

École J.H. Picard

English Academic Program

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

EDMONTON CATHOLIC SCHOOL DIVISION



What We Heard



École J.H. Picard High School English Academic Program Engagement

From March–May 2026, the J.H. Picard Catholic School community was invited to share their perspectives on adding an English academic high school program alongside French Immersion. Engagement methods included focus groups, an online survey, a video, and an in-person community input event.

ENGAGEMENT AT A GLANCE



Total respondents to the questionnaire that was open April 23–May 8, 2026



Students responded to the online questionnaire



Students, staff, parents/guardians and community members attended the in-person community input event on April 23, 2026



Total views of the video on Youtube



Students, parents/guardians and staff attended two focus groups

SUMMARY



STRONG SUPPORT

Expanded course options and opportunities



MIXED VIEWS

Dual-track model seen as both opportunity and risk



KEY CONCERN

Protecting French Immersion identity



CLEAR ASK

More detail, transparency, and communication

KEY THEMES

Expanded Opportunities
More courses, extracurriculars, and academic pathways are highly valued

Protect French Immersion
Language, culture, and identity must remain central

Risk to FI Identity
Concern that English programming may overshadow French

Programming Gaps
Limited options identified as a key reason students leave.

Implementation Concerns
Questions about space, staffing, timelines, and construction.

Need for Clarity
Community is seeking more detailed information on how the model will work

WHAT MATTERS MOST

French Language Use
(in classrooms, hallways, announcements)

Student Opportunities
(courses, sports, pathways)

Cultural Identity
(Carnaval, Francophone traditions)

Community & Belonging
(small school feel, connection)

SUPPORT

- More course options
- Expanded extracurricular opportunities
- Stronger high school experience
- Retaining students at J.H. Picard

CONCERNS

- Loss of French Immersion environment
- English program becoming dominant
- Overcrowding and limited resources
- Lack of clarity on implementation

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ★ The community supports growth—but not at the expense of French Immersion
- ★ **Protecting language, culture, and identity** is the top priority
- ★ Clear planning and communication **are essential** to build trust

NEXT STEPS

- ➔ Feedback will inform planning and recommendations
- ➔ Updates will be shared regularly with families and the community, including details on academics and extracurricular opportunities
- ➔ Ongoing engagement will continue

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Edmonton Catholic Schools conducted a comprehensive engagement process to gather feedback on the introduction of an English academic high school program at École J.H. Picard Catholic School, alongside the existing French Immersion (FI) program, beginning in September 2027. This initiative is part of a broader effort to address declining high school enrolment at J.H. Picard, improve student retention, and strengthen the long-term viability of the school's high school program.

Engagement activities included focus groups, an in-person community event, and an online questionnaire. Participants included students, parents/guardians, staff, alumni, and members of the broader school community.

Overall, the feedback reflects a highly engaged and invested community. Participants expressed strong support for expanding academic programming, increasing course options, and enhancing extracurricular opportunities. At the same time, there is a clear and consistent concern regarding the preservation of the French Immersion program's identity, culture, and language environment.

While many respondents recognize the potential benefits of a dual-track model, there is significant apprehension that the introduction of an English program could unintentionally weaken the French Immersion experience if not carefully planned and implemented.

The key message from the community is clear:

Growth and innovation are supported, provided that the integrity, quality, and prominence of French Immersion at J.H. Picard are protected.

BACKGROUND

J.H. Picard Catholic School currently operates as a single-track French Immersion school from Kindergarten through Grade 12. In recent years, the school has experienced ongoing challenges related to student retention, particularly during the transition from Grade 9 to Grade 10. High school enrolment remains significantly lower than junior high enrolment, raising concerns about the long-term sustainability of the program.

At the same time, other high schools across the Division are operating above capacity, highlighting an opportunity to better utilize available space and strengthen program offerings at J.H. Picard.

To address these challenges, beginning in September 2027, the Division is introducing an English academic program at the high school level. The program will be introduced in phases, starting with Grade 10 in 2027–2028 and expanding each year to ensure quality implementation. The dual-track model is intended to:

- Increase enrolment and retention
- Expand course offerings and extracurricular opportunities
- Provide greater flexibility for students
- Enhance the overall high school experience

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The engagement process was designed to:

- Gather meaningful input from students, parents/guardians, staff, and community members,
- Obtain feedback on the introduction and implementation of English academic programming,
- Identify positive and enabling factors that support student retention,
- Explore opportunities to strengthen programming and enhance the student experience, and
- Inform future planning and decision-making through community perspectives.

