

**REPORT AND GUIDELINES**

**FOR THE TRANSFER OF STUDENTS FROM**

**THE EARLY FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM**

*May 1996*

## FORWARD

This report was prepared in response to expressed concerns regarding students who experience learning difficulties in the Early French Immersion program, particularly those who eventually transfer to the regular program.

A committee comprised of principals, superintendents, and both the FSL and Special Services coordinators was struck to address the issues arising from Immersion student transfers and to provide directional procedures which would facilitate future transfers for both the students and the receiving schools. Basically, it attempts to answer the questions:

Who might be considered for transfer from an Immersion program?

When should the transfer occur?

How should the transfer proceed?

A variety of research and other relevant documents were consulted. A bibliography of these reference materials is annotated at the end of the report and will be on file for subsequent consultation if needed. Appendices for transfer forms and student profiles are also included. In addition, policies and recommended procedures for Immersion student transfer within two other boards were examined. This report synthesizes the findings, makes recommendations and establishes a transfer guideline that hopefully responds to the need for direction, and provides a satisfactory process for uniform standards and practice with regard to student redirection.

Given the reality of current classroom demands and the limitations of available CRT assistance, it is imperative that continued emphasis be placed on in-service for the classroom and resource teachers. Though not explicitly stated in the report, on-going opportunities for teachers to fine-tune their observation and identification skills and, more importantly, to learn and to apply new and proven strategies for effective early intervention will be of great benefit, not only to the "at risk" Immersion student, but to all children with special learning needs in our system.

We extend our appreciation and gratitude to the following members of the committee:

Principals:	J. Bénard and Tom Wilson
Superintendents:	K. Hallett and G. Gadoury
Coordinators:	M. Séguin F. Bignucolo

## **PURPOSE**

- . to investigate the question of Early French Immersion student transfers to the regular program, and the impact on both the students and the receiving elementary schools;
- . to gather comparative data pertaining to transfer practices and procedures in other boards, and to identify research findings that substantiate the established criteria for redirection;
- . to provide information to parents, administrators and teachers as a basis for making judicious and cooperative decisions about appropriate student program placement;
- . to formulate a guideline that assures uniform procedures once the collective decision has been reached to redirect a student out of the Immersion program.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **a) Response to Child's Needs**

Students who are enrolled in the Early French Immersion program may decide to transfer to the regular program for a variety of reasons. Given the particular focus and structure of the Immersion program, the decision to leave is a significant one that impacts both on the child's needs and on the receiving school's preparedness to effectively respond to those needs.

When children encounter difficulties in the program it should not be presumed that Early French Immersion is the root cause of the problem. It is quite probable that the learning difficulty would manifest itself regardless of the program the child is following. More important however, is the need for the early identification of the learning difficulty and the provision of adequate support services once the child's needs have been determined.

### **b) Considerations**

When learning difficulties become apparent, redirecting the child out of the Immersion program may be the easiest, but not necessarily the proper solution. First consideration is what course of action will be of most benefit to the child. If the change risks being detrimental to the child's self-esteem, the sense of exclusion and the stigma of failure could further compound the child's learning problems. Moreover, a transfer is no assurance that the learning difficulty will disappear.

### c) Responsibilities

The basic premise therefore, is that any decision to change the placement of a student must, above all, be in the interest of the child and not of the program, nor the teachers. Each potential transfer situation must be weighed on its own merits. Although the parents make the final choice, it is the school's role to identify the problem as early as possible, to inform the parents, to provide remediation, to maintain communication with the home and to be prepared to provide sound direction based on substantive data, should a transfer be considered. In keeping with the directives of the Ministry of Education and Training, support services in an Immersion context must be provided in the language of instruction, based upon the needs of the individual student (Memorandum 1988 26 05).

