

## **Busing and Transportation Assistance Issue**

How to curtail cuts that would affect busing and transportation assistance in particular.

French Immersion out of catchment busing and transportation assistance may be cancelled

### **Who is CPF**

CPF believes in a bilingual Canada where young Canadians have the opportunity to learn both of Canada's official languages, English and French. We believe every child has the right to become a bilingual citizen through French second language programs such as the French Immersion and Core French.

CPF fulfills three main functions: Firstly, to offer opportunities for our students to be exposed to and use French outside the classroom; secondly, to provide support, information and resources to parents whose children are in the French Immersion or Core French programs; and to provide advocacy and support for FSL education. Both independently and through collaboration with like-minded organizations, CPF promotes quality FSL education at national and provincial/territorial levels. CPF works with teachers, principals, trustees and school boards to promote and improve FSL education.

### **French Immersion in British Columbia = current stats here**

Ex. French Second Language education is a BC and Canadian success story. 2001-02 was a record year for French Immersion in BC with some 31,990 students enrolled across our province. This represents an increase of 854 students over the previous year (also a record year), and an increase of 1,576 students, or 4% over two years. These increases in French Immersion enrolment have taken place while the overall student population in BC has dropped. Most significantly, the number of French Immersion students in Kindergarten and Grade 1, the most important entry points for FI programs, has increased by 9% over the past two years from 6,216 to 6,807.

On Vancouver Island, Campbell River has the highest per capita rate of growth in its French Immersion program than any other school district in BC. Saanich, District 63, has the lowest attrition rate in BC. Victoria has thriving Early and Late French Immersion programs. Over the past three years, the Nanaimo-Ladysmith School District French Immersion program has grown 12.4%, putting it in the top 10 fastest growing areas in BC.

Comox Valley has an excellent French Immersion program. The success of this program is a tribute to the efforts of School District 71 - teachers, administrators and board members - and the work of the Comox-Courtenay Chapter of Canadian Parents for French.

In School District 71, in spite of overall declining enrolment, the French Immersion program is growing. According to the Ministry of Education website, in the past year French Immersion enrolment grew by 3.2% in this district. That doesn't sound like a big number but it means the difference of 621 students in FI in 2001/2002, as compared to 641 students this year. 20 students is the equivalent of a full Kindergarten class. Clearly, this demonstrates growing interest and support in French Immersion from this community. And the Comox Valley School District isn't alone. There are 6,267 students enrolled in French Immersion programs on Vancouver Island. That's a 10% increase over the past three years.

Why is FI so successful in School District 71? The program has received strong and ongoing support from the district office. We have terrific teachers and students. And you offer busing to French Immersion students, a fact that enhances access in particular for single parents and working families.

We appreciate that these are difficult financial times for School Districts. As a result, the Comox Valley School District is considering cutting bus service and transportation assistance for French Immersion students this fall. We ask the District not to adopt to cut this service and to work with the Comox-Courtenay Chapter of CPF and the affected PACs to assess the alternatives in the coming year.

### **4. Busing Students in Comox Valley - A Key Element of Program Success**

Comox Valley is one of 10 districts across BC that allows French Immersion students to access its school busing system. As an optional program, French Immersion students are not legally entitled to access this service. However, offering busing has been a key element of the FI program's success in the community.

Indeed, as a group, the districts that continue to offer busing from the Rocky Mountains to the Saanich Peninsula, generally have a higher than average enrolment and a lower than average attrition rate. In addition, with busing, districts are able to centralize

middle school and secondary school programs at one location, a cost-efficient approach for the district that helps support a broader, more dynamic educational climate.

Early French Immersion (EFI) is offered at two locations from K-6 (Ecole Puntledge Park and Ecole Robb Road); one Middle School location (Aspen Park Middle School) and one Secondary location (Highland Secondary).

## 5. Proposed Cancellation of French Immersion Busing and Transportation Assistance

The purpose of this presentation is to address the proposed cancellation of busing to French Immersion students and transportation assistance to families of students who do not live within the school catchment zone. Currently French Immersion students have been able to access busing from all areas of the school district. If not on a bus route, parents have had the option of applying for transportation assistance.

First, what is the reason for the proposed cancellation? The Ministry of Education allots \$2.1 million to this district for transportation costs. This amount has been frozen for three years - and this is Year One. Proposed cuts include \$40,000 for French Immersion busing and \$60,000 for Transportation Assistance to French Immersion students. While other areas have been targeted for cuts, these are the two on which we will focus.

\$100,000 is a very tantalizing amount that theoretically could be applied to deficit areas in the school district budget. While that might bring great short term gains, it could have devastating repercussions down the road.

Firstly, it is my understanding that using those funds for areas other than transportation could lead to losing the funds completely at the end of the 3-year budget cycle. That means \$2.1 million or a figure in that range could leave the district permanently starting in 2005/2006.

Second, and more important for parents of children in the French Immersion program, this cut could lead to the long term erosion of a highly successful program.

Take busing and transportation assistance out of the equation and what are your options?

- If you don't live close to the French Immersion school, you might have to consider pulling your child from there and enrolling him in the nearest catchment school. Your child would then be deprived of a full immersion education, and would not be able to graduate with the bilingual Dogwood.
- If students were pulled out of French Immersion, the district could lose significant federal funding. \*Please [refer to chart to see federal funding guidelines](#).
- Not only that, but the Immersion schools could lose their critical mass with classes becoming too small to be sustainable. Many parents of preschoolers, who were considering French Immersion for their children, would think twice.

