GUIDE FOR FRENCH IMMERSION PARENTS

Bienvenue!

We are thrilled your child is part of our French Immersion program! We have a strong team of passionate bilingual teachers who look forward to working with your child(ren).

As you know, the French Immersion program is designed to teach the same outcomes as students in English while also developing language skills. Students in French Immersion have access to a wealth of resources at HHE, and will be participating in several cultural events this year.

The realities of learning French:

- Teachers strive to teach in French all day. We aim for oral language development before we target reading and writing. Research tells us that an immersion program where we instruct in the language, surround students with language supports and avoid repeating concepts in English is the fastest, most efficient way to learn a new language.

- As students move up the grades, one approach that limits student growth is when they write or research something entirely in English and then translate it into French. People who become fluent learn to think in the target language. They research in French, they read in French, and they write in French. Can they look up words in a French/English or a French dictionary and use a grammar corrector as needed? Absolutely! Reference tools are essential. But, from the earliest grades, we teach children phrases so they can learn to express themselves in French. We put French reading materials in their hands, so they learn sentence structures and expand their vocabulary. Children that rely exclusively on translating their ideas may find their language development hindered in the long run.

- Learning a second language can be tiring! Students spend much of the day making sense of new vocabulary as well as new curriculum concepts. Ensure your children get a good night's sleep and have nutritious snacks throughout the day.

- Students may occasionally get confused between English and French. Do not worry if your child switches words or mixes up spellings. 27% of words in English and French are

similar, only differentiated by small spelling changes. By Grade 5-6, children's brains typically get it all straightened out.

- French may look complicated, but it has more consistent rules than English does in terms of pronunciation and noun genders and the grammar structure is similar.

- Formal instruction in English begins in Grade 3, but families are encouraged to enjoy reading English books together from a young age to build a strong base for their children.

- French Immersion is good for brain development for all types of learners. By Grade 6, French Immersion students typically surpass their English peers on formal assessments in Math, Science, French, Social Studies and even English Language Arts.

How to support your child in French Immersion

Teachers' primary role is to focus on French language instruction during the day. We do not expect families to become experts in French to help with homework at home. We appreciate when families provide practice opportunities and enrichment in the home language because there are many skills and abilities that transfer between languages. If your child is struggling with homework or needs further supports, then have a conversation with your child's teacher.

Tips for reinforcing literacy and numeracy skills at home even if you don't speak French:

1. **Spend time talking about what students are learning each day**. Talking helps children organize their thinking, revisit key ideas and store information in long-term memory.

2. **Encourage creative projects and imagination** – creative tasks help students generate ideas, lead to divergent thinking, help children solve problems and get multiple aspects of their brain working in sync.

3. **Find opportunities to engage in mental math and numeracy activities** such as counting, adding, subtracting, seeing patterns, learning to navigate the world with directions and maps (spatial awareness), etc.

4. **Use rich, descriptive words in your conversations and be word detectives**: look for words that sound funny, that rhyme, that have more than one meaning, mean the same or are opposites. Gently correct any misused or mispronounced words. Play games such as Boggle, Scrabble, etc.

5. **Read with your child daily** in your home language. Reading can be a blend of listening to your child read, reading to your child or reading with your child (taking turns – word by word, sentence by sentence, page by page). Reading is an active process – it should be interactive and enjoyable.

a. When we read with children, give them just enough support. Don't immediately provide the correct word – brains need repeated practice recognizing letters and blending sounds until children can eventually read words at a glance. If they get stuck, try prompting the initial sound in the word. Try a word again if it doesn't sound right.

b. Talk about the story/text as you read:
   i. make connections to things your child has seen and experienced
   ii. look at the pictures and visualize the scenes
   iii. ask questions
   iv. make predictions
   v. fix up any misunderstandings

6. **Ask your child to teach you some French words**. Consider learning some simple French – there are many terrific language learning apps such as Duolingo.