## IDENTIFICATION

### a) Indicators

Given the universal aspect of admission to our Early French Immersion program, it would be advantageous to have a test instrument which could determine with reliability the likely success of a child who enrolls in a Kindergarten immersion program. Regrettably no such measurement tool is presently available. There has been determined however, albeit subjectively, a list of identifiable traits which might predict how well the child will succeed in an Immersion program. Although not conclusive in themselves, the following identifiable characteristics could be useful in establishing a profile of a student who might be at risk by remaining in the Early French Immersion program.

The child.....

- has poor first language skills
- imitates with difficulty
- does not notice errors
- is often a reluctant speaker
- has poor memory and poor meta-cognitive awareness
- has poor auditory discrimination abilities
- has unconvinced parents unable or unwilling to assist
- is from a poor modelling environment
- mistrusts or has a defeatist attitude
- often fears making mistakes
- is often unwilling to participate
- is often inattentive and unfocused<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Learning Disabilities and Cross-Linguistic Interference in French Immersion: When to transfer, when not to transfer? D. Demers; L.D. Association of Manitoba, 1994

**b) Early Identification**

In the early years, the above indicators could serve as initial signs of potential difficulties; however, the success of early identification will rely in large part on accurate teacher observation, intervention, tracking and assessment.

A full-day Senior Kindergarten program structured 50% French and 50% English will allow the teachers to better know the child. Also, the observational perspectives of both teachers involved should result in a more accurate profile of a child in difficulty. These will target deficiencies in those skills which are particularly crucial to the acquisition of language, namely: listening, expressive language, maturity and attention focusing. Once recognized, both teachers can plan common strategies in remedial efforts.

**c) Recommendations by end of SK**

Parental awareness and involvement should be part of the process from the time that the teacher first alerts the principal with concerns about an individual student. Realistically, some recommendations regarding program continuance or program change might be made by the end of the Kindergarten years for those individual cases where there is sufficient evidence that to show the prerequisite skills are not adequately developed to meet the demands of a bilingual academic environment. Although a maturational lag is not in itself a definitive criterion for redirection from the Immersion program, it could be a factor in the overall picture.

**d) Recommendations in Subsequent Years**

In those situations where a clear recommendation for program change cannot be made by the end of Kindergarten, the Grade One teacher should be made aware of those students in question. This would assure continued monitoring with additional remedial strategies formulated and implemented. By the end of the first term of Grade One, a referral for a formal assessment can be initiated with the emphasis on diagnosis and appropriate remediation at the earliest possible stage. This would require a team approach involving the teacher, the resource teacher, resource personnel, the principal and the parents.

With the nature and the severity of the child's disability determined, and an individualized education plan set up to respond to the needs, reasonable time is then required to monitor the progress of the student. If the student is functioning well and is content under the modified program, then a transfer out of Immersion is not necessary. If, on the other hand, there is lack of evident progress and increased frustration in spite of the support efforts provided, then redirection to a regular program may be considered.

## STUDENT SUITABILITY FOR AN IMMERSION PROGRAM

### a) Research Findings - General

An abundance of research literature addressing the question of a student's suitability for an Immersion environment has been available since the late 1970's and continues with more recent reports. Summarizing the relevant literature, the following set of conclusions can be drawn:

- a) Although Immersion is a viable option for the majority of students, there are certain groups of students with serious learning problems who will not best be served in the Immersion program.
  - b) Early identification of these "at risk" students is essential.
- c) Proper diagnosis and remediation should be provided at the earliest time possible. The sooner the identification and intervention the better chance of proper placement.
- d) After a reasonable time, if students do not respond to the intervention strategies, or if adequate support is not available to meet their needs, these students should be directed out of the program.
- e) Second language acquisition can occur within a wide range of intellectual abilities, including a lower I.Q.
- f) Mild to moderate learning problems, including learning disabilities, can be accommodated in an Immersion program.
- g) Neither teacher-student personality conflict nor a "weeding out process" designed to rid the program of difficult or troublesome students should be the basis for transfer.

