

GOLDEN FRENCH PROGRAM CONVERSATION

PUBLIC INPUT

Following is written input received. Please note:

- **Some input has not been published on this website because individuals have requested that it remain confidential.**
- **Names and other information that would identify the individual providing the input have been removed unless there was specific request to include the name. Other than that, the messages are printed exactly as received. If you wish your name and/or identifying information to be added to your message published below please contact Bendina Miller at bendina.miller@sd6.bc.ca and she will be pleased to do so.**
- **New written input will be added to this website as it is received.**

Feb 6, 2010

Future of French Language Program

I wish to share my concerns surrounding the future of the French language program in the Golden Schools. My belief is that it is best to start learning a second language at the youngest age possible.

I work as a (*occupation removed to protect confidentiality*) communicating is one of the fundamental skills necessary in my work, as it is in many occupations.

I am unilingual and find this to be my largest handicap in improving my ability to communicate. Fortunately most of my guests speak English as well as their native tongue however, it has long been apparent to me that to be a truly educated citizen of the world you should speak more than one language. In an effort to achieve this I have tried as an adult to learn the second language and have found it to be an incredibly difficult task.

Watching children go through the French program and develop a workable knowledge of the language is something I am envious of. Children seem to easily absorb this at a young age and I don't believe this process of learning language can start too soon. We will be doing our children and future generations disservice by not providing them with the communication skills necessary to compete in a world market. I am firmly opposed to abolishing early French immersion, Keep it from K to 12.

I was unable to attend the meeting on Thursday evening but I wanted to make sure I commented on the FI discussion.

It is unfortunate that this conversation seems to be bringing such strong emotions and concerns to many staff and community members but I also understand the concerns (as I know you do too). I realize that many are worried for their jobs I know the threat of losing ones job well, and let me assure you it is stressful and extremely difficult to face. I understand that this is a real concern for some here and that's not pleasant, but I want to urge the Board not to make a decision based on jobs because as I see it, it's either French or English jobs and we should not be basing decisions on this. I would ask the trustees that when considering their options, they focus on the students, French and English and what is best for the collective student body. I would ask that teachers not be a focus here because this should not be about individual teachers, if it is, it becomes about this or that French teacher versus this or that English teacher.

The debate should not focus on whether the FI program is a good program or not, of course it is and we have been lucky to have it here for as long as we have.

The real question is how does a school community the size of ours (and shrinking) support the program? We have a total of 47 grade one students currently in Golden (FI and English combined), there are about 50 to 60 students per grade from grades K through 4. In 10 years from now – that looks like about 250 to 300 students at GSS. How do they provide an English and FI program with those numbers? GSS is starting to feel the number crunching (at currently about 380 students) but the grade 12 and the grade 10 groups are still quite large – they'll feel it quite drastically in a few more years. If the Board decides to go status quo and continue with FI, it would seem to me that we will have to have this conversation again in a few years or else bankrupt our high school? Provide even less options for our English students? I have heard people in the community say that they are considering leaving Golden before their children get to GSS because they can't offer enough for their high school aged students? This challenge increases every time the numbers go down and providing 2 programs is a major factor in this challenge.

I have heard that lifting the cap on FI kindergarten has been suggested. I don't see how that would keep the students in the program? The graduating class this year may have 16 students in FI, but that FI group started out as 34 students. And there are not 90 or 100 students in one grade anymore. 6 or 7 years ago, I know that APES decided to split the FI kindergartens and lift the cap. By late Fall, there were 21 English kindergarten students in a class, 13 FI kindergarten students in a class, and 11 in the other FI kindergarten class. The decision to lift the cap, cost the school about \$30,000. for 2 students.

Because I was unable to attend Thursday's meeting, I am not privy to all of the concerns, comments, or suggestions. I have heard discussion around status quo, late immersion, and intensive French starting in grade 6. The only option that seems fiscally responsible, in my opinion, at this time, appears to be the Intensive French program because it allows for students to graduate with a dual dogwood and it doesn't put the same strain as a FI program on the course selection choices and class size numbers at the high school level (where the greatest concern would seem to be).

Thank you.

Dear All:

My (son/daughter) is just enrolling for grade 11 courses now and wants to be a (*occupation removed to protect confidentiality*). At that grade you are allowed three electives outside of your academics. He/She has to use all but one elective block for her "FI academics" Last year the only elective that would fit into the FI curriculum is foods: foods in English foods, in French and sometimes foods for three hours depending on the day. My other (son/daughter he/she did not want to drop French. In hind-site she/he should have because when she/he was (away) for grade 12 year the staff at GSS would not accommodate him/her in Francaise Language so he/she took Grade 12 French through correspondence so it would at least show up on the report card and graduated without his/her Dogwood.

FI courses should not be classed as electives. This extra work load and restriction is placed on FI students as soon as they enter grade 8. You may not know that since we had more than 1 student drop out of the FI program transitioning over to grade 8 four's ago Golden Parents for French put major time into figuring out how to keep kids interested because they weren't encouraged by home or school to stay in we initiated a grade 7 field trip. If you want more information I would be glad to explain. We are now going into the third year with reduced drop outs if any. I encourage you to look into it. If there were any I am sure the reasons were not "lack of interest" and the ones who stayed are have a stronger love of their studies. I believe you are going to interview some of those students soon or may have already. I would be more than happy to assist on a rescheduling committee to see if anything can be done. And since this is a personal letter I sincerely hope you do not phase out Early French Immersion. The only alternative I support is phasing out Early Immersion and replacing it with Intensive French for the entire student body. Why can't our population be bilingual. Just because the province hasn't mandated it yet we have always been in the forefront lets start a trend. Your attrition issues would go away and your goal of "graduating students with strong French" would be met as the ridiculous scheduling difficulties would be eliminated.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my rant. And in all fairness thank you for NOT letting this drag on for a year (we've been through that before) but just tell parents your decision would be made by the beginning of April. Again thank you for your concern and giving us an opportunity to provide input.

This letter is in response to the "Conversation Starters" that were included in the APES Chatter, sent by Vicci Nelson this morning.

I was unable to attend the meeting last night because I was home caring for my daughter, who is in immersion at APES. However, it is my understanding that you indicated that attrition in the later grades is the main reason the school board is considering changes to the French program.

Attrition should not be a surprise. It is natural that as students enter high school and begin preparing for post-secondary education (most likely at English institutions), that they may wish to study math or sciences in English. Many students may feel that this is the best way to successfully compete for entrance to university, and to set themselves up for success once they get there. And with the benefits of early immersion, even if they enter the English stream in Grade 9, they will have a solid grasp of the French language. This is success, not failure. We should support and celebrate this. It is not a reason to cancel the French immersion program.

However, since this "conversation" is ostensibly about addressing the "attrition problem", I find your four conversation starters rather curious.

The first three do absolutely nothing to respond to the issue, since they all propose continuing immersion to grade 12. The second and third options propose phasing out early immersion in favour of starting in grade 4 or 6. Can you please explain how beginning the French immersion program later would have any affect on reducing attrition rates in high school? If attrition is really the issue, why hasn't the school board presented an option of K to Grade 8 immersion, followed by solid core French through high school to allow immersion students to maintain their second language while they prepare for university in English?

Given the failure of the first three options to address the supposed main issue, it is difficult not to come to the conclusion that this "conversation" is simply a charade, and that the school board has already settled on the fourth option as a preferred direction. If this is the case, then this is unacceptable. The fourth option is a recipe for mediocrity. It should not be considered any further.

