



# Edmonton Catholic School Division

French Immersion Program Engagement

Phase 1 – Setting the Stage - Interim What We Heard Report

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# Introduction

The Edmonton Catholic School Division (ECSD) French Immersion program has experienced fluctuations in enrollment. Despite an increased enrollment with 3,600 students currently, ECSD's French Immersion program still experiences retention challenges as students move into later elementary, junior high, and senior high school grades. Only 20% of students who start in the ECSD program graduate in French Immersion, resulting in an 80% attrition rate.

ECSD, working with Y Station, has embarked on a phased multi-method approach to engage French Immersion stakeholders to seek insights and feedback on how to address these enrollment challenges. This interim engagement report provides insights from Phase One of a two-phased engagement with Phase Two occurring early 2024.

During Phase One – Setting the Stage, we began the conversation with current and former students, parents, and staff through drop-in style open houses where stakeholders could provide feedback in a low-pressure environment that supported idea sharing and conversation. In addition to the in-person opportunity, a concurrent online survey was available.

From October 26, 2023, to December 5, 2023, ECSD engaged with over 350 French Immersion program stakeholders from current and former students and parents to staff to learn what they value about the program, transportation, pathways, retention, and program experiences. The feedback and insights gathered from this engagement will be used to shape Phase Two: Options and Trade-offs.

The engagement key objectives are:

- Engage French Immersion program stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, administrators, Division staff and external partners) to gather information to inform future planning.
- Gather rich insights to understand why families and students choose French Immersion.
- Determine and better define the obstacles for students and families to remain in French Immersion.
- Collect feedback and suggestions on what steps ECSD can take to improve the continuum of French Immersion programming from kindergarten to grade 12.

## Results and Findings Summary

Overall, the engagement connected with 234 students or parents and 118 staff. Through six in-person sessions insights and feedback was gathered from 184 stakeholders, 84 parents or students and 100 ECSD staff. Meanwhile, the online survey collected insights and feedback from 168 stakeholders, 150 parents or students and 18 ECSD staff.

Below is a summary of the most common themes identified during this engagement. More detailed responses are provided on page 10.

### Values

Participants were asked what they value most about the French Immersion program, and the top themes were:

- The opportunity to learn a new/second language.
- The opportunity to learn more about French Canadian culture and good cultural opportunities.
- French Immersion allows for improved career opportunities.



## **Transportation**

Regarding transportation, in the survey, it is clear that an acceptable bus travel time is 30 minutes or less and the majority of respondents were not sure what their child's current travel time is. From the in-person sessions, attendees seemed more willing to accept longer bus travel times as compared to survey respondents.

In terms of open-ended feedback, the top theme was bus service needs to be reliable, stay on schedule, and arrive on time.

## **Retention**

Participants were asked why they felt students left or would leave the French Immersion program at different grade levels.

Before the end of grade 6, the top theme was that the program is too difficult.

Before the end of grade 9 top themes included:

- The lack of/poor course/subject/extracurricular options.
- School locations are too far away/inconvenient.

After grade 9 top themes included:

- The lack of/poor course/subject/extracurricular options.
- Lack of or limited high schools that offer French Immersion programming.

In the survey, respondents were asked if they were considering leaving the French Immersion program, and 16% indicated they were considering leaving.

## **Pathways**

Survey respondents were asked if the pathways to remain in the French Immersion program across all grades worked for their families and 52% indicated yes.

All participants were asked to provide feedback about the current pathways from Kindergarten to Grade 12 in French Immersion, what is working, what is not working and what needs to be changed. Several common themes emerged from both the in-person sessions and the survey responses, including:

- School transportation/bussing-related concerns.
- There is a need for more high school location options, particularly in the north and south.

## **Program Experiences**

Participants were asked what additional experiences they feel are important in the French Immersion program.

- For Kindergarten to grade 6, in both the survey and the in-person sessions, the top theme was cultural-related opportunities, activities, and program experiences inside and outside of school.
- For grades 7 to grade 9, the top theme was cultural-related opportunities, activities, and programs.
- For grades 10 to grade 12, the top theme was student exchange or travel-related opportunities.

## **Final Thoughts**

The final stage of the engagement asked participants to leave any additional or concluding thoughts. The most common feedback across both the survey and the in-person sessions was the need to provide more support for students.

# How We Communicated

Successful engagement requires participation from those most knowledgeable and potentially impacted by any changes to a program. To reach French Immersion program stakeholders the ECSD utilized their websites, internal communication channels, and social media to inform stakeholders of engagement and encourage participation.

Below is a breakdown of the communication activities.

Communication Tool	Key Dates - Activity	Reach
Website	November 15 – Published November 30 – Update regarding open houses December 6 – Update regarding survey ending	631 visits* 1,767 pageviews* 1,466 unique pageviews* 4 min 30s average visit duration*
SWIFT**	November 15 – Invitation to participate November 27 – Reminder November 30 – Thank you and survey reminder	8,200 emails 8,200 emails 8,200 emails
<b>Social Media</b>		
Facebook	November 27 – Reminder	Impression: 2,931; Reach: 2,753; Engagement: 206
	November 30 – Thank you and survey reminder	Impression: 2,310; Reach: 2,187; Engagement: 174
	December 5 – Final survey reminder	Impression: 757; Reach: 704; Engagement: 11
Instagram	November 27 – Reminder	Reach: 1,915; Likes: 107
	November 30 – Thank you and survey reminder	Reach: 726; Likes: 11
	December 5 – Final survey reminder	Metrics unavailable; posted as Story
X (Formerly Twitter)	November 27 – Reminder	Impression: 221; Engagement: 5; Clicks: 3
	November 30 – Thank you and survey reminder	Impression: 227; Engagement: 8; Clicks: 1
	December 5 – Final survey reminder	Impression: 172; Engagement: 3; Clicks: 3

\*Overall activity

\*\*Reminder email sent via individual French Immersion principals to their school communities on November 22 and 23, 2023.

French Immersion staff, teachers, and principals were all invited to participate. French Immersion staff were invited to participate in the open house engagement after a professional development session on October 26, 2023. French Immersion principals were invited to participate after a leadership meeting on November 22, 2023.

Parents' and students' sessions were held:

Date and Time	Location
Tuesday, November 21, 2023, 4:00 - 7:00 PM	St. John XXIII Catholic Elementary/Junior High School
Monday, November 27, 2023, 4:00 - 7:00 PM	Holy Cross Catholic Elementary/Junior High School
Tuesday, November 28, 2023, 5:00 - 8:00 PM	St. Cecilia Catholic Junior High School



# Who We Heard From

Overall, the French Immersion program phase one engagement heard from 350 stakeholders: future, current, and former students, staff, and parents. 234 parents and students and 118 staff provided their insights.

## In-person Sessions

The in-person sessions were designed as drop-in sessions where attendees engaged in a self-guided process, where information was shared on boards, and feedback could be placed on the boards.

The in-person sessions were attended by 84 parents or students over four evenings, and 100 staff attended the two afternoon sessions. Except for the principal session, all attendees were welcomed and provided with an introduction to the session and process by a member of the Y Station team. ESCD programming and engagement staff were also present to help answer questions. Two additional Y Station team members were present to support attendees to engage with the session materials as well as gather process feedback. The principal session was supported by ECSD’s programming, planning and engagement staff.

