



French Immersion

Parent Handbook



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Religious education in French Immersion schools

Catholic principles govern all Calgary Catholic school activities and are present in every subject taught. Religious education instruction, which provides young people with the opportunity to learn more about their faith, is mandatory at every grade level. Opportunities for prayer and religious celebration are integral to the program. Religious education is taught in English.



What is French Immersion?

French Immersion is a form of bilingual education, which uses the French language as the medium for instruction while teaching the curriculum mandated by Alberta Education. To reinforce and enhance the second language, various extracurricular activities also occur in French.

What type of student will benefit from this program?

A student who has little or no previous knowledge of French, but who possesses a keen interest in learning designated curriculum through the French language, is well-suited for this program.

What are the French Immersion program objectives?

The French Immersion program enables students to develop a functional fluency in French while providing them with the advantages of an all-English program. The program's objectives are:

- To enable students to become functionally bilingual, that is:

- able and willing to participate easily in conversations in French and English;
- able to further their education as appropriate to their abilities and interests, with French as the language of instruction; and
- able to accept employment using French as the working language.
- To provide opportunities for students to gain insight into the French heritage and culture of Canada and the common attitudes and values of the French-speaking community.
- To enable students to achieve equivalent levels of learning in all subjects taken whether they are instructed in English or French.

What types of French Immersion programs are available?



The Calgary Catholic School District offers Early Immersion, Late Immersion, and Extended French programs.

Early Immersion program (kindergarten to Grade 9)

The Early Immersion program currently has an entry point at the kindergarten or Grade 1 level only. This is because your child's progress in each grade will depend, in part, on the French language skills he or she has acquired in previous grades. No background in French is necessary to enter the program. To register for kindergarten, your child must turn four years old on or before March 1 of that same calendar year. To register for Grade 1, your child must turn five years old on or before March 1 of that same calendar year. Contact your local French Immersion school to register.

Instructional time in the Early Immersion program is allocated in the following way:

Grade levels	French instructional time	English instructional time	
Kindergarten	90%	10%	(15 minutes of Religion per day)
Grades 1–2	80%	20%	(30 minutes of Religion and 30 minutes of English Language Arts per day)
Grades 3–6	70%	30%	(30 minutes of Religion and 60 minutes of English Language Arts per day)
Grades 7–9	50% - 57%	43% - 50%	

Late Immersion program

The Calgary Catholic School District offers a three-year Late Immersion program, with an entry point in Grade 7, for students who have completed Grade 6 in an all-English regular program. No background in French is necessary.

Extended French program

The senior high Extended French program is offered to students entering Grade 10 who have completed the Early or Late French Immersion program in Grade 9. This program enables students to maintain and develop the French language skills they have already acquired. Students enrolled in the Extended French program at Bishop Grandin High School and St. Francis High School also have the option of taking the Advanced Placement course in French Language Arts. A combined Extended French and International Baccalaureate program is offered at St. Mary's High School.

The percentage of instructional time in Extended French programs is as follows:

Grade level	French instructional time
Grades 10–12	30% (Études Sociales, French Language Arts, Mathématiques)





Benefits of learning a second language



What are some of the benefits of learning a second language?

Simultaneous learning of two languages

Students develop a communicative competence in the second language, with no negative effect on the development of the first language.

Enhancement of cognitive skills and better understanding of language learning

Many of the skills and knowledge used in learning a second language are the same as those used in learning one's first language. This experience may enable students to learn additional languages more efficiently and effectively.

Enrichment and personal growth

Students gain a new awareness and appreciation of other cultures in addition to an enhanced understanding and appreciation of their own culture. A knowledge of French helps students to better understand the history, development, and politics of Canada, and also helps them to develop an enhanced global awareness.

Travel and career opportunities

Bilingual students become increasingly competitive in their ability to participate in world affairs, including business, civil service, trade and commerce, service industries, diplomacy, teaching, journalism, and international and national agencies. Personal interests in areas such as literature, art, music, theatre, and travel are also enhanced.

How do French Immersion students perform academically?

Students do very well academically in Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies and have, over the years, consistently demonstrated comparable or better performance than students who are taught in an all-English program.

Immersion programs have proven successful in promoting advanced French language status and in leading English-speaking students to becoming functionally bilingual.

How do students learn a second language?

The approach used in the French Immersion program is based on the fact that learning a second language has much in common with learning a first language. In both instances, the processes are very similar and the language becomes a tool for communication.

