

Frequently Asked Questions

Will learning a second language hinder my child's first language skills?

“This high level of French proficiency is developed at no cost to student's English proficiency or to achievement in other academic subjects such as science or mathematics.” (Dr. André Obadia)
Learning French does not hinder a student's English language skills, nor their subject content learning. Skills learned in second language do transfer to first language. This transfer is more likely to occur from French to English because of the greater exposure to literacy in English outside of school and the strong social pressure to learn English. In fact, it is not uncommon to see Immersion students reading English fluently even though they have had no formal classroom instruction because of this skills transfer principle.

Is French Immersion for all children?

French Immersion has sometimes been criticized as an elitist program. Studies have shown that there is no reason why Immersion programs should not be suitable for any child. A student who struggles in French will most likely show the same difficulties in English language. The keys to success in learning a second language, just like in a first language, are early interventions, assistance, support, lots of encouragement and building on the child's strengths.

How good will my child's French be?

It will take years of Immersion schooling before your child will reach a level of achievement and comfort in a second language. Language skills of French Immersion students are consistently superior to those of Core French students. Immersion French oral and reading comprehension skills will be almost on a par with those of Francophones. Although their speaking and writing skills in their second language may not be as advanced as their comprehension skills in early years, it is important not to dwell too much or too critically on the quality of French spoken. Remember, learning a second language takes years of practice and we all need to keep encouraging their efforts. Teachers and parents should constantly seek out opportunities for children to use their French with Francophones (see Ways To Help At Home for strategies)

Is my child going to lose out in English or in subjects taught in French?

Understandably, in the first two or three years of French Immersion, your child may show some lag in certain areas of English language skills such as spelling, capitalization, etc. These lags, however, are temporary and usually disappear when English Language Arts are introduced. Research reveals that by Grade 6, students' listening and reading comprehension skills are equal to those of a Francophone. By Grade 10 or 11, oral and written production skills catch up to those whose first language is French.

How can I help at home?

- Establish a good rapport and regular communication with your child's teacher

- Focus on the positive
- Show an interest in what your child is doing at school
- Buy, rent or borrow French books, magazines, videos and software
- Watch French television with your child
- Tune into a French radio station and let it play in the background
- Take a French course to refresh your own skills
- Encourage participation in French extra-curricular activities
- Read to your child in English to help develop a love of reading

Many parents of Immersion students have a limited background in French or do not speak the language at all. If this is the case, don't feel alarmed. The most important thing you can do to help your child is to provide lots of encouragement and support as they practice the language. Numerous studies have shown that parents greatly influence their child's attitude towards homework. If homework is seen as an arduous task, it will become a negative experience. Parents should encourage a positive attitude towards homework. If you are positive, they will be more likely to enjoy the experience of a second language. Remember, many times, simply helping your child with reading and writing in English will develop their language skills in both French and English.

A homework helper website can be accessed at www.rainbowschools.ca and go to the Programs link

For more information on French Immersion programs, check out the Canadian Parents for French website at www.cpf.ca .