

**December 11, 2017**

**To:** Members of Parliament John Aldag and Ken Hardie

**From:** Mary-Em Waddington, President Surrey Chapter – Canadian Parents for French

**Regarding:** Access to French Language instruction in Surrey

**Background Information:**

- Total student population of Surrey: **69,800** (5 year aggregate)
- An estimated ~1000 new students enter Surrey's public education system each year
- Total French Immersion population in Surrey: **3352** students (5 year aggregate) or **4.8%** of total population.
- **7 schools** currently offer early French Immersion and **5 schools** offer late French Immersion.
- There are 4 French Immersion high schools.
- The newest early French Immersion program opened in Sept 2016 at Ecole **Cougar Creek Elementary** and is slated to close June 2018.
- Effective September 2017, **Ecole Woodward Hill Elementary** was reduced from two kindergarten classes to one, with the remaining class open to only siblings of older students.
- There hasn't been a new net French Immersion program since the 1990's.

**Concerns:**

- 1) **Capping** – The French Immersion program has been capped for over 20 years although it has experienced consistent growth over the same period of time. Each year over 250 students are placed on a waitlist for early French Immersion; many families opt to not even try. In 2016 the Surrey School District began an online registration system which replaced phone line and/or the in-person registration at the board office. The online process should allow for better data capture in terms of the actual numbers of families interested in French Immersion.

**The district needs to increase its cap of French Immersion until student enrollment numbers are at a minimum of 10 % of the total student population.**

- 2) **Program Relocation** – Surrey School District is unique in that it is a consistently growing district, and that it has been forced to create over 300 portable classroom learning spaces. Current Ministry policy dictates that all available options must be explored before capital

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funding announcements for new schools can be made. Oftentimes this means that “choice programs” are relocated throughout the district. The District created a policy (9200) to reflect Ministry policy; however, it’s the only District in the Lower Mainland that has such a policy. The latest example of this is the relocation of the French program from Lord Tweedsmuir Secondary to the new Salish Secondary. Through survey’s done in 2016, we anticipate a 20% attrition rate over the next 2 years related to the move. Similarly, the Inter-A program had to move from Kwantlen Park Secondary to Queen Elizabeth Secondary this year, instead of the French Immersion program. Many families move to the neighbourhoods of their choice program school, relocation is very disruptive to families, students, and teachers. Program instability is one of the reasons we lose valuable French teachers. It’s interesting to also note the Sooke School District faces similar growth pressures (even higher than Surrey per capita) yet does not have caps on French Immersion and a robust program for ~30 % of its total student body.

**French Immersion should be protected from relocation and other disruptions to improve attrition rates and loss of teachers.**

- 3) **Access to FI teachers** – There is a national shortage of French Immersion teachers, and this issue is being addressed at the National and Provincial CPF levels. Surrey is not unique in this regard, but a 1.6% rate of French students does not allow us the opportunity to grow our own teachers. Additionally we know that ~90 qualified FI teachers have elected to enter the English program over the past 5 years, due to a variety of reasons including program instability, not being able to secure FI seats for their own children, job sharing, and reducing commute times.

**A national campaign to train, recruit, and retain French language teachers is needed.**

## **Requests**

Canadian Parents for French – Surrey Chapter request Surrey MP’s to address these systemic issues affecting French Immersion/French language learners with local politicians including City of Surrey, Surrey School Board, and the BC Ministry of Education. We also urge Mme Joly to support a national campaign to recruit French language teachers, and look at how the French Funding protocol might be used to incentivise school boards to increase access to French Immersion. Additionally, French Immersion should not designated a “choice program” but as **distinct**. It earns this designation for being unique from other choice programs for being part of a national mandate, coming with federal funding; it is the only program that engaging students from K – 12, and the only program that that earns students a Double Dogwood.

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