

Personal Analysis and Proposal for the Late French Immersion (LFI) Program

To whom it may concern,

In the face of the sudden proposal being put forward right before the holiday break, I would like to share my detailed analysis regarding the Late French Immersion (LFI) program at École Quarterway. With a background in qualitative research, I feel it's important to take a second, more nuanced, look at the data and justifications for the proposed closure of the LFI program.

Upon reviewing enrollment trends, district forecasts, relevant studies, and local context, I believe the proposal to discontinue this program is not justified by the available data. With appropriate support, the LFI program can stabilize and grow in alignment with broader enrollment projections for the district.

1. Enrollment Trends Demonstrate Resilience and Recovery

The LFI program has shown steady demand when examined objectively:

- **Pre-Pandemic Stability (2014–2018):** Enrollment grew consistently, peaking in 2017 with **51 students**. This indicates solid demand for the program during this period.
- **Pandemic Disruptions (2019–2021):** The declines during this period mirror district-wide and global trends caused by COVID-19 disruptions:
 - **2019:** Enrollment dropped to **34 students** (lowest point).
 - **2020:** Modest recovery to **44 students**.
 - **2021:** Further increase to **48 students**, showing the program's resilience.

This aligns with the broader district trends, where enrollment fell short of projections during the pandemic. As Mark Walsh, secretary-treasurer for the district, noted, "COVID-19 has affected numbers of students physically attending school in 2020-21, but Nanaimo-Ladysmith school district foresees enrolment increasing the next three school years." (Nanaimo News Bulletin, Feb 18, 2021)

- **Post-Pandemic Stabilization (2022–2024):** Enrollment rebounded:
 - **2022:** 43 students
 - **2023:** 51 students (equaling the 2017 peak).
 - **2024:** A slight dip to **45 students**, but still within the program's historical range.

This recovery demonstrates that interest in the LFI program remains strong, particularly following the pandemic's challenges. With additional support and targeted promotion, enrollment numbers are likely to stabilize or grow further.

2. Misrepresentation of "Low Demand"

The claim of "low demand" fails to account for administrative barriers, including insufficient promotion and lack of prioritization. The Late French Immersion program serves families who may have missed Early French Immersion (EFI) opportunities or who recognize the benefits of bilingualism later in their children's educational journeys.

Key Points to Consider:

- The district’s enrollment forecast anticipates overall student growth:
 - **2021-22:** 14,360 students
 - **2022-23:** 14,845 students
 - **2023-24:** 15,015 students (Nanaimo News Bulletin, Feb 18, 2021).

These projections suggest opportunities for growth within specialty programs like LFI, provided they are properly supported and promoted. Families often lack awareness of the LFI option, which suppresses enrollment artificially.

3. Potential Future Trends and Growth Forecast

Analyzing the data holistically, there is clear potential for growth in LFI enrollment if the following conditions are addressed:

- **Enhanced Promotion:** A targeted marketing strategy emphasizing the benefits of bilingualism and the accessibility of LFI will attract families unaware of the program.
- **Program Stability Post-Pandemic:** The 2023 rebound to **51 students** demonstrates latent demand that can be tapped into further. A dip to **45 in 2024** is likely temporary, given broader district growth projections.
- **Alignment with National Trends:** French Immersion programs across Canada have seen continuous growth since 2011 (Kubota & Bale, 2020). The LFI program provides a critical late-entry option to accommodate families unable to participate in EFI.

Forecasted Enrollment Scenarios: With adequate support and promotion:

- **2025:** 48–50 students (conservative estimate).
- **2026:** 50–55 students (growth projection based on increased awareness).

These projections align with historical pre-pandemic levels and account for post-pandemic recovery patterns.

4. Long-Term Value and Return on Investment

The LFI program is not simply a line-item expense; it represents an investment in:

- **Bilingual Workforce Development:** “The federal government is the largest employer of bilinguals. During 2006–2007, about 40% of the positions were designated bilingual.” (Kubota & Bale, p. 782)
- **Cultural and Educational Equity:** Programs like LFI support Canada’s bilingual identity and provide equitable access to French-language education for families who missed EFI.
- **Economic Opportunities:** Bilingual individuals enjoy greater employment and educational prospects, benefiting both students and the broader community.

5. Recommendations

To support the program and unlock its full potential, I recommend the following steps:

1. Targeted Promotion and Outreach:

- Launch a district-wide awareness campaign to inform families about the LFI program's benefits and accessibility.
- Engage elementary schools, community centers, and parent groups to share enrollment information.

2. Equitable Resource Allocation:

- Provide administrative and staffing support to ensure the program's stability and growth.
- Treat LFI as a core part of the district's educational offerings, not an expendable specialty program.

3. Commit to Long-Term Growth:

- Use enrollment data and district forecasts to inform a strategic plan for expanding LFI opportunities in alignment with overall student growth.

Conclusion

The Late French Immersion program at École Quarterway has demonstrated resilience and strong post-pandemic recovery. Its perceived "low demand" is a product of systemic underpromotion rather than genuine disinterest. With targeted support, the program aligns with district enrollment projections, national trends, and Canada's commitment to bilingualism. Maintaining and promoting the LFI program is not only feasible but essential for providing equitable, high-value education to students.

Thank you for considering this analysis as you prepare to vote on the future of this important program.

Sincerely,

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Citations and Supporting References:

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