



Immersion Programs - Facts and Perceptions

Costs - Perceptions

There is an extra cost for Halton taxpayers to operate the Immersion programs.

Staffing costs are higher in French Immersion schools.

Resources are put into the Immersion programs at the cost of the English programs.

There are fewer resources suitable for Immersion than for English programs.

Elitism - Perceptions

Immersion is an elitist program.

Immersion programs are only for above average students without learning disabilities.

Costs - Reality

Currently there are no extra costs to operate Halton's Early Immersion programs. The Ministry of Education's French-as-a-second language (FSL) grants cover the costs for Halton to operate the programs. These are additional grants that the Board would not receive if there were no Immersion programs. ¹

Funding for Immersion programs is currently provided through a Protocol Agreement between the Federal and Provincial Governments. ²

The transportation adjustment (centralized pick-up) implemented in September 1996 resulted in reduced transportation costs for the Board.

All Halton teachers are paid according to the same salary grid as per collective agreements.

All the costs of resources for Immersion are covered by current Ministry FSL grants. These are in addition to the Ministry per pupil grants allocated to the English programs. ¹

There are Ministry approved texts available for all courses (e.g., Math). In recent years more resources have been developed and many are becoming available through technologies such as CD-ROMs and the Internet.

Elitism - Reality

Immersion is an open access program since:

- parents choose the program
- it is open to all Halton students
- there are no waiting lists
- there is no limit on the number of classes
- transportation for Early Immersion is provided

Research concludes that Immersion programs are appropriate for students with a wide range of learning abilities and language skills. ³ There is, however, a "natural streaming" in Immersion, which results in fewer identified students in the program. The final decision about program placement rests with the parents.

¹ Incremental Costs of French Immersion Programs - Update of Report #3175 1995 0207, W. McNally, 1996

² Protocol for Agreement between the Government of Canada and the Provincial/Territorial Governments for Minority-Language Education and Second-Language Instruction, 1996

³ Genesee (1983), Brucks (1978), Cummins (1984) in Key Issues in Bilingualism and Bilingual Education, Colin Baker (1988)

French Proficiency - Perception

The French used by Immersion students is poor and full of mistakes.

There is no difference in the language proficiency of Early and Late Immersion students.

English Proficiency in Immersion - Perception

Early Immersion has a negative impact on students' English skills

Other Curriculum Areas - Perceptions

Immersion students do not perform as well as English-stream students in other program areas (e.g., Math).

French Language Proficiency - Reality

Numerous studies demonstrate that Immersion students can function in francophone environments. In general, by the end of secondary school, listening and reading skills are almost on par with those of native French speakers. Speaking and writing skills are strong, but are not as advanced as those of Francophones. ⁴

Immersion students do make grammar errors and, at times, use English language structures in French. It is natural that this would occur in a geographic area where little French is spoken outside of the classroom. We continue to build components into our programs to address these errors.

Research shows that language proficiency is directly related to starting point⁵ and number of hours of instruction.⁶ In regards to long-term outcomes, the earlier the exposure, and the greater the number of hours in the program, the higher the level of proficiency.

English Proficiency of Immersion Students - Reality

False. English skills are, in fact, often enhanced through learning French. Research suggests, that in addition to acquiring French, students develop mental flexibility, superior concept formation and a more diversified set of mental abilities through the experience of learning the two languages. ⁷

Research suggests that there may be an initial lag in the English skills of Immersion students, but that within one year of the introduction of English language instruction in the curriculum, they perform as well or better than their English counterparts. On the Grades 3 and 6 Provincial assessments of reading and writing in English, Halton Immersion students did as well as, and in some cases, better, than their English counterparts. ⁸

A recent provincial study of Grade 3 immersion students' performance in literacy on the Ontario EQAO assessment found that in the case of reading and writing, Immersion students were somewhat more likely to be rated at Levels 3 and 4 than students in the regular program. ⁹

Immersion Students' Achievement in Other Curriculum Areas Reality

Studies have shown that Immersion students perform as well as their English counterparts in all program areas. ¹⁰ On the Grades 3 and 6 provincial assessments of reading, writing and mathematics, Immersion students did as well as, and in some cases, better, than their English counterparts.