Daniel Demers, a learning resource specialist, appropriately sums up his thoughts on student transfers with a quote from Kathie Chernoff: "We often believe that all our students should be performing at the same level. This belief is certainly not limited to the French Immersion classes. Let's carefully consider the learner before making any far-reaching decisions. *Imagine how quiet the forest would be if only the best birds sang.*"

**b) Research Findings - "At Risk" Indicators**

Research studies further identify those groups for whom an Immersion program is *not* suitable. The following serious disorders affirmed through proper diagnosis include:

i) *attention-deficit disorder syndrome*

If the child is not treated (medically or otherwise), the inability to attend persists, learning is impeded, frustration increases and negative behaviours develop. With proper treatment and coping strategies, second language acquisition can occur.

ii) *central auditory processing problems*

In a program that relies extensively for the first few years on oral expression, sound discrimination and sound production, a student with low scores in the verbal and auditory sub-test of psychometric measures would experience great stress and frustration.

iii) *multiple-delay English speech (articulation) and or language deficits*

A child who by the age of five exhibits serious language delays and articulation difficulties will likely be at risk in a bilingual program. Strengthening the first language base will better serve the child's needs rather than attempting to build a second language on a weak first-language foundation.

iv) *prolonged and severe emotional stress*

If a child has been unhappy for a prolonged period of time, the reasons for this unhappiness would have to be examined. If caused by circumstances that cannot be resolved (i.e. feeling of isolation, dislike of the language, lack of moral support in the home etc...), then a change of program should be discussed.

v) *severe, identified learning disabilities for which suitable programming cannot be arranged*

Signs of severe language acquisition difficulties can become apparent in the early primary grades. Assessment and intervention strategies should be implemented and monitored at the earliest time. In some instances however, serious reading disabilities masked by intelligence and hard work are not detected until the later grades. Severe cases will require extensive professional and parental support in preparation for the demands of secondary school. If the home is unable or unwilling to assist, and if the services provided inadequately respond to the needs, the parents should be made aware that their child's educational prospects are at risk in French Immersion.

vi) *serious developmental delays*

The suitability of placement in a second language environment is questionable if there are concerns in two or more of the following areas: physical, behavioural, intellectual, social/emotional and communication. This is particularly significant if the child has been identified and has received service from agencies during the pre-school years.

Many of the aforementioned indices can be readily identified as early as Junior Kindergarten. Recommendations for program redirection could be made at the end of the Kindergarten years, thus assuring proper placement at an early age according to the child's identified needs.

## **GUIDELINES FOR THE TRANSFER FROM FRENCH IMMERSION TO THE REGULAR PROGRAM**

The following guidelines are designed to facilitate a student's withdrawal from the French Immersion program while assuring the child of appropriate assistance both before and after the transfer. Further, they outline a uniform approach with regard to direction and procedure pertinent to both the Immersion and the Regular Program Schools when a transfer situation arises.

### **1. *Notifying the principal***

Early French Immersion students who are experiencing difficulties, or those students who are identified as "at-risk" candidates as per the early identification indicators, are reported immediately by the teacher to the principal.

### **2. *Notifying the parents***

The principal informs the parents of the concerns and outlines to them the appropriate remedial strategies to be used to assess and address the difficulty. The principal also calls upon additional assistance from the Special Services department, if necessary. The principal requests that the parents seek medical evaluations relative to the perceived areas of difficulty (i.e. auditory, visual, physical etc...) and that the findings be reported back to the school.

### **3. *Tracking and remediation***

Using the initial tracking process as outlined in the Special Education manual, a remediation plan is formulated by the teacher, with input from the school's resource personnel. Resource assistance is provided in the language of the program in which the difficulty has been identified.

### **4. *Home - school communication***

Regular parent-school communication regarding the child's progress during the remedial process should be maintained. The teacher will investigate with the parent any relevant details about the child's health, development, attitude and behaviour. Parental concerns will be noted and parents will be encouraged to work with the school on suggested home strategies which address the problem.