A kindergarten student, just like an infant, wants to create meaning and understand the world around them. Children also have a deep urge to be understood. The French Immersion program is designed to create the same kinds of conditions that are thought to occur during first language acquisition – that is, students are encouraged to learn the language by participating in meaningful and interesting language activities. Kindergarten teachers focus on the use of the language rather than the study of it.

Although communication in French is the goal and is perceived as the best method to develop proficiency, the relationship between the French teacher and the student – just like the relationship between the parent and child – is vital to one’s success in a French Immersion program.

Teachers work to ensure the creation of a non-threatening, stimulating and rich environment that reduces anxiety and encourages students to take risks. Together, parents and teachers discuss and reinforce the values and benefits of learning two languages.

Students learn to view their French teacher as an individual who communicates with them primarily in French. If necessary, the teacher will reassure kindergarten and Grade 1 learners by using English. The young learner initially responds in English and, without denying the importance of the child’s message, the teacher will respond in French. Young children are encouraged but are not forced to speak in French as teachers recognize and respect the fact that second language learners go through a silent period until they are ready.

When the French oral and listening skills are fairly well-developed, the Grade 1 teacher will formally introduce reading and writing skills in French. In Grade 1 and in all French subjects, students frequently use the language while studying its form. This is based on the premise that proficiency is most effectively acquired when the language is taught across most subjects.

Deciding to enrol your child in French Immersion



Is French Immersion right for my child?

You may be trying to decide whether or not to enrol your child in a French Immersion program.

There are many indicators that can help you assess whether your child has an interest in studying French in a French Immersion setting. For example, is your child:

- Enthusiastic about school and what has been taught and learned?
- Using French words and phrases outside the classroom?
- Inquiring about the French language and French people?
- Showing an interest in engaging in French language activities, such as watching television shows, reading books, listening to music and seeing performances in French?

If so, French Immersion might be an appropriate challenge for your child. Phone your local French Immersion school for more information.

The kindergarten year will allow you to determine if your child responds well

to learning a second language and is motivated to learn French. However, if you and the teacher later decide that your kindergarten child should be transferred to an English program, your child will be prepared to make this transition.

What services are available in the French Immersion program?

School Resource Team and Instructional Services Department

As is the case in many Calgary Catholic schools that offer French or English programs, French Immersion schools have the support of a School Resource Team (SRT). The SRT's mandate is to provide teachers with suggestions and support in order to address the unique learning needs of all students. The SRT is supported by the district's Instructional Services department, which offers a range of services to all schools, and facilitates the academic, emotional, behavioural, social and physical needs of all students.



Instructional Support Team

Although a child's difficulties might be short-term and may be addressed in the French Immersion setting, some children may require additional assistance. In these cases, the child may be referred to the Instructional Support team within the Instructional Services department.

At that time, classroom observation, psycho-educational assessment (including intellectual and/or emotional assessment) may take place. A consultation with parents takes place before any formal assessment is done. After the formal assessment occurs, parents and school personnel will be contacted to discuss the assessment results and recommendations.

Based on the rationale that children who experience difficulties are best taught in their first language, the French Immersion program does not provide the services of special programs. Therefore, transferring to a more appropriate program may be recommended for some students, based on the following considerations:

- Lack of a more intensive program to serve a child's specific needs
- Learning difficulties
- Emotional concerns
- Child's lack of motivation to learn in French

If a transfer to another program is in a child's best interest, parents are always involved in decisions pertaining to the possible transfer. If the parents agree with the recommended transfer, communication with the receiving school is offered to ease the transition to the new setting.

What transportation options are available?

Elementary students who live more than 1.2 km from their designated school are eligible for transportation. A transportation fee is applied. Junior and senior high students are eligible for Calgary Transit monthly passes if they live more than 2.4 km from their designated school. These passes are purchased at Calgary Transit retailers.

Call the district's Transportation department at 403-500-2458 for additional information.



Frequently asked questions



Does it matter if no one at home speaks French?

No, it is not important since the program is designed for children from non-French speaking families. All communication between the school and parents is conducted in English.

How can I help my child with homework if I don't speak French?

There is usually little homework in kindergarten and Grade 1. In order to further develop students' French skills and to help parents become more involved in their children's learning, the district has organized a home reading program where students can bring books home daily. Parental involvement with this program has proven to be very rewarding for both parents and children. As for other homework, parents can help with any concept regardless of the language.

How can I get involved in my child's education?