The table below shows the attendance by location, stakeholder type, and number in attendance. Overall, more staff attended in-person sessions than parents and students.

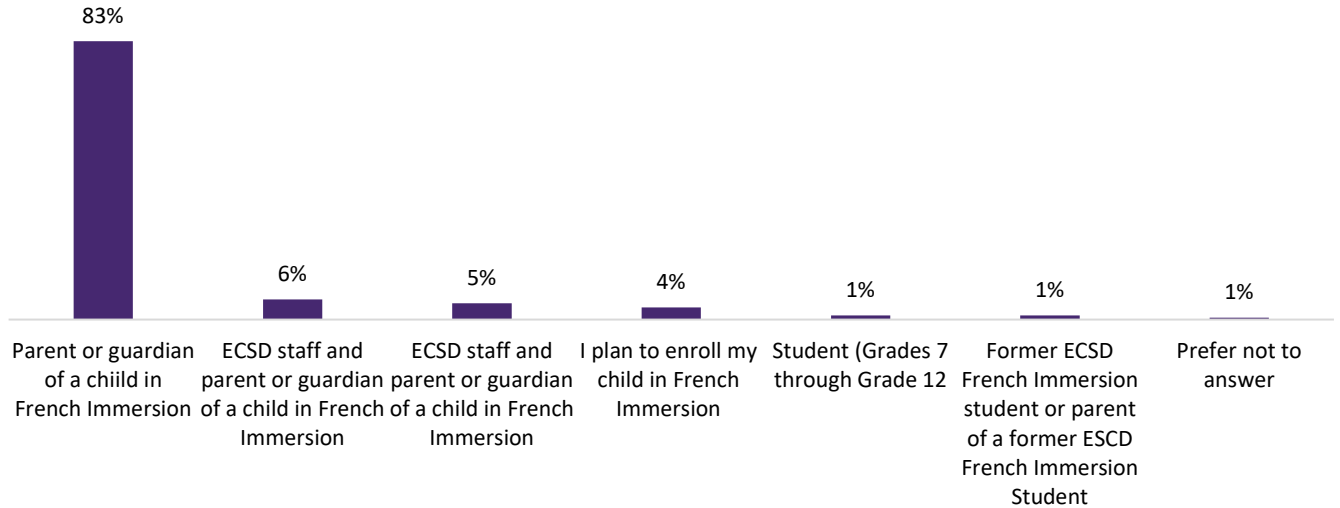
In-Person Session Location	Stakeholders	Number of Attendees
St. Cecilia Catholic Junior High School	French Immersion Staff	88
St. John XXIII Catholic Elementary/Junior High School	Students and Parents	10
Lumen Christi Catholic Education Centre	Principals	12
Holy Cross Catholic Elementary/Junior High School	Students and Parents	17
St. Cecilia Catholic Junior High School	Students and Parents	18
J.H. Picard Catholic Elementary/Junior/Senior High School	Students and Parents	39

## Survey Respondents

In total, 168 stakeholders shared feedback through the survey. The majority of survey respondents indicated they were a parent or guardian of a child in French Immersion.

### Respondent Role

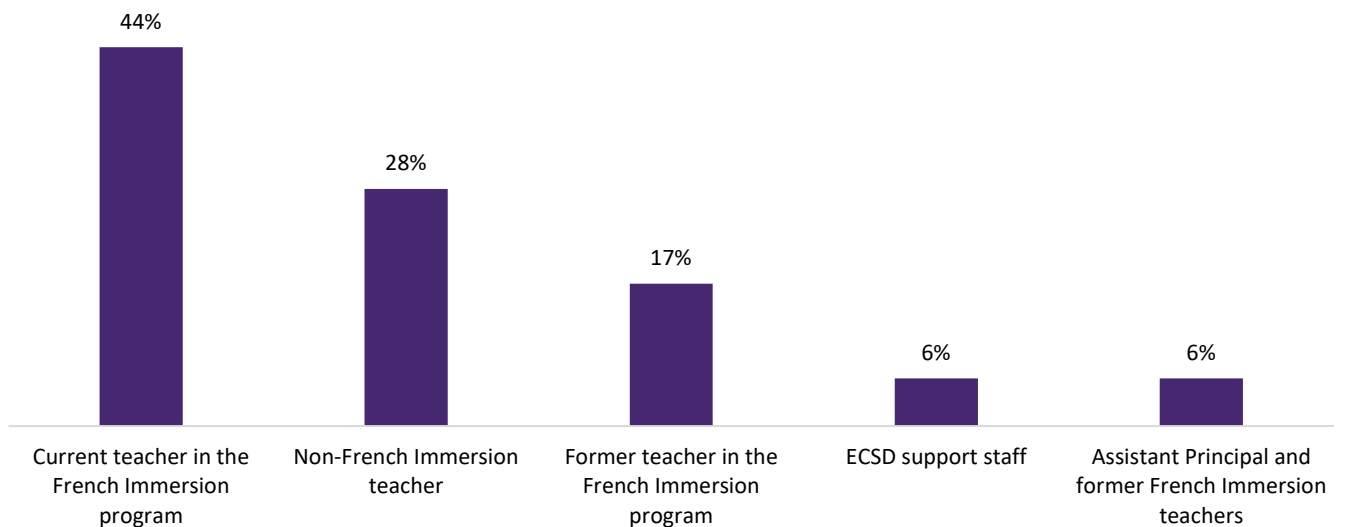
(n=168)



Regarding staff member roles, the majority of respondents indicated they are current teachers in the French Immersion program.

### ESCD Staff Member Roles

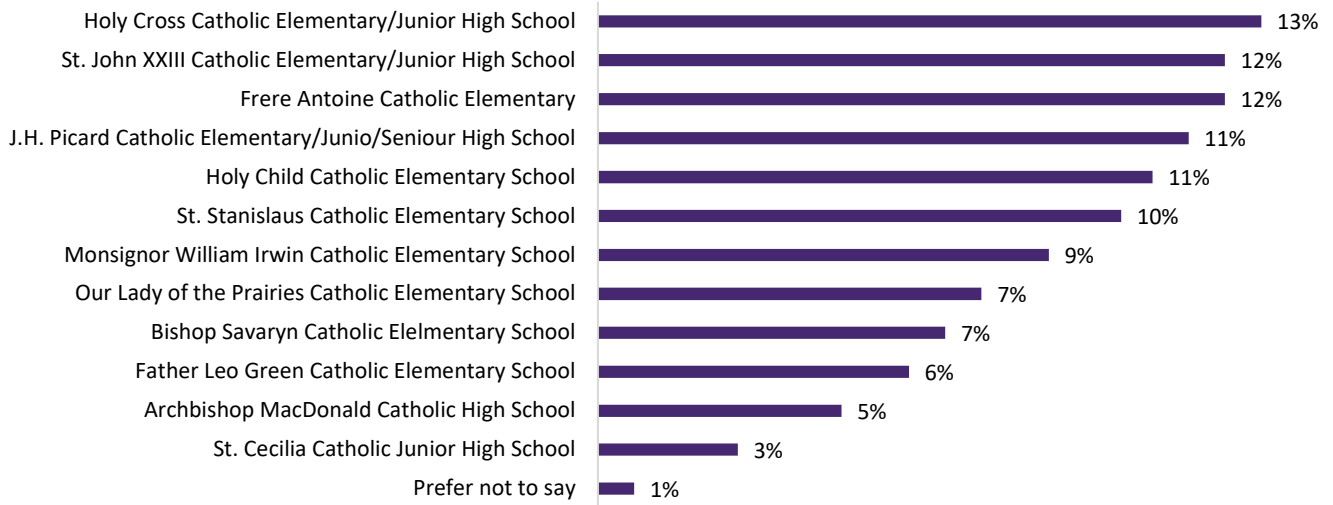
(n=18)



The top three schools' parents indicated their child attends were Holy Cross Catholic Elementary/Junior High School (13%), St. John XXIII Catholic Elementary/Junior High School (12%), and Frere Antoine Catholic School.

