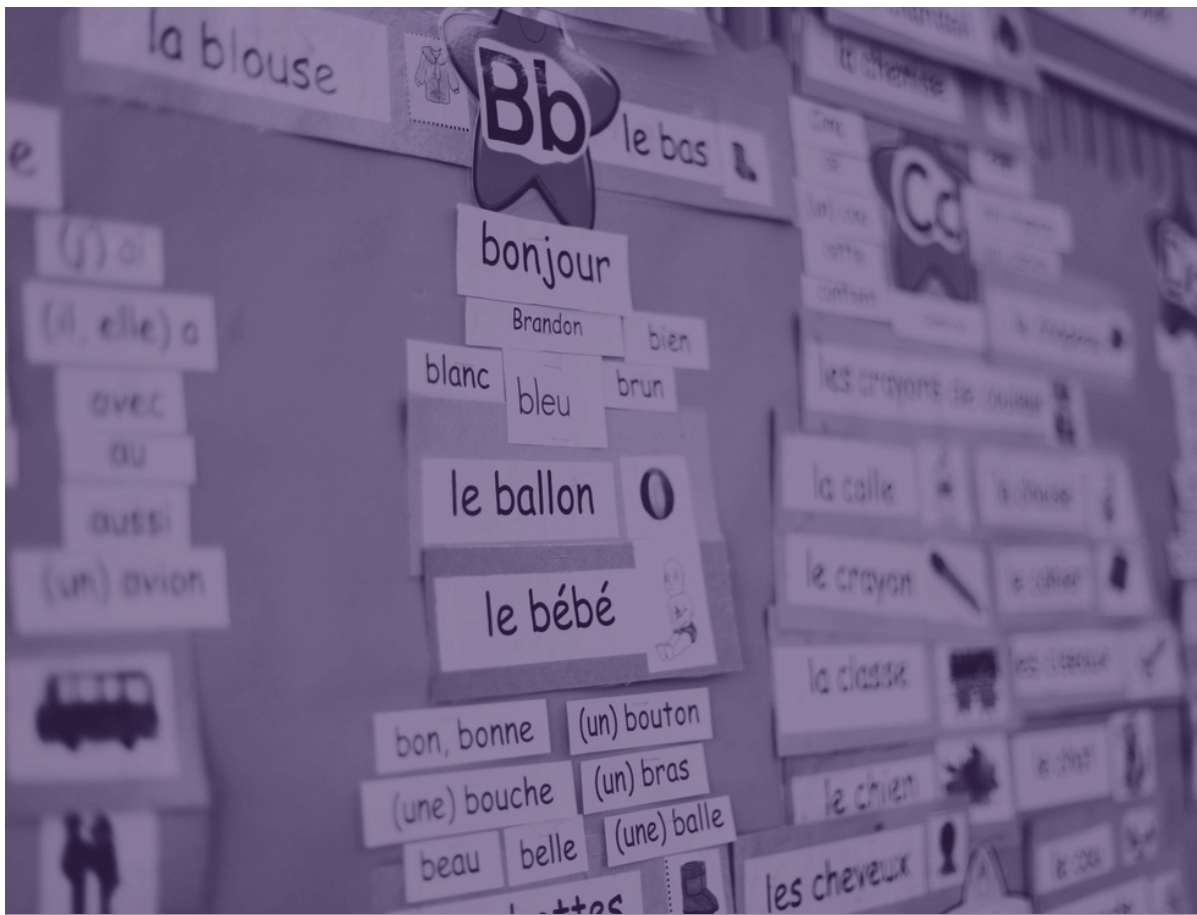


WHAT WE HEARD

French Immersion Engagement Report



September 2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Edmonton Catholic School Division (ECSD) has offered French Immersion for over 50 years. Our goal is to always have a strong, viable K-12 French Immersion program. With 3,600 students in the 2023/24 academic year, only 20% of students who start the program graduate in French Immersion. This 80% attrition rate creates sustainability challenges over time. ECSD's goal is to increase this retention rate so that more students complete the full Kindergarten to Grade 12 program and experience the benefits of learning an additional language.



