

Learning French on PEI

Hello!
Bonjour!



A Guide for Parents

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Introduction

If your child will be starting Kindergarten soon, one of the important choices you will make is how learning French can be acquired.

There are different programs to access this skill in the PEI school system. These are: Core French, Early, Mid and Late Immersion and French First Language programs.

There are many questions you may ask. What is the level of language proficiency you would like for your child? Is French Immersion right for your child? What is the French Immersion program like? Should you choose early or late? What are the expected outcomes of the programs? What are the advantages of the program? How can you tell if it's the right choice for your child? This brochure will give you some information you need to help answer these questions.

French Second Language Programs

Core French Program

In this program, the second language is taught as a subject in the recommended timetable of 30 minute periods daily at the elementary level (270 hours) and 10 to 13% (338-360 hours) of the time at the intermediate level.

The outcomes of Core French include:

- Basic communication skills such as routine social demands and limited requirements in school/work settings;
- Language knowledge such as common social situations, introductions and casual conversations about events in school and community, autobiographical information in some detail and directions from one place to another; and
- An appreciation of French culture in Canada and beyond.

Core French starts in Grade 4 in PEI and is mandated until Grade 9. Most Island high schools offer it until Grade 12. A student who studies Core French from Grade 4 to Grade 12 is exposed to a maximum of about 1100 hours of French instruction.

Early French Immersion Program (EFI)

EFI is a school program where the teaching and learning happens in French. In PEI, the Early French Immersion program begins in Kindergarten. From Kindergarten to Grade 3 the students spend a minimum of 90% or 3330hrs in French. With the introduction of English Language Arts in Grade 4 the time in French is reduced to 65% or 1803.75 hours. In Grades 7-9 students spend a minimum of 50 % or 1387.5 hours in French.

In high school, students are required to complete a minimum of 6 credits in French spending at least 660 hours or 25% of the time in French. By the end of high school, immersion students have proficiency in both French and English. When they graduate, they receive a Provincial French Immersion Certificate.

Middle French Immersion Program (MFI)

There is only one program of this kind on the Island and it is at the Gulf Shore Consolidated School. Instruction in French begins as Core French in Grade 1 followed by implementation of French Immersion at Grade 4. The percentage of French instruction in Grades 4-6 is 75%. At the intermediate (Grades 7-9) and senior high school (Grades 10-12) levels, students receive the same amount of French instruction as their counterparts in other immersion schools.

Late French Immersion Program (LFI)

LFI is a school program where the teaching and learning happens in French. In PEI, the Late French Immersion program begins in grade 7. The Late French Immersion program has similar outcomes to the English program in French Language Arts, Math, Science, Social Studies and English Language Arts. In Grades 7 and 8 about 80 % or 240 minutes/1480 hours are spent in French, in Grade 9 it is 50% or 150 minutes/ 462.5 hours and in Grade 10-12 it is only 25% or 75 minutes/660 hours. In PEI students are integrated with Early French Immersion students in Grade 10.

In high school, students are required to complete a minimum of 6 credits in French. By the end of high school, immersion students have proficiency in both French and English. When they graduate, they receive a Provincial French Immersion Certificate.

French First Language Program

This program is intended for:

- The child of a person who is eligible under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms;
- The child of a person of Acadian or francophone origin who wants his or her child to develop an Acadian and francophone identity through the acquisition of the Acadian and francophone culture.

The intent of the program is to:

- To develop a high proficiency in the French and English languages, both spoken and written;
- To develop a positive attitude towards the French language ;
- To develop a positive attitude and a sense of belonging to the Acadian and francophone community
- To promote the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes in all disciplines taught in French

The school offers a homogenous francophone environment. The French language is used as the language of instruction from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Extracurricular activities are also conducted in French.

English is introduced in Grade 4. Given the mainly English environment on PEI, students acquire the English language naturally. Upon graduation, students should have the choice to pursue post-secondary education in either language.