### What School does your Child Attend:

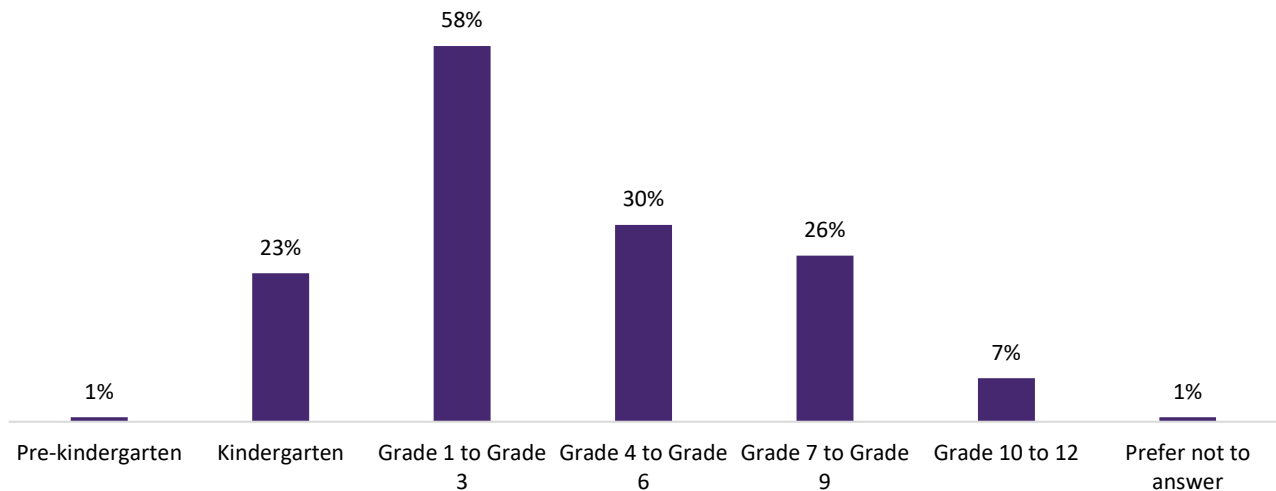
(n=149)



The top three grade ranges parents indicated they had children in were Grade 1 to Grade 3 (58%), Grade 4 to Grade 6 (30%), and Grade 7 to Grade 9 (26%).

### What grade is your child in:

(n=149; multiple responses allowed)



In terms of students who responded to the survey, the grade levels they selected were Grade 7 and Grade 10 and they indicated attendance at Archbishop MacDonald Catholic High School and St. John XXIII Catholic Elementary/Junior High School.

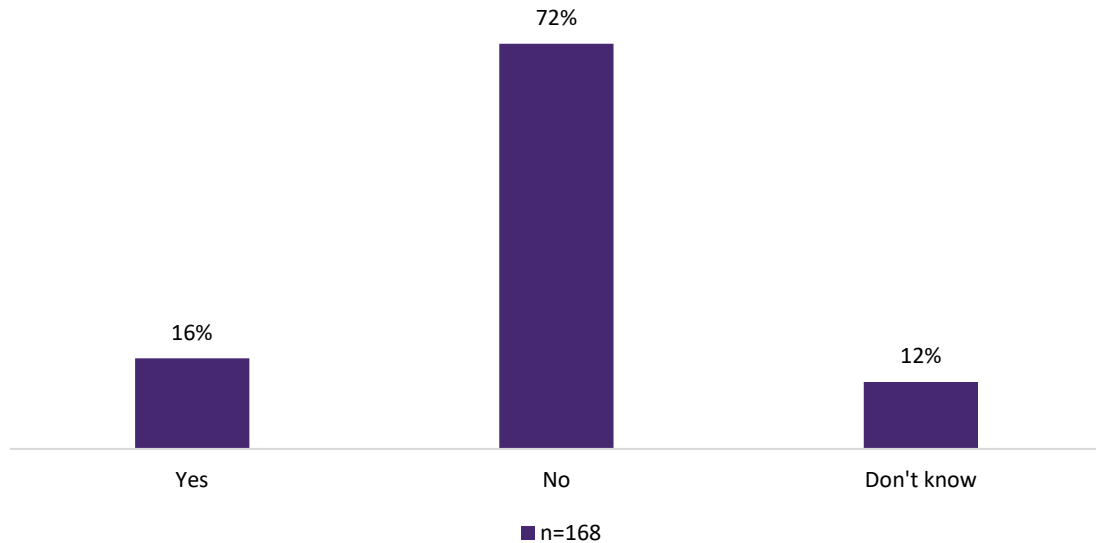




## Considering and Have Left the French Immersion Program

In the survey, respondents were asked if they were considering leaving the French Immersion program, 16% indicated they were considering this.

Considering Leaving the French Immersion program: (n=168)



Additionally, in the survey, respondents who indicated they had left the program were asked some follow-up questions: when and why did they leave the program and what improvements would have encouraged them to stay in the program?

Five respondents indicated they were either a former French Immersion student or a parent or a former French Immersion staff. In terms of when they left the program, respondents indicated after Grade 9, staff left in 2021 and 2023, and some indicated they did not know.

The reasons provided for leaving the program included having only received a conditional acceptance letter, pursuing other opportunities/interests, and lacking adequate support.

When asked what improvements would have encouraged them to stay, suggestions were:

- Discontinue conditional acceptance letters, provide enrollment status immediately,
- Offer French Immersion and soccer academy program,
- Provide students with more course and subject support, and
- The ability to continue in diploma program/course.

# What We Heard

In this section, results from the survey and in-person sessions and key engagement questions on values, transportation, retention, pathways, and program experiences are explored. Similar codes were used to theme both the survey and in-person responses. For the survey themes, percentages will not add to a 100% as multiple themes were noted in responses.

For each key area of exploration, where top themes across engagement techniques emerged, they are noted first, then detailed themes are presented for the survey followed by the in-person themes. For the in-person sessions, common themes across the parent and staff sessions are noted first followed by specific or unique themes for parents or staff.

## French Immersion Program Values

What we asked: First, we would like to learn about what you value in the French Immersion program.