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Participants

Engagement included a wide range of community members:

- Current J.H. Picard students
- Parents/guardians across all grade levels

- School staff and administration
- Alumni and community members

Methods

Multiple engagement methods were used to ensure broad and inclusive participation:

- Focus group sessions: 32 participants that included students, staff, parents/guardians, and alumni.
- Online questionnaire: 358 respondents, including 256 J.H. Picard students, 94 parents/guardians, 2 staff and 6 “other”. The 6 other respondents indicated they were alumni of J.H. Picard.
- Community input event: There were 27 attendees in total, including staff, students, and parents/guardians. Time spent engaging with the display boards ranged from 16 to 46 minutes.
- Video: 130 views on YouTube
- Project website and regular communications

Timeline

Engagement activities took place between March and May 2026, with questionnaire responses collected from April 23 to May 8, 2026.

ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

Overall Sentiment

Feedback reflects a balanced but cautious perspective. While there is strong support for improving program viability and student opportunities, there is equally strong concern about preserving the defining characteristics of the French Immersion program.

Participants emphasized that the success of any changes will depend on maintaining a strong commitment to French language, culture, and community.

Key Themes

1. Strong Support for Expanded Opportunities

Many participants expressed clear support for the English academic program to enhance the overall student experience. Respondents identified potential benefits including:

- Increased course offerings and academic pathways
- Expanded extracurricular opportunities, athletics, and clubs
- Improved preparation for post-secondary education
- Greater flexibility for students to pursue their interests

These improvements were widely viewed as important factors in retaining students and attracting new enrolment.

2. Preservation of French Immersion Identity

The most prominent theme across all responses was the importance of protecting the French Immersion program.

Participants consistently emphasized:

- The importance of maintaining French as the primary language of communication within the school
- The value of cultural traditions and events such as Carnaval d'hiver and other Francophone celebrations
- The significance of J.H. Picard as a unique full French Immersion K–12 environment

Many respondents indicated that this identity is the primary reason families choose the school.

3. Concern About the English Program Overshadowing FI

A significant number of participants expressed concern that the introduction of an English program could:

- Reduce the use of French in daily school life
- Encourage students to transition out of French Immersion
- Ultimately diminish the program's quality and long-term sustainability

Some respondents described the proposal as potentially masking underlying issues, such as limited course options, rather than addressing the root causes of student attrition.

4. Programming Gaps as a Key Driver of Attrition

Many participants identified limited programming options as a primary reason students leave after Grade 9.

Suggestions included:

- Expanding academic, technical, and career-based programming
- Increasing extracurricular opportunities within the French Immersion stream
- Exploring partnerships to broaden course offerings

This theme highlights a strong desire to strengthen the existing program alongside any new initiatives.

5. Implementation and Operational Concerns

Respondents raised several practical considerations related to implementation:

- Availability of physical space and potential overcrowding
- Construction timelines and funding for new facilities
- Staffing capacity and availability of qualified teachers
- Transition impacts on current students

There was a clear request for detailed planning, including timelines, contingency strategies, and transparent communication.

6. Equity and Access

Feedback on the English academic entry requirements (e.g. minimum grade thresholds) was mixed.

Some participants supported maintaining academic rigor, while others expressed concern that:

- Requirements may exclude students who would benefit from remaining at the school
- Current students may be forced to leave due to eligibility criteria

This reflects a broader concern about ensuring equitable access and supporting diverse student needs.

7. Maintaining Community and School Culture

Participants strongly value the current school environment, describing it as:

- Close-knit
- Supportive
- Community-oriented

There is concern that increased enrolment may:

- Reduce the “small school” feel
- Limit access to teachers and supports
- Create competition for opportunities

Maintaining a sense of belonging and connection was identified as a priority for any future model.

8. Need for Clarity and Ongoing Communication

Participants consistently asked for more detailed information, including:

- Course offerings and program structure
- Interaction between English and FI students
- Staffing, class sizes, and resource allocation
- Facility plans and timelines

There is a strong expectation for continued engagement, transparency, and clear communication throughout the decision-making process.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is strong community support for improving high school programming and increasing opportunities for students.
- The French Immersion program is viewed as the defining strength of J.H. Picard and must remain a priority.

- Participants are open to change but expect clear safeguards to protect French language, culture, and program quality.
- Limited course offerings and extracurricular opportunities are key contributors to student attrition.
- Transparent communication and thoughtful implementation planning are essential to maintaining community trust.

CONCLUSION

The engagement process demonstrates a deeply committed and passionate school community. Participants have clearly articulated both the opportunities and the risks associated with the dual-track model.

While there is openness to innovation and growth, there is also a shared expectation that the French Immersion program will remain central to the identity of J.H. Picard Catholic School.

The path forward will require a careful balance between expanding opportunities and preserving the unique qualities that define the school. Success will depend on how effectively the Division can respond to community concerns, demonstrate accountability, and implement a model that reflects both operational realities and community priorities.