The benefits of early immersion are clear. Early immersion provides the best opportunity for students to gain the ability to speak a second language with skill and confidence. It introduces students to the diversity in the world around them, and sets them up to expand their horizons in whichever direction they chose as they mature.

French immersion in Golden is hugely successful, to the point that entrance to the program is fully subscribed. I have been impressed with how well my

daughter has begun to speak French only months after entering the program, thanks to the great atmosphere and dedicated teachers and staff at APES. Let's embrace this success and work to make the program even better, rather than abandon it because of some perceived failure related to attrition in later grades.

Finally, since you are considering changes that will affect families deeply, please have the courtesy to arrange meetings at times when parents can actually attend. I suggest future meetings be scheduled to start at 4 or 5 pm so as not to interfere with family dinner/bedtime schedules.

Hello Bendina,

Yesterday night I attended the meeting/discussion at the Lady Grey school, and I must say that the way people reacted (also towards you) didn't give me a good feeling at all. Most people were too offensive and didn't want an open discussion. I would like to have an open discussion. Our oldest son/daughter is in French Immersion Kindergarten.

For me the two most important things to improve the French immersion program are the following:

a.) provide good-quality education, for example: let only native speakers be teachers from Grade 1 /12, also during maternity leaves etc. That way the children will learn to speak the language grammatically correctly and hopefully without an accent. There is a native French speaking teacher in Golden that has friends that want to come to Golden to teach in the French immersion program, if you don't have enough teachers right now.

b.) Give the kids and parents that want to drop out of the program support. Don't make dropping out easy. Talk to and with the parent and kids. Maybe parents together can form a support group for their children. Maybe somebody knowledgeable can be a coach for the kids to keep them motivated throughout the program.

Considering the fact that the formative years for a child to learn a second language properly and without too much struggle are between 3-9 years of age, French immersion in Kindergarten is still the best option, in my opinion. Maybe you have to select the children that are allowed into the program, so that children that are verbally not strong are protected and don't drop out of the program later. That is not good for a child's self-esteem plus they have to make new friends later etc.

Another option would be immersion from Grade 4 on, so that you can first check how a child is doing in school. The only problem with this option is that it can be too late agewise.

I think immersion from grade 6 on is too late. I started to learn English from age 12 and that really is too late. English will never feel to me like my own language; for me it is still much easier to express myself and to think in *(language removed to protect confidentiality)*, even though I have lived in Canada since 3 1/2 years. In *(country removed to protect confidentiality)* we have English immersion for the best students from Grade 6 on, but those students will never become really bilingual.

I really hope the Early French immersion program will stay in Golden, because I (as an outsider) think it is a wonderful program and opportunity. But yes, the

program can be improved.
I wish you all the best with the decisions to be made!

Kind regards,

Pros for Early French Immersion versus Late IF or Intensive French

- Early immersion is far more successful in forming French speakers due to the early starting age. People learning any second language at 12 or older will always have an accent. This is because the part of the brain that deals with language accent fossilizes at 12. Our FI students speak with an excellent accent.
- Research on brain development shows that learning a second language at a younger age helps develop strong skills in many subjects, not just language, but Math and Science too.
- Parents with children who are struggling in school do not enrol them in Late FI. Lots of Early FI students are not academically strong and being bilingual is a great asset for them. With a Late Immersion or Intensive French program, mostly strong academics will become bilingual. All the academically challenged students end up in English, creating very difficult class to teach for the regular classroom teacher.
- Golden is proud of the FI program we have here. Our students have an excellent level of French. When we compete with other districts in the Concours d'Art Oratoire, it is easy for any French speaker to recognise Golden's students because they definitely have a better accent, and overall level of French than Late Immersion students. Although we have a smaller population, we often win first prize.
- Once there is an established program it attracts people to the area who have young children. We have experienced teachers and plenty of teaching material for Early Immersion.

I was unable to attend the recent conversations on the topic of French immersion held in Golden, but did want to submit my comments and experience with French and English throughout my school years. To start with, my daughter/son is in grade 3 French immersion, and my daughter/son is in K French immersion in Golden. While my son/daughter is just getting started, my daughter/son is by most measures, fluent. We were recently in line at the grocery store, and a couple in their mid-twenties were having a conversation in French behind us, (daughter/son) understood everything that was said. He/she can carry-on complete, coherent conversations in French with both adults, and kids in her/his class. There is no question that he/she can "think" in French as opposed to translating English thoughts into French.

I started school (many years ago). We had what would probably have been considered an intensive French program, in which we had conversational French lessons on a daily basis. I left (city removed to protect confidentiality) for (city removed to protect confidentiality) at the end of grade three. I can clearly remember having complete (for a grade three kid) conversations with my teacher in French. What I can remember most is that when I was speaking French, it was the equivalent to speaking English. By this I mean there was no translation taking place. I didn't know this at the time, but I learned this later as I re-started my French education in grade 8. With no exposure to French from grade 4 to grade 8, and with the methods of teaching French in BC schools, I was literally starting from scratch. I went from thinking in French to translating English into French, and I never came close (by the end of grade 12) to the level of French comprehension and expression that I had already achieved by grade three.

I am not a teacher by profession, but I am a lifelong student, having obtained (several degrees). I know how to learn and I know what is effective in terms of teaching. French immersion starting in K is effective, there is no argument (if the objective is to have the children speak French). However, my feeling is that the French immersion program in Golden unravels by the time the children get into middle school (grade 8). There simply are not the numbers to support the program, and class offerings appear to be haphazard at best. By grade 8, a French immersion student is most definitely fluent in French, and with continued exposure to the language, will be able to maintain this lifelong skill (gift).

The main purpose of my message is to suggest an option that is not offered on the list of current discussion items. My suggestion is to continue with full French immersion from K to 7. Starting in grade 8, the French immersion kids would then participate in an "intensive" French program. I will be honest in that I am unclear of what exactly the school board defines as "intensive" French, so I will define it as I see it. To me "intensive French" would consist of 3-5 hours per

week of entirely conversational French, and it could be applied to topical/educational material as appropriate. This model would ensure that the French fluency obtained in K-7 would be maintained, and it would alleviate the problem of trying to maintain a French immersion program in 8-12 where there are not enough students to support this type of program. It would also address the concern (valid or not) that French immersion students are not appropriately equipped for English-based University level education.

I will end with a short story that I use to support my French language model. I was traveling in Turkey many years ago, and befriended a group of university students in Ankara. They invited me to come to their school one day. I was met at the "armed" gates of the campus, and escorted to their classroom. The class was English. The professor welcomed me into the classroom and asked if I would be willing to participate in a question-answer type session. The class originally was supposed to have a test, but the professor said that an hour of "real" English conversation was far more valuable than any test he could administer. The hour long class lasted almost three hours that day.

Hi,

Thank you for taking the time to listen to the comments at tonight's meeting. I think it was appreciated by everyone that there was no attempt to limit even the longer speeches.

You will already have plenty of comments and suggestions to wade through, so I hope you will find the time to read mine, and not just skim them.

I sincerely believe that canceling Early French Immersion, whatever it is replaced with, would be a poor decision. If such a decision was made, I hope that enough time would be provided to allow people to deal with it (now until September is not).

Also note that from your own figures, you have seen a threefold increase in graduates from the existing French Immersion program in Golden over the last 5 years. Only the current grade 8 blip (which is due to people leaving the district) gives any cause for concern.

TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF BILINGUAL GRADUATES

- I strongly feel that it would fall somewhere between misguided and plain stupid to abandon the proven Early French Immersion program in Golden to replace it with ANY unproven solution (as all three alternatives discussed undoubtedly are).
- The best years for a child to physically develop the brain patterns for learning a second language are before grade 4.
- I would rather my children were in an intensive French program from grades K-8 than grades 4-12. Although it is the same number of years and only the grade 4-12 child would get a double dogwood, I believe that the K-8 child would have the better language skills.
- Concentrate on RECRUITMENT and RETENTION into the existing early immersion program - it will pay bigger dividends than throwing out the entire program and starting again.
- Consider supplementing the existing early immersion program with a strong French program for the non-FI students. This would be good for students from Nicholson and Field. If it can be a gateway into FI for a motivated student, all the better.

RECRUITMENT

- Currently, registration into French Immersion at kindergarten is reasonably open, until a full class (22) is reached (often a few hours after registration opens). After this it is strongly discouraged, with English kindergarten presented as the only option. Although this may make administration of the program easier, it does mean that the waiting list is artificially short.

- It takes a very strong willed parent to get a child into French immersion at grade 2, even when there is space. At grades above that, it has likely only ever happened for students who are already French speaking.
- Open up the process; encourage people to register their preference, even if they don't register until the first day of school.
- Allow and encourage children moving into the area to join the program in grades 1-3 and even higher. The teachers I have spoken to are open to this. (It is what English speaking students moving to a French speaking school are expected to do, and vice-versa).
- PROMOTE and ENCOURAGE people to consider the French Immersion program.
- This year there were 22 F.I. students and 31 non-F.I. students. With the right atmosphere at registration, those figures could easily have been reversed.

RETENTION:

- Most attrition from FI is people leaving Golden; the figures are not significantly different for non-FI.
- Currently there is a one way movement OUT of the French Immersion program. Students are not being allowed to move into it - unless they already have a strong French background - and this will make any attrition more significant. In comparison, attrition in the English program is offset by people entering the English program from the French program, from the alternate school, and from moving into the area.
- Allow movement into the FI program for non-French speakers (in the early grades at least). Develop a program - summer school, a grade of intensive French, whatever - to assist those who are older and self-motivated to move into the program.
- Find out the reasons for children leaving the FI program. Address them where possible. Perhaps teaching assistants would help?

Thank you for taking the time to read my comments.

My name is (name removed to protect confidentiality). Although my last name is French, my family does not speak French. In high school I only took French in Grade 8 and didn't really want to continue learning the language. After I graduated, I went to college in (city removed to protect confidentiality) for 2 years. During that time I came across many bilingual people. They weren't speaking French though. Most of them were international students from various parts of Asia, Africa and the Middle East. I was somewhat jealous that they could go in and out of another language so fluidly. Some of them knew more than just one other language. My roommate from Kenya knew English, Swahili and another language that I can't pronounce.

In my second year I decided to take some French courses when I learned that some of the more prestigious schools in Canada require it for acceptance. After taking a full year of these courses I was getting a little better but didn't get to practice very much. After I moved back to Golden I noticed a lot of people from Quebec living in town. While they were having trouble with their English, I conversed with them to work on my French. It helped them to get used to living in a mostly Anglophone community. After a while I found myself using French in situations where there were no French speakers in the area. Even today I use little phrases and words at work or when visiting friends.

When I was in Tokyo, I found myself speaking with people on the subway. But, it wasn't in Japanese, it was in French! Knowing another language can be very helpful with career opportunities (government, teaching etc.) When travelling, you learn that not all tourist areas around the world have fluent English speakers. French is another worldwide language (because of colonialism in the 18th to 20th centuries.) You might be in Turkey or Greece trying to speak with a shop keeper who has broken English, but if you try a different language there is always someone around that can speak something else.

North America is statistically behind the curve on multiple language speakers. In Europe, most students know two or three languages. In Asia, there are many English language schools that people willingly attend AFTER their school days. They also can pay a lot of money for them. But if you're still in high school, you get similar courses for FREE! Not only that, but the courses that I paid for in college covered the same material that's in the high school classes. So in hindsight I could've saved some money!

Once you start learning the basics, it's not very difficult! And after time you notice many English words are taken from French (and many other languages). Take it from me, knowing a second language is very helpful. It's good for your brain, it's good for your future and most importantly knowing French and English is part of being Canadian.

Dear Bendina,

Last week, I was out of town and therefore unable to attend the French Immersion meeting held on Thursday, Feb 11th at Lady Grey Elementary School.

It is interesting to hear my colleagues, friends, and parents of present, past, and future students in Golden's French Immersion program talk about what had been presented at this meeting.

I find it very surprising that our school board is considering the proposed changes to the French immersion program (i.e. taking it away from our community and potentially replacing it with a half-school year intensive French course for grade 6s). In particular, I have been asking myself the following questions and haven't found satisfactory answers yet:

- Why discontinue a program that is working very well and proven successful according to many parents, teachers, and members of the community? How many surveys have been sent out to them and what were the results of this survey?
- Is there satisfactory evidence on a national scale that French Immersion K-12 programs are not effective and if so, where are these documents? What about Canada's bilingualism and giving students greater job opportunities with French fluency.
- If Kimberley has started this suggested program of half-school years of intensive French for grade 6s but these students haven't completed grade 12 yet, how can we determine if this type of suggested program is successful and comparable to the French language skills outcomes from the French Immersion programs across the country, including Golden. I am doubtful that the outcomes of such a program could be equal or better than the current K-12 French Immersion program. Also, it will be difficult for teachers to cover the already packed curriculum that most teachers have difficulty covering when given only half a school year to complete this in.
- If we were to discontinue our French Immersion program in Golden, it would definitely affect the local economy as quite a lot of families have moved to Golden for this flagship and reputable program and will take their children out of our schools and have to sell their homes and find another place to enrol their children in French Immersion elsewhere. These families moving away will impact our local economy because they are home owners, have jobs in our local area, take active roles in our community through volunteering, and spend their money within our community. Of course, French Immersion teachers will also be looking at moving away from Golden to find jobs outside of our school's community. The French Immersion parents are our community leaders and take much more active roles in our community than the parents of the English track. It will be a huge loss to our community to see these families pick up and leave Golden.

- Have other French Immersion programs in the Kootenays, BC, or Canada gone through similar changes recently, why and what were the outcomes?
- Has extensive research been conducted by outside agencies to prove that we need to make changes to the current program and if so, what were the findings?
- Who is in support of the proposed changes and why? What is the motivation behind this?
- It would cost a lot of money to reorganize the classrooms from French Immersion to English classes for those students who would be staying in Golden and switching to English. All the French teaching materials, including teaching resources, text books, work books, classroom posters, etc. would have to be bought anew to fulfill the English classes requirements. Not to mention a huge re-hiring process to replace all of the French Immersion teachers who would lose their jobs.
- What are the legal obligations in BC in terms of providing continuous French language education to students who have started their education in French. I know that in Ontario, students are legally entitled to have access to French education for the rest of their education years (K-12) once they have started and received French education. I have studied case studies from the East Coast during my teacher's college years on this where parents have won the case because of this education law.

I am curious to hear your responses to my questions and hope that I am not asking too much from your time.

Sincerely,

First of all I would like to thank you for this opportunity to discuss and explore different opportunities for learning in the Golden Zone. I did attend the meeting last week but want to submit some thoughts independently.

For years French Immersion (FI) has been a popular program that starts strong in Kindergarten but declines in numbers over the next 12 years. The statistics that you handed out last week showed the declining class sizes. The student population base for Golden was much greater when the program was first implemented. FI has had some negative effects on the English Program which have become more predominant in recent years of declining enrolment.

