

Scope of Work

French Immersion (FI) Review Committee

The FI Review Committee (includes parents and staff) is responsible for **providing guidance and advice** to the Waterloo Catholic District School Board related to French Immersion program decisions and future accommodation plans.

In keeping with the goals and scope of the French Immersion Review, the committee is responsible for ensuring that the French Immersion program is reviewed comprehensively, keeping all students front of mind, that adequate public consultation is carried out, and that strategic options and recommendations align with the Board's fiscal and accommodation realities.

The FI Review Committee is **responsible for developing strategic options and/or recommendations for Board staff to consider** in their final report.

Goals

- To articulate the WCDSB values and beliefs regarding French Immersion program delivery.
- To ensure that students in French Immersion receive equitable access to a quality program.
- To create a long term French Immersion delivery plan taking into account all WCDSB students and families. The delivery plan should respect fiscal and accommodation realities, the Board's Long Term Accommodation Plan, and provide a predictable and transparent method of locating programs.

Scope of the Committee's Work

The following factors will be considered in this review.

- School organization (grade structure, single track, dual track)
- Entry point
- French Immersion boundaries (and registration priorities)
- Transportation (as it relates to school organization)
- Criteria for selecting new French Immersion sites

Process



Priorities

Accommodation

When considering how future accommodation decisions should be made, it is important to establish what we value and prioritize as a Board. The FI Review Committee has identified the following priority.

- **We believe that students should be offered access to the French Immersion program at the same school from Grades 1-8.**

Staffing

Staffing the French Immersion program is a challenge across the province.

- The growth rate of FI is outpacing the availability of French teachers and the ability to recruit high quality French teachers.
- This will limit how quickly WCDSB can grow its FI program.

WCDSB prioritizes program quality over opening new FI programs quickly.

- WCDSB will use its discretion to determine how the program should be delivered (i.e. one teacher teaching both FI and English to the same class vs. one teacher teaching English and another teacher teaching French to the same class). This may vary by school and class.

Transportation

Transportation (bussing) for the French Immersion program is currently under review. Although it is not the intent to provide bussing for all FI students, **the Board recognizes the importance of reducing traffic congestion around schools.**

Entry Point

WCDSB's entry point to French Immersion is Grade 1.

The FI Review Committee discussed the merits of moving to a Kindergarten entry point. However, they **recommend that the entry point remain as Grade 1** for the following reasons:

- Although research indicates that oral fluency is strengthened by an early start to second language learning, there is no research identifying any differences between a Kindergarten start and a Grade 1 start.
- A Grade 1 entry will allow students two years at school prior to beginning French Immersion. This will enable teachers to identify early predictors of achievement and risk related to speech, language, and literacy before introducing a second language. If a second language is introduced in Kindergarten, it could delay the identification of these early predictors.

Dealing with Enrolment Pressure

Enrolment pressure exists when enrolment exceeds the capacity of the school. Typically, this is handled by adding portables, changing boundaries, building capacity (addition/new school) or any combination thereof.

No two schools are alike. Having multiple accommodation strategies allows for the greatest flexibility.

If a school no longer has enough space to continue to grow the French Immersion program, **the following accommodation strategies should be considered first**. The results of the public survey supported these priorities:

- **Add portables**
- **Change boundaries**
- **Open a new dual track school (add FI to another school)**
- **Open a new single track school (French Immersion only)**

Other strategies considered and not recommended at this time:

- Limit the number of Grade 1 French Immersion classes at each school to one.
- Spread FI over multiple schools (e.g. Grades 1-4 at one school and Grades 5-8 at a different school)
- End the FI program in 2019 and merge students into the English stream.
- Move the existing FI program to another school that can accommodate the dual track model.
- Phase in a single-track French Immersion model at an existing school (English stream students would attend a different school).

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis was completed on each of the 4 top accommodation strategies. The purpose of the SWOT analysis is to gain a full understanding of the benefits and risks associated with each strategy.

Add Portables

Strengths

- ◆ Flexible/Responsive/Timely
- ◆ Fiscally responsible compared to building an addition
- ◆ Less disruptive than changing boundaries
- ◆ Allows the FI program to expand/grow while keeping students together at one school

Weaknesses

- ◆ Increased cleaning & snow removal time
- ◆ Longer transition times for students going in and out of the school (e.g. to use washrooms, gym, library)
- ◆ Isolation from school building
- ◆ Decreased yard/playground
- ◆ Need for more supervision at recess/lunch due to decreased sightlines
- ◆ Cost to buy/lease a portable
- ◆ Site limitations regarding the number of portables that can be added

Opportunities

- ◆ Larger school (larger staff) could allow more collaboration between teachers in the same program/grade

Threats

- ◆ May be difficult to get portables (shortage in Ontario)
- ◆ Less gym and library access due to a larger number of classes
- ◆ Potentially increases traffic congestion
- ◆ Potentially increases security issues—vandalism, roof access, sightlines between portables
- ◆ Zoning may require construction of additional parking spaces

Change Boundaries to Move English Students

Changing boundaries is commonly used to reduce enrolment pressure at a particular school. Because WCDSB currently offers FI at only three schools, there is no opportunity to move a portion of the FI students to another school. (e.g. can't move 5 FI students per grade to another school because there's no class to merge it with). Therefore, boundary changes as a stand-alone strategy at this point in time would be for English students only.