The top themes for program values were very similar across engagement techniques. The top values for both in-person attendees and survey respondents were:

- The opportunity to learn a new/second language (80% of survey respondents).  
*“The opportunity to learn a 2nd language with no charge! It’s a gift kids have for life.”*
- The opportunity to learn more about French Canadian culture and good cultural opportunities (25% of survey respondents).  
*“We are a bilanguage country! Should know both languages.”*  
*“Giving students the opportunity to learn a different language, culture, way of life and exposure to the world.”*  
*“Opens your mind to new lenses, cultures, and customs.”*
- French Immersion allows for increased, good jobs, and career opportunities (17% of survey respondents).  
*“Learning French opens doors to additional employment opportunities.”*  
*“Bragging rights – aka stuff to put on a resume.”*

In terms of survey responses, additional value themes were:

	Percentage of Respondents
Good/strong sense of community	13%
Teachers are excellent/exceptional/provide high quality of education	4%
Other*	3%
Don’t know/Not stated	6%

\*Other responses include:

- likes the single-track French Immersion model/program,
- opportunity to improve/enhance communication skills, and
- small class sizes.

Two additional top values in the in-person sessions were:

- The opportunity to improve/enhance communication skills.  
*“Second language strengthens first language.”*
- Likes the single-track French Immersion model.  
*“Our family values our single-track immersion program (to increase French Exposure).”*



The values raised by parent attendees only were:

- French Immersion is academically challenging.  
*"I value the chance to challenge my children, to give them future opportunities that I didn't have both in jobs and in social life."*  
*"Having two languages helps challenge my child who loves to learn."*
- Provides students with better travel opportunities.  
*"Simplifies travel to French countries"*
- Diversity and Inclusion.  
*"In French immersion, my children are surrounded by children from other nations/cultures. With such a diverse community around them, I find French Immersion kids to be naturally inclusive of others and accepting of all types of people."*
- French Language and Catholic History.

The one value raised by staff that was not reflected in the parent sessions was that French Immersion enhances a sense of community.

## Program Boundary Maps

What was presented: Boundary maps for Kindergarten to Grade 6, Grade 7 to Grade 9, and Grade 10 to Grade 12. These maps were presented to show attendees the geographical span of the French Immersion school boundaries. In the staff sessions, these boards were commented on with stickies. During the parent sessions, no comments were placed on the maps.

A tension emerged in the themes posted on the maps between the perceived function or benefit of dual-track schools versus single-track schools. At the elementary level attendees felt dual-tracks schools did not function but at the junior high and senior high levels there was more support for dual-track schools.

### Kindergarten to Grade 6 Boundary Map Feedback

- Single-track schools are preferred as they create a stronger sense of community, encourage the use of French throughout the school and can increase the number of cultural experiences.
- Consider single-track schools that are Kindergarten to Grade 9 or Grade 7 to Grade 12.
- Dual language schools do not function.

### Grade 7 to Grade 9 Boundary Map Feedback

- Not enough extracurricular programs or options are available in French Immersion.
- Consider dual language schools in multiple locations as it may keep more students in the program.
- Need a school in southeast Edmonton.
- Create dual language schools, for example, Spanish/French or Ukrainian/French schools.
- The journey from Kindergarten to Grade 12 is not clear for parents, especially after Grade 6 and then after Grade 9.

### Grade 10 to Grade 12 Boundary Map Feedback

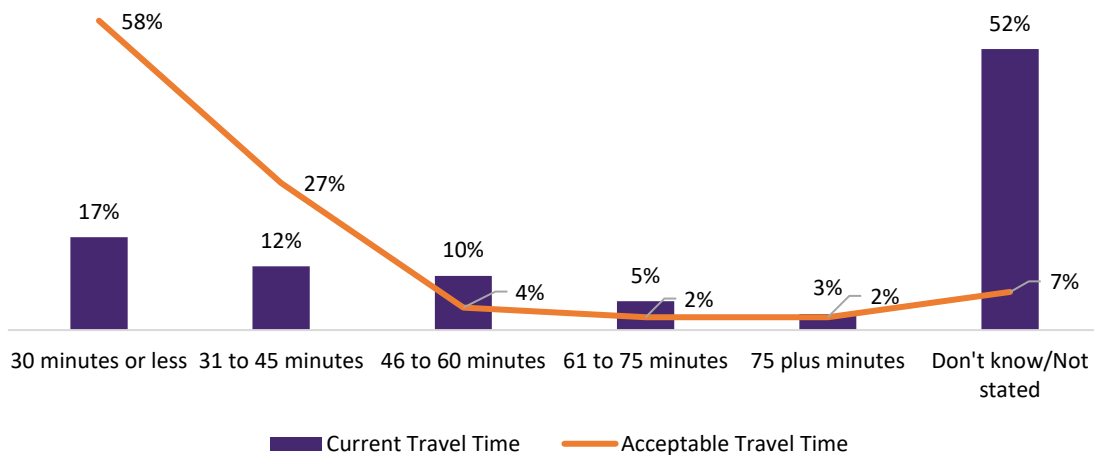
- Need more French Immersion high schools.
- There are no high schools within an appropriate distance for those in the south and the west of Edmonton.
- High schools need to be more accessible and have less distance to travel to. Consider four locations for the main quadrants of the city or more dual-track sites.
- Review the elementary school boundaries and high school boundaries.
- North Edmonton would benefit from a high school as some of these students are leaving to attend schools in St. Albert.
- Consider making all high schools dual track.

## Transportation

In both the survey and in-person session attendees were asked to indicate both acceptable bus travel time and current bus travel time. The exception was at St. John XXIII Catholic Elementary/Junior High School where only acceptable travel time was asked.

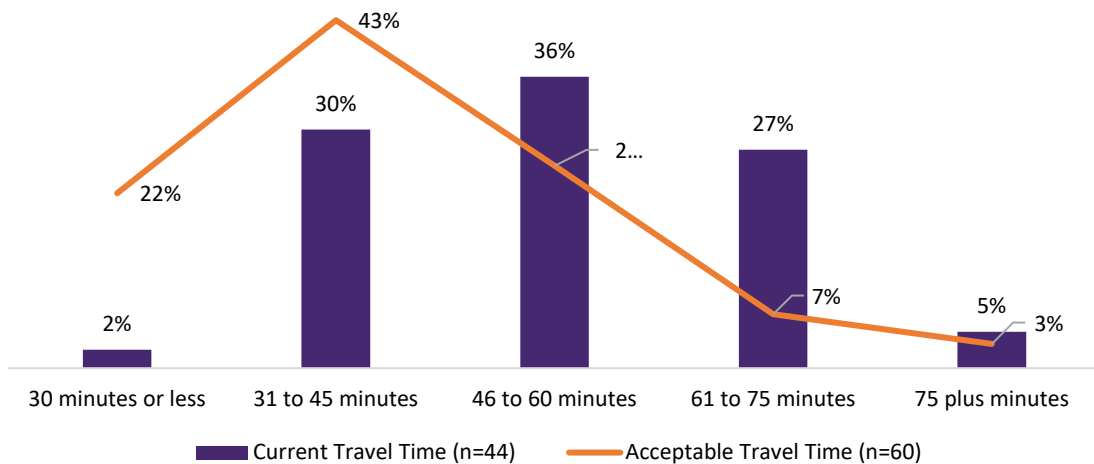
In the survey, participants felt that an acceptable bus travel time is 30 minutes or less, and the majority of respondents were not sure what their child's travel time is.