The actual number of French Immersion students using bus service and transportation assistance had not been determined at the time this brief was being prepared although it is estimated that 250 - 270 students would be affected by the bus cancellation alone. Let's be conservative and say that 100 cars would bring them to school and pick them up at the end of the day. Imagine the increased traffic at the drop-off zones. Not only would it be unhealthy for the environment, it would be downright dangerous for the students. And this option could open a whole new dilemma by requiring more paid personnel to monitor the school zones.

Perhaps we should encourage our kids to walk or ride their bikes - a healthy idea - or is it? This is a rural community where bike paths and sidewalks are rare or non-existent. Lack of enforcement of the speed limit raises the potential for accidents involving students. This option needs careful scrutiny.

When both parents work, or when it's a single parent household, getting your child to school takes on a whole new meaning. Carpooling becomes problematic, especially with inflexible working hours, and arrangements need to be made for after school care, adding further financial burden. In addition, car pooling is not an attractive option for some parents who are concerned about liability issues. Even ICBC has stated that it is statistically safer to travel by bus than by car.

Buses keep students of all ages on a schedule. Take away that routine and students will have more unsupervised time on their hands to hang out after hours at the schools, in parks, on the streets where they may encounter unsavory characters.

## 6. Solutions

So, what can we do?

Parents in this community would like to have the opportunity to look at options and be part of the decision-making process. If the majority of parents are passionate about keeping the school buses running, better to make it sustainable than cut it. Once the cuts are made, it would be unrealistic to expect them to be rescinded down the road.

There is currently a bus running for Francophone students attending Robb Road School. It would be worthwhile to look into collaboration between the Comox Valley School Board and the Francophone School Board whereby the Francophone school bus would run with a full complement of students.

I am not sure of the hours the French Immersion schools keep, but one way to cut costs is to stagger start and finish times at the schools so that fewer buses are required. For example, once the elementary children have been dropped off in the morning, the bus is then recycled to take the middle and secondary students to school.

Some parents polled are not adverse to paying a user fee so that the bus service can be maintained. It is my understanding that the School Board can levy a Transportation Fee on all students, whether they use the bus or not, or the board is also permitted to levy a fee on only those who use the bus.

Transportation Assistance is also vital to many families. It would be worth exploring the possibility of having incentives for parents who carpool 3 or more children, or have the assistance based on financial need only.

### Conclusion

In closing, we ask that you take a close look at the long term effects of these proposed cuts and ensure that you won't be worse off in the long run.

Transportation is the key element that ensures equality of access to this extraordinary program of choice. Please consider our concerns. We are committed to working together with all partners in the budget and transportation committees. We are confident a fair and equitable solution to the transportation dilemma can be found.

Thank you for your time.

### \* Federal Grants that Districts Receive Automatically 2002-2003

1. **Learning Assistance Grants to small districts/small programs**
  - if the total district enrollment of French Immersion is less than 250 Full Time Equivalents (FTE's) the District will receive \$10,500 to assist students experiencing significant learning difficulties in one or more areas.
2. **Library Grants**
  - designed to provide library purchases of French language materials for schools with French Immersion programs.
3. **Revitalization Grant**
  - specifically for French Immersion issues. The decision of how these funds will be applied is District's decision in consultation with teachers parents. This grant is targeted to help districts with small enrolment in French Immersion.

300 FTEs or less	\$14,000	601-900 FTEs	\$7,000
301-400 FTEs	\$12,000	901-1,000 FTEs	\$6,000
401-500 FTEs	\$10,000	1,001 or more FTEs	\$5,000
501-600 FTEs	\$8,000		

4. **Learning Resources Grant**

- o assist districts in the higher cost of buying French resources for students in French Immersion programs.

Regular	K-7	\$11.85 per FTE
	8-12	\$23.60 per FTE
Growth (based on FTE enrollment increases as compared with previous year):		
	K-7	\$25.00 per FTE
	8-12	\$50.00 per FTE

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5. **Teacher in Service Grants**

- o supports teacher in-service and program implementation for Core French and French Immersion programs.

\$2,699 for more than 10 FTEs in the district \$2,699  
 \$0.8925 additional per FTE for more than 2570 FTEs

6. **Supply Grants**

- o funds paid to districts for maintenance of French programs based on actual enrollments (FTEs) in the various French programs. (see chart below)

7. **Growth Grant**

- o funding for growth is based on the French programs FTE enrollment increases in the district compared with the previous year.

	SUPPLY GRANT	SUPPLY GRANT
<b>Immersion</b>		
Primary	\$48.30	\$394.80
Grades 4 - 7	\$67.20	\$394.80
Grades 8 - 10	\$94.50	\$1,436.40
Grades 11 - 12	\$94.50	\$1,795.50
<b>Core French</b>		
K - Grade 12	\$3.15	

**Sources**

1. Canadian Parents for French - 2nd Annual Report on the "[The State of French Second Language Education in Canada](http://www.cpf.ca)", October 2002 ([www.cpf.ca](http://www.cpf.ca))
2. CPF Ontario - "[Study of Transportation to French Immersion and Extended French Programs in Ontario School Boards](http://www.cpfont.on.ca)", June 2001 ([www.cpfont.on.ca](http://www.cpfont.on.ca))
3. CPF Saanich - "[Presentation To Saanich School Board on Busing Issue](http://www.cpf.bc.ca)" - November 2002 ([www.cpf.bc.ca](http://www.cpf.bc.ca))
4. BC Ministry of Education enrolment statistics ([www.bced.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca))
5. BC Ministry of Education French Funding Guide ([www.bced.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca))

