

Intensive French

An exciting new second language learning option

Students receive 4x the number of hours of instructions normally devoted to Core French.

Increases student self-esteem, self-confidence and independent learning skills.

Amazing results:

After 5 months, many students will be able to carry on a conversation in French on specific topics.

No negative effects on English skill levels nor on other subject area content.

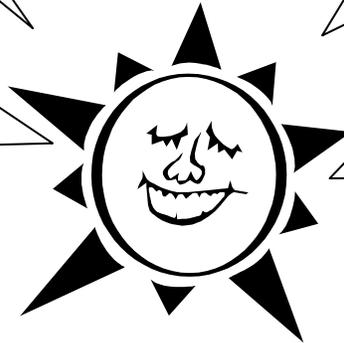
More amazing results:

After 5 months, many students will be able to write at the level of a grade 3 francophone student.

Project-based instruction motivates students to communicate in French.

French is used as the language of communication in the classroom and is used in authentic situations throughout the day.

The teacher speaks French all the time and students talk about activities and events that interest them.



PERSONAL BENEFITS OF LEARNING A SECOND LANGUAGE

Research tells us that learning a second language has had a valuable impact on students, aside from developing bilingualism.

There has been an **intellectual impact**:

- students fluent in two languages score higher in verbal and non-verbal intelligence and they are superior in divergent thinking tasks.

There has been a **scholastic impact**:

- students have higher test scores in reading, language and math

There has been an **impact on the first language**:

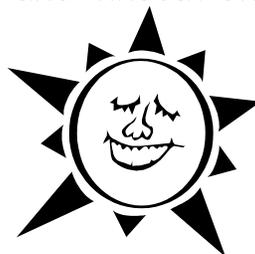
- second language education enhances the first language skills in the areas of reading, vocabulary, and communication

There has been an **impact on citizenship**:

- second language learners have superior cross-cultural skills, adapt better to varying cultural contexts and display greater cultural sensitivity

There has been an **economic impact**:

- second language learners are better equipped to compete in global markets. In this age of information where the economy depends more and more on knowledge and innovation, communication is key.



INTENSIVE FRENCH

Saskatchewan students have the opportunity to experience an exciting new second language learning program. Intensive French began in 2002/2003 in 2 classrooms in St. Paul's R.C.S.S.D. #20 in Saskatoon and is generating interest province-wide. Due to the success of the program, Intensive French has expanded to Prince Albert R.C.S.S.D, Light of Christ R.C.S.S.D. Lloydminster R.C.S.S.D., and Humboldt Public School Division.

Intensive French is an enrichment of the Core French program by the creation of a period of intensive exposure to French which enables students to receive up to four times the number of hours of instruction normally devoted to Core French in one school year. During the intensive period, all activities relate to the learning of the second language; no subjects are taught in French and no content objectives for the other subjects are evaluated through Intensive French. The teaching strategies focus on interaction and group work, helping the students to communicate orally in French.

The Intensive French program is offered for the first 5 months of the grade 6 year. Instruction is carried out in French from 60% to 75% of the day. Subject instruction in English makes up the remaining daily instruction time.

In the second five months, students study their English subjects (English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Health, Math, etc.) with the exception of an enriched Core French program. This program incorporates the teaching and learning strategies of Intensive French and is aimed at maintaining and further developing second language skills. Reorganizing the curriculum for other subjects for five months requires a review of the learning objectives for these subjects to identify skills, cognitive processes and content which could be introduced during the Intensive French period activities. This introduction gives the children some awareness and latent knowledge so that skills, cognitive processes, and content for other subjects can be covered more quickly during the second five month period.

The students' oral and written proficiencies were evaluated and the results have been extremely positive. The oral proficiency of students was evaluated through an oral interview administered by trained interviewers and scored according to a rating scale used in other provinces.

The students in Saskatchewan scored at a level in the oral evaluation that indicated they "are able to sustain a conversation using short phrases and sentences; demonstrated emerging spontaneity and some ability to create with language". This is an amazing result given they have only been studying French for 5 months.

To evaluate their written proficiency, students wrote a composition that is used to evaluate grade 3 francophone students in Quebec. The compositions were scored in Quebec according to a number of specific criteria. In the written evaluation, students scored at a francophone grade level of approximately grade 3 on fluency and accuracy.