When students leave the FI program they are moved into the English program. This has a direct impact on the receiving class and on the system as a whole. These students are not moved because they are successful at school. They often have learning, social and emotional challenges. It is my experience that the moves are made mid-year and often without support.

The English program is experiencing the effects of declining enrolment. As the classroom composition of FI typically does not include students with special needs, the English program has been challenged in regard to classroom composition. In recent years, there have been a number of students entering the school system with significant special needs. Due to declining enrolment there are fewer English program classes available to place these students and to meet their educational and social needs and at the same time meet the needs of the other students in the classes. The learning environment and socio-economic make-up of the English and FI programs ought to be similar.

I believe in inclusion and that every child has much to offer and the right to learn, but I am aware that special needs students do change the learning conditions in a classroom. I also believe that teachers and students that never have the opportunity to befriend and learn alongside special needs students are being deprived of a wonderful opportunity to learn about acceptance, accommodation and inclusion.

Studies are showing that more and more children are entering school without the oral language skills shown in the past. Would it not be better to give all children strong skills in our first language before introducing a second language at such a young age? It seems to me in our rush to have our children succeed we do everything too early at the expense of the basic foundations for learning and life such as play, strong oral language, and maybe the most important thing... social skills!

I often hear people talking with pride that we are the smallest district to have French Immersion from K-12. I would like to know why other small districts do not have FI. Could it be that the presence of a FI program in small districts places unrealistic demands on the English program in those districts?

Are there other alternatives to FI from K-12 that will provide strong French language skills that have less effect on the English program in small districts?

A French program offered in the later grades would help the smaller schools to retain students and stay open. The FI program has impacted Nicholson and Field Elementary Schools (and Parson when it was open).

As a parent, I definitely would have considered late FI and I really like the concept of Intensive French. My spouse and I did not choose FI for our children because we felt Kindergarten was too young to assess how they would achieve as learners. We wanted them to attend their neighbourhood school, and most importantly we wanted them to have a solid foundation of English reading, writing and oral language skills before learning another language. We had hoped that the District would institute strong French instruction in the English program.

As set out above, I am very interested in the intensive French program being offered in the other areas of the district. I consulted with friends in Kimberley whose son opted for Intensive French this year (against what they thought would be best for him as he had not had great success at school previously). To their delight he is having a great year and actually wants to go to school for the first time! What I liked about this was that the child was old enough to be a part of the decision.

Parents at the meeting last week called for an independent study. I recall one being done years ago after FI was implemented. What I remember is that this study predicted all of the current problems we are now having around sustaining a dual track system with declining enrolment in a small district. There is no need for another study.

Good luck in making your decision. We all know that whatever option you decide on, you will have people for and against. I know you will do what is best for all of the learners in this zone.

Respectfully,

Hi there,

As a parent with 2 children in FI I would like to respond and comment to the results of last week's meeting. I understand that the purpose of this meeting was to "converse" about the concern about the attrition of students from the FI program. However the conversation starters that the board passed out were another topic altogether. Until we hear from teachers and students as to the reason for attrition we cannot proceed because we don't know what needs to be changed or if change is even necessary. Is it necessary to talk about the pros and cons of programs when we're happy with what we have. Aren't we? Is there proof out there that Early Immersion is not what parents want? That still is another topic that is different from what the board is concerned about.

On a side note it might be an idea to have persons in attendance sign in to the meeting so the board knows how many people were in attendance and if they are parents or prospective parents.

Does the board know how many FI children there will be next year? If there are more than 15 then it is enough to have a FI class. From my understanding there has always been more than 15 FI students registered so numbers in early FI are not a concern.

Thanks for listening!

February 15, 2010

To Whom This Concerns:

Background:

I only speak English, I studied French in high school, but struggled with the pronunciation, I have visited France and Quebec, and while visiting I could only bumble my way speaking French to ask the very basic of questions

I do not have children in the FI program, however I have one child who graduated with the FI Dogwood Diploma and another, who preceded the program, but studied French for a year in Belgium. If you ask the later about learning French later in life, she will say that late immersion takes commitment and is an arduous process.

I believe the current program brings value to the community. As a host of over 50 international youth over the past five years, (95% speaking two languages, and some speaking as many as 4 or 5 languages), I think it reflects poorly on those who are responsible for the Global Café to even consider diminishing the current FI program.

But rather that focus on the program itself, as a community member I want to give feedback on the process or lack thereof:

Feedback on Process:

- As the Superintendent pointed out, it is understandable that parents are passionate about the program, however what I witnessed last evening included anger and resentment. Why because the group feel that they own the program and should be included in designing a process for change. By not involving the group in the initial conversation you have taken ownership of both the program and the process of change. Further you have allowed suspicion to develop and swell.
- Options for comments were presented without a firm understanding of the issues, or development of goals for the program.
- In presenting options for comment, you stymied critical thinking. You presented to the group what they perceive to be what you think is best for them to consider. In this case many in the group reacted negatively, pulling others along with them. Consequently critical thinking slowed and for many it stops. This only compounded the lack of ownership in the process because now what they thought they owned was being steered by others.
- Presenting options for comments was also a missed opportunity. You had so many bright people in one room and you narrowed their creative thinking and thus their response.
- The process itself was not that well managed; _It was difficult to hear the Superintendent, and the questions being answered.

_The presentation material was not clear, and in the short time I reviewed a shared copy at our table, I did not see any statistical analysis attached to the numbers presented. 'A picture tells a thousand words' graphs would have helped.

_After reading the material and watching the short presentation, I was still unclear as to the issue. Is it funding, attrition or wanting more children from the district graduating with 'strong French' skill (whatever this means)?

-Our section of the 'Global Café' only completed two tasks, and I understand there were three.

-The summary of the session was poorly handled. I left hearing that the process would be a meeting next week to answer the questions presented. But I did not hear who would summarize the materials and what would happen to the summary of materials.

Website

-I spent 5 to 10 minutes searching the School District 6 website for documents or an outline of procedure for last evening's 'Conversation on French' and didn't find any references.

-At 3 PM on Friday, February 12, 2010 I visited School District 6 and did a search of documents using the word 'French', which resulted in no documents.

-I checked the website district calendar and next week's meeting was not scheduled.

-Most relevant (and perhaps I missed it), I did not find a history of internal discussion leading up to last night's meeting, nor did I find an outline for process.

Conclusion:

In light of above, I would have to agree with the fellow who stood up with questions and suggestions regarding process. You need to rethink your strategy and allow the critical thinking that needs to be done to take place. The above process to date hasn't and will not help you to move forward with the necessary support you need to meet the goal that has yet to be clarified.

It is obvious to me that if you want long lasting results, supported by the community at large that it is necessary to implement an independent review of the program, along with development of a process, which is partially designed by the FI parents and the community at large.

Win/Win is a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions. Win/Win means that agreements or solutions are mutually beneficial, mutually satisfying. With a Win/Win solution, all parties feel good about the decision and feel committed to the action plan.

Covy 1987

'Doing the right next thing versus doing the next thing right' Bill Murray

Thank you for considering my comments and concerns.

Yours truly,

Denise English

.cc Trustees, Paul Carrier, FI parents with email

French Immersion in Manitoba A Handbook for School Leaders

"Since recruitment and retention of French immersion students are as vital to the success of the program as its quality, and since these aspects are inescapably intertwined, administrators should monitor enrolments and enrolment trends at all levels and work to address issues of recruitment and retention."