**5. *Establishing a student profile***

During student monitoring, the stated remedial strategies are accompanied by follow-up documentation: observation remarks, work samples, medical data and progress notations. The purpose is to establish a student profile which highlights the child's needs and outlines the student's areas of strength and weakness.

**6. *Summative evaluation and in-school review***

After a reasonable period of time a summative evaluation should be prepared for an in-school review of the case. This meeting, attended by the principal, the classroom teacher and the CRT will determine the effectiveness of the remediation provided or will define further strategies to be used. Based on the available information, the review committee could also conclude at this point, that the student is "at risk" and would be better suited to the Regular Program.

**7. *Transfer recommendation***

Recommendation for program transfer should be consensus-based and made to the parent *only* by the principal. This would be done at a meeting with the parent and the School Consultation Committee comprised of the principal, the classroom teacher, the CRT and other resource persons if needed.

The discussed findings would substantiate the severity of the problem, show that the assistance provided has not proven beneficial to the child, and indicate that alternate strategies would be insufficient to meet the child's needs in an Immersion setting. A joint decision would be made with the parent, and would be based on the degree of certainty that withdrawal from the Immersion program would be in the student's best interest.

**8. *Timelines for transfer***

Parents are advised that, in the child's best interest, transfers to the Regular program should occur at two points during the school year:

- a) at the beginning of September and
- b) at the beginning of the second term in January.

If the parent insists on a transfer at any other point during the year, this should be confirmed by the principal in writing with copies provided to the parent, the superintendent and to the receiving school principal.

**9. *Interim intervention***

When it is decided that a student will leave the Immersion program, intensive English instruction in language and mathematics will be provided until the transfer takes place. This can be achieved through the efforts of the resource teacher, adult volunteers, peer coaches, the parents and the classroom teacher. Independent reinforcement and instructional opportunities at the listening, reading and viewing centers, as well as at the computer station could be initiated.

**10. *Notifying the receiving school***

Receiving schools should have reasonable notice in advance of the transfer. Both principals should communicate with each other for the purpose of information sharing and of making the transfer as easy as possible for the student. In addition, a Notice of Impending Transfer and Student Profile will be completed with a copy sent to *each* of the following: *the receiving school, its resource teacher* and the superintendent.

Before accepting any Immersion transfer into the Regular program, the receiving principal shall first request that the parent obtain a referral from the Immersion principal outlining the reason(s) for the transfer. The **Notice of Impending Transfer from French Immersion to the Regular Program** form shall be used for this purpose.

**11. *Appropriate placement in the receiving school***

The receiving school should give important consideration to the child's emotional, social and academic needs, particularly during the transitional phase of relocation. It should *not* be assumed that a student who transfers into the Regular Program will automatically be placed a year behind her/his peers. Each transfer situation is unique and suitable placement can be determined through discussion with the principal and classroom teacher in the Immersion school, the parents, the principal and the resource personnel at the receiving school.

When transfers are made before English instruction has been introduced, care must be taken not to put undue pressure on the child in an effort to have her/him "catch-up". It is unfair to hold the child responsible for the English skills which would have been introduced at a later point in the Immersion program. Unrealistic academic expectations risk increased anxiety already associated with the prospects of attending a new school.

**12. *Transfers from French first-language schools***

Parents of students from French first-language schools seeking admission to Nipissing English Catholic schools should be directed to a school which offers the Early Immersion program in their neighbourhood. The parents should be made aware of the bilingual option available to them and be encouraged to visit the Immersion school to discuss the advantages of the Immersion program as a transitional step before making a final decision to register their child in the Regular program.

**13. *Immersion registration in later grades***

Parents whose children have not had any Immersion Kindergarten experience but who still wish to register their child in the Immersion program *after* Grade 1 should be strongly advised of the *unsuitability* of this intent. The Immersion principal should outline the inherent duress and demands which the parents would be putting on their child if placement beyond the first grade was being considered.