Intensive French students acquire a higher level of competence in oral and written French in five months. To maintain students' motivation to continue studying French and to enable them to build on what they have acquired, some type of specialized follow-up (Post-Intensive French) is essential. Currently, funding is available for summer institutes for training both Intensive French and Post-Intensive French teachers. The French Learning Program Unit is committed to continue supporting Intensive French and the follow-up programs through the development and adaptation of resources at the local level. The Intensive French personnel are also collaborating nationally to continue to develop resources for the follow-up to Intensive French. These initiatives will ensure quality programs for the students of Saskatchewan.

Parent Comments

I would like to share some comments made by parents whose children have participated in the program . These are not direct quotations, but capture the essence of what they expressed.

- ◆ It has been the most positive experience for my son in every way: academically, emotionally and socially. He is really enjoying the program.
- ◆ My son never wants to miss a day of school. He is having so much fun while learning so much.
- ◆ I was concerned about my daughter leaving her neighbourhood school to attend this program, but it has been a wonderful experience for her. Everyone in the school has been so welcoming and she is loving the IF program and is learning so much.
- ◆ Prior to this experience, I would not have driven my son to school out of the neighbourhood for the IF program. After having experienced this program, I would gladly drive my son anywhere in the city to attend this program. It has been such a positive experience.
- ◆ This experience has had a positive impact on the whole family. My daughter in grade 3 wants to know everything her brother learns every day in IF so she can teach her classmates and my daughter in grade 9 Core French comes to her brother to get help! You can imagine the effect this has had on his self-esteem.
- ◆ It is a win-win situation. Sign your children up. It is an experience they shouldn't miss.
- ◆ It is a wonderful opportunity. I want all of my children to have this experience.

PARENTS' FAQs ABOUT INTENSIVE FRENCH

As a parent, do I have to know French?

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

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.

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.

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.

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. There will be no change in the learning of mathematics as time for this subject is not reduced.

How is language taught?

The children learn language orally first, using correct forms and structures. Grammar is taught, usually related to writing activities, where it is important that forms be spelled correctly. Activities are centred on a theme (my family, hobbies, etc.) and the children work together to complete projects relating to the theme (surveying music preferred by their classmates, etc.).

Will the teacher speak French all the time?

Yes. English will be used by the teacher for a very short period of time, at the beginning of Intensive French program. The rest of the time, the teacher will speak French.

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

Keeping up with the French is not a problem. The teacher will use many learning strategies to ensure that the children comprehend what is being said.

What happens if my child already has difficulty in school

- with core French?

Intensive French is a new approach, a new way of learning a second language. French is taught as a means of communication, and not as a purely academic subject with content that has to be ‘learned’ or memorized. The children do not need to analyze the language or use it out of context. This makes the learning of the language much easier, particularly for those students who have difficulty learning languages.

- 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.

Weaker students 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 enable weaker students to work with the other students to achieve the learning goals.

How is Intensive French different from

- Core French?

In Intensive French, the approach to teaching the language is based on the way English is taught, that is, on a first-language or language arts 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 program, the children are encouraged to use the language to communicate their ideas but time and intensity are lacking.

- 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.

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.

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 should be able to carry on a conversation on topics related to their age and interests with a francophone, read short stories in French, grasping the general idea, and simple articles in newspapers or magazines at an appropriate age and interest level. They should also be able to write a few paragraphs, for instance, write or reply to a letter from a friend, write messages to people of their own age, asking questions and giving information.

In two of the provinces where program results have been tested, children 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.

What are the proven “benefits” of Intensive French?

Children will be able to increase their communication skills in French, and also English skills. 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.

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 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.

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

The report card for Intensive French will be different from the usual way of reporting progress in French. It will be like the English language report card, with results given for all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the intensive semester, an assessment will be given for only French, mathematics and those subjects retained and taught 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.

What will happen in grade 6 and the following years?

This depends on the province, or the school district, implementing the program. There should be, at the minimum, an enriched core French program for all children who have participated in Intensive French.

Is Intensive French new? How did it get started?

No. Intensive French is not new. It was first experimented in Quebec in the 1970's. However, for many reasons, it was not pursued. It was re-started in 1998 through a three-year research project undertaken by researchers (Dr. Joan Netten, Memorial University of Newfoundland, and Dr. Claude Germain, Université du Québec à Montréal) in two school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador, one rural and one urban, in 1998. It was introduced in order to improve the core French program.