–"enhanced extra-curricular activities in French" seek support from local artisans and sports leaders to head up a sporting or cultural event after school
Our local Monitor could be extremely helpful here

– "The immersion centre favours the creation of a French environment that makes it possible to attain a high degree of proficiency in French" perhaps the women's centre or civic centre could be a meeting place monthly to create a place for French culture to be developed

– "Creating a French environment in a dual track setting is a challenge and requires active support and fostering of the use of French inside and outside the classroom." I think it is integral that our national anthem be sung by all students in French and English at the beginning of each week and that all announcements are made bilingually. It supports our FI students and expands our English students knowledge. Canada is bilingual therefore our student body should at least be able to sing the national anthem in both languages.

–"opportunities for and the encouragement of spontaneous and frequent use of the language by students through student-teacher and student-student interaction;" "access to appropriate resource support and learning assistance for French immersion students" I believe SD6 should commit to providing a Monitor/rice yearly not every second year. They are an invaluable tool to our teachers and a direct link to French culture and dialect.

"By its nature, middle and late immersion attract a smaller student population." We are blessed to have our early immersion program and by the success of our graduating students it is clear that the program works. I would like to see Golden Parents for French and the local PAC have immediate access to information when students move out or into the program. We initiated a grade 4 information night for students entering Lady Grey a couple of years ago and it was highly beneficial. I would like to see GPF part of that process. As well Golden Parents for French together with the school district should provide the Welcome Wagon with an information package.

"The *Curriculum Policy for the French Immersion Program* provides guidelines to divisions/districts for establishing and maintaining the French Immersion

Program. It is expected that any school division/district will respond to the needs of its community. Divisional policies should allow all students reasonable access to the French Immersion Program. This involves considering matters such as:

- location of the French Immersion Program;
- transportation of students to the program;
- inclusiveness of the program through provision of support such as for special needs; and
- provision of information regarding the availability of the French Immersion Program." Kindergarten enrolment should be moved to the board office, non biased information packages should be available for pick-up prior to registration, the cap should be removed and registration should be opened at the board level with the A/O and two teachers (one representing FI and one representing English) and a parent representative (i.e. GPF president) should be present. Some or all of these ideas would increase enrolment and reduce the animosity felt by teachers, staff and parents when it comes to releasing our little ones into the system. Thank you to Alexander Park for working together with GPF in the past couple years to conduct an effective and informative kindergarten information night. Unless you have children aged 3 4 or 5 you may not comprehend the importance of this event.

This document is clearly rich in suggestions I highly recommend it to all. I could find more if you want.

Golden Parents for French has implemented a number of anti-attrition tactics. I am sure it could assist in implementing some of the ideas as well. I would also like to see annual enrolment reports provided to us directly by SD6 so GPF can play a more integral part of reducing attrition and increasing enrolment.

Dear Bendina,

I wish to provide some comments on the Golden French Immersion program. We have two children in the program and we plan on enrolling our third child in the program. Our two girls (gr 2 and K) enjoy the challenge and have begun to demonstrate an ability to effectively communicate in French. I believe it would be an exceptionally short-sighted decision by the School District Board to make fundamental changes to this particularly successful program.

If your administration's goal, with respect to speaking French, is to graduate bilingual, or nearly, bilingual students, then you cannot go the route of "Intensive French" or Late Immersion. I went through Late Immersion in New Brunswick, starting in grade 7, presently I can understand and read French but my vocabulary is essentially gone; it is as if I have had a stroke and the spoken aspect of my second language has been deleted. My wife went through Early Immersion in New Brunswick, and her spoken French is impeccable. I realize this is merely anecdotal evidence but we grew up in New Brunswick and we have many friends with identical stories to ours with respect to the ability speak French.

You can surely come up with a solution to the high school problems without eliminating Early Immersion.

Early Immersion is not broken, do not fix it. It's successful by all accounts, your clients told you as much last Thursday.

Sincerely,

In regards to the French Immersion conversation:

The 2010 version of Golden's school community is much different than that of 1986, when French Immersion was inaugurated in Golden. We have lost hundreds of students over that time, but have still proudly retained a full K-12 French Immersion program. We cannot fool ourselves, though. There have been costs to maintaining the program through those years of declining enrolment. As enrolment declined, so too did the number of classrooms of English instruction; the French program was insulated from those declines. Because many students with academic or behavioural issues have difficulty with the Immersion program, many students with learning concerns are not enrolled or do not stay with the program. The English program classrooms remaining have seen an increased concentration of students with exceptional learning needs, with many of those classrooms exceeding the provincially-set guideline for students on Individual Education Plans.

Contrary to some public opinion, we have established a two-tiered education system in Golden. French Immersion classes are typically, though not always, smaller and typically have fewer students with exceptional learning needs. I've read comments about how changes to the program will affect teachers, especially those employed in French Immersion positions. In terms of employment for teachers, we need to remember that we've lost several fine English-program teachers due to declining enrolment. We have under-employed and unemployed teachers in our community, some of them life-long local residents, at the same time as we've had to recruit French Immersion teachers from outside. Regardless of decisions made by the Board, there will continue to be teachers affected in either program. For example, we no longer have "newer" teachers in our primary classrooms. Removing the cap for French Immersion enrolment may result in teachers with 15-20+ years of experience being affected. Conversely, phasing out early Immersion will result in teachers' jobs being affected.

We also have to consider numbers. When the French Immersion program was started, we had two full classes of Kindergarten students at APES and Lady Grey, as well as half classes at Nicholson and Columbia Valley, in addition to the French Immersion class. Presently, our enrolment of Kindergarten students is close to 70, and our Grade 1 enrolment is near 50. Two of the questions the Board of Education needs to consider are: What will strong French Immersion and English programs look like 10-15 years down the road when the programs are of roughly equal size? How will Golden Secondary continue to offer choice for students enrolled in either program when their enrolments will continue to decline over the next decade?

My last comment is about how we define success. Is success the ability to converse in French? Is it the ability to attain employment as a bilingual person? Is it different if you attain employment for a ski resort versus the Government of Canada, whose standards of bilingualism may vary? Is it the ability to enrol at a French language university and complete post-secondary work? Who

determines success? Is the program a success if 60% of students enrolled in Kindergarten leave the program along the way?

I am pleased to see that the Board has committed to providing a strong French Language program leading to the graduation of bilingual students. I wish the Board well in its deliberation about the future of its programs. This is a passionate issue, but it is one that has needed to be addressed -- the board's courage to ask the difficult questions and possibly make the difficult decisions is appreciated.

Dear Bendina,

In light of tonight's meeting in Golden I wanted to make my voice heard. I am an EFI graduate from NB. I have both a BA and a BSci. In For. Mgmt. PLEASE!!! do NOT move Golden backwards by altering in any way our current EFI program. Your clients (We) have told you that if there are attrition concerns in the secondary level, address them there!

DO NOT FIX WHAT IS NOT BROKEN!!!

Kindest regards

Dear Bendina,

As an employee of the Rocky Mountain School District, I have made a concerted effort to remain neutral on the current issue of French Immersion in Golden. However, the militant voices of the supporters of the program are overshadowing so many of us in the community that question it's continued course in this time of provincial school closures and in Golden, a dramatic declining enrolment.

Statistics are not at my fingertips but the numbers seem clear enough. There is a reason that very small communities such as ours, are unable to offer many programs, with French Immersion being one of them. I fast forward the small numbers in primary grades and imagine graduating classes and cannot conceive how offering both French and English programs can be considered an option.

