource two sites with identical resources, which would undoubtedly cost more than the allocated amount.

Other costs that will need to be considered are those related to staffing. While these are Chilliwack students who would be enrolled in a neighbourhood elementary school and provided with a teacher regardless of the program, in many districts we have seen that due to a variety of factors including attrition, French Immersion classes can sometimes be smaller than regular neighbourhood classes, leading to a lower student to teacher ratio and therefore increased staffing costs to the district. Also, experience in other districts has shown that the need to increase staffing at the French Immersion school does not necessarily lead to a comparable decrease of FTE on the English side of the enrolment, as these students tend to come to this program of choice from all over the district, and therefore may only be decreasing any one school’s student population by one or two students, which would not net out a decrease in staffing at that school.

Additionally, the Board should keep in mind that, as stated in the Ministry K-12 French Immersion Policy document, students enrolled in an Immersion Program are entitled to the same resources as those in a regular program. This will create the need for the hiring of additional French-speaking Learning Assistance Teachers, Teacher-Librarians, and Education Assistants to name a few. As these positions will need to be filled by bilingual teachers, it is highly unlikely that they can be assumed by teachers already on staff in the school. While again, this may not mean more FTE than the school would need with only an English program (because theoretically it is the same number of students in the school), it will most likely generate a higher headcount of teachers in the district, which means increased costs in benefits, etc.

Also, as mentioned earlier, there will be additional staffing costs at the middle school level if Early and Late French Immersion classes cannot merge into one cohort group.

The district may also wish to consider increasing the amount of French Helping Teacher time/FTE that is currently available, as the number of teachers that he or she will be supporting will in effect double within a few years. This will be an increased cost to the district.

Finally, on what may be a smaller point, there will be additional costs to the schools as they move to change their signage, letterhead, etc. to better reflect the bilingual milieu in which students are now learning.



All of this means that the District will have to look to their existing budgets to at least partially support the implementation of this program. Trustees should keep in mind that this is a long term commitment of at least 13 years, as it is assumed that students would enter the program in Kindergarten or Grade One and continue through to graduation at the end of Grade 12, meaning that each consecutive year would mean the addition of another grade level, more classroom and library resources and additional staffing.

Although it is not necessarily a cost item, it does bear mentioning the difficulty that many school districts have in attracting and retaining qualified French Immersion teachers, particularly in towns and regions that are somewhat removed from the Vancouver area. The cost of living in BC, as well as the knowledge that they will have to live in a predominantly English milieu has deterred many Francophone teachers from Québec and Ontario from moving here to work. Chilliwack does have the advantage of lower housing prices than many other Lower Mainland towns and cities, but the area itself would be relatively unknown to most teachers from Eastern Canada or from other French-speaking countries such as France and Belgium. They would therefore probably not seek out employment with the district unless they were made aware of the opportunities. This could possibly be facilitated by the school district's participation in more national and international level job fairs, rather than staying limited to the local university job fairs, but once again, participation in these activities would involve increased costs to the district.

Many districts that have had French Immersion programs for years are starting to find that the graduates of their own French Immersion programs are now coming back to them as teachers. These former FI students- now teachers, are not trained in the appropriate French Immersion methodology courses, and have no practicum experience in French, but they do have the basic French language skills and the love for and understanding of the program that is necessary for them to be strong advocates for and teachers of the program, with perhaps a little extra district support.

If the district were to create the opportunity, in conjunction with a local Faculty of Education program, for a student to complete their practica in French Immersion classrooms in Chilliwack, they may be helping to create a "home grown solution" to the staffing problem. What would also be needed in the way of support to these teachers is many and varied opportunities for the teachers to practice and improve upon their own language skills, as well as the opportunity for them to interact regularly with each other. Some districts have taken to offering "summer institutes" or "French camps" for such a purpose. They have also organized special French Immersion professional development opportunities on District Pro-d Days, and in some cases, have even provided funding, through the federal French funding, for these teachers to take additional university courses or to participate in national conferences. There are also several bursary opportunities for non-Francophone teachers who teach in French Immersion to participate in 3 or 6 week summer programs offered by UBC and l'Université de Laval. What will be needed is someone (i.e. the French Helping Teacher) who could take on the facilitation and organization of these events and opportunities.



## TIMELINE FOR START UP

While the survey indicates that there is a strong desire on the part of many Chilliwack parents for an Early French Immersion program, if approved by the Board, to start up in September of 2013, District staff will need to set aside a significant amount of time for the planning needed to accompany the opening of such a program. It is for this reason that this report recommends that if an Early French Immersion Program is approved, that the start-up of such a program be scheduled for September 2014, and that the program begin with at least one Kindergarten (preferably two) and one Grade One class. This would allow for a reasonably-sized beginning cohort group, and would allow three French Immersion teachers to work together on planning curriculum and activities for their classes, instead of having one teacher working in isolation. It would definitely increase the recognition of the school site being a bilingual milieu, as opposed to an English school with one French class. Finally, this timeline with two entry points would also perhaps create some comfort for those parents whose students were not able to apply for Early French Immersion in Kindergarten of September 2013. They could instead begin in Grade One in 2014.