Survey Results: Current Bus Travel Time Per Trip by  
Acceptable Travel Time Per Trip n=168



Overall, in-person attendees seemed more accepting of longer travel times, up to 45 minutes.

In-Person Results: Current Bus Travel Time Per Trip by  
Acceptable Travel Time Per Trip



Survey Respondents Acceptable and Current Travel Time by Grade (Multiple selections allowed)

Travel Time	Pre-kindergarten to Grade 3 (n=100)	Grade 4 to Grade 6 (n=45)	Grade 7 to Grade 9 (n=35)	Grade 10 to Grade 12 (n=10)
Acceptable – 30 minutes or less	58%	47%	57%	60%
Current – 30 minutes or less	18%	13%	17%	10%
Acceptable – 31 to 45 minutes	29%	36%	31%	20%
Current – 31 to 45 minutes	12%	16%	20%	0%
Acceptable – 46 to 60 minutes	3%	2%	3%	0%
Current – 46 to 60 minutes	8%	9%	11%	50%
Acceptable – 61 to 75 minutes	1%	2%	0%	0%
Current – 61 to 75 minutes	6%	4%	6%	10%
Acceptable – 75 plus minutes	0%	4%	6%	10%
Current – 75 plus minutes	1%	9%	6%	10%
Acceptable – Don't know/Not stated	9%	9%	3%	10%
Current – Don't know/Not stated	55%	49%	40%	20%

Next, respondents and attendees were asked to provide any additional comments they may have about transportation. Both attendees' and survey respondents' top theme were that bus service needs to be reliable, stay on schedule, and show up on time (16% of survey respondents).

*“Transportation is a huge issue – always late/no drivers/ later for am or pm.”*

Survey respondents had several additional themes that they raised from bus travel time being too long to improvements needed for the bus notification, GPS system, and the accuracy of bus tracking on the website.

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Bus travel time is too long/not acceptable	13%
Expand yellow bus service to more schools/regions (general)	11%
School transportation is satisfactory/good/adequate	7%
Reduce cost of school transportation	4%
Hire more bus drivers/shortage issues (general)	4%
Improve bus notifications/GPS system/accuracy of bus tracking system on website	3%
Other*	5%
Don't know/Not stated	53%

\*Other responses include:

- concerned about overcrowding on buses,
- better management of ridership behaviour/etiquette,
- expand/review/change school boundaries, and
- dissatisfied with transportation administration/management.

There were three additional themes raised across all in-person sessions:

- Improve bus notifications/GPS/accuracy of the bus tracking system on the website.  
*“The bus finder on PowerSchool used to provide a real-time location for the bus and recently is unavailable.”*
- Consider an express bus/expanded service/bus sharing with other divisions.  
*“Could have transfer express bussing specifically for EFA, St. Stan’s etc., (elementary schools, to FI JR/SR high.”*  
*“Could there be a bus from St. Stan’s to JHP for Jr high and High school?”*
- Bus travel time is too long/not acceptable.  
*“It is a very long bus (75 min) ride even though a private drive is 15 min where the bus is over 75 minutes.”*  
*“Younger kids are impacted the longer the ride time.”*

Additional in-person themes were:

- School transportation is satisfactory/good/adequate.  
*“We feel very fortunate in our bus driver – he is consistent and on time.”*  
*“The bus may be long, but we knew that would be part of the package when choosing a FI Program. The busses home has been on time and dependable.”*
- Bussing to multiple schools is challenging.  
*“Parents are more willing to have longer bus times if the family (siblings) can be together k-9, 7-12 (not k-6).”*

Only one theme emerged in the parent sessions that was not reflected in the comments provided by staff:

*“Currently use ETS school specials which can be very full in the morning.”*

Two themes emerged in the staff sessions that were not raised in the parents' sessions:

- New Canadians' need more support with transportation, and
- ECSD should explore a partnership and information sharing with ETS.

## Retention Challenges

In this section, a graphic representing the dwindling enrollment throughout the grades was presented along with the statement 'enrolment in French Immersion is strong in the elementary years, but only 20% of students complete the program through Grade 12.'

During the staff sessions, many comments were placed on the board:

### Dual vs single track

- Dual-track schools make the switch to the English program easy, offer more options, and do not value French.  
*"Dual-track schools make it too easy for students to leave French and go to English."*
- Single-track schools retain more students.  
*"Single-track French Immersion school work better."*

### Support for parents and students

- Support is needed to develop a sense of belonging, for students with disabilities and for teachers and staff to help students who are struggling.
- Parents are not equipped to support their students.
- Parents need a better understanding of language learning and disabilities.  
*"Parents don't know/research about language learning with disabilities."*
- Parents need to understand the pathways through French Immersion.  
*"Start parent engagement session in grade 4 – JH, in grade 8 – HS, make the journey easy to map out."*

### Transportation and locations

- Transportation travel times are long and can cause students to become dysregulated and high schools are too far away.
- Need more French Immersion schools all over the city.
- Need more location options for junior and senior high school.  
*"No great options for high school, therefore students start leaving French in Junior high."*

### Difficulty levels

- Parents think English programming will be easier.  
*"Families think the English programming will be 'easier' in the long run."*
- Common assessment tools punish language learners.

All participants were then asked questions about retention with a focus on grade groupings: Kindergarten to Grade 6, Grade 7 to Grade 9, and Grade 10 to Grade 12.



## Retention: Why do students leave the program before the end of Grade 6?

Both survey respondents and attendees had the same top concerns that the program is too difficult (28% of survey respondents).

*"Difficulty learning so that other grades/courses are suffering."*

Survey respondents indicated the reason students leave the program before the end of Grade 6 varied from difficulties learning the French language to concerns related to school transportation:

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Difficulty learning the French Language	15%
Lack of/poor parental support/not enough support given by parents	14%
School location is too far away/inconvenient	13%
Lack of interest/no longer interested in program	11%
Poor teachers/style of teaching/lack of support from teachers	8%
Moving away/to another division/region	8%
Lack of/poor course/subject/extracurricular options	5%
Learning disability/disorder related reasons	5%
School transportation/bussing related concerns/issues	3%
Other*	5%
Don't know/Not stated	17%

\*Other responses include:

- class sizes are too large,
- the program is not challenging enough,
- lack of social-related events/activities, and
- wanting to be in the same class/school as their friends/peers.

Attendees noted reasons students leave the program before the end of Grade 6 include:

- Other programs of choice are more attractive/promote their programs more.  
*"More specialized opportunities at other schools."*
- Lack of support (general).  
*"Some children might need just a bit of extra support to grasp and "make a leap" into really getting/picking it up. However, there is a lack of resources/support or time of the learning coach to address these tiny challenges."*
- Concerns over English language skills acquisition.  
*"Reading – parents fear that if not getting it by grade 2, they should leave."*
- Lack of support for students with learning disabilities.  
*"Not as much academic support in French as opposed to English programs."  
"You could have a disability such as dyslexia and not have enough support."*
- Lack of school options at the secondary level.
- School locations too far away/inconvenient/transportation concerns.  
*"Elder sibling leave making it inconvenient to take younger siblings to another school."*

At the parent sessions, some unique themes emerged:

- Lack of support for parents.  
*"Parents do not feel supported or able to help their child."*  
*"Challenges with getting support at home for non-French speaking parents."*
- Lack of commitment from parents.  
*"I honestly think it's a lack of commitment from the parents."*
- Communication/miscommunication.  
*"Myths and misconceptions, especially for struggling students."*
- Students lack the motivation to continue.

