

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS About Intensive French

As parents, do we have to know French?

NO, you do not have to know French. This is a program designed for children whose families do not necessarily speak French. The best way to help your child is to support and encourage him or her in the study of French: watching TV in French, listening to a small book the student would like to read to you, etc. If you do not speak French, your child may become a more autonomous learner because he or she will have to call upon friends or look for other sources of help if there are problems with homework or assignments.

Will the teacher speak French all the time?

YES. The use of the English language by the teacher will only occur for a very short period of time at the beginning of the Intensive French program. During the 70% French part of the day, it is essential that students be completely immersed in the language for maximum learning.

What happens to the skill level in English?

Data collected across Canada over more than 10 years has shown absolutely no negative effect on the level of skills in English. This is because learning a second language, such as French, is an overall literacy experience. In the teaching of Intensive French a language arts approach is adopted. Skills in the areas of speaking, listening, reading and writing are all taught. All the processes involved in the study of these skills in French are transferred into English during the last five months of the school year. In effect, there is an increase in instructional time for language arts and as a result more time is devoted to actual literacy development.

For English as Additional Language (EAL) students, a recent study conducted in Surrey, BC from 2004 to 2008 showed that the English proficiency of EAL students in the Intensive French classes showed a significantly greater improvement over the school year compared with that of their EAL peers in regular English classrooms.

What happens to other subjects?

Since many processes in the learning of subjects such as Science and Social Studies are the same as the ones used and developed in the learning of French (generalizing, making hypotheses, etc.), it is not necessary to relearn these processes. These skills will transfer into the different subject areas so that, even if time is reduced in these subjects, student success can be the same. This has been demonstrated in practice across Canada in the past 10 years.

Do students have extra work to do?

NO. Students will not be expected to “do extra work” in order to “cover the curriculum”. The curriculum for the year will be carefully structured to cover all the learning outcomes without increasing the workload. This can be achieved by “compacting” the overlapping learning outcomes, reducing the number of activities used to attain the same learning outcomes and focusing on skill transference from one subject to another.

What happens to Mathematics?

There will be no change in the learning of Mathematics. The regular grade 5 Mathematics program will be taught throughout the entire school year in English.

How is Intensive French different from Immersion?

In French Immersion, students learn subjects, such as Mathematics, Science or Social Studies, in French. Students learn French while learning a subject.

In Intensive French, the focus is on learning the French language. Students develop their communication skills, both oral and written, by working on themes. These themes are drawn from topics relevant to the students' lives. No specific school subject is taught in the second language. However, many of the themes link well with areas in the grade 5 curriculum. As a result, a large number of the grade 5 learning expectations are covered during the Intensive French period.

How is Intensive French different from the regular Core French program?

Core French is taught following a curriculum that emphasizes the ability to communicate in French through the use of themes and projects centered on the everyday experiences of students. It is the increase in intensity and in instructional time in French which will allow students to acquire skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing which go beyond the skills acquired in a regular Core French program.

Research shows that students in Intensive French develop spontaneous oral communication skills equivalent to that of grade 11 Core French students and written skills equivalent to grade 3 Francophone students.

What will a student be able to do in French by the end of the year?

At the end of the school year, where Intensive French is offered, students should, among other things, be able to:

- carry on a general conversation on specific topics;
- write with a reasonable degree of accuracy: for instance, write or reply to a letter from a friend, write messages to people of their own age;
- ask relatively simple questions;
- read a short, simple novel in French, grasping the general idea;
- read simple articles in a newspaper or magazine at an appropriate age and interest level.

The focus of Intensive French is on the learning of French as a means of communication, and not as an academic subject of study.

What happens if a student cannot keep up with the French?

French is taught as a means of communication, and not as an object of study. Curriculum in Intensive French is based mainly on the everyday experiences of students; therefore they learn how to speak about things of interest to them. They become motivated and interested, talking about themselves, their families, their favourite animals, sports they like, films, etc. Anecdotal reports from parents and students show that even students who struggle in academic areas gain more self-confidence and actually improve their overall literacy skills.

What will happen to the student with learning difficulties?

The Intensive French program should provide a positive learning experience in literacy for ALL students. In a three-year study in Newfoundland, it was noted that some students who found learning more of a challenge made tremendous progress not only in French but also in English. Furthermore, with the increased time in French, these students were able to see themselves as “successful” students, at least compared to other students in French at the same grade level. This contributed to a significant increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, important factors for success in learning. In fact, in some cases, performance in English Language Arts improved significantly. One hypothesis for this phenomenon is the fact that students get a “second chance” to learn emergent and beginner level literacy strategies they may have missed in their primary years.

What will happen to Intensive French students after the Intensive year?

To maintain students’ gains in French, the entire school will be taught using the Post-Intensive French strategies. When transitioning to secondary school, Intensive French students will choose the Post-Intensive French grade 9 course. Programs at the grades 10-12 levels will be offered based on demand. Students will receive a certificate for their portfolio, acknowledging their participation in the Intensive French program at the end of grade 8, and for every level completed in secondary school.

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

The regular provincial report card will be used for the Intensive French students, however, in the Intensive semester an assessment will be given for only French, Mathematics, Religion and Physical Education. In the non-intensive semester an assessment will be given for all subjects in the usual manner.

You are invited to direct any additional questions to the Intensive French teacher or the school principal. You may also contact the French Consultant in Learning Services at 519-578-3660 x2333.