The list of things to be accomplished before the start of the program is lengthy and includes, but is not limited to:

- Development of appropriate district policies and administrative regulations
- Revision of student application and registration procedures (including sibling priority)
- Advertising and promotion of the program to the community (visits to pre-schools, daycares, etc.)
- Preparation of classrooms (this may involve re-assigning existing classes)
- Ordering, receiving, preparing of resources for both the classroom and library, as well as any necessary equipment
- Advertising, interviewing and hiring of suitable staff
- Preparation of school site (bilingual signage on exterior and interior of building, changing of letterhead, etc.)
- Planning for and hosting Parent Information meetings related to the program, as well as the application and registration process

As is the case with most school districts, the workload of Senior Staff in SD #33 is already substantial, and there may not be someone within the Executive Team who can devote the large amount of time and energy that is required to completely oversee the implementation of this program, if approved. Therefore, in order to do a thorough job and to ensure that all tasks are completed in a timely manner, there may be a need to provide additional staffing at either the district or the school level (or both) in order to get this done. The additional staffing could perhaps be facilitated by providing additional administrative time to the principal of the school selected as the EFI site, or perhaps hiring or seconding someone outside of Senior Staff to oversee the process. There will still be the need for significant input from and collaboration



with various district personnel, but this person would have responsibility for initiating these processes. Unfortunately, this would of course be an added cost to the district.

## **OPTIONS FOR PROGRAM APPLICATION AND REGISTRATION PROCEDURES**

Given that Early French Immersion, if implemented, would be a program of choice, it is important to differentiate between the **application** and the **registration** process. Families will have to **apply** for entrance to the Early French Immersion Program, because if experiences in both this district for Late French Immersion and in other districts for Early French Immersion are any example, the number of families requesting EFI for their students will exceed available space. Currently, applications for the Late French Immersion Program are taken in late February of the preceding school year. Past experience in other districts has shown that this may be too late for an EFI program, as entry into the French Immersion program can affect the enrolment at other schools which need to know before March 1<sup>st</sup> whether or not the student in question will be attending their school or whether they have that space to offer to someone else.

Currently in Chilliwack, all applicants to the Late French Immersion Program are interviewed with their parents in order to discuss their suitability to the program. This would not be necessary or even possible in an Early Immersion Program, given the young age and unknown academic abilities of the applicants. Given that Early and Late French Immersion are public school programs that are therefore open to all students, there should not be any type of selection process for candidates to the program. All applicants who are of the appropriate age and who reside in Chilliwack must be considered as eligible.

### **Applications**

There are at least two options that should be considered when looking for a suitable application process. In other school districts, the application process is usually handled through a **lottery**. In a lottery system, as long as the applications are received before the deadline, all applications are considered equal and are drawn in random order. Those whose draw number is higher (i.e. #51) than the total number of spaces available (i.e. 44) are placed on a waitlist. This is the system that appears to be used most commonly by districts at present and would be recommended if the district decides to implement the EFI program.

The other option is having applications taken on a **“first-come, first-served”** basis. This usually involves parents waiting in long line-ups or even camping overnight in front of the school or Board Office to guarantee a spot. Some school districts offer a variation of “first-come, first-served”, in that they accept applications over the phone on a specific date. Whatever the system, there must be a finite number of pre-determined spaces so as to ensure that there is not an excess of students and enough classroom space and qualified teachers for them.



Within the lottery system, there are also a variety of different ways of sorting the applicants. In some districts, apart from sibling priority (explained below), the only distinction is between district and non-district students. In others, where EFI is located in more than one school site, each French Immersion school is assigned a French Immersion catchment area and applications are therefore arranged according to whether they are within that particular FI catchment area or not. One criterion that is not considered is whether the applicant lives within the neighbourhood (English) catchment area boundaries. Since Early French Immersion is considered a district program, the neighbourhood school catchment areas should have no impact on the sorting of applications. All Chilliwack students would be considered equal. If the district is planning on implementing an Early French Immersion program and will only begin with one school site, it is likely that at this point, apart from the sibling priority distinction, the applications would only need to be sorted from a “Chilliwack/non-Chilliwack” standpoint.

The decision as to what type of application process should be followed is one that will need to be made by district staff. With every system, there are concerns voiced by parents as to the “fairness” of the process. “Is it fair that this family gets a spot because they stood in line all day and I couldn’t, due to work commitments?” “Is it fair that the decision is made by the arbitrary drawing of numbers?” “Is it fair that I can’t get my child into the program when I live right across the street from the school?” The suggestion to district staff would be to spend the time before the implementation of the program, if approved, to discuss with neighbouring school districts which systems they use and what the pros and cons are from their point of view. The Board of Education (Chilliwack) and District Senior Staff know their constituents best and also know what will meet the needs of their schools and community. Whatever the decision, the district needs to be prepared to hear parental discontent and to have prepared a solid rationale for their choice of system.

### **Sibling priority**

In all districts, sibling priority is in effect. This means that once one child in the family has been accepted into the Early French Immersion Program, all younger siblings are guaranteed a spot in the program. The rules around sibling priority however vary greatly from one district to the next. For example:

- If you have a sibling currently in either program (Early or Late) you are guaranteed placement either program  
OR
- Your sibling must be in the same program, in the same school at the same time to guarantee placement  
OR
- Your sibling can be in high school or even have already graduated but your placement is still guaranteed



If the purpose of sibling priority is to enable families to have their children attend the same school and thereby facilitate transportation, daycare, etc., and SD #33 policy 531 states that *“siblings will be admitted to the same school wherever possible”*, it would make sense that the sibling priority should focus on the “same school, same program, same time” concept.

## Registration

Regardless of whether or not they make an application to Early French Immersion, families are required, by a certain date, to **register** their children for their first year of school. Current administrative regulation (531) states that parents should register students for Kindergarten anytime between September 1 and March 1 of the preceding year, and that *“applications will be received, dated and prioritized for kindergarten enrolment for the following school year.”* SD #33 will most likely need to change this regulation district-wide if they decide to implement Early French Immersion.

In many other school districts, the registration period for all Kindergarten programs begins later in the school year (i.e. from mid-January) and the application process takes place either during or immediately prior to registration.

