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Programs & Skill Building

Math-English Language Skills

Making Choices About Your Child's Education

Parents want to make the best educational choices for their children. Many would like their children to have the advantages of learning both of Canada's official languages, but they have some questions:

- Will my child develop strong English-language skills in a French-immersion program?
- Will my child be taught the same math skills as students in the regular English program?
- Will my child understand math courses taught in French?

Researchers have studied these issues since French-immersion programs were introduced in the early 1970s. This pamphlet is intended to help to answer your questions about French immersion by providing some information from research studies and the results of a number of provincial student assessments. We have included references to these materials so that you can study them further. We have also posted this information of the CPF website and we will update it as new studies become available.

French-Immersion Students do Well in English and Math

A recent review of the research on immersion programs from 1972 to 2001 concludes that "the effect of learning a second language on first-language skills has been positive in all studies done. Furthermore, the loss of instructional time in English in favour of the second language has never been shown to have negative effects on the achievement of the first language."¹You will find a link to this study below.

In fact, a 1991 review of student outcomes research showed that although French-immersion performance sometimes lag behind at Grade 3, they match and often surpass English program students' performance in English-language skills by Grade 4 or 5.

These studies also found that French-immersion students met or exceeded English program students' performance in mathematics.²

Recently, a number of provinces have introduced province-wide assessments by which all elementary and secondary school students in selected grades write the same tests.

Although not all provinces reported the results of French-immersion students in province-wide assessments, results from British Columbia, New Brunswick and Ontario show that students in French-immersion programs demonstrate superior skills on tests of English-language skills and mathematics. We have included a few results from these assessments; the references will help you to locate these materials if you would like to read the full reports.

- In 2000, researchers in Ontario reported that at Grade 3 "the performance of immersion and non-immersion students was broadly similar. Immersion students did somewhat better on literacy tests, but differences were small." By Grade 6, however, "students in immersion clearly outperformed those in the regular program on tests in both literacy and mathematics."³
- In New Brunswick it was found that at Grade 8 "students in the Early and Intermediate French-immersion programs were considerably more successful than regular program students in a 2000 province-wide English assessment of language proficiency." Mathematics assessment results also indicated that immersion students "achieved at a significantly higher level than those in the regular program."⁴
- In 2000, program province-wide student assessments in British Columbia demonstrated that at Grade 10 French-immersion students do as well or better than non-immersion students in measures of English-language and math skills.⁵

References

1. Bournot-Trites M., Tellowitz U. (2002) Report of Current Research on the Effects of Second Language Learning on First Language Literacy Skills; Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation, Halifax NS. [Link to the Bournot-Trites article](#): Report of Current Research on the Effects of Second Language Learning on First Language Literacy Skills [here](#).
2. Dubé L., MacFarlane A. (1991) Middle Immersion: Is it a Better Option than Early or Late? Immersion Journal 14(3) p. 21-27; Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers; Ottawa ON.
3. Turnbull M., Hart D., Lapkin S. (2000) French immersion Students' Performance on Grade 3 Provincial Tests; Potential Impacts of Program Design; Canadian Modern Languages Review 58(1) p. 9-26; University of Toronto Press, Toronto ON.
4. New Brunswick Department of Education (2000); Report Card 2000, Anglophone School Districts, NB Department of Education.
5. British Columbia Ministry of Education (2000); British Columbia Foundation Skills Assessment 2000, BC Ministry of Education.

To Find Out More About Learning in French-Immersion

- Contact your local school or school board to find out about French-immersion programs in your area.
- Contact Canadian Parents for French for answers and support as your children learn French. Our provincial Branches are listed on the last page. Ask about Helping Your Child Become Bilingual: A Toolkit for CPF members.
- Check out the CPF website www.cpf.ca to find out about French-immersion studies as they are published.