



# French Immersion – Parent Information

## École T.M. Roberts Elementary

École T.M. Roberts (ETMR) Elementary school is a dual-track school, which means that the French Immersion (FI) program co-exists with the regular English language program. The French Immersion program at T.M. is open to any student in the Cranbrook area, while our English program is for our school's catchment area. There are currently 11 French Immersion classrooms at École T.M. Roberts.

French Immersion will present an additional challenge to your child as it is a program developed for the specific purpose of giving school children the opportunity to become bilingual, while still maintaining their English skills.

At ÉTMR, we offer an Early Immersion program which means that the intake of the program is in Kindergarten and Grade 1, depending on available space. The FI program is intended for a child who speaks any language other than French at home and who wishes to become bilingual or multilingual. French Immersion is suitable for children of all academic abilities. Communication between home and school is in English.

There are many benefits to learning a second language, some of which include:

- adopting new perspectives
- mental flexibility
- developing an awareness and appreciation of other people and cultures
- increased educational and career opportunities
- increased brain development



## What teaching approach is used?

French is the main language of instruction from K-3, with the exception of library and music. Formal instruction in English Language Arts begins in Grade 4, the percentage of French language instruction is 80%. Beginning in Grade 7 at Parkland, the instruction in French will be 50 – 75% of instructional time by the time students reach Mount Baker, they are receiving 25% of their instructional time in French. There will be times teachers need to speak in English to help students solve problems with their peers and/or fully comprehend a concept. Late French Immersion is offered beginning in Grade 4 at École Isabella Dicken in Fernie.

Students who complete the French Immersion program in Grade 12, and who fulfill the BC Ministry of Education's graduation requirements will receive two diplomas:

- The British Columbia Certificate of Graduation,
- The Diplôme de fine d'études secondaires en Colombie-Britannique

## What if my child is a struggling learner?

Today's French Immersion classrooms are as diverse as any other. At ÉTMR we strive to support students in the FI program and to help them along in their educational journey.

If your child is struggling, we have a team of teachers, educational assistants, student services teachers, speech and language pathologists, counsellors, youth care workers, and an indigenous education support worker who can provide support depending on your child's needs. Early interventions have been shown to have the greatest impact. We also work closely with parents, family physicians and pediatricians should there be a need for further support.



## DISPLELLING COMMON MYTHS ABOUT LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

Research has demonstrated the positive impacts of bilingualism, including the development of language learning strategies that help accelerate cognitive development and the development of greater mental flexibility (Peal and Lambert, 1962; Ben-Zeev, 1977). French Immersion programs are also proven to offer students benefits that are not only linguistic, but also academic and cognitive, including the development of creative thinking competencies and multi-language awareness (Lazaruk, 2007). While there are many examples of the positive influence bilingualism has on children, recent studies have also demonstrated how these influences last into adulthood and well into old age, by helping to delay the onset of symptoms of dementia, for example (Bialystok, 2007; Hilchey & Klein, 2011).

Arnett, K., & Bourgoin, R. (2018). *Access for success: making inclusion work for language learners*. Pearson Canada.

Myth	What the research says
Learning another language will have negative long-term effects on the first language skills of the learner.	There is often a short-term decline in the first language skills of language learners compared to monolingual students, but in the long term, no negative effects have been observed. Generally, students who are proficient in multiple languages have stronger overall skills than monolingual students.  <i>Cummins, 2000, 2001; Mady, 2013a, 2013b; Swain &amp; Lapkin, 1982; Wiss, 1987</i>
For a language learner to do well, he/she must have a parent who speaks the language, or otherwise have regular access to the target language	Multiple factors influence second language development, including environment. Within that influence, parental knowledge of the target language has not been identified as a critical need; what matters more are the types of interactions that occur within the language environment. It is also worth noting that French immersion programs were specifically developed for those students whose parents did not speak French. <i>Ortega, 2009</i>
Fluency or proficiency in the language takes only a year to develop	Language skills – especially the most sophisticated – will take years to develop. Though learners may be able to carry on a social conversation with relative ease after a few months in some situations, learners are not able to navigate all language situations in such a short time.
If a student is having difficulty within the new language, it is counterproductive to give support in the first language.	Because learners are able to transfer ideas and information across languages, the issue is not the language of support, but rather that support is offered at all.  <i>Bourgoin &amp; Dicks, 2013; Bournot-Trites, 2008, Durjunoglu, 2002</i>

## HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED AT SCHOOL?

Getting involved in your child's school benefits your child, yourself, and the school community and shows your child that you value their education and that you are a partner in their learning. There are many ways to get involved:

- Offer to volunteer in your child's classroom.
- Attend field trips that request parent/guardian helpers.
- Talk with other parents/guardians or get involved with the school PAC (Parent Advisory Council).
- Encourage play dates with your child's friends.
- Volunteer to coach a sport, host a lunch club or an after-school activity.

## HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD?

Reading and communicating with your child in your first language **early** and **often** is very important and beneficial as literacy skills are transferable from one language to another.

Bring home French or English books from the library or local bookstore to look at and read together. Keep reading joyful and make it a special time between you every day.