If there is a decision made to follow the lottery system and a definitive application period is established, it will be very confusing for parents if they are to **register** in their catchment school between September and March and then **apply** for the EFI program at a later time of year. It would be much clearer for parents if all Kindergarten registrations began later in the year (i.e. January 15), and applications to the Early French Immersion Program came in and were drawn and selected before that date. Outlined below is an example of such a process:

- December 1-21<sup>st</sup> Early French Immersion applications accepted (location to be determined)
- January 1- 7<sup>th</sup>: Lottery draw and parents notified of placement in EFI program or on waitlist
- January 15<sup>th</sup> – June 15<sup>th</sup>: Parents to register for Kindergarten, either in EFI school if successful in lottery, or at catchment area school if on waitlist
- January 15<sup>th</sup> – September 30<sup>th</sup>: Waitlist maintained and late applications accepted and placed on waitlist

If the district opts for the first-come, first-served option and it remains the current September to March timeline, one can anticipate long line-ups on the first of September, as parents rush to assure themselves of a space in the program, at a time that is already the busiest of the year for most schools. Therefore, once again the registration period should begin later in the school year, at a time that is not so busy.

If the district were to maintain the current timeline, it is foreseeable that parents would misunderstand that application and registration are two distinct and separate processes, and would assume that they can do both at the same time during the December application period,



and thereby perhaps not only not obtain a place in the Early Immersion Program through the lottery, but also be too late to get a placement in their home school.

Another element that SD #33 may want to consider for discussion, not just in relation to Early French Immersion, but for all schools and programs is the move to a central registration process. This means that all parents of students of all ages (including Kindergarten) who are new to the school district would register centrally, usually at a specific district facility. Many Lower Mainland school districts have adopted this process as it eases the clerical burden of registration at the individual school level, it eliminates possible errors in registration, and it allows for a better central knowledge base of district enrolment trends. Unfortunately, once again, this creates an additional cost to the district, usually in the form of a district administrator and/or additional district clerical staff.

## RECOMMENDATIONS/CONSIDERATIONS/CHALLENGES

The Board of Education (Chilliwack) and Senior Staff undoubtedly recognize that the successful implementation of an Early French Immersion Program is the desire of a large group of parents of children about to enter the school system. From looking at the goals outlined in the District's Strategic Plan, as well as through interviews and conversations with various staff members, it is clear that the majority believe that this would be good for students and good for the Chilliwack School District. What is less clear is whether there is actually the physical space, the staffing and the financial resources available to implement such a program. This report has laid out the anticipated issues around school sites, alerted Trustees to possible extra costs, and has also clarified concerns around staffing, as well as making suggestions for other considerations associated with the program, not the least of which being the application and registration procedures. After careful consideration of the entire report and additional input from Senior Staff, the decision as to whether or not to move forward with the implementation of an Early French Immersion Program will rest with the Board of Education of School District #33 (Chilliwack).

If the decision is made to go ahead with an EFI Program, Trustees may wish to consider the following additional recommendations:

- As noted earlier in the report, plan for a September 2014 start date with at least one Kindergarten and one Grade One class, so as to allow district staff time to properly prepare for the program
- Consider assigning additional staffing (at district or school levels) to the job of preparing for the implementation of an Early French Immersion program
- Begin creating district policy and administrative regulations related specifically to the District's French Immersion programs, as well as reviewing and making changes to the existing regulations around Kindergarten registration.
- If a suitable school site can be located, it is recommended that the Early French Immersion Program begin in only one school site. This will place less of a financial and



staffing strain on the district, and although it may not allow for the number of spaces necessary to meet parental demand, it will at least ensure that initial enrolment is at a maximum. As well, the district must be certain that the space is available over 7 years to have the program occupy at least 6 or 7 classrooms and continue through from Kindergarten through to the end of Grade 6. In the past, the District has had some flexibility in moving LFI from one school to another, or in running one Grade 6 class or two at the different sites. This has not been difficult, as the LFI program only takes one year in the elementary school configuration. It will be very different with EFI which cannot be moved in and out of a school as easily.

- Once that site is chosen, it is suggested that the district conduct another parent survey, this time naming the school and the exact start date (September 2014) and asking parents again if they are willing to transport their child to this school at this time. This will give staff a better idea of the actual number of students who will be planning on attending, as opposed to those parents and community members who are interested in theory in an Immersion program.
- Set up a French Immersion Advisory Committee consisting of Trustee, Senior Staff, school-based admin, Teachers' and Support Workers' Unions and parent representation. The committee's mandates might be to discuss and provide input on processes such as application and registration, to give input on policy and administrative regulations, to help with information meetings at various levels, and to provide input to the budget allocations related to the French federal funds.
- Conduct an annual or bi-annual review of the program and its growth and report back regularly to the Board of Education on aspects such as community interest in the program, staffing issues, resourcing costs, important events and activities.
- Make the review of the French Immersion Program, its location, growth, etc. an integral part of the District's yearly Long Range Facilities Plan and projected enrolment trends review, along with making it part of yearly budget discussions in order to predict possible future areas of growth and/or stress to the system.
- Consider raising the profile of French Immersion in the district and bringing some cohesion to the program and the schools involved by having regularly-scheduled (i.e. quarterly) French Immersion Principals' meetings, where French Immersion school-based admin at all levels can meet with district staff to discuss concerns, issues, events that are specific to their schools and programs.
- The Human Resources Department will need to become even more proactive in recruiting qualified French Immersion teachers. This may mean participating in job fairs such as those at the Faculté St Jean in Alberta and l'Université d'Ottawa, in addition to those that they already attend at local university job fairs. They may also wish to consider looking to create partnerships with post-secondary institutions such as the University of the Fraser Valley or Trinity Western University. There may be students in their Faculties of Education who would like the opportunity to complete their practica in a French Immersion classroom. This would require the Chilliwack School District to arrange for appropriate placements with French teacher sponsors and perhaps some help in providing a bilingual Faculty Associate to supervise and support the students if



one is not available through the university. Upon graduation, those teacher-candidates quite often look to obtain teaching positions in the districts where they had positive student teaching experiences.