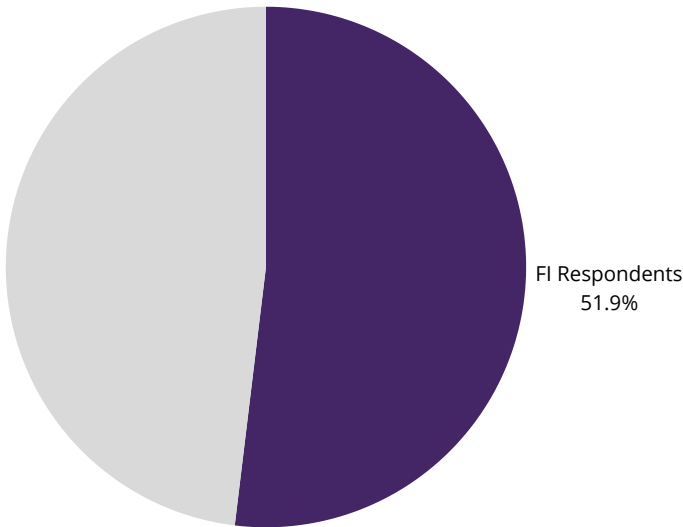
DEMOGRAPHICS

From April 29 to May 13, 2024, ECSD launched two questionnaires to capture insights, suggestions and feedback to help shape the future of French Immersion in the Division. The questionnaires were designed to reflect the two key French Immersion groups, French Immersion parents, guardians, and staff, and students. There were 1383 community members who responded, representing 52% of ECSD’s French Immersion families. Additionally, 902 French Immersion students in Grades 7 through 12, representing 89% of the French Immersion students in these grades, responded to the two questionnaires.

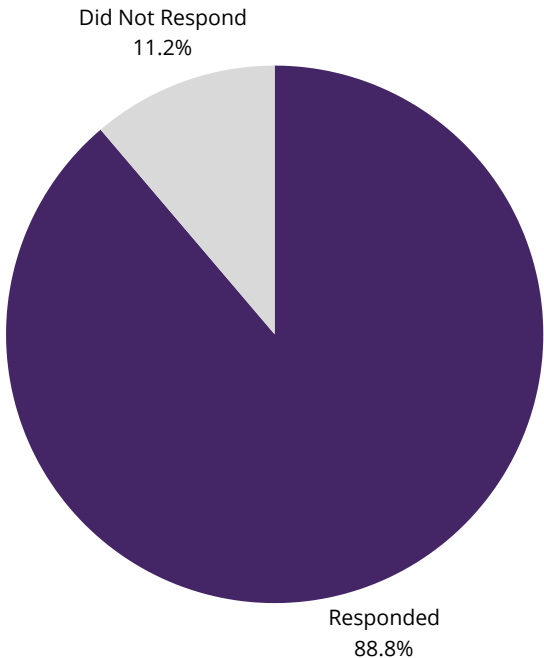
TWO QUESTIONNAIRES

Open from April 29 to May 13, 2024

RESPONSE RATE OF ECSD FAMILIES



RESPONSE RATE OF FRENCH IMMERSION STUDENTS (GRADES 7 TO 12)



SIX IN-PERSON FOCUS GROUPS

Archbishop MacDonald
J.H. Picard
Monsignor William Irwin
St. Cecilia
St. John XXIII
St. Stanislaus





THEMES

The major themes that emerged from the engagements were:

- Transportation
- Program Pathways and Locations
- Program Experience, and
- Cultural Experiences

NEXT STEPS

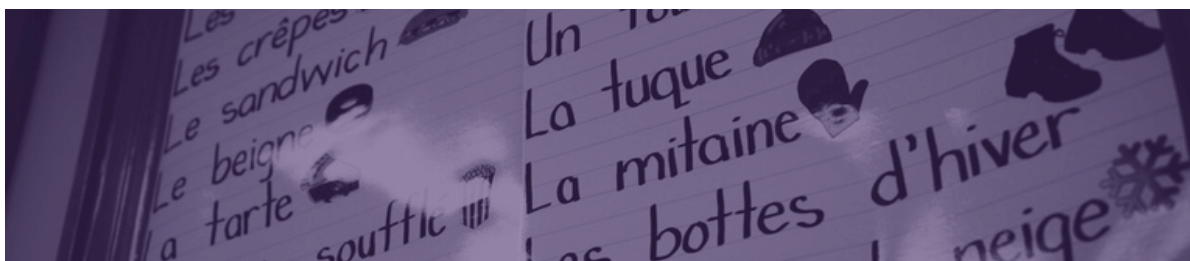
The next steps will include the development of a detailed implementation and monitoring plan to address the themes that emerged from the engagement process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This report contains a summary of findings and recommendations for program enhancements made with the purpose of increasing retention in French Immersion in ECSD based on the engagement process. These recommendations include:

- Enhance bus services to French Immersion Junior High and Senior High schools.
- Review program pathways and locations to:
 - balance community school needs with French Immersion programming;
 - match areas of demand and population growth; AND
 - reduce the number of school transition points
- Enhance program and course offerings in French Immersion, particularly at the High School level;
- Enhance cultural opportunities
- Enhance awareness of French Immersion resources for families.





