



School District #39, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Vancouver School Board

# PARENT INFORMATION

## INTENSIVE FRENCH

SCHOOL DISTRICT # 39 (VANCOUVER)

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## What exactly is Intensive French?

Intensive French is a second language teaching approach in which French is taught intensively for most of the day during five months during Grade 6. The students in the program receive about 80% of their instruction in French during the first half of the year and 20% during the second half; the rest of the curriculum (except for Mathematics) is “compressed” into the second half of the year.

The key ingredients for IF success are:

- **Intensity of French instruction**

Students and teacher speak only French during the first half of the year (80% of the day). The focus is on learning to communicate in French and not on other content learning in particular. To this end, students focus on topics that are grouped into relevant and motivating themes. Real-life projects within these themes help students to see the practical value of what they are learning. Instruction concentrates on the oral as well as the writing and reading skills.

- **Time of concentrated exposure**

It has been shown that the most efficient way to learn another language is to spend concentrated time with it. Higher results are achieved with 60 hours concentrated into three weeks with four hours a day than with 60 hours spread over three months with one hour a day, even though the number of hours is the same.

- **Enriched communicative FSL methodology**

In order to make optimum use of the increased time of French, an enriched curriculum is required. This enrichment is provided through expanding the content of the curriculum, increasing the depth of exploration of topics and adopting a whole language approach to the teaching of French. The curriculum is cognitively demanding and increases in complexity of language use, tasks and knowledge base during the five months. It integrates some information from other subject areas, such as Science (environmental issues), Social Studies (Canadian and world geography, Canadian and world history) and Health (rules for good nutrition)

- **Interactive pedagogy**

Regular use of an interactive pedagogy, such as cooperative learning (working in pairs and small groups) and project-based learning is an essential part of IF. Projects permit students to use language in many different contexts, enabling them to use more types of language functions (explaining, gathering information, asking questions, negotiating meaning) as well as integrating knowledge from different sources using complex language structures. It contributes significantly to the development of cognitive, social and personal capacities as well as the organizational skills of the learner.

## What is the Difference?

**Elementary Core French:** is a basic second language program intended to enable students to communicate purposefully in French and develop an openness to cultural diversity. The program is available in elementary schools at the Grade 5-7 level offering, on average, 80 minutes of instruction per week.

**Intensive French:** is an intensive French language acquisition program involving a period of intensive exposure to French (80 % of one half of the Grade 6 year and 20% for the remaining half). The program continues with strong French instruction in the following years.

**French Immersion:** is an intensive French language acquisition program with the goal of developing functionally bilingual students through teaching most of the curriculum with French as the language of instruction. The program is offered beginning in Kindergarten (Early French Immersion) or in Grade 6 (Late French Immersion).

## **Intensive French Model**

### **Entry level: Grade 6**

#### **September to January:**

- Intensive French semester
- 80% Intensive French Language instruction
- 20% instruction in English (Mathematics will be taught in English throughout the whole year)

#### **February to June:**

- Integrated curriculum semester with instruction in English.
- 20% (or 60 minutes per day) French instruction

### **What do we mean by “integrating the curriculum”?**

Basically it means integrating the curricula of the different subjects in Grade 6 (e.g., Science, Social Studies, English Language Arts) into the second half of the year. Simply put, all the subject matter learning outcomes will be maintained, but the number of resources used to achieve these goals will be reduced. This is possible because a lot of the learning outcomes (especially the process ones) can be met effectively during the Intensive French part. Students will not have to do “extra work” to meet all the required learning outcomes.

There is a theoretical basis for integrating the curriculum, called the “transdisciplinary approach” to second language instruction. Since there is a common underlying proficiency in first and second languages, many of the objectives of the English Language Arts curriculum can be met in the learning of French. In addition, there are many underlying learning outcomes that actually overlap the different subject areas. These can easily be identified and, by eliminating needless redundancy, the time of instruction can be reduced.