## CONCLUSION

The decision as to whether or not to implement a new educational program in a school district is an important one that requires community and staff consultation, thoughtful analysis of various district infrastructures, and consideration of both the needs and wants of the community as well as the best interests of the schools and students in SD #33. It is hoped that this report has been a helpful first step in providing the Chilliwack Board of Education with the information necessary to make that decision.

*Nancy Brennan  
Seconded Assistant Superintendent,  
Make a Future, Careers in BC Education*



## **Appendix A – Answers to Question #7 of Stakeholder Survey**

### **“Other comments about the Early French Immersion Program (or another Program of Choice) that I would like the District to consider when making its decision”**

- It's a good program, but fully immersed, I would like to see more French subjects brought back on an elementary level 4-6 grades. Also more First Nations opportunities for students that are not First Nations - Treating children with the same equality instead of putting them into racial groups. Children will learn not to discriminate or to divide ethnic groups
- My son is taken to a school that offers French Immersion - we feel it has and will continue to be a worthwhile educational program and would welcome it in an elementary environment also. Thank you
- It might not be popular at first but it could gain popularity as it is established. This might also be a solution for overcrowding schools, if we put the French Immersion program in a school with lower enrollment
- I am not sure about transportation ie # 6. It depends on our family circumstances and work situation that year.
- [www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Bilingualism-in-Young-Children--Separating-Fact-fr.aspx](http://www.hanen.org/Helpful-Info/Articles/Bilingualism-in-Young-Children--Separating-Fact-fr.aspx)
- Great idea!
- I was in French Immersion from grades 6-12. I feel that giving the opportunity to children starting in kindergarten will give them a greater advantage to learn the language as well as further career opportunities at a later date. I would love for my two boys to experience French Immersion starting at the kindergarten level.
- we have/are considering enrollment in ecole LaVerendrye, however we would prefer that they went to school where we live, FFI. oldest daughter entering kindergarten in 2013, youngest entering 2015 (was really hoping French Immersion would be ready for 2013!)
- Instead of focusing on a small # of people who want this, I think time and \$ is better spent on getting the graduation rate up in Chilliwack public schools. I believe we are below provincial average and something desperately needs to be done. If some people want this then they can pay for it in the private system. Enough extra \$ is already spent on starting it in gr 6. Let's get the grad rate up and have our public schools be something to be proud of.
- I have had 2 children who attended the Early French Immersion Program in Alberta. I was disappointed to see that my younger two could not join here. Early Immersion makes learning another language just part of life instead of the stress I have seen Grade 6's take on when entering, i.e. have to be perfect. Academically, my older children are near to the top of their classes in their respective English grades and I have yet to see any detriment to their learning, only augmentation. It is nice to see children who need a challenge to focus on in regular school having a chance to work towards their fullest potential. The school my children attended ran as 1/2 English and 1/2 Immersion. It was a huge boost to the school including the English focused children. Early Immersion makes the focus on learning, not just on French. When children enter



middle school they have the same opportunities as the other children and don't have to give up some of the benefits, i.e. options classes that older Immersion students have to face.

- I would have liked the option of Early French Immersion program, years ago. Other school districts offer this, always never sd33!
- I totally believe that it is a strong skill. the earlier the better
- We need this program so that our children have an opportunity to compete and excel at a national and global level.
- Nous pensons qu'il sera une bonne idee. La langue de francais est la premiere langue de quelques personnes a Chilliwack. Pensez de ca, s'il vous plait.
- I would not want this new program to affect my children's current school to offer the late entry French program as this is the program I would prefer
- Another language is great for any student especially when it is the official language of Canada as well
- My ability to transport is limited to the south side, not willing to transport to north side school.
- I think these kids need to learn proper English before French. English is the hardest language to learn
- Don't bother. Put money into improving existing educational opportunities for ALL children, not just those who want French Immersion. This is unnecessary.
- I believe it is an excellent idea
- Strathcona Elementary where my children attend has a grade 6 French Immersion class. It is not something that I am personally interested in for my children. In a time when there is very little funding for the very basic education that our children need, I do not support the expansion of the early French Immersion program although I do see that it could be beneficial to some to learn a second language at an early age. However, when there are not enough funds to have enough EAs in each school and class sizes are at a max, I would say it would be more wise to put the extra money spend studying and implementing such a program into making the learning experience for ALL children and teachers a little better.
- Personally I do not feel the need for it as school can be stressful enough having an additional language on top of learning new things would become very frustrating for both me and my kids.
- Although my children are past the age for early French Immersion, they are both already enrolled in the current French Immersion program. If the early French Immersion program had been available when they were younger, we certainly would have taken advantage of it.
- Early Immersion is long overdue in Chilliwack
- I would be wonderful for more space in the Immersion Program as we just moved here over the summer and my son was not able to join. I still have a daughter who is a few years away from that point but will try again with her.
- I think it's a huge waste of money.
- There are children who will benefit from a challenge especially since it seems our education system seems to have 'dumbed down' and spends too much time catering to behavior, ESL,, special needs and forgetting the basics!