Also at the staff sessions, unique themes emerged:

- Dual-track concerns.  
*"Dual track does not work – kids are not truly immersed."*
- Class sizes are too large for the amount of support needed/available.
- Perception of being able to achieve better grades in English programming.
- Do not see the career opportunities.
- Dual-track schools are easy to switch to.
- Lack of social-related activities/events.

### **Retention: Why do students leave the program before the end Grade 9?**

The top two reasons attendees and respondents felt students leave the program before the end of Grade 9 were:

- The lack of/poor course/subject/extracurricular options (28% of survey respondents).  
*"Lack of academic and creative options compared to other district."*
- School locations are too far away/inconvenient (15% of survey respondents).  
*"Why continue when I cannot get my child to a school nearby for JR/HS!"*  
*"Not enough schools within reasonable travel distance."*

Survey respondents also noted the program is too difficult/hard/challenging and students move away to another division or region:

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Program is too difficult/hard/challenging	14%
Lack of interest/no longer interested in program	10%
Difficulty learning the French Language	7%
Wanting to be in the same class/school as their friends/peers	6%
School transportation/bussing related concerns/issues	5%
Lack of/poor parental support/not enough support given by parents	5%
Poor teachers/style of teaching/lack of support from teachers	4%
Moving away/to another division/region	3%
Other*	1%
Don't know/Not stated	17%

\*Other responses include:

- lack of/limited schools that offer French Immersion programming, and
- class sizes are too large.

In-person attendees, both parents and staff, in addition to the top two reasons above also noted:

- Lack of support for and from parents.  
*"Not enough supports at home."*
- Lack of interest/no longer interested in the program.  
*"They don't see much of a point to it."*

At the in-person sessions, parents noted several reasons that differed from those mentioned by staff:

- Expect better grades in English.  
*"Wanting to get high marks and feeling it may be easier in English."  
"Students many not be able to keep up academically for certain courses that are taught in French.  
Some may choose the English path to make it easier for future education."*
- Lack of support for struggling learners.  
*"Other families we've seen have left in order to get access to learning disorder assessments or resources that have not been given to them in the French Immersion school."*
- Concerns about acceptance to Archbishop MacDonald High School.
- High school plans change from when they started the program.
- Lack of/limited schools that offer French Immersion programming.
- Leave for the public system.
- More transparency on the number of French courses and spoken in schools.  
*"Schools need greater transparency about how much French is offered."*
- More use of French language throughout the school.  
*"Options offered in French would help."*
- Poor teachers/style of teaching/lack of support from teachers.
- They want to be in the same class/school as their friends/peers.

Staff noted one additional reason students might leave the program before the end of Grade 9 is that the program is too difficult.

### **Retention: Why do students leave the program after Grade 9?**

The top reasons attendees and respondents felt students leave the program after Grade 9 were:

- The lack of/poor course/subject/extracurricular options (24% of survey respondents)  
*"Competition for kids amongst high schools is tight and often split between athletics and academics. French Immersion options need to stand out on its own and compete within these categories."  
"English High School offers a much larger variety of programs that are enticing."*
- Lack of or limited high schools that offer French Immersion programming (13% of respondents).  
*"You could leave because you want to go to a bigger high school with more programs."*

Survey respondents' other reasons for leaving the program after Grade 9 include the program being too difficult, poor teachers or teaching style, and lack of support from teachers.

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Program is too difficult/hard/challenging	17%
School location is too far away/inconvenient	11%
School transportation/bussing related concerns/issues	8%
Lack of interest/no longer interested in program	7%
Wanting to be in the same class/school as their friends/peers	6%
Difficulty learning the French Language	3%
Poor teachers/style of teaching/lack of support from teachers	3%
Other*	1%
Don't know/Not stated	35%

\*Other responses include:

- lack of/poor parental support/not enough support given by parents, and
- learning disability/disorder-related reasons.

In-person attendees, both parents and staff, in addition to the top two reasons noted above also indicated several other concerns, including :

- Expect better grades in the English program.  
*"Wants to achieve highest grades possible so that when applying to post-secondary having higher grades in English will look better than having "average" grades in French."*
- Not continuing in French for post-secondary.  
*"Some parents make the switch at high school because want their kids to be on the same level as peers for university entrance."*
- School transportation/bussing-related concerns/issues.
- Not enough French spoken.  
*"Option teachers should be French speaking."*
- Not wanting to be with the same peers.  
*"Kids can leave to go to a different school with different kids. Unlike some schools, French Immersion kids can sometimes have the same classmates for K-12, it can get old."*
- Difficulties learning French/learning in two languages.  
*"Difficulty with overall learning and not wanting an extra challenge."*
- They want to be in the same class/school as their friends/peers.
- Archbishop MacDonald High School entrance concerns.

Parents noted a few other reasons not mentioned in the staff sessions:

- Lack of support for children with learning disabilities.
- Concerns about transition to post-secondary institutions.
- The program is too difficult.  
*"High school is hard, and a second language makes it harder."*
- There seems to be more females that stay till grade 12 than males.
- Need extra support outside of the classroom.

Staff noted two additional reasons:

- A lack of interest or no longer interested in the program, and
- Large class sizes.

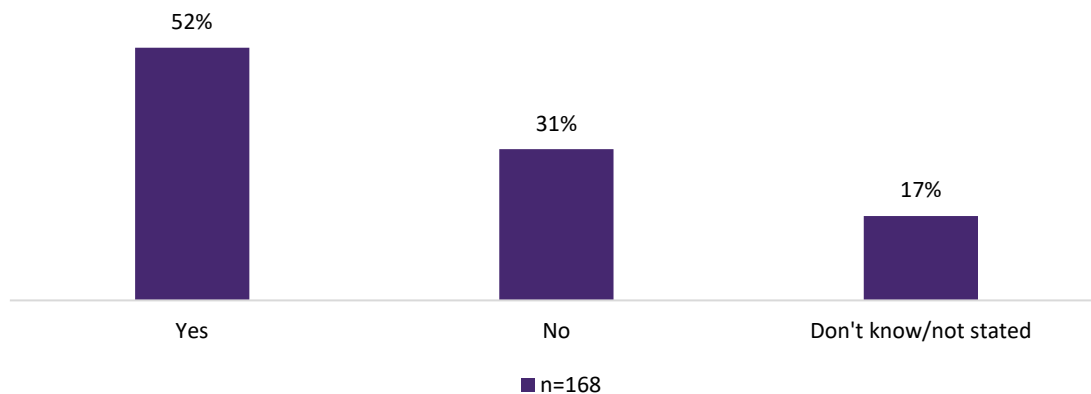


## Current Pathways

Attendees and survey respondents were able to view the current pathways through French Immersion. Three boards showed each of the main sector pathways, north, central, and south. Attendees at the staff sessions added sticky note comments to the pathway boards. A follow-up question was also asked requesting feedback on the pathways.

Survey respondents were asked if the pathways worked for their families and 52% indicated yes.

### Do the Geographic Locations of these Pathways Work for Your Family?



Staff feedback on the pathway boards provides insights into what schools students are leaving the pathway for and other concerns they have about the pathways.