Early French Immersion (EFI) vs. Late French Immersion (LFI)

Research conducted over four decades has consistently shown that EFI is the most successful program option in building learners' French second language competencies while promoting high quality subject matter learning. Various studies have shown that the level of French proficiency attained by immersion students depends on the age at which French instruction begins and the intensity of French instruction, as well as the total number of cumulative hours of instruction. Early French Immersion (EFI) students show higher degrees of proficiency in oral production, particularly with regard to fluency and spontaneous language use.^[i]

EFI students also tend to outperform delayed (middle or late) immersion students. Also, despite the myths to the contrary, research also shows that EFI does not have a negative effect on students' first language development. In fact, studies show that there is a positive effect. It is not surprising that, in a recent article, the Canadian Council for Learning ^[ii] argues that French Immersion, and particularly EFI, is the most effective means for non-Francophone students to become bilingual.

Late French Immersion students tend to achieve the same level of proficiency as far as reading and writing as Early French Immersion students, but their oral expression is often inferior. It is generally the decision of the student to enroll in Late French Immersion, as opposed to the parents, and thus the types of students that enroll in each type of program reflect underlying motivations and personal characteristics.

Immersion Academic Outcomes

Are there any adverse effects on English proficiency?

Parents often wonder if learning a second language had detrimental effects on one's first language. This question has come up so often since the introduction of French Immersion that the Education ministers in Atlantic Canada commissioned a review of the research on the topic in 2002. Bournot-Trites and Tallowitz reviewed over four dozen pieces of research done on the topic and concluded that: "The effect of learning a second language (French) on the first language (English) skills have been positive in all studies done. Furthermore, the loss of instructional time in English, (first language) in favour of the second language has never been shown to have negative effects on the achievement of the first language."^[iii]

French Immersion is open to any student. Research shows us that the majority of children will have no problem learning French. The skills learned in the French Immersion program transfer to the English program, making it easy for the students to adapt literacy strategies. Early French Immersion students do "lag" behind their English program peers in some aspects of English skills until they have had one or more years of English instruction. However by Grade 5 or 6, they will be doing as well (or better) than students in the regular English program plus they will be reading and writing in French.

Developing literacy skills

In a French Immersion classroom, students do not just learn the French language, but acquire the language. They do not just learn the grammatical structure of the language, but experience the language and culture. Acquiring a second language provides students with greater opportunity to develop their literacy skills and their ability to communicate. These skills are transferable from one language to the next. Developing literacy skills in a second language helps to reinforce their literacy skills in their first language. Most importantly, developing literacy skills in their first language helps to promote their ability to communicate in their other language(s). For more on literacy go to: www.peireads.com.

Quality of French language acquired through FI

French Immersion students, especially those that enroll in Early French Immersion, will achieve levels of reading and oral comprehension very similar to those of native French speakers. However, their spoken and writing abilities will be somewhat lower. Remember, although it seems like children are in school for a long time, the average academic year is about 950-1,000 hours long (20% of a grade 1 child's waking hours) during the year. The other 80% of the time the child is exposed to English!

French Immersion students, by the end of their education, are capable to participate in a French community, study at a bilingual university, or even work in a French workplace.

Benefits of second language learning

The French Immersion program is open to all students. If you want your child to develop proficiency in Canada's two official languages and cultures, French Immersion has a great deal to offer.

Children benefit from learning in two languages. Their thinking and reasoning skills improve, and English language skills are enhanced. Later in life, French Immersion can also give your child additional career opportunities. We live in an increasingly global economy, so proficiency in more than one language will be an advantage for career development and will give students a competitive advantage in the job market.

Intellectual Potential^[iv]

Students fluent in two language score higher in both verbal and non-verbal intelligence. Students studying a second language are superior in divergent thinking tasks and in memory ability and attention span.

Scholastic Achievement

Second language students have higher test scores in reading, language and mathematics. Each additional year of second language training created a greater positive differential compared to students not receiving a second language.

Effect on First Language

Second language education significantly strengthens first language skills in areas of reading, English vocabulary, grammar and communication skills. The earlier the start, the greater the positive effect on the first language.

Citizenship

Students studying a second language have superior cross-cultural skills and adapt better to varying cultural contexts. Students studying a second language display greater cultural sensitivity.

Economic Potential

There is an urgent requirement for qualified speakers of languages other than English in areas of science, technology, medicine and global commerce.