- My daughter graduated from the late French Immersion program and we only wish she could have started learning French earlier. I also have friends in Alberta whose daughter went to early French Immersion and she is such an intelligent and well rounded young woman. I believe the challenge of a second language is something that should be available to any family desiring it, no matter where they live, or their heritage!
- This is an URGENT issue, please be sure to start it for Sept 2014 so that both of my kids can do it (Kindergarten 2014 & 2016!) South of Hwy#1 strongly preferred! (Yarrow?)
- I took late French Immersion and would love to give my daughter the ability to take early French Immersion. It has been such an asset and helped me with employment opportunities.
- Before and after school care is important as well.
- Before and After school care at an out of catchment facility would be a tremendous asset and may determine our ability to participate in an out of catchment school.
- I think this would be an amazing opportunity for children and a fine arts school seems the best place for such a program. I was considering a French Immersion school for my children, but nothing is available until grade 6. So this would make some VERY happy parents. :)
- Will you be providing options for school age children to enroll in French Immersion (eg. continuing the gr. 6 entry program and/or starting at grade 3 or 4?)
- I think it will be hard for the younger kids to say some of the words
- I was in early French Immersion in the Lower mainland and would like my daughter to have the same opportunity in Chilliwack.
- I have friends who currently drive their 2 primary school aged children into Vancouver every school day so they can be educated in EFI. These children are often sleeping in the vehicle and miss out on other after school activities due to the amount of time they spend in commuting. If the program was universal, which it should be, there would not be this considerable stress on both children and parents. Having said that, they are committed to providing their children with this formal education.
- Unfortunately my child is already in grade 2 and would not be able to be in this program. I did have my child in a private school for Kindergarten that did offer a French class - it was 1 of the things my child missed most when she went to public school for grade 1. (left due to not in agreement with the faith based teachings in the classroom) Because my child is advanced for her age she finds school boring and is not challenged - having the option for French Immersion would have offered her that challenge. I would like to see at least a French language class offered to all students in elementary schools at all ages so that the decision to enroll in French Immersion at grade 6 can be done with more insight. Finally - if French Immersion is an option in the future the school(s) that offer it will need a before/after school program available that working parents can use - without that it will mean working parents are unable to enroll the child in French Immersion - buses are not enough as the school day is too short. On a totally different topic - I would like to see a more structured program for students who are functioning at a higher level in the public system. I have found this area to be lacking and teachers/principals to be uninterested in finding ways to challenge these children on a daily basis. The current "gifted" program is not nearly enough. I do not understand why individual schools and teachers



cannot have curriculum activities to challenge these children. Valuable years are lost and in the case of my child she has lost interest in school because she is so bored; she is not learning how to apply herself or work through a challenging problem; dumbing these kids down to the "meets expectation" level is a huge disservice to them. Unfortunately in Chilliwack there are no options for alternative schools unless you want your child in a faith based system. I feel these children should be accommodated in the public system where they can learn alongside their peers and neighbourhood friends but at their level. How are they less important than the children that are struggling to meet expectations? Thanks!

- Will we have the funding in the budget to pay for EFI teachers? How can we think of spending money on this program when there are so many other needs in the primary grades such as early interventions for reading, social/emotional needs, just to name a few.
- Late Immersion program is best choice for our family.
- Specialized programs of choice deplete the neighbourhood school although I understand the desire of parents to have the public school system provide specialty services.
- I am not interested in this program for my children.
- Vedder Elementary
- Ensure that the teachers are using communicative curriculum.
- Please, we need one
- If a child is placed in a French speaking environment earlier than is currently available in Chilliwack, it is not so much having to teach the child French, but more that the child will be in the critical period where he or she will just learn French naturally from being around the language. It will provide the child with a more enriched learning experience and will set him or her up for more opportunities in the future.
- We are considering either moving to or transporting our daughter to Abbotsford so that she can attend a French school or French classroom.
- I attended French Immersion and it has enriched my life tremendously. I have traveled to France twice, once to study and once to teach English. My desire to be in France long-term definitely stemmed from learning the French language. French Immersion gave me a fantastic foundation for easily slipping into the French culture both times I was in France.
- The info that I have, states that early Immersion at the preteen level is when the brain is more apt for learning a 2nd language than at the age of 5. I currently have children in the French Immersion program, and I feel that having a base in English, in our English society, is a greater benefit than learning a 2nd in the early years. It is from my own experience having witnessed a child come out of an early Immersion and into English schooling that the child was deficient with both languages and has struggled with school since. Although some parents are pushing for it I think that it is in the benefit of all children that are to be involved in French Immersion to start at the preteen level to gain an essential knowledge of English 1st!
- That the teachers are truly qualified to teach FRIMM and there will be active recruitment and retention incentives to maintain integrity of program; also, provide adequate support network for these teachers