The alternate suggestions offered at the meeting last Thursday address the reality of attrition and fewer students in general in our schools. My sense from what I've read, is that the Intensive French would be the best choice as it offers the language piece but not at the expense of a solid English base for children.

You have heard the prepared speeches at the meetings. The proponents of French Immersion are organized, demanding and they perceive any challenge to the program as "anti-French" I am not anti-French and feel that by attending the public meeting and voicing my concerns that I will be labeled as such. I have been asked by several people the loaded question of which program did I choose for my children. We are now a divided community.

My concerns are based on my years spent in the schools as a professional and as a parent. There is a two tier system within our schools. The French classes are not welcoming of students with academic or behavioural challenges. These children are ejected with sometimes devastating social/emotional fallout.

Science groups, reading groups and teacher collaborations within our schools creates an atmosphere of community.

The French classes close their doors, remain aloof and in one case, a child was penalized for asking me a question in English.

I see excellent, hard working teachers who have dedicated years to building solid English core of reading and writing who are not rallying to "sell" what they do. They diligently work to meet the needs of all the students that walk through their classroom door. The configuration of their classes is unfairly stacked with students who have special needs, language delays, or behavioural issues. They don't have the option to eject these students down hall for someone else to deal with.

The majority of the students that I work with are from families you will not hear from. They won't be speaking at a public forum and for a variety of reasons, will not likely be taking the time to express their thoughts in a letter. I encourage you and the School Board to use this time of review of the French Immersion Program, to consider the needs of all the students in our Golden zone.

Sincerely,

Dear Bendina:

Last week I spent the morning sitting in an Intensive French class in action. Here are my observations and opinion.

Intensive French starts in grade six and have all mornings in French. They spend 70% of the time learning French and 30% for Math, PE, and HCE. For the first 6 months of the year, they have no Language Arts, no Science, and no Social Studies.

My first and most serious concern with this program is all the school time that is taken away from higher thinking level, replaced by teaching the language. Intensive French is essentially a second language class. In an Intensive French class, the students repeat after the teacher, fill in the blanks, and write simple sentences. Due to the student's limited language skills, the discussions are at a very basic level. The grade six IF students reading level at the end of the intensive six months of compares to the level of grade one or two FI, therefore the discussions are very simple, basic communications.

In contrast, in Early French Immersion the quality of French allows for a high level of reading and writing. Therefore, the depth of discussions we have in Science, Social Studies, and Language Arts (novel studies) is very engaging. Our students are developing a deeper thinking level; they can expand and support their ideas. Teaching using the "Smart Learning" model helps develop higher thinking level, which is not happening for IF students for 70% of the first six months of grade six.

The logic behind the IF program is that the students will learn the curriculum in the last four months. I am convinced that covering the curriculum in such a "crash course" manner is detrimental to the average student. Strong academic students who already have high intellectual abilities will be natural thinkers, but weaker students will not have enough time to build it up. Due to parent's choice the IF program is usually composed of stronger academic students. After all, that program was created in Quebec for strong academic students with very high marks. We do not want to create a two tiered system in Golden. Our FI program includes students from all ranges of abilities. IF students still have to take away an hour of instruction every day to keep working on their French. Five hours a week taken away from class time in order to learn French will surely have an impact on the rest of their learning, may it be Science, Social Studies, or writing essays. In Early French Immersion children learn French in Kindergarten as they learn their letters, play in centers, and get familiar with classroom behaviour.

Another serious consideration about IF is the level of French the graduates will speak. I did spend a few minutes in a grade 7 IF class, and although their French is a lot better than the students in Core French, but because of the

amount of exposure they have had, they still are beginners without the necessary vocabulary to conduct a simple conversation. For example, the books they use to read in French are similar to what they use in grade one Early FI.

We all are proud of the achievements of our Early French Immersion in Golden, and thank you for this discussion on how to increase the number of bilingual graduates. Please do not replace it with a weaker program. The quality of French of our bilingual graduate students from Early French Immersion in Golden is recognized far and wide.

Thank you for your consideration,
Sincerely,

Dear Bendina,

I am writing to voice my opinion on the French Immersion issues that are currently going on in Golden. I no longer have a child in either of the schools, however I was very much involved when FI was first initiated, and again when it was extended to the High School and had, and still have, some very strong opinions about it. I chose not to attend the “conversation” evenings as I find them to be far too emotional and having been through it in the past and being accused of being “anti-French” and a number of other unsavoury things, I felt this was my best option for conveying my opinion. Years ago it was made very clear to us that the power and influence wielded by the very aggressive FI lobby, completely overshadowed any facts, figures or opinions the English stream folks had to offer. In fact, we were even told by them at the time that to have something passed by the board, “one must be prepared to put in hundreds of hours of work in preparation, do all the legwork and spoon-feed the board”. Now with threats of droves of people moving, as a result of French Immersion not being offered, is being sent to community leaders, it appears things are being ratcheted up a notch.

I would like to put forward some of my thoughts on why the “Move to Intensive French Grade 6 – 12, Phase out French Immersion” would be the best option .

1. This would enable ALL students to have an opportunity to graduate with a solid enough background in French so, if they chose to further that study they would be prepared to do so. Many have graduated from high school with core French and gone on to learn other languages very successfully.
2. When children with learning or physical disabilities, those that are temperamentally challenged or of a minority language are removed from the FI program, the financial resources are not sufficiently directed to the English programs to handle these extra needs. The result being that the teacher is unable to deliver to the English stream the quality of teaching they have as much right to receive, as what is being delivered in the FI classroom.
3. Much of it comes down to the fact that the small community, its schools, its resources and its social network is simply not conducive to creating this kind of split. There develops a “them” and “us” stigma with the English stream children sometimes being thought of as “inferior” because they are not speaking French. I was witness to a few of these elitist comments over the years and found it to be quite sad. I remember a friend wavering on where to send her children was told by an FI parent that Nicholson had the highest rate of welfare recipients and single dads in the district and she shouldn’t even think twice about where she should send her children to school. Now, what has that to do with a French education?
4. The pressure put on well meaning parents to enrol children in FI can sometimes miss the mark. There are well known experts in the field that set

out valid arguments against the “Frenglish” that students graduating from the FI program have. E.g. **French Immersion: Myths and Reality by Hector Hammerly, Linguistics Professor, SFU**. How would a parent unprepared to conduct research in the linguistic field know that the Parents for French are only passing out literature and statements that reflect only one side of the issue. New Brunswick, the only official bilingual province in Canada, has discontinued early FI after discovering it just wasn’t working. This is in a province where the opportunity to speak French constantly is right outside your door. **See article by Konrad Yakabuski in the Globe and Mail, Saturday, April 5, 2008.**

5. Scheduling issues at the high school level was something that was brought up by the administration when FI was extended into the high school. They said it would be difficult and history went on to prove that to be the case. Both French and English students were and are denied electives and important core subjects due to having blocks filled with French only instruction.

6. The attrition rate of FI students in Golden was something that we presented at one of the meetings when the debate was going on years ago. We had stats and graphs and a very clear picture of how it was not working and we suggested at that time, that if the same attrition was showing up in the English stream that there would surely be an investigation. Sadly, we were not given the time of day.

7. With declining enrolment, shrinking funds to education and a school population already too small to support French Immersion, a quasi private school system going on in the public school system should come to an end.

In closing I would like to add how good it would be to see ALL the students able to sing Oh Canada in French, not just a privileged few.

