

PARENTS' FAQs ABOUT INTENSIVE FRENCH

As a parent, do I have to know French?

No, it is not necessary for you to know French.

What can I do to help if I don't know French?

You can support your child by listening to him/her read in French, watching TV in French, etc. It is important that he/she knows that you are encouraging him/her to learn French.

Will my child have a lot of homework to do?

No. Much of the activity in the classroom is oral. Homework consists generally of completing a written work already started in class, reading books, listening to appropriate TV or radio programs and organizing or collecting materials for projects. Of course, the usual homework will be assigned in mathematics and any other subjects that still may be taught in English. In the non-Intensive semester, homework will follow the normal pattern.

What happens to the skill level in English?

As indicated by research, there will be no negative effect on the skill level in English because literacy skills can be transferred from one language to another. In fact, provincial assessment results show that students in Intensive French score higher on the tests than students who have not participated in Intensive French.

What happens to other subjects?

Even if time is reduced in some other subjects, such as science and social studies, results achieved are the same. Many cognitive processes are similar in French and in other subject areas (example: problem solving, hypothesis testing, etc.) and can be transferred from French to the other subjects. There will be no change in the learning of mathematics as time for this subject is not reduced.

How is language taught?

The children learn language orally first, using correct forms and structures. Grammar is taught, usually related to writing activities, where it is important that forms be spelled correctly. Activities are centred on a theme (my family, hobbies, etc.) and the children work together to complete projects relating to the theme (surveying music preferred by their classmates, etc.).

Will the teacher speak French all the time?

Yes. English will be used by the teacher for a very short period of time, at the beginning of Intensive French program. The rest of the time, the teacher will speak French.

What happens if my child cannot keep up with the French?

Keeping up with the French is not a problem. The teacher will use many learning strategies to ensure that the children comprehend what is being said.

What happens if my child already has difficulty in school

- with core French?

Intensive French is a new approach, a new way of learning a second language. French is taught as a means of communication, and not as a purely academic subject with content that has to be 'learned' or memorized. The children do not need to analyze the language or use it out of context. This makes the learning of the language much easier, particularly for those students who have difficulty learning languages.

- with English?

Results in all provinces have shown that children experiencing difficulty in English are able to cope successfully with the Intensive French program, and in most cases, improve their English language skills as well. This improvement is due to the increased time spent on literacy development, in addition to the chance to re-learn strategies necessary for reading and writing successfully.

Weaker students are able to see themselves as "good" students, at least compared to other students in French at the same, or even at a higher grade level. This perception contributes to the development of a significant degree of self-esteem and self-confidence, important factors contributing to success in learning. There is much use of project activities which enable weaker students to work with the other students to achieve the learning goals.

How is Intensive French different from

- Core French?

In Intensive French, the approach to teaching the language is based on the way English is taught, that is, on a first-language or language arts approach. Children use the language to speak, read and write what they want to say, to create with the language. They can more easily see the practical value of learning a second language because they are able to use French to communicate. In the regular Core French classroom, the children do not have enough time to use the language to communicate their ideas.

- Immersion?

In French Immersion, children learn subjects, such as mathematics, science or social studies, in French. Children are doing two things at once; they are learning French at the same time as they are learning a subject. In Intensive French, no school subject is taught in the second language. The focus is on the learning of the second language.

Has Intensive French been offered in areas where there are immersion programs?

Yes. The objectives of the programs are different and the expectations for the French language development of the children are not the same.

What will my child be able to do in French? What level of French will my child attain?

At the end of the school year, children should be able to carry on a conversation on topics related to their age and interests with a francophone, read short stories in French, grasping the general idea, and simple articles in newspapers or magazines at an appropriate age and interest level. They should also be able to write a few paragraphs, for instance, write or reply to a letter from a friend, write messages to people of their own age, asking questions and giving information.

In two of the provinces where program results have been tested, children are able to use French at the same level as those students who have followed a Core French program to the end of grade 9 or 10.

What are the proven “benefits” of Intensive French?

Children will be able to increase their communication skills in French, and also English skills. In addition, the Intensive French program is an overall enhancement of the regular school experience: children increase their level of self-esteem and self-confidence, their overall responsibility for learning and become more autonomous learners.

What happens in the non intensive semester?

During the non intensive semester, the children go back to their regular curriculum, including regular periods for French. However, in these periods, the children continue with the same kind of learning activities they have used in the intensive program, including working in groups and project activities. The emphasis is still on communicating in French, and because the children are already able to speak spontaneously in French, they can do much more than is normally accomplished in a Core French program.

Will the report card be the same, or different, for French?

The report card for Intensive French will be different from the usual way of reporting progress in French. It will be like the English language report card, with results given for all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the intensive semester, an assessment will be given for only French, mathematics and those subjects retained and taught in English. In the non-intensive semester an assessment will be given for all the subjects in the manner that is usually followed by the school.

What will happen in grade 6 and the following years?

This depends on the province, or the school district, implementing the program. There should be, at the minimum, an enriched core French program for all children who have participated in Intensive French.

How many students have dropped out of Intensive French?

Out of 3300 children who have participated in Intensive French up to June 2004, none have dropped out of the program. Children enjoy the experience, feel that they are making progress and are able to communicate in French.

Is Intensive French new? How did it get started?

No. Intensive French is not new. It was first experimented in Quebec in the 1970's. However, for many reasons, it was not pursued. It was re-started in 1998 through a three-year research project undertaken by researchers (Dr. Joan Netten, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and Dr. Claude Germain, Université du Québec à Montréal) in two school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador, one rural and one urban, in 1998. It was introduced in order to improve the core French program.

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