- Enrollment for children in neighbouring school districts where French Immersion is not available (currently reside in Agassiz)
- Please consider that French Immersion is of interest to only a small minority of families, and it seems unreasonable to spend the extra money finding and hiring fluent French-speaking teachers, which are in short supply, for so few people. A better alternative for these people would be a private French-speaking school, which would not require public funding. In my experience, students in French Immersion programs, even in public schools, are socially isolated from other students in the school. Due to the small number of students in the program, there is usually one class of students that sticks together for years, severely limiting their interaction with other students and teachers. This is not beneficial to the students. French is taught in schools routinely as a course for students anyway, and if there are students that develop a passion for it, they are certainly able to pursue their interest for it with continued French education. Also, it is important to consider the age of the students being put into French Immersion - they are certainly not choosing it for themselves, it is their parents forcing them into it. For something that so dramatically effects a child's education, should it really be allowed to be forced upon students at such a young age? Just a few things to consider.
- The option of French Immersion is excellent, and if offered at the school my children are currently attending, I would definitely enroll them in the program. I would also be willing to pay additional fees to use this service, however I would NOT be willing to move my children to a different school for them to access the program.
- Will this program take funds away from areas that all students could benefit? This is an "extra". There are average students who could benefit from more focused individual or small group learning. The money would be better spent doing that.
- I like the late French Immersion option better, so I hope my kids will still get to do that instead of early French Immersion.
- I was enrolled in French Immersion K-12. In the 6th grade there was an English Language exam given to both French Immersion students and English students, the results were that the French Immersion students scored higher than English only students. I remember the teachers saying that it was because we were using more areas of our brains.
- Although I think teaching our children another language early is important. I think that there is not the resources to support such a program in Chilliwack, There isn't enough TA's, Learning assistance to go around as it is!! Maybe when more Chilliwack students are reading & have math skills up to par to the rest of the province and graduation levels are at 100%. Why not expand the French school to allow another class or two of children there?
- I am an early Immersion student and believe strongly in the program. I am currently a teacher in the district and teachers from out of district are shocked when they hear we do not offer early Immersion. I also have several friends who have chosen to live in Abbotsford instead of Chilliwack because our district does not offer early Immersion. Finally people often say that it will be difficult to get qualified French teachers; however, I STRONGLY disagree. Our district has lost several high quality French teachers and Immersion teachers to districts to the west of us



because they were unable to get full time continuing work here and they would rather drive 30 to 45 minutes for job security than stay in our district and hope for a job to come up.

- It is amazing opportunity for our children and we are considering taking our children elsewhere to get the program if our district does not offer it.
- When I have children I would like to be able to offer them early French Immersion!
- As my child is an ESL student I would not consider Early French Immersion program for him in the near future but it is a great idea for the one whose first language is English.
- I don't think French is a very helpful language. However I would consider Spanish.
- My daughter took K French Immersion in Abbotsford, then we relocated here for Grade 1. I would want her to attend French either for the rest of grade 1 or starting grade 2. Thank you.
- As an Early Immersion graduate myself, it is my strongest wish that my daughter (who will begin kindergarten in 2015) and future children (currently expecting) have the opportunity for Early French Immersion. Being fluent in a second language has been an invaluable asset to me: it made me a better student with a gift for language(s) and helped develop flexible critical thinking. I am proud to be fluent in both of our country's national languages!
- Ability to have a second language is priceless in today's world.
- Please consider for Strathcona Elementary
- My children are in high school and won't be able to benefit however I feel it is a valuable program and would have registered my kids in French Immersion had it been available.
- Our community is growing. Please let's make this option available to families. Let's give our kids the best chance for their future.
- Sardis Elementary is one of the few schools in Chilliwack that has late French Immersion (grade 6) so why not just keep the French program at that location?
- Please bring this to Chilliwack.
- Starting the program would create more interest and draw people to it.
- I attended Programme Cadre at LaVerendrye, but would prefer for my children to have French Immersion. The earlier the better!
- I took French Immersion from grade 1-12 and it was the best experience. It makes a difference. I don't regret it.
- Canada is so diversified that even though French is an official language, I feel the way of the future is in Spanish, Chinese, East Indian, Mandarin and other languages. Why waste precious resources on a chosen few who would like to learn French. I am not opposed to learning French, but if some people want special treatment, they should pay for it. Resources are stretched enough as it is. Please ask how many parents would be willing to pay for early French Immersion and I suspect numbers would dwindle significantly.
- Promontory Heights or Vedder would be great
- Spanish language at an early age
- Early Immersion would enrich our children's education. My hope is that programming is implemented in Chilliwack to make Immersion accessible.



- Our children are currently enrolled in the LFI program and we are quite happy with the program and their teachers. We also know that there have been times when it has been difficult to find teachers for the program. Why not try to add one grade...say grade 5 for the 2013-2014 school year? Go from there.
- I attended school in an French (Early) Immersion School as did my spouse, and we would not send our children to an early Immersion program. My husband has struggled with his English grammar as a result of his French Immersion schooling. I have spent time in many French Immersion Programs and have found that the teachers struggle to teach English/French grammar because of their own language skills. Some teachers have strong English and poor French grammar and the opposite is also true. I know that this is not the rule, but before hiring I believe it should be mandatory that teachers write an English and French proficiency test that includes spoken and written content before being considered for positions. If this was possible and enough staff with these qualifications could be hired I would send my children to an Early Immersion Program.
- I believe that the earlier a child is exposed to another language the easier it is for them to learn it. I would love the opportunity for my children to learn our country's second language and feel that it is necessary for our schools to offer French Immersion sooner than later in the education journey.
- We transported our eldest daughter to Abbotsford for French Immersion & continue to do so for our youngest - 7 years in total so far transporting outside our catchment area just because Chilliwack does not provide this service.
- Will the EFI students merge with the LFI students at middle school and high school? What is the prospect for finding qualified teachers to sustain an EFI program? Will Special Education support services be available for students enrolled in the EFI program?
- I would drive to another area, but not more than about 10 minutes. I chose distance learning for my 2 kids who are now in school because early French Immersion was not available. I did consider driving to Abbotsford, but decided the drive was too far.
- I have three children, all of which are in French Immersion. We would like to move back to Chilliwack, but without French Immersion in the current school program we are unable to make the move.
- Consider school buses to pick up and drop of younger students.
- Providing more support in our current system should be a higher priority. Our current system isn't providing the basics as well as it used to and that should be addressed before considering any new programs.
- As our second official language I feel it is extremely important our children learn French as early as possible. Not only is it a shame we don't have an early French Immersion it is also disappointing that instruction starts in grade 4 or 5. I am from another province where instruction of both languages begins in kindergarten.
- I think EFI would be a huge benefit to my children, and I would like the opportunity to offer it to them