On the North Sector board, the need for another Northside high school option was raised, and it was noted that Archbishop MacDonald High School does not accept all students.

Students leave for:

- Archbishop O’Leary Catholic High School,
- St. Albert schools,
- Ross Sheppard, and
- Harry Ainley.

On the Central Sector board, ideas raised included the need for more French cultural activities and the need for more French Immersion schools (especially high schools). Archbishop MacDonald High School was seen to be fine if the student wants to focus on academics, but Immersion does not always equate to academics, and it is not a full-immersion program.

Students leave for:

- Ross Sheppard,
- Harry Ainley, and
- Holy Child students primarily go to J.H. Picard.

On the South Sector board, ideas noted include transportation issues and a need for a French Immersion junior and high school for the southside. Participants also mentioned that there are too many students for this pathway and suggested adding a French Immersion high school in the Keswick High School. J.H. Picard was mentioned as not being central enough and does not have trades or hands options.

Students leave for:

- Strathcona High School,
- Louis St, Laurent,
- Auston O'Brien, and
- Harry Ainley.

### Pathways from Kindergarten to Grade 12:

All participants were asked to provide feedback about the current pathways from Kindergarten to Grade 12 in French Immersion, what is working, what is not working and what needs to be changed. Several common themes emerged from both the in-person sessions and the survey responses:

- School transportation/bussing related concerns/issues (16% of survey respondents).  
*“Bussing multiple students through 2-3 central location in a community could help, JH and HS children are old enough to walk 10 min to a bus stop.”*  
*“Transportation isn’t working. We need to reconfigure the boundaries in FI so that we retain our students.”*
- Need more high school options, particularly in the north and south (16% of survey respondents).  
*“To me it is highly troubling that all schools feed into JHP, as that school has a growing issue with French learning. Active students WILL leave the system if other districts offer better French Immersion.”*

Additional themes for survey respondents ranged from the location of pathways are adequate, acceptable, and workable to needing more course offerings in French (general):

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Locations of pathways are adequate/acceptable/workable	13%
Need more school options in South area that offer French Immersion programming	9%
Lack of school options will result in leaving the FI stream	4%
Provide more support tools/services	3%
Need more school options in North area that offer French Immersion programming	3%
Need more flexibility with FI program eligibility/registration	2%
Concerned about teaching quality/style/quality of teaching staff	2%
Lack of school options will result in going to FI public system	2%
Need full day kindergarten programs	2%
Need more course offerings in French (general)	2%
Other*	6%
Don't know/Not stated	41%

\*Other responses include:

- Hire more FI teachers/teaching staff,
- Need more funding/funding-related support (general),
- Need more extracurricular options,
- K-12 programs are too broad of an age gap/break down smaller groups is a better fit,
- More cultural-related opportunities/activities/programs, and
- need more school options in the West area that offer French Immersion programming.

For this topic, there were as many similarities across all in-person themes by attendees as there are differences. Four common themes emerged about the pathways for parents and teachers:

- Lack of school options/increased accessibility to more schools.  
*“There’s not many options of schools to choose from.”*
- Increase interactions between schools.
- More dual-track schools.
- More information for parents to help them understand the program.

In the sessions for parents, diverse themes emerged about the pathways:

- More support for students with diverse needs.  
*“Have more support when it comes to disabilities.”*
- Not enough French is being spoken.  
*“We are concerned with the lack of French spoken at JHP after French being mainly spoken at Frere Antoine, why aren’t announcements in French? What aren’t all the French-speaking teachers speaking French all the time in the classroom.”*
- Likes Kindergarten to Grade 9 schools.  
*“I like that any child can go to school K-9 in the same building. Predictable teachers, fewer changes and easier for me when my kids can both be in the same building.”*
- More French support to encourage interest that will sustain until post-secondary.  
*“More French supports to encourage the interest of students to remain in French Immersion to university.”*
- Increase transparency about the amount of French spoken.
- More cultural-related opportunities/activities/programs.

During the staff sessions, several themes emerged:

- Likes single-track schools.
- Develop more learning materials in French.
- Need support, in particular Education Assistants who speak French.
- Change grade configurations.  
*“Bigger lumps k -9 or 7 – 12, less k-6.”*
- Reputational challenges, some schools are more desirable than others.
- Administration support.
- Full-day kindergarten.

## Program Experiences

The final key area explored by attendees was what additional program experiences are important to French Immersion programming, divided into the three main grade groupings: elementary grades, junior high grades, and high school grades.

Overall survey respondents and in-person attendees feel that students in kindergarten through to grade 9 would benefit from more cultural-related opportunities, activities, and program experiences. For students in grades 10 to 12, a key program experience that would benefit students is student exchanges or travel to French-speaking places.

### Kindergarten to Grade 6

In terms of additional program experiences for Kindergarten to Grade 6 students, in both the survey and the in-person sessions the top theme was cultural-related opportunities, activities, and program experiences inside and outside of school (20% of survey respondents).

*“More French cultural activities to immerse kids.”*

Survey respondents’ other themes for program experiences in Kindergarten to Grade 6 include off-site field trips and food, dining, and culinary-related experiences.

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Off-site field trips	12%
Music/live music related activities	5%
Student exchange related opportunities	5%
Visiting Quebec/trip to Quebec	4%
Need more course offerings in French (general)	4%
Dance classes/programs	3%
Summer camp related programs	2%
More focus on teaching the value/importance of learning another language/a second language	2%
Sports related activities/opportunities	2%
Hiring more male teachers to provide different role model/teaching experiences	2%
Food/dining/culinary-related activities	2%
Nothing/no additional experiences	3%
Other*	8%
Don't know/Not stated	46%

\*Other responses include:

- Provide students with more support (general),
- Physical fitness-related exercises/activities,
- Health and wellness-related programs,
- Mentorship-related opportunities,
- Workshops/seminars/guest speakers,
- Summer school/learning opportunities,
- French-speaking courses/programs/resources for parents,
- Religious topics/programs/courses, and
- Offer more courses in English (science and math).



For the in-person sessions, attendees raised two additional themes:

- Likes/preference for single-track schools.  
*“Single-track school provides a more immersive experience – French is the predominant language/culture of the school.”*
- More interactions with other schools.

A few staff session-specific themes emerged for this topic as well:

- Pre-kindergarten in French Immersion.
- Full-day kindergarten.
- Need more support for parents.  
*“Parent night – how to support your child at home in a 2nd language program.”*
- More support (general).

No unique parent session-specific themes emerged.

## Grade 7 to Grade 9

The top theme for additional experiences that are important in the French Immersion program for Grades 7 to Grade 9 in both the survey and in-person sessions was cultural-related opportunities, activities, and programs (11% of survey respondents).

*“...French culture is still important at higher grade level.”*  
*“French cultural activities, movies, restaurants, and concerts.”*

Additional experiences noted in the survey ranged from visiting Quebec to offering some courses in English, specifically some core or option courses.

