

# Vancouver School District French Immersion Working Group Meeting #1

January 18, 2018

## **DRAFT** Meeting Summary

**Facilitator** Dorli Duffy

**In attendance:**

Joy Alexander, VSB Trustee, Vice Chairperson  
Richard Anderson, Administrative Assistant, Modern Languages  
Ranjit Bains, VASSA Representative  
Jill Barclay, VESTA Representative  
Nancy Brennan, Associate Superintendent  
Marion Broadbent, VEPVPA Representative  
Karen Coflin, VASSA Representative  
Cheryl Douglas, Employee Services, Manager of Recruitment  
Amanda Hillis, DPAC Representative  
Adrian Keough, Director of Instruction, Educational Programs  
Sam Kerr, Student Leadership Council  
Anne Lee, Facilities Planner  
Patrick Lee, Student Leadership Council  
Chloe McKnight – VESTA Representative  
Janis Myers, VEPVPA Representative  
Marlene Perrett, VSTA Representative  
Richard Zerbe, Director of Instruction

**Regrets:**

Erin Bartlett, DPAC Representative  
Megan Taylor, DPAC Representative  
Pauline Tinka, VSTA Representative

## 1.0 Objectives

The Vancouver School Board French Immersion Working Group held their first meeting at the School Board offices on January 18, 2018. The meeting objectives were to:

- Confirm context and terms of reference for French Immersion Working Group
- Review and discuss information gathered to-date
- Identify additional issues, concerns and questions for this process
- Discuss broader consultation process (survey, focus groups, etc.)

- Clarify next steps including additional information needs, homework and subsequent meetings

This document provides a brief summary of discussions held during the meeting. A copy of the January 18 PowerPoint presentation is also attached.

The meeting began with introductions of all Working Group members. The French Immersion Working Group is comprised of a diverse group of parents, teachers, administrators and partner organizations.

## **2.0 Context and Terms of Reference for French Immersion Working Group**

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) is conducting a program review of the French Immersion Program. The facilitator provided a brief overview of the context for this work before reviewing the Terms of Reference for the French Immersion Working Group. The reader is directed to the attached PowerPoint presentation for the Working Group Terms of Reference.

## **3.0 French Immersion in VSB – Current State**

Nancy Brennan, Associate Superintendent, provided an overview of the current state of the French Immersion Program in the Vancouver School District.

French Immersion in the VSD is delivered through a number of programs:

- Early French Immersion – single and dual track
- Late French Immersion – Grade 6 – offered in two schools: General Gordon (where it is a standalone program) and Laura Secord (where it is offered as a third track in addition to English and Early French Immersion).
- Intensive French (Grade 6 and 7) is a separate program in three schools (not French Immersion)

Additional information and clarification was provided regarding the current state of French Immersion in Vancouver:

- All choice programs in all school districts are well subscribed.
- Many more school sites offering French Immersion in VSB than in other school districts
- Old language restored in Nov. 2016; good things have come out of that.
- Smaller class sizes means that the same number of students require more “boxes” to put them into. This has implications on physical spaces available in schools.
- As a result of the Supreme Court of Canada decision and Memorandum of Agreement, there were 136 fewer spaces available for Kindergarten students across the VSB including one less K class in five schools. Additional challenges include the difficulty finding qualified French Immersion teachers (an issue across BC).

- When we think of a “division” we need to think of both the physical facility and the number of students. In 2016-17 the number of applicants decreased from 893 to 841. But the waitlist is higher than in previous years due to fewer classes (increased from 313 to 437).

### **Questions and Answers**

**Q1:** When was the last French Immersion program review done?

**A1:** The last program review was conducted in 2004. It was not a full program review but addressed implications associated with catchment programs and the opening of three new programs.

**Q2:** Are other programs being reviewed?

**A2:** yes they are, but it was felt that FI is more pressing so it is being done first. Nevertheless, all programs of choice are being reviewed in the coming years as part of the district’s plan.

**Q3:** Do the numbers on slides refer to first choices for applicants?

**A3:** All stats refer to first choices for programs.

**Q4:** Are the 15 unfilled teaching positions both elementary and secondary?

**A4:** All secondary positions are filled at this time, so all openings are in elementary schools.

**Q5:** Richmond School District is the only district with increased numbers of French Immersion students. Why is that?

**A5:** We are not sure. One possibility is that they had significant waitlists in the past and they may have cut other programs of choice to make room for French Immersion (TBC).