Unless linguistic, academic and moral support could be assured from the home, such late registrations should be discouraged. If parents insist on an Immersion registration in spite of the recommendations by the principal, they will be asked to sign a statement acknowledging that they have been advised by the school administration of the academic and emotional risks involved.

## **SUMMARY**

The decision for a child to remain in an Immersion setting or to change to the regular program is not an easy one. Many variables ranging from attitude, early identification, remedial support and parental involvement come into play. Arriving at that decision is a collective undertaking between home, school, resource persons and the receiving school. That decision can be reached only after documented observation, appropriate assessment, suitable intervention, monitoring and regular communication with the home.

What is fundamental however, is being aware of the child's needs and how we might best serve those needs so that the child is placed in a suitable educational environment that promotes personal, emotional, spiritual and academic growth. The importance of a student's self-image and the potential negative impact on his or her self esteem cannot be minimized when considering a transfer out of the Immersion program. Basic as well, is that each case for transfer be considered on its own merits and that generalizations are neither applicable nor possible.

An emphasis on preventative strategies and early identification of learning problems is also imperative in the transfer process. Research data and other relevant articles corroborate the principals' recommendation (SEARC minutes 1995 10 12) that early detection and intervention make decisions for program change easier for everyone involved. If a transfer is to be recommended it should be done in the earliest grades, if at all possible. Not only would it effectively address the child's first language and learning needs at an early stage, but it would also lessen the impact on the receiving schools to provide the proper transitional services required.

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**NIPISSING ENGLISH CATHOLIC SCHOOL**

**NOTICE OF IMPENDING TRANSFER FROM FRENCH IMMERSION  
TO THE REGULAR PROGRAM**

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ School \_\_\_\_\_

Current Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Receiving School \_\_\_\_\_

Effective Transfer Date \_\_\_\_\_ Suggested Grade Placement \_\_\_\_\_

Reason(s) for transfer \_\_\_\_\_

**STUDENT PROFILE**

Summary of difficulties \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Intervention strategies tried \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Assessment results \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Additional \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Date \_\_\_\_\_ Immersion

c. Receiving school principal  
CRT  
Superintendent

**(School letterhead)**

**(Date)**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Further to our conversation regarding your child, (*student name*), I wish to confirm your decision to immediately transfer your child to a Regular Program rather than wait for the transfer date which was suggested to you during the course of our recent discussion.

We have suggested the advantages of allowing your child to remain in this school until the recommended time for relocation. The following could have been implemented to make the transition to the new school easier:

- concentrated instruction in English Language Arts and Mathematics;
- suggestions for parental assistance in the home;
- communication with the receiving school to relate to your child's needs.

If we can be of any further assistance in this transfer matter, please contact me at the above number.

In closing I wish you every success in your new school.

Yours

(*Principal's name*), Principal

c. Superintendent  
Receiving School Principal

(School letterhead)

**EARLY FRENCH IMMERSION  
LATE ENTRY REGISTRATION**

I have enrolled my child \_\_\_\_\_ in Grade \_\_\_\_ at this school.  
(Full name)

I understand that my child has not accumulated the number of hours of French-second-language instruction that is expected for this grade level, and that my child may not be functioning at the same level of proficiency as his/her classmates. I further understand that this may present a learning disadvantage which could adversely affect my child's academic development. I take responsibility for this decision, and will be in close contact with the school to monitor my child's progress.

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

- c. Parent  
Superintendent of Education  
School file

## FRENCH IMMERSION REGISTRATION

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have registered my child,  
\_\_\_\_\_, in Grade \_\_\_\_\_, Early French  
Immersion at \_\_\_\_\_ School.

I understand that my child will be placed in a room with children who have received the majority of their instruction in French over an extended period of time and that he/she may have some difficulty with the language. I take responsibility for this decision and will be in close contact with the school on an on-going basis in order to monitor my child's progress.

I understand that the school will meet with me at the end of the first and second term to review my child's progress and to discuss whether or not continuation in the program is beneficial to his/her educational experience and progress.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date