

Urgent Appeal to Reconsider the Closure of Late French Immersion

Dear Members of the SD68 Board of Education,

I am writing to express my deep concern and disappointment regarding the proposed cancellation of the Late French Immersion program at École Quarterway. As a parent of two children, one currently enrolled in Late French Immersion and the other set to begin next year (2025), this decision has deeply upset our family. We value that Canada has two official languages and very much want our children to have access to learning French.

Of note, the¹ government of British Columbia (B.C.) recognizes French and English as Canada's official languages. It recognizes the important and valuable contribution of past, present, and future French-speaking residents in the development and prosperity of the province. In addition, the B.C. Ministry of Education and Child Care supports French Immersion programming in B.C. schools, consistent with the goal of providing the opportunity for non-francophone students to become bilingual in English and French.^{1,2}

Impact on Families

This decision creates an inequitable situation for families like ours. One of my children will benefit from the rich educational and cultural opportunities that French Immersion provides, while the other will be denied this same pathway. Such a disparity is not only personally devastating but also runs counter to the values of fairness and inclusivity that our district upholds.

Our daughter is currently thriving in grade six of the program, and we have already seen the benefits in her academic growth, confidence, and enthusiasm for learning a second language. The opportunity to gain bilingual skills will not only enhance her future educational and career prospects but also prepare her to participate in a globalized world. Our son is eagerly anticipating starting the program next year, but this cancellation would deny him—and many others—the same opportunity that has been so impactful for his sister.

¹ British Columbia French Language Policy (<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/organizational-structure/office-of-the-premier/intergovernmental-relations-secretariat/francophone-affairs-program/french-language-policy-en.pdf>)

² French Immersion Program (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/french-immersion-program>)

A Broken Promise to Families

When our children were in kindergarten, we were eager to engage with the Early French Immersion lottery to give them the opportunity to learn French. During the recent Business Education meeting Mr. Balcombe discussed “Demand (for French Immersion) is now met... Early French Immersion is a lottery system and everybody just gets in”. This was not our experience in 2018 and 2019 when we were enrolling for Early French Immersion in the district. Despite our best efforts, we were unsuccessful: we were number 68 on the lottery waitlist at École Quarterway and didn’t even make the list for École Pauline Haarer, École Hammond Bay or École North Oyster. At the time, we were assured by district and Quarterway staff that Late French Immersion would provide our next opportunity to engage in French education.

For six years, our family has patiently waited for this promised opportunity. We have planned and hoped for the moment our children could finally access French education through Late French Immersion. **Now, just as we are reaching that long-awaited milestone, this program is being taken away, abruptly and within weeks of registration.**

This decision feels like a complete betrayal of the promises made to families like ours. What message does it send to children when the district removes a program they were told to count on? French education is a Canadian constitutional right, yet access to this right is being systematically denied through this sudden and unfair decision.

Contradiction to Inclusivity Goals

The abrupt closure of this program appears to conflict with the district's commitment to Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) principles, as outlined in the SD68 Strategic Plan. The vision to create an "inclusive and equitable learning community where every individual thrives" cannot be realized if access to diverse educational opportunities like Late French Immersion is restricted.

This program fosters inclusivity by:

- Providing diverse pathways for learning success: It ensures students can access a bilingual education regardless of their background.
- Building cultural awareness: It exposes students to Francophone cultures, helping them appreciate diversity.
- Equipping students with valuable life skills: Bilingualism enhances communication, cognitive flexibility, and future career opportunities.

- Provides students who didn't enter Early French Immersion another chance to access bilingual education, promoting inclusivity. Levels the playing field for families who may not have known about or been able to access earlier immersion options.
- Prepares students to become leaders in bilingual Canada, contributing meaningfully to the country's linguistic and cultural landscape.
- Demonstrates alignment with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which recognizes English and French as the country's official languages.

Removing this program undermines these benefits and creates barriers for students who rely on it to expand their educational horizons.

Concerns About Process

The rushed timeline exacerbates these issues. Families have been given little time to respond, and the timing over the holiday season feels dismissive of our ability to engage meaningfully. This approach undermines trust between the district and the community. We have been excited to submit our application for Late French Immersion in a few weeks and now we are finding out this program may no longer exist. If I had known this program may no longer exist, I may not have enrolled my daughter in this program last year, being that it would bring inequity to our family dynamic.

To truly embody the district's values of inclusivity, fairness, and collaboration, I urge you to:

1. Extend the decision timeline to allow for meaningful consultation with families.
2. Explore alternative solutions to maintain the Late French Immersion program.
3. Provide transparent reasoning for the proposed changes and consider their long-term impacts on students and the community. The decision disproportionately impacts families who have waited years for this opportunity, undermining the district's commitment to equity and inclusion. **Budget decisions should not come at the expense of equity and inclusivity.**

A Call for Collaboration

I recognize the financial and logistical challenges the district faces, but I firmly believe that solutions can be found through collaboration. Families, educators, and the community at large are eager to work together to preserve this vital program and ensure that SD68 continues to lead as a model of equity and opportunity.

It is the district's responsibility to ensure that every student, regardless of where they live or when they enter the school system, has access to the same educational opportunities. French education is a fundamental part of Canada's identity, and cutting this program limits students' ability to engage with our country's linguistic and cultural heritage.

These children are our future leaders, innovators and advocates for our communities. Their worth cannot and should not be measured solely in dollars.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this letter. I hope you will reflect on the values that guide our district and work with the community to find a way forward to keep this exceptional program.

Sincerely,

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