- I believe that children should have a solid foundation in their mother tongue (i.e. English) before embarking into a second language. Late Immersion fits the bill. Early can do a lot of damage to the mother tongue (i.e. poor spelling, learning disabilities are exacerbated in an early Immersion program). Also, the past and present indicate that finding qualified staff is an ongoing challenge. As our LFI teachers retire, this will be even more evident. The success of any program depends on the capacity of the teacher in front of the students. I have serious concerns about teacher recruitment.
- We are planning to move near the new Sardis Library in the next 2 years and will hopefully be sending our three children to the school within that catchment. We would love the option of an Immersion program and the location would impact our future home purchase decision.
- I believe there is no greater gift to give a child, a second language. My husband and I actually considered an uprooting to Kelowna to see this happen. Thank you for taking the public's opinion into consideration!
- I think it is essential that we give our children the opportunity to learn both of our official languages from an early age. I wish I would have had the chance,
- We live in Promontory Heights and would love to see this happen!!
- I realize this is an important option but our family, at this stage, has decided that we would rather concentrate on excelling in "standard" classes for the grade level. We think that French, or other language classes, are fine to have in High school grades.
- I took the French program (in a private school) starting in grade 1, my child will be enrolled at FG LEARY for SEPT 2015. The ability to integrate children at a young age to multiple languages is proven to increase a child's ability to problem solve; reason; learn and interact (and respect) other cultures. Considering French is one of our nation's official languages, it is a fundamental part of the learning process. Integrating a child at an early age will also help them as years go on (as it becomes more difficult/frustrating) to learn in the later years (i.e. grade 6). To instill a love for the language by helping them to learn/understand the basics will dramatically assist them in the future, while at the same time giving them an appreciation for the language.
- REALLY wish languages other than French would be considered. Understanding that it is Canada's "other" official language, yet it is not as useful internationally as it once was. Consider Mandarin, or Spanish.
- We need early French Immersion school!
- We are looking at moving away from the area in order to have our child attend early French Immersion. I was shocked when I heard Chilliwack did not offer an early French Immersion program. This is an opportunity that we want for our child.
- I have a child in French and it's going great. My next son will go into late French also and don't want them to wait to start learning at English at grade 3 - so I think the late French is better so they have better English language skills before they start French.
- My children attend, and will continue to attend Late French Immersion. I feel that this is an excellent program and there is no need to use further public school resources to have Early French Immersion, when there is already such a great program in place.



- I grew up in Early French Immersion and I think it is an excellent opportunity for children to develop a strong written and oral understanding of a different language. It widens a child's world of understanding and appreciation for different cultures and languages. It is an amazing opportunity and should have been available in Chilliwack years ago. I'm home schooling my oldest child to give her the opportunity that she can't get in the Chilliwack Public School system at this time. Please make this opportunity to excel further in life available to the rest of my children and all the other young children currently in Chilliwack and those to come! Thank you!
- I think this is a great opportunity that I am sad is not currently available in our district. Thanks for taking the time to consider this for us and our children.
- We live in Cloverdale and we want to move to Chilliwack and we need our children who are already attending French Immersion in grade 4 and kindergarten, as well as our 4 year old and 2 year old to be able to attend French Immersion. French Immersion be an incentive for people who live in an area like Cloverdale where it is becoming more crowded and want a smaller town experience. I teach French Immersion as well and my husband coaches for the football team. Please contact me if I can help in any other way
- Learning a second language from k is very important to me. I am willing to take my children to Abbotsford if there isn't early Immersion here
- I believe more families on the south side would be interested in French Immersion. The south side has more young families with parents who have post-secondary education and are more likely to enroll their children in French Immersion and assist their children with their French studies. I am a graduate of the early French Immersion program (W.J. Mouat in Abbotsford, 1996).
- We would really love for our children the opportunity to be enrolled into French Immersion starting in Kindergarten!!!
- As an EFL graduate myself I feel it is essential for my children to have the opportunity to enroll in this program as well. I believe it is a better way to learn the French language and culture versus the late Immersion program.
- I think it is an opportunity for Chilliwack to catch up to other school districts and promote a stronger pride in learning
- Promontory Heights? Yes please :)
- My wife and I are willing to transport our child outside our catchment area to a school with an Early French Immersion program.
- I do not support early Immersion. In an English-speaking community, it does not make sense for students to be learning French at the expense of their English skills. Students who have learning disabilities may be recognized much later than they should be in early Immersion because their problems are attributed to the language barrier. It makes more sense for students to enter late Immersion in grade 6 after building up a solid foundation of English literacy. I think that rather than surveying parents who may be interested in an exclusive education for their children, the district should be looking at what the research shows as being the most beneficial for students in an English community, late or early Immersion. Not all parents necessarily understand the potential drawbacks of early Immersion.