Contributors to success

Based on more than 30 years of experience with immersion programs, it is common to find the following characteristics in successful Immersion students, please note that not all of these characteristics are needed for success, they are merely a guideline. We recommend that you discuss these characteristics with your child's early childhood educator or teacher.

- is verbal and likes to talk
- has strong skills in his or her first language
- enjoys books
- imitates easily
- has a good memory
- is confident
- is a risk taker
- enjoys new challenges
- has demonstrated a successful transition from home to school

Additionally for Late French Immersion students there should be a willingness on the student's part to participate. The student's reasons should be valid, not simply because their friends are taking Immersion. It is well researched that a student with a learning disability will have that disability in the French immersion or the English program. If students have already been struggling with learning before grade seven, considering late French Immersion may offer more challenges and specific questions should be addressed with elementary and junior high teams to make the best decision for each child. There are supports to compliment good classroom instruction for students requiring help (Reading Recovery, PLIP etc.) that are available in Early French Immersion. School teams and parents are advised to consider many factors assessing student needs.

The ability to hear correctly is extremely important when learning the structures of a language. Listening is a major component of the French Immersion program. If a student has a severe learning disability that is auditory in nature, that student may best be served in the English program.

Early Years Assessment

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development requests the administration of the Early Years Evaluation Development Assessment to all children scheduled to start kindergarten (English or French Immersion program). This tool helps school board personnel identify children for appropriate supports, in all programs.

French Immersion Kindergarten Program

Orientations and Welcome to Kindergarten

A number of activities are available to assist parents in connecting with their child's school. There is an orientation to the school as well as the Welcome to Kindergarten Program each spring.

French Immersion kindergarten

The French Immersion Kindergarten Program is based on the belief that **all children can learn**. It is important to remain positive and encouraging even though your child has not yet demonstrated any visible learning. Some children wait to speak until they feel confident in their ability to speak in French well. Each child follows their unique path and will learn in their own particular way. The French Immersion Kindergarten Program respects these differences.

General Preparedness (Kindergarten)

Children come to Kindergarten with a variety of skills. Some come already knowing their alphabet and how to print it. Some can't hold a pencil. The program is designed for students of all levels to learn. Research shows us that the majority of children will have no problem learning French. The only area where there could be difficulty is if children have an auditory problem. Your child need not have all of the "qualities" but should have some. In *"Yes, You Can Help"* produced by Alberta Education, Early French Immersion has been called a "gentle" introduction to a second language education.^[vi] Once more research shows that the biggest adjustment for children entering schools, is the same for both the French Immersion student and the English student; that of separation from their parents and adjustment to the school and classroom routines. Parents can help with this by preparing their children for school, teaching them how to use zippers, tie their laces, **read to them** (English or French) and help ensure that they enjoy going to school.

Studies have found no evidence of emotional or social difficulties linked to a child's immersion experience. The gentle approach to French in the early years of an immersion program helps to build students' confidence and ability to understand what is going on. Stresses experienced by the children are often found to be related to factors other than immersion.

In their study of kindergarten students, Weber and Tardiff reported, «We were very surprised at just how easily children adapted to the situation, if anything, it was the school-specific rather than the language-specific aspects of the classroom experience that seemed to pose a challenge to some of the children: separating from parents, getting used to the concept of recess (not going home), learning the classroom rules about how to behave and adjusting to the demands of an unfamiliar schedule. These seemed to be the real challenges in both the regular and immersion classrooms».^[vii]

Helping Out

Many non-French speaking parents ask, “How can I help my child in French immersion?” Not to worry! The French Immersion program is designed for children of non-French speaking parents. Your support and involvement in your child’s education is one of the most important things you can do to make sure your child is successful in school—that is true no matter what program your child is taking. Reading to your child regularly in English is one important role you can play.

The role of parents with their child’s **homework** is guidance. Listen to them, read in both English and French if you know it, and help them develop their literacy skills, provide them with the resources they need (dictionaries). In the first years, “homework” might consist of taking in pictures of family members, finding a calendar in the home and counting how many chairs, windows in their homes etc. Homework in later years is always information that has been covered in class and is sent home for practice. **If your child is having trouble with homework, contact your child’s teacher.**

French Immersion is designed for students who do not have French at home. Teachers assigning homework are aware of this and your child can tell you in English about their homework and you can have an English discussion about the subject they are studying.