Introduction

Edmonton Catholic Schools currently has 3,600 students enrolled in French Immersion across 12 schools. To ensure our programming meets students' needs and maximizes the benefits of completing the 12-year program, ECSD initiated an engagement process with community partners, staff, and students. This effort focused on understanding why only 20% of students who begin French Immersion in Kindergarten/Grade 1 continue through to Grade 12.

The Division enlisted YStation Communications and Research to lead this process. YStation guided ECSD, facilitated discussions, and organized the feedback collected throughout the 2023-2024 school year. This feedback has informed recommendations aimed at improving student retention across grade levels, enhancing the quality of learning environments, and strengthening the overall viability of the French Immersion program.

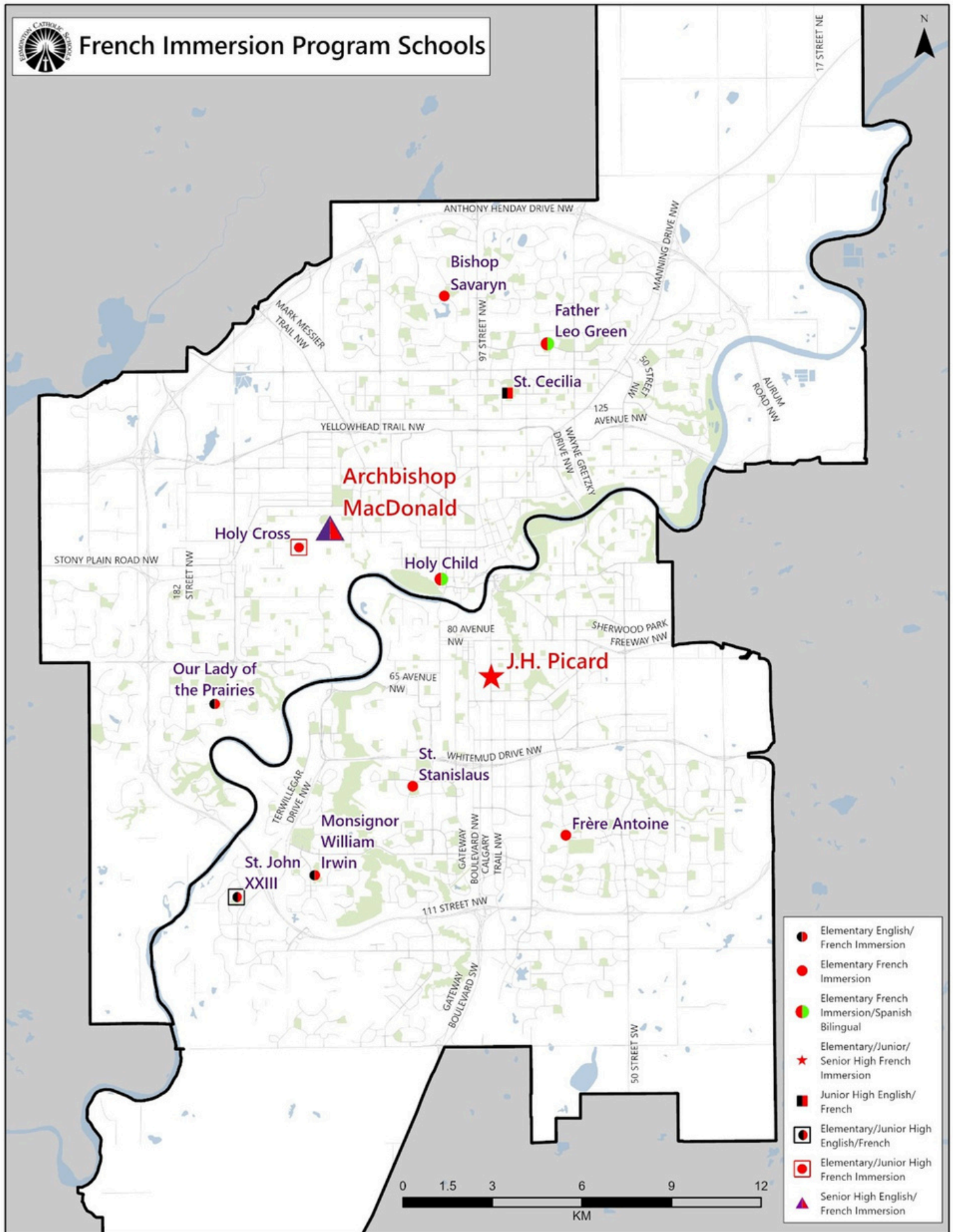
French Immersion in ECSD

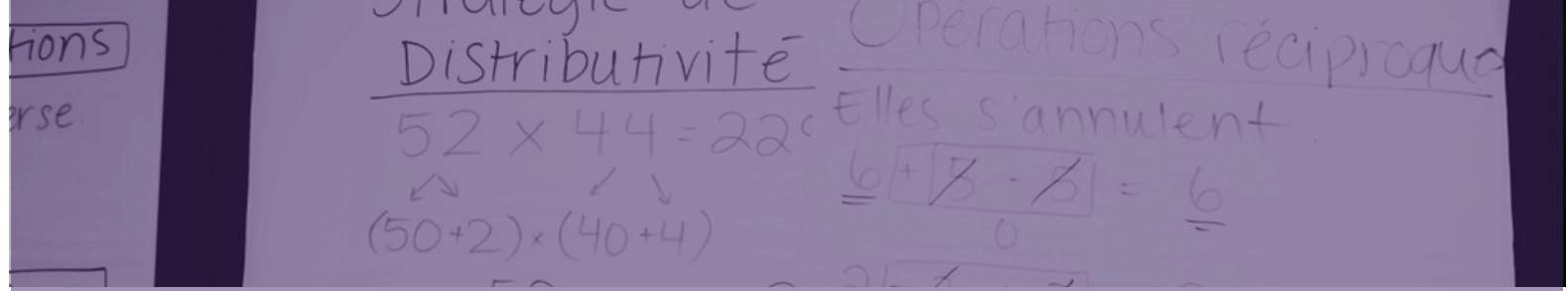
ECSD offers French Immersion programming at 12 schools across all grade levels.