7. Set up students for success by **providing an effective study space** for days when they have homework. Homework is typically an extension of learning that has happened in class, so students should be able to do it mostly on their own.

8. **Look for opportunities to enrich your child's French language skills**:

   a. Have magazines, comics, graphic novels and books in French available at home and encourage students to spend some time reading in French regularly. Students visit the school library weekly so they will regularly have books to bring home. The Strathcona County Public Library also has French materials that families can borrow (library cards are free for children).

   b. Encourage your children to watch French TV shows. Add French subtitles to shows and movies they watch.

   c. There are numerous apps and games where students can practice their literacy and numeracy skills in French.

   d. Participate in language/cultural activities: Cabane à sucre (Maple Sugar Shack); Flying Canoë Volant festival in January; a family weekend hosted by Canadian Parents for French; etc.

9. Empower your child to **feel ownership of their language development**. Learning French expands their identity. They should be proud of their ability to speak a second language and should learn to steer the journey for their own benefit, not simply because this path may have been chosen for them.

10. Help your child **develop 'soft' skills** because there are days when it will feel easier to do everything in English or avoid putting in the work: patience when they are frustrated or tired; persistence when things feel hard and they need to practice more than they would like to master something; social skills to help them navigate friendships and conflicts;

curiosity to learn new things; and, confidence to try new things, ask for help and speak in French. Help them remember how remarkable it is that they are learning a second language and how proud we are of what they accomplish every day!

11. Reference Materials:

   a. **wordreference.com** – this French-English dictionary (online or app) provides detailed entries and examples so users can choose the word with the closest meaning to what they intended

   b. **DeepL Translator** – this tool provides a very accurate translation of French words and phrases; it is not just translated words strung together.

   c. **Bonpatron.com** – French grammar and proofreading tool. Copy the text into the text box and click check text. This tool is best used with older grades.

   d. **Google Docs and Word** have an automatic French dictionary/editing feature when French is added as one of the proofing languages.

   e. **How to type accents?** All keyboards can be switched to a French keyboard, but rather than learn where the French keys are, it is often simpler to use ALT codes. Mobile devices have accents built into the keyboard, you hold down the letter (for example, e) and all the options for e's with accents will appear.

To type French accents you need to use the **ALT** key and the **NUMBER PAD.**

Hold the **ALT** key as you type in the numeric code for the letter you need.

Ex:

ALT + 133 gives you an "a" with an "accent grave" (à)

à	133	À	0192
â	131	Â	0194
ä	132	Ä	142
ç	135	Ç	128
é	130	É	144
è	138	È	0200
ê	136	Ê	0202
ë	137	Ë	0203
î	140	Î	0206
ï	139	Ï	0207
ô	147	Ô	0212
ù	151	Ù	0217
û	150	Û	0219
ü	129	Ü	154

If you like our program, please tell others!

One of our long-term goals is to continue to grow the Immersion program at Heritage Hills Elementary so that we can offer more classes, provide more supports, and add to our team of language experts. We appreciate our families who are our best form of advertising. We are passionate about French Immersion and the strong, confident children who develop in our program, and we hope you will share with others so they too can experience the benefits of this program.

Volunteers

If someone in your family speaks French (or even if they don't) and they have time to volunteer, we would welcome the help. Reading with students, playing math games, helping with special events, creating a display or going on field trips – there are many ways to contribute. If you have ideas for how to enrich our program, we would love to hear from you.

Canadian Parents for French

CPF has numerous resources to support parents with children in French Immersion. From fun family weekends to a 6-week self-guided course for parents to learn French, CPF creates resources, sponsors cultural events and provides advocacy for French at the local, provincial and national level. If a group of parents would like to explore opening a local CPF chapter at our school to provide supports to all our French Immersion parents, that is an option that CPF would be happy to discuss. For more information, visit https://ab.cpf.ca/en/

Thank you for your support of this program!