For a child to develop literacy and learn a second language they have to assume that they will be **successful**. Parents play an integral part at this point. Here are some things you can do to help your child be successful in French Immersion:

- Learn about the French Immersion program.
- Speak positively about learning.
- Encourage your child and show an interest in what your child’s learning; this demonstrates to your child that you are committed to the program.
- Find ways to expose your child to French or to use French outside of school time. Borrow French books from the public library, listen to children’s music by French artists, watch some French television programs, and visit French communities.
- Be happy for their opportunity and pleased with their progress.
- Volunteer in the classroom or with school events such as concerts, sporting events, library, CPF etc.
- Encourage your child to talk about their day and experiences in general terms.
- Have realistic expectations; recognize that learning a second language is a continuous and developmental process.
- Read stories to your child in English. Literacy skills are transferred from one language to another.
- Do not ask your child to translate. They will not understand this concept in very early grades.
- Do not attempt to correct your child if you are uncertain of the exact pronunciation or expression.

- Do not give in to the temptation to say “now dear, say something in French to Grandma.” If your child is eager to speak French at home then encourage it but do not make it a chore.
- Do not compare your child’s progress with your neighbors’ child who may not be in a second language program.
- Express any questions or concerns you might have to the teacher or principal not to your child.
- Talk with parents who have children in the French immersion program.

Register as early as possible

French immersion is open to any student in P.E.I. who registers by the deadline in November. After that, the schools will consider additional students but there is no guarantee of acceptance into the program. Therefore, please register at your designated French Immersion school as soon as possible. Registering early helps the School Board to plan for your child as effectively as possible. It also gives you and your child time to prepare for the start of the program.

How can you get more information?

Information meetings are held for parents at schools that offer Early French Immersion annually in November. Watch the newspaper; listen to the radio, CPF PEI website, and school newsletters for information about dates and times. Contact the French Consultant at the School Board.

English Language School Board Eastern and Western schools

Deneen Gallant-Norring
 French consultant
 (902) 620-3694
dagallant-norring@edu.pe.ca

Canadian Parents for French

CPF was founded in 1977 by parents who wanted to ensure that children would have the opportunity to become bilingual in the Canadian school system. You will find resources, games and activities for your child and links to other CPF websites nationwide on the National CPF website. Membership in CPF (\$25 annually) helps provide opportunities for children to practice French as well as support advocacy activities.

www.cpf.ca/
www.cpfpei.pe.ca

Websites and suggestions

English Language School Board, www.gov.pe.ca/edu/elsb

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, www.gov.pe.ca/eecd/

CASLT (Canadian Assoc. of Second Language Teachers) is a not-for-profit professional association dedicated to promoting the advancement of second language teaching and learning. www.caslt.org/

This handbook about Kindergarten describes many aspects of the kindergarten experience including how children learn. www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/edu_ENGHandbook.pdf

Same as above for French Immersion. www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/edu_fr_immersio.pdf

Curriculum guides by grade level. www.gov.pe.ca/eecd/index.php3?number=1026202&lang=E

Contains a video that describes the advantages of learning a second language. Alberta Education/ Teaching and Learning Centre at the University of Calgary. arts.ucalgary.ca/lrc/research/advantage-life

A grade 4 student shares her experience, as well as her parents' thoughts, about whether or not to enter the French Immersion program.

www.hcdsb.org/Programs/FrenchImmersion/Pages/default.aspx

References

[i] Dicks, J. and Kristmanson, P., (2008) Second Language Research Institute of Canada, UNB ConneXions

[ii] Trites- Bournot Monique and Talloway Ulrick (2002) Report of Current Research on the Effects of Second Language Learning on First Language Literacy Skills, Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, Halifax www.cfnb.com/reports/apef_report.pdf

[iv] Alberta Learning, education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/learnlang/benefits.aspx

[vii] Alberta Education, *Yes, you can help.* education.alberta.ca/media/3091402/yesyoucanhelp.pdf

[viii] Weber, S., and Tardif, C., (1991) *Assessing L2 Competency in Early Immersion Classrooms*, Canadian Modern Language Review, v47 n5 p916-32



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