

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 19 (REVELSTOKE)

TO: Board of School Trustees

FROM: Anne Cooper, Superintendent of Schools

DATE: March 3rd, 2009

INFORMATION: Intensive French



Intensive French (IF) is a new program designed to increase French language skills. The program was developed to address concerns with existing Core French programs. Intensive French was introduced in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1998 as a boost to core French. It has produced such good results that all Grade 6 students in that province now take it instead of core French.

Intensive French starts in Grade 6 with a five-month “intensive” period of French for the first part of the school year (Sept-Jan). In this period, everything except Math, takes place in French. It is a French language arts program for four hours a day for half the year; students do language-rich projects and activities, and read and write in French. For the second half of the year, students take a compacted version of the regular science, social studies, and language arts curriculum in English plus one hour of French per day. In Grade 7 and beyond, they continue an enriched French program along with the regular curriculum. They enter secondary school speaking French and take Intensive French 8, a differentiated course using IF pedagogy. The purpose of Intensive French is to boost communicative skills quickly and improve student’s fluency and verbal language skills.

There are more than 10,000 students taking intensive French across Canada in almost every province and territory including British Columbia and the Yukon. In British Columbia, the Surrey School District implemented an Intensive French program in 2004. It has been positively received by the community and students.

What are the challenges to implementing Intensive French? The two major ones are similar to those faced by French Immersion, that is, finding fully bilingual teachers and starting a new program within an existing school organization. Intensive French normally starts at Grade 6 and continues with a daily hour follow-up in Grade 7, thus requiring only one teacher per school. The lack of methodologically trained, bilingual teachers is a problem affecting all FSL programs in this province.

Some ask if Intensive French should replace core French. The winning combination of time and intensity produces results in immersion and intensive programs and the lack of both is part of why core French doesn’t yield better outcomes. IF focuses on literacy (a language-arts approach) and uses interactive teaching strategies that enable students to develop fluency and accuracy. Students use and re-use language in real situations while teachers model and redirect what they say, helping them to internalize that language. This, in turn, leads to the intuitive use of French in a very short time.

Advocates of IF believe that Intensive French offers great potential for children to achieve functional bilingualism while remaining in their neighbourhood school. The addition of this program to a district's offerings can bring renewed attention to French as a desirable addition to a child's education and could open up programming possibilities at the secondary level.

Comparison of elementary FSL programs in British Columbia

<i>Core French</i>	<i>Intensive French</i>	<i>French Immersion</i>
150 hours (Gr. 5, 6, 7)	600 hours (Gr. 6 & 7)	5,000 hours (K to Gr. 7)
Students learn French using a communicative approach wherever possible.	Students use French to do activities and projects. Regular school subjects are compressed into second half of the intensive year.	After Grade 6, a student can engage in a general conversation.
Core French is provincially mandated in Grades 5 to 8, usually delivered in two 40-minute lessons per week.	Intensive French is a program of choice that starts in Grade 6 with an intensive half-year (80% French) followed by one hour/day in French for second half of year and all of Grade 7.	French immersion is a program of choice that starts in Kindergarten or Grade 6 with 100% French instruction.
By Grade 12, a student can communicate in a variety of real-life situations.	After Grade 6, a student can engage in a general conversation.	By Grade 12, a student is functionally bilingual.