**Q6:** Is information regarding waitlists and likelihood of getting in to French Immersion available to the public?

**A6:** It is but is only visible when registering a student in a program. Additional information includes the anticipated number of siblings in each school. VSB has a policy re: sibling priority. In some situations half of the spaces are taken up by siblings (or in some case a whole class). Also, many applicants eventually turn down a space in French Immersion, so it is hard to gauge how long the waitlist actually is. This information will also be available at the Committee III meeting. At this time 19 French Immersion divisions will be available in the fall (approximately the same as last year).

- Minimum of 1 division per school and 6 schools with 2 divisions
- Also anticipating siblings coming into the program
  - Siblings get priority (same across Lower Mainland)
- Waitlists (1<sup>st</sup> choice applicants)
  - Not all will accept
  - Students (families) on waitlists are not always committed to participating in French Immersion

- This year, 93 of the 870 on the waitlist declined a choice program offer. So while the total registration is 870, these are all registrants who are not necessarily committed to participating in the program.

#### 4.0 What do we assume is included in a school or site offering French Immersion in VSB?

Working Group members participated in small group discussions to identify assumptions regarding the French Immersion program in VSB. Participants offered the following responses to the question, ***“What do we generally assume is included in a school or site offering French Immersion in VSB?”***

- French speaking teacher/librarian/ support
- Fluent teachers, native-like fluency
- An immersive setting
- French Resources (federal resources, materials, books, assistants, supports)
- French/ bilingual messages, signage, national anthem
- Within secondary schools: a program within a school (e.g., like a mini-school)
  - It is one of the things found in a secondary school
- Assumptions would depend on the nature of the school (single vs. dual, elementary vs. secondary, etc.)
- High quality French spoken on grounds, in hallways
- People want to be there (occupants) – curious and engaged
- Awareness of different culture
- Exposure to cultural activities (e.g., exchanges)
- Dual track programs provide enrichment to the entire school
  - Entire school participates in cultural exposure
- An engaged, organized parent group
- Fewer Ministry designations in these schools
- French Immersion team works together very collaboratively
  - Because of difficulty accessing resources
- Signage in French
- Communication between programs
  - Participating in some activities together
- Resource supports (e.g., Learning assistants, etc.) are mirrored in both programs (English and French)

Additional comments regarding delivery of French Immersion included:

- Dual track schools should have at least 2 K divisions to ensure sufficient numbers and flexibility through to Grade 7 (13 sites have 1 class, 6 sites have 2 (vs. 2-3 each before))
- Consider recruiting strongly for Late French Immersion to fill the gap left by attrition of students from French Immersion programs in higher grades. It was noted that

students choose to participate in late French Immersion vs. a parent decision for students entering French Immersion in Kindergarten.

The Working Group identified a number of **“givens” or non-negotiables** regarding the delivery of a French Immersion program:

- Ministry guidelines dictate the amount of English taught and when it is introduced
  - There is a desire to clarify whether/where VSB has flexibility in offering entry points to French Immersion (e.g., starting French Immersion in Kindergarten (optional) vs. Grade 1 (required))
- Collective agreements
  - Class size and composition
  - Working conditions
  - Teachers autonomy
- Requirement to deliver English program to Vancouver students vs. French Immersion program as a program of choice

## **5.0 Guiding Principles/ Measures of success for a successful French Immersion Program**

The Working Group discussed guiding principles for our review of the French Immersion Program. This focus of this discussion evolved into an exploration of measures of success for a successful French Immersion Program. Participants acknowledged that the current issues facing the VSB French Immersion Program require that measures of success continue to be top of mind.

Once completed, these measures of success will serve as an ongoing reference point for the program review. Keeping these measures of success top of mind will assist the Working Group in its deliberations and in communicating its work to the broader community, and will assist the VSB in making trade-offs during decision-making.

