
Administrative Memorandum

Regular Board Meeting

Date: September 19, 2018
Topic: French Immersion Motion
Submitted by: Jordan Tinney, Superintendent of Schools/CEO

Background:

The Board of Education and our community value flexibility in school choice. By far, our most popular program of choice is French Immersion with over 3000 students enrolled. We are continually challenged with how to meet the demand for French Immersion in the context of our rapidly growing district.

In districts with declining enrolment, the expansion of French Immersion is a matter of teacher recruitment and of determining the proper location. When you have space in your schools, creating new programs is a supply, demand and sustainability issue. In Surrey, our rapid growth means the context is much different. With over 7000 students in portables, the ability for us to find and create the space for expansion of a program of choice means that we must displace neighbourhood students in order to make room for French Immersion. In some cases, we also end up moving French Immersion programs which creates instability for these families as our district grows and expands. These are difficult decisions. We have restricted boundaries to keep French Immersion in place at the expense of local students and we have moved French Immersion to make space for local students which creates uncertainty for French Immersion. All these decisions are related to space and growth.

We are also challenged by our lottery system. Any lottery system suggests to the public that all participants are on equal footing. This is not the case in French Immersion since those families who win the lottery once, are guaranteed space for any future siblings. This means that, in some cases, more than half of the “available” new kindergarten spaces are guaranteed to siblings of families who already are in the school and so the number of available spaces is reduced automatically before the lottery begins. This does not increase the diversity of French Immersion, and it does not mean that our lottery serves all well. Our policy on lotteries (which applies to other programs as well) is intended to support keeping families together since it would otherwise divide families to have one child in French Immersion and another in a separate school.

In the end, we are still faced with the Board’s desire to increase availability of French Immersion which is fundamentally hampered by our lack of capital and school space. We want to keep families together, we do not want to displace local neighbourhood children and we want to provide more opportunities for French Immersion for all. To do this, we must be able to consider our overall Capital Plan and potential new opportunities.

French Immersion Motion

We have significant new capital in our plans and we have new school approvals in Clayton (Maddaugh Road and Regent Road), and Site 206 (167th and 23rd Grandview). At the top of our Capital Plan is a new school in Sunnyside Heights (165a and 20th), along with a new school in South Newton/Sullivan. If we get approval for our top priority elementary schools in our plan, in addition to the 3 already underway, these 5 schools represent close to 3000 elementary spaces.

Currently we have secondary French Immersion programs at École Panorama Ridge, École Kwantlen Park, École Earl Marriott and École Salish, in addition to the grade 12s graduating this year from École Lord Tweedsmuir. With the approval of the addition at Sullivan Heights Secondary (700 seats) and with the approval of a new secondary at Grandview Heights (1500 seats), in addition to the newly opened École Salish Secondary (1500 seats), we are better able to consider our balance of secondary French Immersion populations across the district.

Our Board is committed to French Immersion and has worked hard to obtain the capital that Surrey needs. The time is ripe for us to once again look at the possibilities that exist and to meet the needs and demand of our community by exploring the long range options for expansion of French Immersion.

It is recommended:

THAT staff explore the possibilities of the expansion of French Immersion in the context of our new capital announcements and to report back to the Board of Education by March 31, 2019.