### **After Grade 6:**

- Grade 7: students continue with 60 minutes of French instruction per day.
- Secondary school follow-up:
  - Various models depending on the number of students:
    - Intensive French students grouped together in one advanced French class in Grade 8 and possibly in Grade 9 (depending on secondary timetabling)
    - follow up to occur in Grade 11 or 12 with possible Advanced Placement courses

## **Appendix 1**

### **Why would Vancouver offer this program?**

#### **Increasing literacy levels**

Research has shown over and over that learning a second language increases the literacy competency of students. In the IF program, specific anecdotal research suggests that even weak students improved their ability to write in English. Thus, the experience left many students with great gains in communicative fluency in another language while improving their achievement in writing and reading in general.

#### **Increasing diversity of learning experiences and choice for ALL students**

This is a powerful enrichment of the curriculum. Anecdotal evidence shows that students in the IF program demonstrated increased self-esteem and confidence. They exhibited greater initiative and responsibility. Furthermore, teachers commented that the students were more willing to use dictionaries, reference works, and the Internet to find information, and that they were more autonomous in their work habits than would be expected for the completion of the regular curriculum.

#### **Increasing the number of functionally bilingual students**

There is a considerable contrast between the communicative ability of immersion students and of those in the regular Core French program; yet the vast majority of students (over 90%) are presently in the Core French program. This is another avenue for more students to become communicatively fluent in French and, as a result, to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that a bilingual Canada offers.

## Appendix 2

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**1. *As parents, do we have to know French?***

NO, you do not have to know French. This is a program designed for children whose families do not necessarily speak French. The best way to help your child is to support and encourage him or her in the study of French: watching TV in French, listening to a small book the student would like to read to you, etc. If you do not speak French, your child may become a more autonomous learner because he or she will have to call upon friends or look for other sources of help if there are problems with homework or assignments.

**2. *Will the teacher speak French all the time?***

YES. The use of the English language by the teacher will only occur for a very short period of time at the beginning of the Intensive French program. During the 80% French part of the day, it is essential that students be completely immersed in the language for maximum learning.

**3. *What happens to the skill level in English?***

As the three-year pilot project in Newfoundland has shown, there will be absolutely no negative effect on the level of skills in English. This is because learning a second language, such as French, is an overall literacy experience. In the teaching of Intensive French a language arts approach is adopted. Skills in the areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing are all taught. All the processes involved in the study of these skills in French are transferred into English during the last five months of the school year. In effect, there is an increase in instructional time for language arts and as a result more time is devoted to actual literacy development.

For children whose first language is not English, research conducted in BC has shown that gains in English proficiency are more pronounced for students who take part in Intensive French than those who do not, especially if their proficiency in their first or second languages (home language and English) are already fairly well developed.

**4. *What happens to other subjects?***

Since many processes in the learning of subjects such as Science and Social Studies are the same as the ones used and developed in the learning of French (generalizing, making hypotheses, etc.), it is not necessary to relearn these processes. These skills will transfer into the different subject areas so that, even if time is reduced in these subjects, student success can be the same. This was shown in practice during the three-year pilot project in Newfoundland.

**5. *Do students have extra work to do?***

NO. Students will not be expected to “do extra work” in order to “cover the curriculum”. The curriculum for the year will be carefully structured to cover all the learning outcomes without increasing the workload. This can be achieved by “integrating” the overlapping learning outcomes, reducing the number activities used to attain the same learning outcome and focusing on skill transference from one subject to another.

**6. *What happens to Mathematics?***

There will be no change in the learning of Mathematics. Students will receive the same number of hours in Math as those in the regular program. It will be taught throughout the year in English.

**7. *How is Intensive French different from Immersion?***

In French immersion, students learn subjects, such as Mathematics, Science or Social Studies, in French. Students learn French while learning these subjects.

In Intensive French, the focus is on learning the French language. Students develop their communication skills, both oral and written, by working on themes. These themes are drawn from topics relevant to the students’ lives. No specific school subject is taught in the second language. However, many of these themes link well with areas in the Grade 6 curriculum. As a result, a large number of the Grade 6 process learning outcomes are covered during the intensive French period.