Potential measures of success include:

1. Student-centred focus
2. Family friendly
  - a. Mindful of driving, commutes, sibling right, etc.
3. Access
  - a. Geographic distribution of the program (location of schools/sites in relation to where families are; matching supply and demand). Access means a lot!
  - b. Recognizing diversity (economic, cultural, geographic, etc.)
4. Welcoming to families from across the district – not exclusive and good for students of all income levels and learning capacities
5. A K-12 program with options and choices at different points
  - a. Program provides support for any student to complete their schooling in French Immersion. If students are leaving French Immersion, they are

doing so to pursue other endeavours and not because they don't have the support to complete it.

- b. If a student chooses to leave the program this does not necessarily translate to a lack of success for the program. As a choice program, students can choose to leave and still be successful. They may wish to try something new.
6. French Immersion as a Choice program
7. Qualified teachers with native-like fluency (maintaining a quality program)
8. Student success (fluency – equal orally and written) – joy, ease, willingness to speak French
  - a. DELF – external standardized test – this is more important to some than others
9. Focus on success for each student – we don't want to dilute learning outcomes
10. Equal opportunity to apply
  - a. Access to the program is not sacrificed by ability to apply; Everyone gets a chance to apply
11. Importance of geographic distribution of choice programs/ seats relative to demand

**Action:** Working Group members asked to review this list. Are these all measures of success? Are they clear? Any missing? Please bring any suggestions for revisions or additions to the February 15 meeting.

## 6.0 Potential survey or focus group questions

During discussions, a number of questions were recorded for possible inclusion in the survey and focus groups planned for April, 2018. The April survey and focus groups will elicit additional feedback from parents, teachers, partners and students regarding the VSB French Immersion Program. Preliminary questions included:

- What motivates families to choose French Immersion?
- Why do some qualified French Immersion teachers choose to teach in English in the VSB?

**Action:** Working Group members are asked to identify additional potential questions for the survey and focus groups. What do we want to know from our wider population?

## 7.0 Information Requests

Participants raised questions for additional information, including:

1. Is there research re: benefits of single vs. dual track programs?
2. Is there a maximum size for Elementary schools? (e.g., in a dual track school)?
3. What are the French language requirements for Education students at UBC and SFU?

4. Are there opportunities for secondary French Immersion mini-school options?
5. Can we confirm that K is not a mandatory program?
6. What are the English/ French language requirements through French Immersion?
  - a. E.g., some school districts or schools follow 80/20 and others 50/50 and others 60/40
  - b. Can fluctuate between and within schools and years
  - c. For example, it used to be the case that French Immersion was taught 50/50 and now it is taught 100% of the time in K-3. This shift was informed by research conducted with Jules Quesnel that showed increased class time in French, especially adding math in French, improved fluency considerably.
7. What are the facts regarding students with special needs and other designations in French Immersion? Some people may think there are no students with specials needs but there are.

**Action:** Adrian and Richard A. to address information requests and either circulate answers or bring information to the February 15 meeting.

## 8.0 Additional consultation process

The Working Group expressed a desire to expand its membership to include

- 2 additional parent representatives, and
- 2 additional French Immersion elementary teachers

**Action:** Adrian to follow up with DPAC to identify additional parent representatives and with VESTA to identify additional elementary French Immersion teacher representatives

## 9.0 Summary of Next Steps and Homework

- **Dorli** to prepare meeting summary of January 18, 2018 meeting #1 and circulate to participants
- **Adrian and Richard A.** to address information requests (above)
- **Adrian** to follow up with DPAC to identify additional parent representatives and with VESTA to identify additional elementary French Immersion teacher representatives
- **Working Group** to review and circulate meeting notes within their organizations
- **Working Group** to identify additional potential questions for the survey and focus groups. What do we want to know from our wider population?
- **Working Group** to review draft measures of success. Please bring any suggestions for revisions or additions to the February 15 meeting.
- **Next Meeting – February 15, 2018, 3:45 – 7:15 PM**
- Working Group members are reminded that you have been asked to serve as representatives of your schools, group or organization. Please strive to be inclusive

of the array of perspectives within your constituency when circulating information and participating in working group discussions.

Please contact Dorli Duffy at [duffrose@shaw.ca](mailto:duffrose@shaw.ca) or 604-980-1462 if you have any questions or requests regarding this meeting summary.