

French Immersion – Parent Information

Ecole 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 TM is open to any student in the Cranbrook area, while our English program is for our school's catchment area.

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

The Early Immersion program aims to make your child bilingual. By the end of grade 12, your child will:

- be functionally fluent in French, with the ability to communicate in personal and professional settings,
- be able to pursue post-secondary education in French,
- have achieved a high English proficiency,
- demonstrate an appreciation for the French language and an understanding of the diversity of Francophone cultures

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

- adopting new perspectives,
- mental flexibility,
- develop self-confidence and social competencies
- develop 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. Instruction in English Language Arts begins in grade 4. Beginning in grade 7 at Parkland, the instruction in French will be 50 – 75% of instructional time and at Mount Baker it is 25% of instructional time. Teachers sometimes need to speak in English to help students solve problems with their peers.

Students who complete the French Immersion program in Grade 12, and who fulfill the BC Ministry of Education's other graduation requirements will receive a Double Dogwood, made up of 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 those delivering other programs. At ETMR we strive to support students in the FI program and to help them along in their educational journey, wherever that may be for them.

Research has shown that the language of instruction is often not the cause of the struggle. If you have any concerns about your child's learning, it is recommended you talk to your child's classroom teacher who might suggest a conversation with your family doctor. Information gained from your physician might offer different instructional strategies that can be used to help students with diverse needs. Supplemental learning support may be available to your child if there is a medical reason that is getting in the way of their learning and success.

If at any time, you have concerns about your child ability to learn, set up a meeting to discuss with your child's teacher. Early interventions have been shown to have the greatest impact. Some signs to watch out for:

Kindergarten:

- your child has difficulty expressing himself or herself clearly in their first language

Grade 1:

- your child has difficulty paying attention even for short periods of time

- he or she is unable to echo words or phrases in French
- very little letter / sound recognition

Grade 2

- very little word identification
- he or she has difficulty paying attention for extended periods of time

Grade 3

- difficulties understanding or recalling information
- they often have difficulty giving information about something they have just seen or experienced
- difficulty with phonetic analysis (that is, identifying or separating the sounds of words)

Grade 4/5

- they are still reversing letters
- their difficulty with phonetic analysis is hindering comprehension

Remember that it is not unusual in French Immersion...

... for children to be frustrated at first because they're used to understanding things easily or to having their curiosity satisfied quickly;

... for some shy or anxious children to be reluctant to participate in class activities, and for their speaking skills in French to develop slowly at first as a result;

... for the youngest children in the class to experience some delays in acquiring readiness skills and academic skills.

(adapted from "Yes, You Can Help!" Information and Inspiration for Parents of French Immersion Students, CPF publication)

WHAT DOES RESEARCH SAY?

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, metalinguistic awareness, and enhanced communicative sensitivity (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).

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED AT SCHOOL?

Getting involved in your child's school benefits your child, yourself, and the school. Being involved in the school shows your child that you value education and understand the importance of it. This is a strong, positive message that will help your child in sharing similar beliefs. The other added benefit of being involved in the school is that it helps the school with various important volunteer roles. There are many ways to get involved:

- Reach out to the school's administration to learn about the yearly school events.
- 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.

HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD?

Reading with your child in your first language is beneficial as literacy skills are transferable from one language to another. Try and help your child with their homework or have them teach you some French. Bring home French books from the library or local book store to read together. Talk with your child's teachers about other strategies that can support your child.

ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO OFFER PEER SUPPORT

As your child gets older, encourage them to offer support to the French community. They may want to consider being a tutor, scribe, or a big buddy. Older children can offer to help younger students with writing, reading, and listening. An added benefit to this type of work is that it not only helps children learn to be empathetic, it can often count as hours towards work experience or career prep.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT FRENCH IMMERSION

Q: Will the students' English language skills suffer in French immersion programs?

No, students' English language skills will not suffer in French immersion programs. Research shows that students in French immersion programs achieve the same levels of competence in English as students in English-only programs. This has been found for reading, writing, speaking and listening. Sometimes students in total immersion programs perform more poorly in English during the primary grades when all instruction is in French than students in the English program. However, these differences usually disappear within one year of getting English language instruction.

Immersion students usually catch up to their peers in the English program quickly because:

- The skills acquired when learning to read and write French transfer to English.
- They may have some experience reading and writing in English at home
- Children have to learn to read and write only once and then they can figure out how to read and write in another language, with some support from their teachers.

It is useful for immersion teachers to assess their students' level of literacy or pre literacy skills in English when they start immersion so that they can individualize instruction. Students who have already acquired the basic skills of reading and writing in English do not need to relearn those skills again in French.