Strengths

- ◆ Reduces enrolment pressure by moving some students to a different school
- ◆ Allows the FI program to expand/grow while keeping FI students together at one school

Weaknesses

- ◆ Prioritizes FI students over English stream students living in the school's attendance boundary

Opportunities

- ◆ Could allow the FI program to accept more students into the program

Threats

- ◆ Resistance to change—potential loss of students to other school boards
- ◆ Potentially bussing away students within walking distance
- ◆ Cost of transportation (depends on bus routing)
- ◆ Could cause tension between parents of students in the English and French streams
- ◆ Risk of decreasing the viability of the English stream at the school
- ◆ Could result in siblings attending different schools if they are in two different streams

Open a New Dual Track School

Strengths

- ◆ Increases opportunities for more students in the Region to take French Immersion
- ◆ Students withdrawing from French Immersion could potentially enter the English stream at the same school
- ◆ Makes use of underutilized space
- ◆ More convenient for families who have children in both FI and the English stream
- ◆ Responds to parental interest in the FI program—want it closer to their house

Weaknesses

- ◆ May not alleviate enrolment pressure if the new dual track school is far away from the existing FI school
- ◆ May not alleviate enrolment pressure right away because it would start with Grade 1 only

Opportunities

- ◆ Could have a more equitable distribution of FI sites across the Region
- ◆ Could alleviate enrolment pressure at an existing FI school if the new dual track school is nearby

Threats

- ◆ May create additional traffic congestion at the new site
- ◆ Could cause tension between parents of students in the English and French streams at the new site
- ◆ Risk of selecting a new FI site where there is insufficient interest to run the program
- ◆ Could add enrolment pressure to an existing school

Open a New Single Track School

A single track school would contain only French Immersion students and no English stream students. This school would be required to offer the Kindergarten program as per Ministry of Education policy. Further discussion would be required to determine if Kindergarten would be offered in French or English, and to determine registration procedures.

Strengths

- ◆ Pupil to teacher ratios wouldn't be complicated by needing to separate English and French students
- ◆ Increases exposure to French in whole school activities (e.g. assemblies, announcements, etc.)

Weaknesses

- ◆ Students living near the school who are not in FI would not be able to attend
- ◆ The school would not be at capacity in the short term (WCDSB does not yet have FI in Grades 4-8)
- ◆ Increased travel time for students—large boundary/catchment area
- ◆ Traffic congestion if no bussing is provided
- ◆ A student withdrawing from FI would be required to attend a different school for the English program
- ◆ Would split families across multiple schools if they have children in French and English stream

Opportunities

- ◆ Could use an existing, vacant school
- ◆ Central transportation (bussing) could be explored to alleviate traffic congestion
- ◆ Possibility of having non-teaching staff (e.g. librarian, custodian, secretary, etc.) that speak French

Threats

- ◆ Recruiting non-teaching French staff may be challenging
- ◆ Risk of selecting a new FI site where there is insufficient interest to run the program
- ◆ Large boundary/catchment area may be a deterrent for families farther away from the school—may impact enrolment
- ◆ Could involve moving a large number of English or French students to another school

Selecting New French Immersion Sites

Geographic Distribution

The FI Review Committee is recommending that the following GENERAL locations be considered for future FI sites.

- Waterloo—East side
- Kitchener/Waterloo—West side
- Cambridge—South of Highway 401

Specific schools have not been identified and will not be identified as part of this process.

Site Selection Criteria

The FI Review Committee brainstormed potential criteria to use when selecting a location/school to open an FI program and determined that the following criteria should be considered first.

- **Empty space**—sufficient space within the school to accommodate additional students over time (empty classrooms, declining enrolment, etc.)
- **Traffic impacts on the school** - surrounding road network, drop-off areas, sufficient parking, opportunities for active school travel (walking, biking, etc.)
- **Easily accessible location**—close to major roads/highway/transit because FI serves an area larger than its school boundary.

Other criteria considered:

- Residential growth (long term planning)
- Interest in the FI program
- Brand new schools as potential FI sites
- Will it help to support a secondary school FI program?
- Ability to handle portables or an addition
- Equity—offer FI in a range of neighbourhoods
- Will it alleviate enrolment pressure at an existing FI school?

Registration Priorities

Registration Priorities into French Immersion

French Immersion is currently delivered at 3 WCDSB elementary schools. These schools are intended to serve the municipality and students can register for FI based on their home address and the location of their home school.

FI School	Municipality of Home School
Our Lady of Fatima	Cambridge, North Dumfries
Sir Edgar Bauer	Waterloo, Wellesley, Woolwich
St. Anne (K)	Kitchener, Wilmot

As more French Immersion sites open, the catchment area that each school serves will need to change.

Registration priorities would remain the same. However, the catchment areas would change as each new FI site opens.

1. Identification of siblings of students already in the FI program
2. Registration online—based on home address and location of their home school
3. Selection by lottery—If the number of students exceeds the number of spaces available
4. Permission granted for students to attend an alternate FI site if space permits. Offered a space at another FI school (if available)

Program Expansion

The committee supports program growth that is ambitious but practical, as staffing and space permit.