**8. *How is Intensive French different from the regular Core French program?***

Core French is taught following a curriculum that emphasizes the ability to communicate in French through the use of themes and projects centered around the everyday experiences of students. It is the increase in intensity and in instructional time in French which will allow students to acquire skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing which go beyond the skills acquired in a regular Core French program.

Research shows that students in Intensive French develop spontaneous oral communication skills equivalent to that of Grade 11 Core French students and written skills equivalent to Grade 3 francophone students.

**9. *What will a student be able to do in French by the end of Grade 6 in IF?***

At the end of the school year, where Intensive French is offered, students should, among other things, be able to:

- carry on a general conversation on specific topics;
- write with a reasonable degree of accuracy: for instance, write or reply to a letter from a friend, write messages to people of their own age;
- ask relatively simple questions;
- read a short, simple novel in French, grasping the general idea;
- read simple articles in a newspaper or magazine at an appropriate age and interest level.

The focus of Intensive French is on the learning of French as a means of communication, and not as an academic subject of study.

**10. *What happens if a student cannot keep up with the French?***

French is taught as a means of communication, and not as an object of study. Because curriculum in Intensive French is based mainly on the everyday experiences of students, they learn how to speak about things of interest to them. They become motivated and interested, talking about themselves, their families, their favorite animals, sports they like, films, etc. Anecdotal reports from parents and students show that even students who struggle in academic areas gain more self-confidence and actually improve their literacy skills generally.

**11. *What will happen to the student with learning difficulties?***

The Intensive French program should provide a positive learning experience in literacy for ALL students. In the three-year experience in Newfoundland, it was noted that some students who found learning more of a challenge made tremendous progress not only in French but also in English. Furthermore, with the increased time in French, these students were able to see themselves as “successful” students, at least compared to other students in French at the same grade level. This contributed to a significant increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, important factors for success in learning. In fact, in some cases, performance in English Language Arts improved significantly. One hypothesis for this phenomenon is the fact that students get a “second chance” to learn emergent and beginner level literacy strategies they may have missed in their primary years.

**12. *What will happen to Intensive French students after Grade 6?***

To maintain students' gains in French, schools will be offering a follow-up program at the Grade 7 level as well as the secondary level. Students will be experiencing an enriched French curriculum and will thus be in a position to successfully complete Grade 12 Core French (with the provincial exam) earlier than expected, leaving them openings for more electives during the graduation years. At the very least, they will have a definite advantage in completing their language requirement with Grade 12 French.

## Appendix 3

### Why Learn Another Language?

- **Increased marketability:**

Our world is fast becoming a global village where economic growth is related to the number of languages in which business is conducted. Knowing more than one language is a great advantage in making oneself more marketable in the business community.

We live in an age of rapid technological advancement. Many of the skills required for such advancement, like the ability to perceive patterns, solve problems and grasp meaning from a limited number of clues, are enhanced by second language study.

Needless to say, knowing another language will increase employment opportunities in every sector of the economy, from retail to technology, from public service to tourism, from teaching to research.

- **Enhanced cognitive ability:**

Recent development in cognitive psychology shows that skills associated with science & mathematics, such as problem solving and hypothesis testing, are also enhanced by studying a second language.

- **Increased creativity:**

Those who have studied another language tend to be less rigid in their perceptions of the world and its problems. They tend to think more originally and see new and different patterns in the world.

- **Enhanced cross-cultural capacity:**

Those who have studied another language learn to communicate with others and participate in another culture. As a result they are less likely to stereotype both intellectually and personally and are better able to appreciate their own individuality.

- **Improved literacy skills:**

Research has shown that learning another language increases the literacy competency of students.

- **Improved foreign language acquisition skills:**

Learning a second language makes the acquisition of any third or fourth language easier.

- **Psychological advantages:**

When learning another language, the learner is encouraged to take risks and overcome feelings of insecurity when faced with the unknown or ambiguous. Repeated success in communicating, despite difficulties, enhances self-esteem.