I have been told that all emails going to you are subject to posting for all the world to see. I would like to request that you **NOT** include my name with this letter when it is posted nor when you share it with Board members. I have carried around misconceptions about my opinions for years on this issue and I would prefer it not to be fueled up again.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter.
Yours sincerely,

Good Day Bendina,

I am writing in regards to the pending decision to alter and/or eliminate the current Early French Immersion Program in Golden.

I currently have two children in the program in grades 4 and 2 and am more than pleased with the outcome of enrolling them in the Early French Immersion Program. They are both bilingual and progressing each year with a positive outlook and fabulous teachers. I cannot tell you how wonderful it is to wake up each morning and have my children eager to go to school. They enjoy reading to me in French and equally enjoy correcting my French as I attempt to read to them.

My husband and I moved to Golden 8 years ago for several reasons and I want you to know that one of the main considerations for us in choosing this community was the type of children's programs it offered...most importantly the Early French Immersion Program.

I am a product of many school systems in Canada and the US and have also lived abroad. I studied linguistics for a year in University and spent many years studying both French and Spanish in Elementary and Secondary School. I was introduced to French in grade 4 in Ontario and continued with French as a second language until I graduated from a Private Secondary School in Texas where I also studied Spanish for 2 years. I can tell you from personal experience that immersion in a second language is a key to success and absorption. After studying French for almost 10 years I was barely able to carry a basic conversation due to the fact that I never had a chance to use the French I was learning. On the other hand, I spent a summer in Honduras after one year of studying Spanish in that Texas High School, and considered myself bilingual after that summer being that I had to speak Spanish on a daily basis exist! Book learning a language and living a language are two very different experiences. Additionally, being immersed in a language at a young age is proven invaluable as retention for a second language is at its' peak between the ages of 3 and 6.

I also want you to know that I am one of those parents who stood in line at 6:45 AM many years ago to ensure my son had a spot in the program. I feel very strongly that if the decision hadn't have been made to move to a draw for positions in the kindergarten classes, you would still find a line up outside of APES on registration day!

I implore you to heed the call of the community and push to continue the Early French Immersion Program here in Golden. The call to arms is overwhelming, the community has spoken and will back that voice up with action in anyway necessary in the future to ensure the program remains intact. We all want nothing more than a **STRONG** French Immersion Program here in Golden...a **STRONG** Early French Immersion Program.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of my position.

Sincerely,

Dear Ms. Miller,

Earlier this week, the GSS PAC met for our monthly meeting. The French Program Discussion was on the Agenda. Opinions, suggestions and frustrations were shared and it was decided that, as President of the Parent Advisory Committee, I must write to you.

The PAC at GSS has parents in it who have children in both the French and English programs. In order for us not to have involved our personal bias', I suggested that we imagine that GSS was not an English/French school but perhaps an English/Sports school. If it was announced that the Sports program was being looked at and a decision for change suddenly being made, what would we ask for??

On behalf of the Golden Secondary School Parent Advisory, regarding the French Program I am asking two things:

We want to have more time to look at and understand the whatever difficulties exist with the current French Immersion Program. We want at least one year before any changes are made.

We want to be part of the solution. We are the Advisory. Our job is to advise the Administration. This is our advice.

Until we are guaranteed time and to be part of the process in a very meaningful way, we cannot offer any suggestions for change. We take this very seriously and want to work with you.

Sincerely yours,

Jane Fearing
President
GSS PAC

Hi Bendina,

I was wondering if it would be possible to have some sort of sign-in sheet (optional names) at the meeting for parents to get an idea of the numbers and ages of the children i.e. current or prospective.

I'm not sure if it is too late to ask these questions before the meeting so I will bring them with me too.

Why is there no mention of French Immersion or the then upcoming French conversation in the recent (past few months) school board meeting minutes or calendar?

What is the projected enrolment for French Immersion Kindergarten in 2010? (Grade 1 siblings alone number ten)

Have the three school planning councils been involved with trying to resolve the issues with attrition?

Thanks,

Dear Ms Miller and Board Members,

I am writing to express some concerns about the issue of French Immersion in the Golden community.

My two grand daughters are part of the English program and their education is vital to me.

As a member of the Golden community for close to 30 years, I know the history of the Immersion program in Golden from its inception until the present day. When I retired, I chose to remain in the community and play my part in trying to make it the kind of community young people would want to live and raise their children in.

When the French Immersion program was introduced, I was supportive of the opportunity for local children to be bi-lingual, however, somewhat concerned with the extreme emotion of some of the advocates, especially when they formed the "Parents for French" group. Over the years, with declining enrolment and changing financial support from the Provincial Government, I have seen problems emerge that in one way or another have had a serious impact on the rest of the children in the system. As these problems have emerged, the "Parents for French" have become even more fierce in their defence of the program especially if any change is suggested. There has been no equivalent organization of parents, or suggestion that there should be, for advocacy of children in the English program. Thank goodness in a way, because there would have been even more inflamed emotions, than what we are witnessing now. That being said, there is an issue of inequality, that many of the parents of children in the English program are now feeling.

For years , in GSS, there has been concern expressed by parents and teachers in the regular English program, about the small size of the French Immersion classes compared to the size of theirs (at times 16 vs 30) and the obvious advantage of more access and attention from the teachers, and the comparative workload for these teachers. As time went on, it became looked upon like a private school within the regular school system, and as such bragged about by some of the parents of students in the Immersion program. Of concern to me too, was the number of students dropping out of the Immersion program and encountering serious problems with their English skills, that came to impede their success. Parents were clamouring to get their children into French Immersion kindergarten and keep them in the program through the early grades, irrespective of whether it was the right place for their child to be. Now, many young parents are saying openly that they have put their children in French Immersion because they don't want them in a classroom with children who have behaviour and learning problems. One child made a comment to

another that “he was in Immersion because his parents didn't want him in a classroom with the brain dead kid”, an autistic child. You know, and I know, that this kind of appalling comment comes from the parents. What has happened to integration in the French Immersion classrooms, an accepted public school policy for many years now ? Where is the equal opportunity for those in the classroom where there are a significant number of behavioural and learning problems, that have to be addressed by the teacher ? Where is the learning of tolerance and empathy for those with these problems, when they are not present in their classes, or are moved out during the year ?

Over the years, this has led more and more to an attitude among the French Immersion parents that the intelligent and superior children go into the Immersion program and they wouldn't want their child in the English program, because it is inferior. A comment was heard from a professional, intelligent parent, that “children in the French program even look more intelligent”. With that attitude has come a profound sense of entitlement, irrespective of any negative effect it has on the rest of the system.

With many parents with that attitude, it has become adopted by their children to the detriment of the schools and the community. My grand daughter went to the beach at the Mitten Lake campsite in the summer, where some girls her age were playing and returned shortly after with the comment, that they were 'French' and wouldn't play with her. At Alexander Park children from the two programs,

with a few exceptions, are not intermingling at recess or lunchtime. Children, my youngest grand daughter attended playschool with and were good friends with, don't play together any more because they are in the different programs. My two other grand daughters in Vancouver are in a French Immersion program and none of this kind of thing is happening, so I know it doesn't have to be this way here.

This should have been addressed a long time ago before it got to this point. In the school as a whole the differentness should have been de-emphasized and many more things developed to integrate the two groups. Within the classrooms, understanding and tolerance deliberately emphasized, to break down the sense of superiority exhibited by too many children in the French program. As adults and educators we have a responsibility to do this.