Archbishop MacDonald Catholic High School	Bishop Savaryn Catholic Elementary School	Father Leo Green Catholic Elementary School
Frere Antoine Catholic Elementary School	Holy Child Catholic Elementary School	Holy Cross Catholic Elementary/Jr High School
J. H. Picard Catholic Elementary/Jr./Sr. High School	Monsignor William Irwin Catholic Elementary School	Our Lady of the Prairies Catholic Elementary School
St. Cecilia Catholic Junior High School	St. John XXIII Catholic Elementary/Jr High School	St. Stanislaus Catholic Elementary School



French Immersion Program Schools





ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The engagement process allowed ECSD to gather multiple viewpoints from families, parents/guardians, teachers, and administrators. ECSD also placed great importance on gathering feedback from students in Grades 7 to 12 through in-class questionnaires and six student focus groups.

KEY THEMES

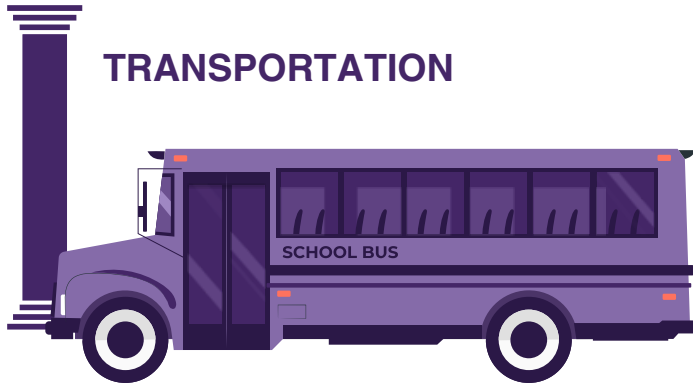
Four key pillars were identified in the French Immersion engagement:

- transportation;
- program pathways and location;
- program experience; and,
- cultural experience and authenticity.