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Cultural related opportunities/activities/program (general)	11%
Visiting Quebec/trip to Quebec	9%
Student exchange related opportunities	8%
Off-site field trips	7%
Music/live music related activities	5%
More French-only speaking interactions/activities	5%
Need more course offerings in French (general)	4%
Food/dining/culinary related activities	2%
Sports related activities/opportunities	2%
Offer other courses in English (core or options)	2%
Nothing/no additional experiences	2%
Other*	5%
Don't know/Not stated	51%

\*Other responses include:

- More language and grammar related support,
- More social related events/gatherings/activities (general),
- Workshops/seminars/guest speakers,
- Reading-related activities, and
- Dance classes/programs.

No additional common themes across parent and staff in-person sessions emerged.

Parent attendees suggested that many additional experiences which could include from exchange or travel experiences to more options offer in French:

- Exchange students or French travel experiences.
- Speak French in all school settings.  
*“More French spoken in the classroom and for the announcement.”*
- More options (general).
- Language supports for parents.
- More language and grammar support.
- Infuse French history, culture, and food in the program.
- Transparency with parents.  
*“Transparency and guidance with programming offered in junior high school for student looking for advance academic.”*
- Options in French.  
*“French speaking options are important.”*

Staff attendees also had many additional experiences noted:

- More interactions with other schools.
- Demonstrate career opportunities.  
*“Career bridge fair.”*
- Field trips, including skiing field trips.
- French teaching resources.
- Like single-track schools.
- More academic programming.
- Time for teacher collaboration.

## Grade 10 to Grade 12

The top theme for additional experiences that are important in the French Immersion program for Grade 10 to Grade 12 in both the survey and in-person sessions was student exchange or travel-related opportunities (17% of survey respondents).

*“A student exchange program with Quebec based families would be great.”*

Additional experiences noted in the survey ranged from needing more course offerings in French to provide students with more support.

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Need more course offerings in French (general)	10%
Cultural related opportunities/activities/program (general)	7%
Visiting Quebec/trip to Quebec	6%
Off-site field trips	5%
Career/job opportunities with French language	4%
More focus on teaching the value/ importance of learning another/a second language	4%
More French-only speaking interactions/activities	4%
University tours/visits	3%
More extracurricular options/variety (general)	3%
Post-secondary support	2%
Provide students with more support (general)	2%
Other*	7%
Don't know/Not stated	49%

\*Other responses include:

- More language and grammar related support,
- French speaking courses/programs/resources for parents,
- Workshops/seminars and guest speakers,
- Music/live music related activities,
- Sports related activities/opportunities,
- Religious topics/programs/courses, and
- nothing/no additional experiences.

Across all sessions three common themes emerged for additional program experiences:

- Career/job opportunities/post-secondary conversations.  
*“Give them goals, create job fairs in French for summer jobs!” “Ensure that student is prepared for both French secondary and English secondary.”*
- More course options.  
*“Ensure any FI HS still has lots of options for students as this is an important part of the high school experience and allow students to explore different opportunities for career pathways and skills.”*
- Speak French in all school settings.

Parent session attendees added one unique suggestion about more academic programming in French:

*“Would like more advanced academic programming for high school French Immersion.”*

Staff session attendees added two more suggestions:

- Cultural-related opportunities/activities/programs and
- Access to online French supports and programming.

## Final Thoughts

Participants had an opportunity at the end of the survey and in-person sessions to provide any final thoughts that were not addressed in the earlier questions.

The top theme for concluding thoughts across both the survey and the in-person sessions centred around providing more support for students (10% of survey respondents).

*“How can we support students if half our class struggles with reading, writing and speaking?”*

*“Inadequate/no support for students who struggle with understanding some subjects in French.”*

Survey responses varied significantly from respondents stating they were satisfied with the French Immersion program to wanting more single-track French Immersion programming.

(n=168)	Percentage of Respondents
Satisfied with French Immersion program/are doing a great job (general)	8%
Need more school options to choose from and that offer French Immersion programming at more schools/grade levels (general)	7%
Transportation/commuting related concerns (distance too far, bussing related concerns)	6%
More cultural related opportunities/activities/programs (general)	5%
Improve teaching quality/style/quality of French Immersion Teaching staff	5%
Need more course offerings in French	4%
Need to promote program/French language/build French Immersion community	3%
Lack of school options will result in students going to French Immersion in the public system	3%
More focus on teaching/speaking French language/less use of English (general)	2%
Provide parents with more tools/supports/resources	2%
Need better program leadership/management (ECSD)	2%
Assign more homework for students	2%
More single-track French Immersion programming	2%
Other*	13%
Don't know/Not stated	49%

\*Other responses include:

- More open-mindedness in non-faith values/beliefs/ less religious mandated events,
- Need more extracurricular options,
- Improve/increase level of communication (general),
- Need more funding/funding-related support (general),
- More social-related events/gatherings/activities (general),
- Hire more French Immersion teachers,
- Concerned about large class sizes/class sizes are too large/should be reduced,
- Is thankful for the opportunity to provide feedback/participate in survey,
- Teachers are great/excellent/exceptional/provide high-quality education,
- More focus on Catholic faith/religion,
- Need full-day kindergarten programs,
- Need more flexibility with French Immersion program eligibility/registration,
- More dual-track French Immersion programming,
- Need more school options in South area that offer French Immersion programming,
- Need more options in the North area that offer French Immersion programming, and
- Nothing/no additional comments.

At the in-person sessions, one additional theme emerged across the request for more collaboration with francophone programs:

*“More collaboration both in and out of Alberta for francophone opportunities to keep interest and elevate student learnings.”*

Parent attendees noted additional thoughts that ranged from stating they need more support to requesting more offerings of extracurriculars in French:

- More support for parents (general).  
*“Support for the parent community.”*  
*“Lack of parent resources to adequately support my child with his French learning.”*
- Speak French in all school settings.  
*“I am hoping to see a lot more French incorporated into the classrooms.”*
- More grammar and literacy support.
- More support for diverse learners.  
*“Inadequate/no support for students who struggle with understanding some subjects in French.”*
- More French Immersion schools across the city.
- French Immersion students must work more.  
*“I believe that English schools have more privileges – easier workload, no homework, more breaks, and less strictness.”*
- Offer more extracurriculars in French.

At the staff session final themes included:

- Administrative support.  
*“Admin who understands learning through language.”*  
*“It is vital that we have strong immersion advocates about school administration – dual or single track.”*
- Smaller class sizes.
- Full day kindergarten.
- Create French resources.
- Separate high schools from other grades.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Throughout the engagement, questions were asked, either of staff in attendance or left on the session boards. The majority of questions were centered on retention: numbers, impact of site locations, impact of program offerings, and activities to help with retention:

- Are there differences between dual-track and single-track schools, in terms of retention?
- What is the attrition rate at these junior highs that determine these pathways?
- Does location impact retention?
- Does offering French Immersion grades 10 to 12 in an academic site impact the number of students that continue in French Immersion?
- Do enrollment numbers increase with full-day kindergarten?
- What is ECSD doing to retain children in early years (grades 2 to 6)?

One boundary question was posed:

- Why does Monsignor William Irwin Catholic Elementary School have such a small catchment?

Attendees also asked about available supports:

- What supports/information is available to parents to keep their kids in French Immersion?

Questions about high school sites and where students continue for post-secondary:

- Why are there only two options for high school French Immersion in the whole division?
- Why is there no French Immersion high school in the southwest?
- How many students move on to French post-secondary?