

PARENTS' FAQs ABOUT INTENSIVE FRENCH

Intensive French is a literacy-based approach to teaching French as a second language that is incorporated into the core French program for five months of the school year at grade 5 or grade 6. It is based on the use of French for authentic communication in the classroom and the development of literacy skills in French. Classroom activities are related to projects and there is a high degree of interaction between teacher and students.

1. As a parent, do I have to know French?

No, it is not necessary for you to know French.

2. What can I do to help if I don't know French?

You can support your child by listening to him/her read in French, watching TV in French, etc. It is important that he/she knows that you are encouraging him/her to learn French.

3. Will my child have a lot of homework to do?

No. Much of the activity in the classroom is oral. Homework consists generally of completing a written work already started in class, reading books, listening to appropriate TV or radio programs and organizing or collecting materials for projects. Of course, the usual homework will be assigned in mathematics and any other subjects that still may be taught in English. In the non-Intensive semester, homework will follow the normal pattern.

4. What happens to the skill level in English?

As indicated by research, there will be no negative effect on the skill level in English because literacy skills can be transferred from one language to another. In fact, provincial assessment results show that students in Intensive French score higher on the tests than students who have not participated in Intensive French.

5. What happens to other subjects?

Even if time is reduced in some other subjects, such as science and social studies, results achieved are the same. Many cognitive processes are similar in French and in other subject areas (example: problem solving, hypothesis testing, etc.) and can be transferred from French to the other subjects. In most of the schools where Intensive French program is implemented, Mathematics remains in English.

6. How is language taught?

Language is taught through using it in authentic situations. Activities are centred on a theme (my family, hobbies, etc.) and the children work together to complete projects related to the theme (surveying music preferred by their classmates, etc.).

The children learn language orally first, using correct forms and structures. In this way they build an internal grammar that guides them to construct sentences. This internal grammar is necessary for them to be able to speak accurately and fluently. Once writing activities are introduced, attention is given to the aspects of written language that they must know in order to write accurately, for example, verb forms,

number and gender agreements, spelling, etc. Thus, children learn the external aspects of grammar in the context of learning how to write what they can say.

7. Will the teacher speak French all the time?

Yes. English will be used by the teacher for the first day or two at the beginning of Intensive French program. The rest of the time, the teacher will speak French.

8. What happens if my child cannot keep up with the French?

Keeping up with the French is not a problem. The approach is one that appeals to the concept of multiple intelligences, and the teacher uses many different learning strategies to ensure that all children are participating in the learning process.

9. What happens if my child already has difficulty in school?

➤ *with Core French?*

Intensive French is a new approach to the teaching of French which is based on authentic communication and the development of literacy skills. The teacher models the language for the children, and engages them in conversations about themselves, using the structures and vocabulary she has used. In this way, children develop language competence through use. The children do not need to analyze the language and there are no aspects that have to be ‘learned’ or memorized. This makes the learning of the language much easier, particularly for those students who have difficulties with academic learning.

➤ *with English?*

Results in all provinces have shown that children experiencing difficulty in English are able to cope successfully with the Intensive French program, and in most cases, improve their English language skills as well. This improvement is due to the increased time spent on literacy development, in addition to the chance to re-learn strategies necessary for reading and writing successfully.

Students with special needs are able to see themselves as “good” students, at least compared to other students in French at the same, or even at a higher, grade level. This perception contributes to the development of a significant degree of self-esteem and self-confidence, important factors contributing to success in learning. There is much use of project activities which enables students of varying levels of ability to work together to achieve the learning goals.

10. How is Intensive French different from:

➤ *Core French?*

In Intensive French, teaching the language is based on the way English is taught in the primary grades, that is, on a literacy approach. Children use the language to speak, read and write what they want to say, to create with the language. They can more easily see the practical value of learning a second language because they are able to use French to communicate. In the regular Core French classroom, the children do not have enough time to use the language enough to be able to internalize it.

➤ *Immersion?*

In French Immersion, children learn subjects, such as mathematics, science or social studies, in French. Children are doing two things at once; they are learning French at the same time as they are learning a

subject. In Intensive French, no school subject is taught in the second language. The focus is on the learning of the second language.

11. Has Intensive French been offered in areas where there are immersion programs?

Yes. The objectives of the programs are different and the expectations for the French language development of the children are not the same.

12. What will my child be able to do in French? What level of French will my child attain?

At the end of the school year, children will be able to carry on a conversation in French on topics related to their age and interests with spontaneity, read short stories in French, grasping the general idea, as well as simple articles in newspapers or magazines at an appropriate age and interest level. They will also be able to write one or two paragraphs, for instance, write a short narrative story, reply to a letter from a friend, and write messages to people of their own age, asking questions and giving information.

Program results have been tested in seven provinces. In general, children are able to attain a level of at least Basic Low on the New Brunswick interview scale and write a composition similar to Quebec francophones at the grade 3 level. Usually, this means that the students are able to use French at the same level as those students who have followed a Core French program to the end of grade 9 or 10.

13. What are the proven “benefits” of Intensive French?

Children increase their literacy skills in both French and English. They are able to communicate in speaking and writing with considerable fluency and accuracy in French. They develop a more positive attitude towards French, and there is an increase in their motivation. In addition, the Intensive French program is an overall enhancement of the regular school experience: children increase their level of self-esteem and self-confidence, their overall responsibility for learning and become more autonomous learners.

14. What happens in the non intensive semester?

During the non intensive semester, the children go back to their regular curriculum, including regular periods for French. However, in many cases these periods are longer, or are blocked together. In these periods, the children continue with the same kind of learning activities they have used in the intensive program, including working in groups and project activities. The emphasis is still on communicating in French, and because the children are already able to speak spontaneously in French, they can do much more than is normally accomplished in a Core French program.

15. Will the report card be the same, or different, for French?

The report card for Intensive French will be different. The first report card will give progress for French, mathematics and any other subject that are being taught in English (art, music, physical education). For French, it will be like the English language report card, with results given for all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The second report card will also be similar, as the students have only just begun their work in English, or it may be delayed till somewhat after the non-intensive semester is under way. In the non-intensive semester an assessment will be given for all the subjects in the manner that is usually followed by the school.

16. What will happen in the other grades after the Intensive French program?

There are two options. The first is called *le français approfondi*, which means that students will follow a program that continues the same kind of learning activities and teaching strategies as those used in Intensive French; however, periods of French will be blocked, so that children have French for one to two hours twice a week. The second is called *le français intégré*, which means that students will study French and one other subject in French; these two subjects will be blocked together so that the students maintain an intensive exposure to French in the school day. The option chosen depends on the province or the school district.

17. How many students have dropped out of Intensive French?

Over thousands of students who have participated in Intensive French up to June 2010, a very small number have dropped out of the program. Children enjoy the experience, feel that they are making progress and are able to communicate in French.

18. Is Intensive French new? How did it get started?

It started in 1998 in Newfoundland and Labrador, although there was a previous experiment in Montreal area in the 1970's. It was introduced in order to improve the core French program. It began as a three-year research project undertaken by Dr. Joan Netten, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and Dr. Claude Germain, Université du Québec à Montréal in four schools in two school districts, one urban and one rural. In 2003 it became an official option for French in the province.

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