

FAQS ABOUT INTENSIVE FRENCH FOR PARENTS

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, and asking questions in English about what he/she is reading. It is also important that he/she knows that you are encouraging him/her to learn French.

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

No. In the intensive semester your child is developing spontaneous use of the language. Homework consists generally of reading books, organizing or collecting materials for projects, and completing written work already started in class. 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 semesters, 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. In fact, provincial assessment results show that students in Intensive and Post Intensive French score higher on English language tests than students who have not participated in Intensive French. Learning two languages through a literacy approach strengthens language learning for each one because literacy skills can be transferred from one language to another.

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. Mathematics results tend to increase due to transfer of cognitive processes and increased reading abilities.

6. How is French taught?

French is taught through using it to communicate in authentic situations, much as it is used in the immersion classroom, except that no subjects are taught in French. Activities are centred on a theme that has been selected in accordance with the interests of the students (family, hobbies, etc.). Students learn to talk, read and write about the topic, and engage in projects related to the theme, for example, surveying music preferred by their classmates.

Students learn language orally first, using correct forms and structures. In this way they build a non-conscious internal grammar that enables them to express themselves. This internal grammar is necessary for them to be able to speak accurately and fluently. Once reading and writing activities are introduced, attention is given to the aspects of written language that they must know in order to write accurately, for example, some verb forms, number agreements, spelling, etc. Thus, students learn the external aspects of grammar, as well as the relationships between sounds and their written form, in the context of learning how to read and write about the topics they have discussed.

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 the Intensive French program. The rest of the time, the teacher, and the students, 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 to the extent of their abilities.

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 students, and engages them in conversations about themselves, using the structures and vocabulary she has used. In this way, students 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 succeed as well as all students in the oral aspects of the course, and 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. They tend to develop reading and writing skills commensurate with their abilities in English.

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. Students use the language to speak, read and write what they want to say, to create with the language. With constant use of the language, they develop spontaneity. They can more easily see the practical value of learning French because they are able to communicate. In the regular Core French classroom, the children do not have enough time to use the language enough to develop automatic control of the language, nor do they develop an intuitive understanding of how the language works.

- *Immersion?*

In French Immersion, students learn subjects, such as mathematics, science or social studies, in French. Students 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. Both programs are intensive programs which are based on literacy development in 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, students in Intensive French 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 some details. They will also be able to write two or more paragraphs, for instance, write a short narrative story or an informative text.

Program results have been tested in many jurisdictions across Canada. In general, 70% of the students are able to attain a level of Basic Low or above on the New Brunswick Middle School interview scale and write a composition similar to Quebec francophones at the grade 2 or 3 level.

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

Students increase their literacy skills in both French and English. They are able to speak and write 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 report card for the intensive semester 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 three language skills: speaking, reading and writing. The report card for the non-intensive semester will be similar to the usual one. It may be delayed till somewhat after the non-intensive semester is under way, as the students have only just begun their work in English. In the non-intensive semester an assessment will be given for all the subjects in the manner that is usually followed by the school, but results for French will continue to be given for each of the skills developed.

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

Students follow the Post Intensive French program. The program continues the same kind of learning activities and teaching strategies as those used in Intensive French. Periods of French are blocked, so that students have French for one or more hours twice a week. Students following this program reach a level of Basic High or above by the end of the intermediate grades. It is anticipated that they will reach Intermediate or above by the end of secondary school.

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

There is no problem with drop-outs from Intensive French. Out of 62 000 children who have participated in Intensive French up to June 2014, a very small number have left the program (perhaps 10). Students generally 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 communication skills for students in core French. It began as a three-year research project undertaken by Dr. Joan Netten, Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN), and Dr. Claude Germain, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), in four schools in two school districts, one urban and one rural. In 2003 it became an official option for French in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Since then it has expanded to classes in most of the provinces and territories. In 2008 it became the only option, other than French immersion, for students in New Brunswick.

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