## **Why Learn French?**

- **To connect with the world:**

Other than English, French is the only language widely spoken on all 5 continents and spoken in over 43 countries in the world. French is a principal language of world diplomacy. It's also an official language of the United Nations, the European Community and the International Olympic Movement. Knowing French will connect students to this world. They can have unique opportunities and adventures, meet new friends and appreciate other cultures. They can also explore books, music and films provided in this major world language.

- **To connect with the rest of Canada:**

Canada is a bilingual country. French is Canada's second language and more than 8 million Canadians speak French. Learning this language would enable students to become familiar with French Canadian culture, history and lifestyle and be able to communicate with French Canadians.

- **To enhance English skills:**

Since French and English are both derived from Latin, learning French can increase one's English skills, vocabulary, and make one more aware of the nuances of language. Over 20,000 English words are almost identical to the French equivalent.

- **To participate in many government-sponsored programs:**

Students learning French are eligible for many existing exchange programs and work experience opportunities in French speaking provinces.

- **To improve employment options:**

In Canada, all federal government jobs require bilingualism. French is a major language of high tech and business in the world. French is also a strong asset in the teaching profession and media-related careers.

## ADVANTAGES OF LEARNING FRENCH

- ❖ makes you more marketable in any career choice
- ❖ opens doors to more career options
- ❖ enhances cognitive ability
- ❖ increases creativity and problem-solving abilities
- ❖ enhances cross-cultural capacity and understanding
- ❖ develops communication skills (e.g., listening, reading, writing)
- ❖ improves literacy skills and competencies
- ❖ increases abilities to learn further languages
- ❖ develops risk-taking, perseverance and self-esteem

### Did you know?

French is the only language spoken in all 5 continents of the world. It is spoken in over 43 countries and one of the official languages in more than 25 countries.

French is the principal language of world diplomacy. French is an official language of the United Nations, the European Community and the International Olympic Community.

Of international jobs recently listed and distributed by the US State Department, French came out on top:

- 82 required or preferred French
- 43 required a UN language (English, French, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Spanish)
- 37 required Spanish
- 11 required Russian
- 5 required Arabic
- 3 required Chinese
- 3 required German

Overall, the French export more per capita than the Japanese and more than twice as much as the Americans. France is, overall, the fourth largest exporting nation in the world.

## **Intensive French – in BC since 2004 (Surrey, Vancouver, Mission & Windermere)**

### **What students have said:**

“It is a new way to learn French that is fun and has lots of things to do.”

“Intensive French is a way we can become bilingual faster. It doesn’t seem like work.”

“At first I was scared to start Intensive French. After just two weeks I saw that it was okay to make mistakes and that people could still understand me. Now I like speaking French in front of people.”

“I like being the only one in my family who knows French. I want to travel to other places and be able to speak the language. I also want to have a good job, and languages will help me do that.”

### **What parents have said:**

“For my son it’s fun, he’s with his peers, I think that adds to his overall enjoyment of the language. He loves it. He’s really doing well and he’s very positive about going to school and loves to speak to me in French.”

“The year put all of the kids on the same “playing field” with French. You did not have to be a straight “A” student to succeed -- just willing to try.”

“She developed a positive attitude to French, a good ear and good pronunciation, and she can converse with a friend from programme cadre”.

“It was very exciting for him to learn a new language, therefore, I believe it was a confidence builder”.

### **What Gr. 8 teachers (who interviewed elem. IF students) have said:**

My impression was of amazement--I was truly impressed. The thing that came out in almost every case was the positive attitude kids had and that they enjoyed being in IF.

I was so impressed with the students! Considering they did not prepare at all for the interviews, they really rose to the occasion and were all able, in varying degrees, to have a true conversation in French.

Quite a few students spoke correctly and gave full answers - better than many of my French 10 students! Their vocabulary was richer than I expected.

I would love to see this program all over BC.

Further information: <http://www.mmecarr.ca>

Click on *Intensive French*

Intensive French research articles

Implementation Materials

Correspondence to Parents / Evaluation Rubrics / Teaching Tools

Draft Curriculum Documents - Year One

Draft Learning Outcomes - Year One

Guiding principles of Intensive French

Photos of the program in action

Thematic links for IF students and teachers