- It is essential - Chilliwack is currently behind the times. This program is LONG overdue. Please expedite this process so that there will be an EFI Kindergarten option (pref in Sardis) for Sept 2014. I have TWO young boys that I would enroll for EFI Kindergarten (one starting Sept. 2014, the other for Sept. 2016)
- Early French Immersion is an absolutely essential program for Chilliwack. I feel very strongly about it and will drive my child to any school in Chilliwack that offers it.
- I have four children. Ages 5, 3, 1 and due May 2013. Please start an early French Immersion Program before my children all start English Kindergarten!
- Well trained French speaking teachers should be implementing the French program
- Studies show that Early French Immersion students have higher performance in learning/grades than students who are not in French Immersion Programs. It's seems like an obvious choice to add French Immersion to the Chilliwack School district if it wants to be on the same level as surrounding districts. We are willing to take our children to Abbotsford if Chilliwack is unable to make this simple choice. Please make this a reality. Thank you
- I would love for my kids to be in Early French Immersion and we've considered moving to another community (Abbotsford) because Chilliwack doesn't have it
- French TTOCs, French classroom supports, appropriate teacher training, \$\$ for resources
- I think that having an EFI program in Chilliwack would be amazing. I would love for my children to be able to have what I did growing up without having to pay expensive private school tuitions. EFI in Chilliwack would severely reduce my planned/scheduled daycare, etc for my child. I will be paying \$400 a month for before and after school care so my son can attend EFI in Abbotsford if it's isn't brought to Chilliwack by September 2013
- I am a student of EFI and wholeheartedly believe in the program. I use my French skills at work regularly and would love for our children to have the same opportunity. We are very excited about EFI coming to Chilliwack and look forward to it being here as soon as possible.
- Early exposure to a second language is the best way to achieve bilingualism. The earlier that children can be exposed to a second language, the easier, more enjoyable it is for them. A higher level of proficiency occurs when started at a young age. Children of Chilliwack should have the same opportunities for education (learning a second language) as students in other districts. Not only will the students gain a second language, they will be advocates and ambassadors for Canada's French culture, helping to keep Canada united. The doors open wider for students who have a working knowledge of Canada's second official language. It gives British Columbian students a chance to experience French as a living language and culture. Please make this happen for Chilliwack students.
- That we live in a bilingual nation and, regardless of what language, learning a second language from early in life has innumerable benefits in other areas of learning.
- Although I do not have children yet, we are planning to this year. My husband and his family is French speaking, and we find it very important to have our children educated in French - beginning at an early age! This part is KEY! We are 100% behind the early French Immersion program in Chilliwack.



- Early French Immersion enables children to become bilingual. It tunes the ear for other languages such as Spanish and Italian. Putting your child in French Immersion gives them another opportunity for success in life.
- Would the grade 6 entry level still be available for those students beyond grade 1?
- I think it would have been better to identify individual potential EFI students rather than surveying the whole District
- Making it available to many elementary schools in Chilliwack and Sardis..or as many as possible not just one or two
- I have 4 nephews in the Salmon Arm school district that have all had the opportunity to participate in the Early Immersion Program, and I would love the same opportunity for my own kids! Considering how small a community Salmon Arm is, and that it is a thriving program in their district I can only hope that Chilliwack can not only add this program, but that it will thrive here!
- I would hope that the district would pick a school that is pretty easy to access for parents coming from both ends of town. Something just north or south of the freeway. I would like to see them offer busing to help maintain the program, even if there is a cost to parents. I really hope that EFI is implemented in Chilliwack.
- Driving is definitely no issue since the alternative right now is Abbotsford. I would love for my sons to have an opportunity to go to school (for French Immersion) in the same area that they have grown up, the same area their friends from sports will be, the same area where they will go to high school.
- What about the Grade 3 model they use in the Maritimes?
- Introducing a second language at an early age has many benefits!
- I already have children in the Sardis school area and cannot transport my youngest child to another school. If there is EFI by 2013 I will have two children in the system. Sadly my oldest will have to try for late Immersion.
- I answered 'yes' to above question but would really prefer the District to give serious consideration to French Immersion throughout the district so our kids have same opportunities as kids in urban districts like the Lower Mainland.
- I would be willing to transport my child to Watson Elementary or Tyson Elementary. **STRONG** preference is Watson Elementary. I am not however, ruling out other schools.
- The introduction stated that early French Immersion would begin in either kindergarten or grade 1. Have you researched the possibility of starting in grade 3? In the Maritimes, this is when they are now starting early French Immersion because the children are still young enough that their brains will pick up the language very quickly, yet the students have a strong foundation in English and are reading, and finally, most learning disabilities and challenges would have been identified by grade 3. This is a superior model to starting in kindergarten and grade 1. A team from the district attended a francophone conference a few years ago to learn about this and I am very surprised that it doesn't seem that the knowledge gained from that conference is even being considered. Please don't just follow the model that many of the other districts in the lower mainland have adopted - there is a better, superior model that really gives



the students more advantages. Please look into this, even if it means delaying the possible implementation of early French Immersion in Chilliwack.

- Busing
- We are in Promontory Heights
- The city of Chilliwack is growing and many people from other communities look to move further into the valley but many will stop as far as Abbotsford due to wanting to enroll their children or having children already enrolled in French Immersion schools where they currently live so they only go as far as Abbotsford due to not having EFI available here.
- Both my husband and I benefitted from French Immersion and would like our children to have the same opportunity. Thank-you!
- PLEASE offer early French Immersion in Chilliwack
- I would be willing to pay a tuition as well.
- Please offer early French Immersion in Chilliwack
- There are so many people in this community who are simply too busy to be a "loud voice" on this issue, but none the less, feel it to be a very important one!
- I am a French Immersion teacher in Abbotsford and would love a job in Chilliwack where I live.
- This would be such a good thing for my children and give them more opportunity in life later on.
- We had early French Immersion in Smithers, BC which is a town servicing about 5,000 people so it confounds me that we don't have early Immersion here in Chilliwack.
- I would really like to see this happen. I am not able to transport my children to Abbotsford for EFI, and would much rather have my kids schooled within Chilliwack. I think having an EFI program would be worthwhile to both my children and future children. It will help them later on in life and opens up a world of possibilities for employment in the future.
- Very concerned that programs of perceived value beyond regular classroom in affluent neighborhoods damages the healthy balance of diversity at our sites in less affluent neighborhoods.