TRANSPORTATION



ECSD currently provides yellow bus transportation to all eligible elementary French Immersion schools. There is limited busing provided to eligible Junior/Senior High French Immersion students. The preferred method of transportation for all Grades 7-12 students is ETS bus service.

Recommendations

Enhance bus services to French Immersion schools.
Introduce shuttle buses to high school from Junior High feeder schools, where viable.
Add yellow bus routes to improve travel times to our French Immersion programs, where viable.

Next Steps

Implement and evaluate the enhanced transportation services and their impact.

Summary

Transportation feedback from the engagements highlighted:

- 83% of the French Immersion community respondents believe travel time to and from school is important.
- 43% of families indicated transportation time is a barrier to continuing in French Immersion.
- 79% of parents/guardians who responded say an additional bus would increase the likelihood of their students completing the program up to Grade 12.



Key reasons why parents are likely to withdraw their children from the French Immersion program. They are:

1. Transportation (has to be reliable)
2. School location (travel time is very important), and,
3. The transition to a different location. Transitioning to a different school is an added stress to kids as well as to the parents.

-Staff





PROGRAM PATHWAYS

ECSD uses program pathways to describe the continuum of learning within a program from K-12. This program pathway includes the transition points from Grades 6 to 7 and Grades 9 to 10. Historical data shows that the greatest attrition occurs at these transition points. Additionally, ECSD is experiencing significant growth, creating increased program demands in areas underserved by French Immersion programs.

Next Steps

Review program pathways and locations to improve program continuums.



I wish there was a French Immersion high school closer to the west/southwest. That is going to be a huge determining factor for us when the time comes.

-Parent

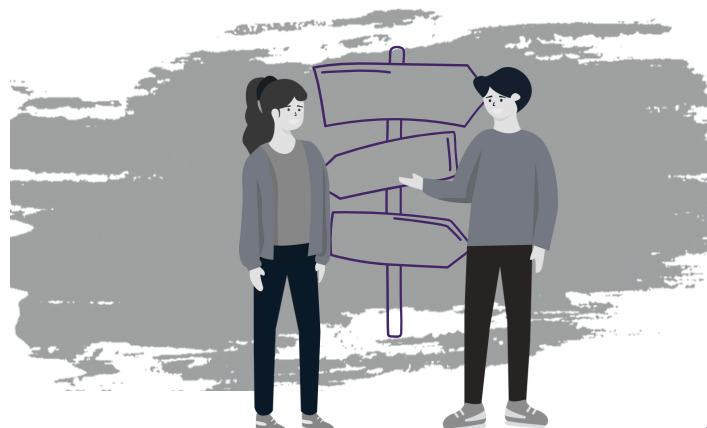
Summary

Feedback received from respondents indicated that barriers to continuing in French Immersion through Grade 12 include the distance between schools and the number of transition points between grades.

- 52% of families find the school location a barrier from Grade 6-7.
- Community feedback generally suggests reducing the number of transition points and reviewing program locations.

Recommendations

- Review and optimize program pathways and locations to enhance continuity and minimize transition points.
- Explore opportunities to create more efficient program continuums.
- Match French Immersion locations with program needs, population growth, and community requirements.





PROGRAM EXPERIENCE



Program experience includes course offerings, course options, extracurricular activities, and school clubs. Due to the unique nature of every school, program experience for French Immersion differs from school to school. Students and families have expressed a desire to have a robust program experience at all levels.

Recommendations

- Increase the variety and number of course offerings, extracurricular activities, and school clubs.
- Enhance awareness of French Immersion resources for families.

Next Steps

Discussions with individual school sites to identify and develop a plan to support student program experience.

Develop a bank of resources for French Immersion family support.

I am leaving French Immersion because I want more experiences. We have a lack of course options available in French. I want to take welding or Cosmo... these are not a possibility at our school.

-Student

Summary

The engagement data highlights the following elements as motivating when it comes to retention in the program because of program experiences:

- 86% of community respondents believe multiple course offerings motivate students to complete the K-12 French Immersion program.
- 57% of French Immersion students want more options in sports or extracurricular activities.
- Students indicated that motivating factors to remain in the program include athletic opportunities, diverse high school experiences, extracurricular activities, school clubs, and more opportunities to practice their French language skills.
- Families provided feedback that enhancing existing tools and facilitating at-home access to resources would have the potential to create positive change in the French Immersion program.
- 71% of respondents indicated that they would like strategies to support their learner at home.
- 47% of respondents expressed a desire for schools to offer more information about opportunities to engage in French Immersion language and culture activities both within the school and in the broader French Immersion community.
- 30% of respondents indicated that French Immersion family information nights at the school would be helpful.