As in any educational program, parental involvement is important. You can help improve your child's French proficiency and involve the whole family by using these fun strategies:

- Expose your child to the French language outside the classroom (travel, French camps and student exchanges).
- Expose your child to French music, magazines, pen pals, radio, books, television and live performances.
- Encourage your child to choose French books and comics at your local public library.
- Read frequently to your child in your mother tongue.
- Be patient with your child. Language learning is a lifelong process.
- Volunteer at your child's school. Knowledge of French is not necessary to participate in school activities.

Contact your child's teacher for additional suggestions.

Where can I find French resources for my child?

You can contact the Alberta branch of Canadian Parents for French (CPF) at 403-262-5187 or www.cpfalta.ab.ca for more information. CPF is a nationwide voluntary association of parents interested in promoting the best possible French Immersion programs in schools. It acts as an information-sharing resource for parents, educators, governments and the general public regarding French education opportunities in Canada. At the request of parents, CPF provides workshops on topics such as helping children with homework.

Is the French Immersion program suitable for all children?

The program is suited for most children. The language of instruction bears little, if any, relation to academic performance, particularly in Early Immersion programs. A student who would excel in an English program will most likely excel in a French Immersion program; a student who would have academic difficulties in an English program will likely experience those same difficulties in French Immersion.

Most major studies report that the only children found to be poor candidates for French Immersion are those with a weak language development in their first language or those with a poor sense of auditory discrimination or auditory memory. In most cases, these difficulties would be apparent to the kindergarten teacher and a transfer to an English program could be made before Grade 1.

Will my child follow the same curriculum as a student in the English program?

Yes, the French Immersion curriculum follows the same Alberta Education guidelines as the English program. Students work toward the same academic goals, regardless of the language of instruction, however, one exception does exist. In the French Immersion Grade 1 and 2 programs, English Language Arts is offered for 30 minutes a day rather than 60 minutes a day.

What happens if my child leaves the French Immersion program?

If your child leaves the French Immersion program for an alternate program, he or she will not be readmitted into the program. In elementary schools, the only points of entry into the French Immersion program are in kindergarten or Grade 1. All children admitted into higher grades need to have had an uninterrupted French Immersion education, except for those entering the Late Immersion program in Grade 7.

My child is in Grade 6 and is interested in Late Immersion. What options does he/she have?

The Calgary Catholic School District offers a Late Immersion program in junior high schools for students who have little or no experience with French language skills. These students have completed Grade 6 in an all-English school, and are interested in a new challenge. Late Immersion is a three-year program beginning in Grade 7.



My child is in Grade 9 and is enrolled in a French Immersion program. Should he/she register in the Extended French program?

Registering in the three-year Extended French program is important to maintain the level of French language skills your child has already achieved and to expand the general competence in the language.

After several years in French Immersion, will my child be bilingual?

To some parents, a young person who has been in a French Immersion program seems quite comfortable in French. When your child prepares for junior or senior high school, however, it is important to remember your original objective for enrolling him/her in a French Immersion program. Formal and informal inquiries suggest parents usually choose the program so that, regardless of the career selected, their child can eventually compete in a bilingual workplace. Yet, while French Immersion students,

even in Grade 10, achieve high scores on French reading and listening comprehension tests, their French language speaking and writing scores are often less satisfactory and show weaknesses in grammar. Students' self-evaluations support these views. Therefore, if the objective for your child is fluency in French for career or personal reasons, it is essential that these French skills continue to be developed throughout high school.

Does the Extended French program offer extracurricular activities in French?

Yes, Bishop Grandin, Bishop McNally, St. Francis, St. Martin de Porres and St. Mary's have all developed an impressive program of co-curricular and extracurricular activities conducted in French. These clubs and activities are open to all students who wish to further develop their communication skills and learn more about French culture.



Are there French summer programs and/or exchange programs available to senior high students?

Yes, many summer and exchange programs in French are available to senior high students. While the participant pays for most of these programs, some programs are partially subsidized by the federal government. Contact the school's Extended French coordinator or Canadian Parents for French for more information.

What if we move away from Calgary?

Canadian Parents for French publishes a directory of all French Immersion programs throughout Canada. If French Immersion is not available near your new home and your child must transfer to the English program during the first few years of school, there may be a brief transition period. Explain to the new teacher that your child was in French Immersion and ask the teacher to suggest which specific English language skills your child needs to practice or review at home.



The Calgary Catholic School District thanks Canadian Parents for French (CPF) for granting permission to use some questions and answers from their various pamphlets.



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