Within the community now, because change has been proposed, the labels have been applied and hard positions taken. I have talked to many, particularly those who have children in the French program,

pointing out facts and avoiding the emotions. Some have been absolutely closed minded, saying the program must continue as is, irrespective of the effect on any others in the system, while others have realized that in fairness there has to be some change. There is way too much emotion involved, a manifestation of that sense of entitlement. My daughter is now noticing that some people who were previously friendly towards her because of their children

being the same age, will not speak to her now. She has been labelled anti-French and a racist, a label totally inappropriate, when she worked and lived overseas in different cultures for 6 years. Too many of the parents of children in the French program are behaving inappropriately and are in no way a model for their children.

The community has become divided, something that is particularly damaging in one this size. None of this existed before the Immersion Program, and for several years after its inception, but now there is a very noticeable “us” versus “them”. It has come to the point where some young parents of children in the English program are considering moving from Golden, to one where they will have more of an equal opportunity.

Change has to come, in what form that has yet to be determined, but whatever it is there also has to come with it some proactive action within the schools and amongst parents, to breakdown the negative attitudes that have been allowed to develop over the years, through inaction. All parents want themselves and their children to be in a healthy community.

Thank you for your attention.

Dear Bendina,

I would like to thank you for your response to my letter of Feb.19/10. I am pleased to hear there will be an external review. I have a few comments regarding the review scheduled to take place and one that took place previously.

I have been reviewing the "French Immersion Program Impact Review" conducted February–March 1995 by Dr. Carolyn M. Shelds and Dr. Linda Rossler for Golden School District. I am sure you are familiar with this paper. There are some aspects of that review that I feel would be best not repeated in the new one.

1. Although it was called an Impact Review, it seemed much of it was taken up with how to improve the FI program. It seemed the Impact was much to do with how successfully the program was working, how French skills were being displayed and not really how the implementation of FI was actually impacting the English program.

2. In the list of the Procedures followed, it stated "spent two days in Golden, visiting the three French Immersion programs and schools, observing students.....and interviewing teachers and administrators of the French Immersion programs," I felt at the time, and still do, that only interviewing the people involved in the FI stream would **not** provide any information on the "impact" on the English program.

3. I found this section interesting. "In every case, the evaluator and the district personnel have tried to act in a fair and objective fashion and to present the data accurately and without personal bias. "**Tried to act**", I should think that in an impartial review they should be stating that they **did in fact act** in a fair and objective fashion.

4. The three districts that were used to draw comparisons from were all larger than GSS.

5. Attrition was minimally addressed and only supplied data from 3 years, 1992–94.

6. I felt the section addressing "Enrolment Predictions" was particularly ridiculous. They based the predictions on questions asked grade 6 & 7 students, 'would they continue in FI until grade 12?' I don't feel that is very solid ground for a prediction of outcomes.

7. There was a section on Academic Achievement which showed that the FI students get very good grades in high school. Not surprising after years of

small classes, and no interruptions from other children with learning or social issues.

The problems and dynamics in English program classrooms due to an overload of children with "behavioural and learning" problems must be looked at closely. The teachers of those children must be listened to. They have been put in an awkward and frustrating position. It seems impossible that they can deliver the quality of education that the FI program can, under those circumstances. The whole picture must be addressed and not affected or influenced by the strong FI lobby. I read in yesterday's paper that Laurie Dalzell is requesting a representative from Parents for French to be present at the review. I would hope that in an external and most necessarily an impartial review, this request will be denied.

In closing I would again state that a strong French program from 6-12 for **all** students would be the most equitable and favourable.

Dear Bendina,

I did not attend the two meetings in Golden since I believed that there would be a level of emotionalism and aggression that would prevent an honest discussion of all aspects of the question of FI. I remember too well the community discussions when the FI program was being proposed. I did not care to be the object of hostility, nor did I want to take the chance that that hostility would be expressed toward my child's family. I think the Board should consider that many parents and teachers are intimidated by that level of hostility and choose not to speak publicly. Contrary to what the organized, pro-FI speakers presented, there is a very strong concern about the impact of the FI program and the tactics used by its proponents.

The impact of the FI program was felt from its inception at NES and CVES, since both schools lost students who would have attended the neighbourhood school. As the years progressed and enrolment declined both schools had a very high percentage of children with special needs and challenges. In individual classes there have been children with Asberger's, Tourette's, severe behavioural issues, ADHD, children with CP with mild and moderate mental impairment, many children with learning disabilities, etc. I know this is true for the English classes in the schools in town. Is it possible to demonstrate on a chart or graph the number of children with special needs such as these who are present in the English and FI classes at each grade level? I have heard that in the two weeks since this "conversation" some FI teachers are beginning to be more willing to accept children with difficulties. But, would that be the optimal learning environment for those children?

I am disturbed by the lack of concern demonstrated by the proponents of the early FI program for any of the other students in our schools. The mantra of "the program works, don't fix it" can't hide the problems that do exist. Why do children, excluding those whose parents move, leave the program? In my experience some children are so unhappy that their parents reconsider and place them in the English program, some children are struggling and their parents recognize this, some parents compare the two programs and prefer the activities in the English program and many children with behavioural or learning challenges are "encouraged" to leave by the FI teachers in "consultation" with

parents and other professionals. I have also had parents of very "successful" FI students tell me that every night they teach their children to read in English. When children leave the FI program because they are struggling, they join an English class but they have missed months or years of basic language learning, conversation and instruction. This is a very difficult transition for the struggling student and requires extra time and effort from the classroom teacher, who probably already has many children in the classroom needing extra support. Why aren't the proponents of early FI expressing concern for these students? Class-composition affects the learning environment of all children in the class and I believe that all classes within a school should include children from all socio-economic groups, children who excel academically and children with special needs who require extra support. I believe that we have created a "private" school for some students within the public system.

I am disturbed by the elitism that has been present since the inception of the program and continues unabated today. Usually it is not so openly expressed or so blatant as the letter writer who noted that "the French Immersion parents are our community leaders and take much more active roles in our community than the parents of the English track." However, this attitude is expressed by pressuring professionals with children to enrol their children in French immersion, by statements that children in FI come from better families, by stressing how few behaviour problems or learning problems there are in the FI classes when attempting to persuade parents to enrol their children and unfortunately, in some cases, by ending friendships between children when children enter the English program.

I am disturbed by the "school within a school", which operates behind closed doors. I remember that when the program was moved to APES there was the request for two recess times so the FI children would speak only French at recess and the hope that the FI program would have its own section of the school. My grandchildren, Grade (--) and Grade (--), have learned acceptance, kindness and understanding by working with children with physical and mental challenges. Unfortunately, they don't know their fellow schoolmates who are in FI since they never interact. The child in Grade (--) knows 2 FI students (from sports); the child in Grade (--) doesn't know any. What a shame that learning a language takes precedence over meeting and interacting with other children their age!

My two grandchildren love school, are excellent readers and have developed a strong foundation on which to build further skills. I anticipate the same from the child who is already excited about entering kindergarten next year. What a shame that since their parents chose English they won't have an opportunity to learn French until Grade 5. Surely there could be a program where all children are included and work and learn together, where inclusiveness is appreciated and practised in every classroom and where all children, no matter what their background, have an opportunity to learn a second language. That is what I support, not the program as it currently exists.

We live in a small rural district with declining enrolment. My own children benefited from two programs that have been eliminated, elementary band and the elementary enrichment program. Library services and services for children with special needs have been cut as enrolment and funding have declined. I believe that early FI can no longer avoid the scrutiny given to other programs.

I know the Board has a difficult task ahead. I hope the review will be truly independent and will consider what is best for all the students in Golden as we look ahead to a further decline in school enrolment.

Respectfully