



French Immersion ~ Questions & Answers

Questions Commonly Asked by Parents Considering French Immersion.

Immersion is the most effective method known for teaching a second language. The aim of Early French Immersion is functional bilingualism. Graduates are able to communicate comfortably in the second language; meanwhile, their English skills will be excellent. The skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are common to all languages and once learned, are transferable between languages. A key to success is a positive attitude in the home toward the language and the program.

The following questions are commonly asked by parents who are considering enrolling their child in French Immersion. We hope the answers will give you a better understanding of this unique Canadian program; a program being increasingly used as a model by other countries around the world.

Q. Will Total Immersion retard my child's development of English-language skills?

A. There is a temporary lag relative to regular English program groups. In Early Immersion the student's weaker performance in English lasts until about the end of grade three. However, the trend in later grades is for Immersion students to perform in English as well as, or better than, their English-educated counter-parts. Learning a second language is believed to enhance a student's performance in his/her mother tongue.

Q. Does it matter if no one at home speaks French?

A. No, ~ the program was designed for children of non-French speaking families. Teachers are aware of this when they send home notices or assign homework. Reporting is in English.

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

A. Yes, ~ the curriculum must follow the guidelines of the provincial Ministry of Education. Materials in French cover the same basic academic goals regardless of the language of instruction.

Q. Shouldn't some sort of screening take place?

A. The only children found to be very poor candidates for Immersion are those with a poor sense of auditory discrimination or auditory memory. In almost all cases, this is apparent to the kindergarten teacher and a decision can be made before grade one. Children who may have difficulty learning to read in English may have difficulty learning to read in French. It is generally the actual reading skills that these children have trouble with, not the language. If learning assistance is available in French, these children should be able to remain in Immersion.

Q. Who teaches the program?

A. A bilingual teacher whose first language is French or who has acquired fluency in the French language. There are university programs which train Immersion teachers.

Q. What if my child wants to go to the bathroom or is injured and cannot communicate in French?

A. Normally all teachers also speak English and if necessary could do so in an emergency.

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Q. What type of accent will my child have?

A. Standard French vocabulary and structures are taught. A variety of accents exist in all languages. During a school career a child will probably be exposed to teachers from various parts of the world who are models of well-spoken French. Your child will develop a natural French accent when speaking French, but will retain his/her natural English accent when speaking English.

Q. What if other children in the family are not in Immersion?

A. The most common problems are with transportation or participation in after-school activities. However, if the family recognizes that different programs are equally valid for each child even those problems should not be a major concern. Often a younger child in Immersion stimulates an interest in French for all members of the family. Older siblings are often motivated to enroll in other French courses where they are available.

Q. Are extracurricular activities in French necessary?

A. No, ~ but they are desirable. Such activities provide other language models for the child to copy and demonstrate that French is a living language. They provide an opportunity for the child to practice and expand his/her vocabulary in a non-structured setting.

Q. Won't my child's English spelling suffer?

A. Although there is a certain lag in English language arts the first few years of the program, this is almost all made up during the first year English is introduced. By the end of the elementary grades many Immersion students perform better than children in the regular program on several aspects of measured English skills.

Q. What about achievement in mathematics and other subjects?

A. Many years of testing indicates that an Immersion student's performance in other subjects is equal to the performance of students not in Immersion.

Q. How can I help my child with homework, when I can't speak French?

A. It is helpful, but not necessary, for parents to speak French. In grade one there is usually no homework. Help with concepts can be given regardless of language. Other suggestions are available from the classroom teacher and your local CPF chapter representative. Please ask!

Q. What if we're transferred to another district or province?

A. French Immersion is available in most urban centres of Canada and is spreading to many smaller school districts. CPF publishes a list of programs throughout the country. You can also contact your School Board or Ministry of Education. A child transferring out of Immersion very early, before English language arts is introduced, may experience a brief lag in this subject. Consultation with the new teacher and some work at home overcomes this problem very quickly.

Q. Will French Immersion affect my child's social development?

A. Studies have proven that early Immersion students suffer no intellectual, emotional, or social impairment. While they might tend to associate more with their classmates on the playground, this is typical of all children. They develop the same sense of English Canadian identity, as do children in the regular program. They attend social functions with their friends in their own neighbourhood as well as with their classmates.

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