

Sigal Smith

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Board of Education

Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District

395 Wakesiah Ave

Nanaimo, BC V9R 3K6

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the recent recommendation to discontinue the Grade 6 Late French Immersion program, effective immediately. As the teacher who piloted this program in 2014, I have witnessed firsthand the immense value it provides to students, their families, and the broader community. Furthermore, as a late immersion student myself, I understand the profound impact such programs can have on students' educational and personal growth. The decision to end this program will have far-reaching consequences, and I urge the Board to reconsider this recommendation.

When we piloted the program, we were told that as long as there were 17 or more students enrolled, the program could continue to run. The current recommendation to discontinue the program is particularly concerning, as it does not seem to align with the commitment made at the time. Maintaining this program is not just about numbers; it is about ensuring that students have access to a high-quality educational opportunity that has proven to be beneficial over the years.

For many students, Late French Immersion is their only opportunity to learn French at a high level. While Early French Immersion programs are often oversubscribed with lottery systems in place, Late Immersion offers an alternative for those who did not have access to early immersion or who needed a few years to develop a strong foundation in English. This program is especially important for students who might not have had the opportunity to enter the early immersion lottery or who require more time to solidify their language skills before taking on a second language.

Late French Immersion also benefits from slightly smaller class sizes compared to the average intermediate classroom, which is crucial due to the intensive nature of the

program. This structure ensures that students receive the individual attention and support they need to succeed. The reduced class size enhances the learning environment and allows for more meaningful interactions between students and teachers, helping to foster success in this challenging program.

Research consistently shows that bilingualism offers significant cognitive, academic, and personal benefits. Learning a second language has been linked to improved problem-solving skills in a number of important ways. Bilingual individuals tend to develop enhanced mental flexibility, allowing them to switch between tasks and think on their feet. Studies also suggest that bilinguals are better at critical thinking, as they regularly engage in analyzing and processing two languages. Additionally, learning a second language strengthens memory and concentration, as it exercises the brain's capacity for multitasking and boosts the regions of the brain responsible for speech and sensory participation.

The benefits of late immersion extend well beyond academics. In fact, research indicates that late immersion students are more likely to become successful, independent thinkers, which can translate into long-term career success. Many high-achieving individuals, including CEOs of major tech companies such as Microsoft, Google, and 3M, are second language learners. These leaders often attribute their success to the problem-solving skills, mental agility, and innovative thinking that bilingualism fosters. By continuing to offer the Late French Immersion program, the Board would be providing students with the opportunity to develop these highly sought-after skills that are critical to success in the modern workforce.

Late Immersion also appeals to a unique group of students. While it differs from Early French Immersion, it has proven to attract students who are particularly motivated and focused on academic achievement, and who may not fit into more traditional social structures. This program tends to attract students who enjoy intellectual challenges and have a strong desire to succeed, even if they may not always be the most socially outgoing or popular. It creates an environment where these students can thrive without the pressures often found in other educational settings. The program's smaller class sizes and focus on academic rigor allow students to feel more confident in their learning and more connected to their peers, creating a supportive and encouraging atmosphere.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that the Late French Immersion program has been a success in many other districts across British Columbia, where it has been a crucial part of the educational landscape for years. As one of the largest and most diverse districts in the province, Nanaimo-Ladysmith should be a leader in offering high-quality educational

opportunities for all students. Maintaining this program would help ensure that students continue to have access to bilingual education, providing them with the skills needed for future success.

In addition to the impact on students, the continued availability of the Late French Immersion program will contribute to the school community as a whole. The program has fostered a diverse and inclusive environment, and it plays a vital role in preparing students to participate in a multicultural society. Furthermore, the potential loss of two teachers at Quarterway over the next two years would significantly affect the school's ability to maintain a high standard of language education, which is of great importance to many families.

I understand that budgetary and logistical challenges must be considered, but I strongly believe that maintaining this program would greatly benefit our students and the broader community. I respectfully ask the Board to reconsider the recommendation and work to ensure that Late French Immersion remains an option for students who would benefit from it.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,
Sigal Smith