



LIKE!

CPF PARENTS TAKE TO SOCIAL MEDIA TO ENGAGE PARENT COMMUNITY

By Glyn Lewis, Executive Director, CPF BC & Yukon

Parents are taking to Facebook to educate, engage, support, and mobilize other French Immersion parents – with great success. A group of parent volunteers in Chilliwack, BC, for example, have created a Facebook page to drum up support for the creation of a new Early French Immersion program.

The absence of an Early French Immersion (EFI) program in Chilliwack has meant that students who wish to enroll in the program must travel outside their school district to attend classes in Abbotsford, a 30-minute drive away. Because these social-media-savvy parents were successful, the doors to a new EFI program will open in Chilliwack for kindergarten and grade 1 students starting September 2014.

By inviting local supporters of French-language instruction to “like” their “Early French Immersion in Chilliwack” Facebook page, and by posting regular and interesting content or “status updates”, their page has become a large and active forum for discussion in their local parent community. Their Facebook page currently has 164 “likes” or followers.

During a Chilliwack School District meeting where trustees debated the new French Immersion program, a savvy parent used their Facebook page to post regular updates and share feedback, almost in real time. Consequently, everyone who was not able to attend this important meeting in person was still able to follow the meeting’s proceedings – via the EFI in Chilliwack Facebook page – and even chat with other parents!

This is the first time in the 43-year history of French Immersion in BC that parents have led a social-media-based campaign in order to educate, connect, and engage other parents in lobbying school trustees for the creation of a new program.

In a similar vein, the CPF Saanich Chapter has been using its Facebook page to keep parents abreast of the latest news and events in their community. The page administrators post updates from their school district, information about upcoming FSL competitions (like Concours), FSL opportunities and CPF volunteer opportunities with their Chapter. It's also proven to be an effective peer-networking tool for parents looking for resources and strategies to support their children with their homework, summer camp ideas, and tutoring opportunities.



Needless to say, this is breaking new ground for the way we organize and engage the parent community. For 33 years, French Immersion parents in BC and Yukon have used telephone trees, newsletters, and good ol' fashioned living room meetings to spread the word and to coordinate initiatives.

These parents in Chilliwack and Saanich – perhaps following in the footsteps of their children – are participating in the evolution of these means of communication and dialogue. Together they are ushering in a new and exciting age of parent engagement and involvement using the latest social media platforms.

Kim Currie, who manages the CPF Saanich Facebook page, says that one of the main strengths of using Facebook for parent engagement within CPF is the visual presence it creates:

“One parent has told me that seeing our CPF Saanich posts pop up every few days on their news feed has created a real awareness that we are out there and active within the community.” Another benefit, Kim says, *“is the ability to provide a variety of concise information in a timely manner and use Facebook’s ‘Insights’ feature to determine which pieces of communication spark curiosity and interest in our community.”*

After two years of organizing, lobbying, and creating awareness by the CPF Chilliwack Chapter, on May 27th, 2013 the Chilliwack School Board relented and agreed to create an Early French Immersion program at the earliest possible date. This was an incredible success for Chilliwack families who – despite considerable resistance by some School Trustees – never gave up in their efforts to bring French Immersion to young students in their community. ■

#French Is...

#French Is, CPF National’s first social media campaign, engages Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube users in a conversation about what *French Is* to them. In addition to providing this forum, the campaign features a YouTube video, and posts a “word of the day”.

The response to **#French Is** has surpassed everyone’s expectations; both the CPF National’s Facebook page “likes” and its Twitter followers have nearly doubled since the campaign began in February.

Like us on Facebook, follow us on Twitter, and let us know what #French Is to you.