⁴ Wesche, Morrison, Pawley and Ready (1986, 1990, 1993)

⁵ Krahen et al. in *The Age Factor in Second Language Acquisition* (1995)

⁶ Lapkin and Swain (1984), Genesee (1983), Wesche (1986), Edwards (1981) in *French Immersion Research Relevant to Decisions in Ontario* (1987)

⁷ Cataldi (1994), Bladystok (1986), Trokle (1981)

⁸ Halton and Provincial Tests of Reading and Writing (1995); Cooper (1987)

⁹ Turnbull and Lapkin (2001)

¹⁰ Bryce (1980) in *French Immersion Research Relevant to Decisions in Ontario* (1987)

Impact on English programs Perceptions

Impact on English programs - Reality

Immersion causes split grade classes in English while there are no split classes in Immersion.

Split grade classes are the result of school decisions and enrolment figures (demographics). Wherever there are small numbers in a school, be it French or English, split classes may occur.

There are more identified students in the English classes of dual track schools than in French Immersion classes.

True, however, the identified students are clustered into fewer classes. This allows for a more concentrated and efficient use of Special Education support.

There is a high dropout rate from Immersion programs.

There are very few dropouts from the Immersion program for academic reasons. Since Halton is a very mobile community many students leave the program due to family moves. Over the last 5 years, only 2-3% of Elementary Immersion students have left the program for either academic or social reasons.

The English program in elementary dual-track schools is a “dumping ground” for students who are unsuccessful in Immersion.

Staffs in dual-track schools plan and implement many experiences that combine both groups of students. Some schools are implementing new timetabling and “home base” strategies, which provide opportunities for cross groupings of Immersion and English students.

Core French is considered as a “second class” program.

Both the Ministry of Education and the Halton District School Board value the Core French program which provides students with relevant learning experiences to develop their skills in French, albeit at a different level of proficiency.

Value of Immersion Programs - Perceptions

Value of Immersion Programs - Reality

Students have a constitutional right to Immersion programs.

False. Only Francophones have the constitutional right to be educated in French. The Federal government, however, through the Official Languages Act, supports and promotes the acquisition of French as a second language by means of FSL grants.¹

English is a universal language so students don't need to learn French.

In many parts of the world, learning other languages is an integral part of education. Our students need to learn French not only because it is one of Canada's two official languages but also because learning a second language promotes cultural understanding and tolerance. In addition, proficiency in French is a valuable tool that students can use to communicate in the global community and in a variety of workplaces. ¹¹

¹¹ Conference Board of Canada: Employability Skills Profile (1992); Senator Paul Simon; Cataldi

"I like the French class because there are cool books and puppets. We do experiments. I like French because I can speak two languages. It is cool."

Chantal (Grade 1)

"French is kind of like a gift, you make great friendships with people you know you'll stay friends with for a long time, you learn a lot and it is always, challenging."

Kira (Grade 8)

"I've had many experiences talking with people from Paris and French countries. Actually I'm proud of myself that I can communicate with people around the world. Some people do not have this advantage so it is kind of a gift."

Yasmeen (Grade 8)

"If you did not know that escargot meant snail, you might eat it!"

Lizzy (Grade 5)

"French Immersion effects my everyday life...It makes you feel very good about yourself, it makes you feel yes you can do another language...It may seem like who cares but for some reason, it makes me think I can do almost anything."

Lizzy (Grade 5)

"...I believe that the most influential result of this program is that it has stretched my mind and creativity to the limits. It has improved my self-confidence along with my understanding and tolerance towards others. I am a far-better person today because I have participated in Halton's French Immersion program."

Martha (Grade 12)