CULTURAL EXPERIENCE

Cultural experiences are an integral part of the French Immersion program. Students in the French Immersion program study and learn about Francophone cultures.

Recommendations

- Explore national and international travel opportunities.
- Promote authentic cultural experiences and different opportunities across grade levels.
- Leverage the role of the Division French Cultural Coordinator to enhance cultural experiences.

Next Steps

Develop and implement a plan for supporting cultural trips and diverse cultural experiences.

Summary

Respondents were asked which cultural experiences are important to them and would be a motivating factor to remain in the French Immersion program. Feedback indicated that a variety of cultural activities were valued. Key findings from the engagement indicated:

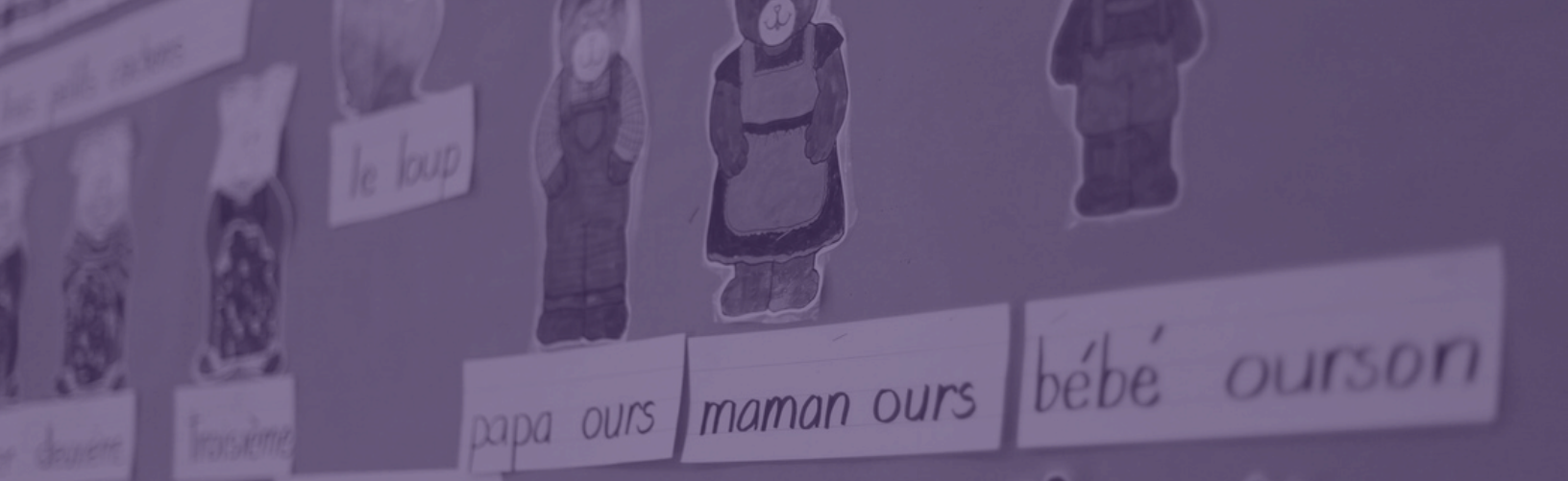
- 67% of students consider cultural experiences an important part of their program.
- 81% value opportunities for French travel experiences.
- Students suggest more field trips and travel opportunities.

“

Cultural Experiences – I want to move towards authenticity and away from stereotypes. We do the same activity year after year and it gets boring. Develop more complexity in the activities that reflect the students' age.

-Student

”



Next Steps

ECSD will develop a detailed implementation and monitoring plan that works at the Division and school levels. Educational Planning and Learning Services will collaborate with school-based administrators to find site-based solutions best suited for their unique school communities. Continuous monitoring and adjustment of strategies will be essential to improve retention and enhance the overall French Immersion experience for students.

“

I wish we were made to
speak more French. I
want my teacher to push
me to do better; to expect
that I can learn French
and do it well.

-Student

”



CONCLUSION



ECSD would like to thank all French Immersion families, students, and staff for their participation in this engagement process. We are committed to supporting French immersion programming.