



Halton District School Board

Report Number 16096
Date: May 27, 2016

FOR DECISION

TO: The Chair and Members of the
Halton District School Board

FROM: David Boag, Associate Director
Stuart Miller, Director of Education

RE: Program Viability of Elementary English and French Programming

Warrant:

The Program Viability Committee was created as per Board motion M15-0043 to study and make recommendations with respect to English and French programming viability in Halton District School Board elementary schools. The Program Viability Committee undertook this work with the assumption that all schools with a primary division will have implemented Primary Core French by 2017/2018 as per Board motion. This report provides an update on the work of the Program Viability Committee and provides a recommendation to improve program viability in both English and French programs.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. *Be it resolved that the Halton District School Board adopt Option 6, Grade 2 Entry to the French Immersion program at 100% intensity in existing single and dual track schools, as outlined in Report 16096.*
 2. *Be it resolved that this model begin in Grade 2 of school year 2018/19. Entry into Grade 1 of our current FI model will cease after the 2016/17 school year and the 2017/18 Grade 1 cohort will be English program only.*
 3. *Be it resolved that students enrolled in our current FI model be grand parented and allowed to complete elementary school in the current model.*
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Background:

High uptake into French Immersion (FI) programs in the Halton District School Board has created issues with program viability in both English and French programs in elementary schools. The two key challenges identified as a result of the high FI uptake are:

1. Challenges keeping up with the hiring of qualified and high quality French teachers. This has been a challenge that has resulted in hiring difficulties, French teacher vacancies needing to be re-posted because of lack of suitable candidates and subsequently extended periods of time with a non-French speaking supply teacher in class while the hiring process continues. This challenge persists despite constant attention being directed to the Board's French teacher recruitment process. Challenges with French teacher recruitment were presented to Trustees in Board Report 16001.
2. Small English cohorts exist in many dual track (both English and French Immersion) schools because of the high uptake of students entering grade 1 French Immersion from kindergarten. The resulting small English cohorts, in many schools less than 15 students, make class building a challenge. In many cases combined grade classes are required and often these classes are smaller than typical classes. This is problematic because these cohorts of students are so small, the students are likely to remain with the exact same group of students through much of their time in elementary school with less likelihood of being mixed from year to year with other same age peers. This limits opportunities for social interactions with a larger number of peers as typically afforded in most other schools. In addition, it is not cost effective to run classes that are significantly smaller than our expected class sizes and so triple grade classes are sometimes considered.

The Program Viability Committee was initiated in March 2015 to study these two challenges and make recommendations to improve viability of both the English and French Programs. Board Report 15081 outlined the initial work of the Program Viability Committee, including the potential options to be shared with the community for feedback. These options were developed from a list of 14 different scenarios initially considered by the committee. Of these, four options were chosen to share with stakeholders, as it was felt that a manageable number of options were required for stakeholders to consider and respond to. The four options chosen would garner specific feedback on the issues of entry (early entry vs mid entry), school type (dual vs single track schools) and intensity (% of instruction in French language) and capping of enrolment as well as any other suggestions or alternatives stakeholders might wish to offer.

Board Report 15114 outlined timelines and a plan for community consultation and feedback from a variety of stakeholders. This consultation consisted of community information nights in each region of Halton in the fall of 2015, followed by the opportunity for input from the following stakeholder groups: parents/guardians and the general public, staff, students, School Councils and the Special Education Advisory Committee. In addition, parent feedback was obtained through a variety of Focus Groups held in each Halton community.

At the Feb 3, 2016 Board Meeting, Report 16019 was shared to provide an update on the various stakeholder consultations, as well to provide information on the implementation of Primary Core French. Stakeholder consultations were well underway at the time of this report and finished the third week of March. The update for Primary Core French Implementation showed that the board is currently in its 2nd year of implementation with 39 schools currently offering Primary Core French. An additional 14 schools are scheduled to begin Primary Core French in 2016/17 and the remaining 28 schools will follow in 2017/18, although this remains a considerable challenge.

Program Viability Committee Mandate:

The PVC was tasked with studying and making recommendations to address the challenges identified above. While the French Immersion model was a significant focus, it was clear that the work of this committee was to ensure viability in both English and French programs. The committee identified three key objectives:

- Maintain efficient and effective English and French program streams
- Ensure students in both streams have equitable access to quality programming
- Ensure the sustainability of both program streams

In addition, the PVC established criteria to measure English and French program viability:

- Viable student enrolment in English and FI programs within each school and/or across the system
- Sufficient number of highly skilled teachers to staff elementary (and secondary) English and French programs across the system
- Distribution of overall enrolment across schools to maximize quality
- Accommodation of students in permanent school facilities and minimal use of portable classrooms for optimal learning experiences for all students
- Reduce need for triple-grading and/or combined classes
- Stable, long-term boundaries for schools and programs with sufficient resources to support learning for all students
- Fiscal responsibilities (e.g., transportation, program materials)
- Minimize the travel distance for students in English and French Immersion programs

These objectives and the identified criteria for program viability helped direct and steer the work of the Program Viability Committee.

Stakeholder Feedback:

A key mandate of the Program Viability Committee was to consult a full range of stakeholders in order to gather information and opinions on English and French language program viability in the Halton District School Board. Feedback was sought from a breadth of stakeholder sources representing a variety of perspectives.

In general, feedback was centred around four proposed options:

- **Option 1:** Grade 1 (early) French immersion remains a 50% French and 50% English delivery model, but entry to French Immersion will be capped (method of capping to be determined at a later date).
- **Option 2:** Grade 1 (early) French Immersion model remains at 50% French and 50% English, however, all French Immersion programs will be delivered in single track French Immersion schools. French Immersion will be phased out of dual track schools and no new dual track schools will be considered. The location of the single track schools will be determined at a later date.
- **Option 3:** French Immersion will commence at a later entry point (mid entry); Grade 4. This will result in the delivery model of French Immersion moving from a 50% model to at least an 80% French Immersion model. In addition, the delivery of French Immersion will occur in dual track schools only.
- **Option 4:** French Immersion will commence at a later entry point (mid entry); Grade 4. This will result in the delivery model of French Immersion moving from a 50% model to at least an 80% French Immersion model. In addition the delivery of French Immersion will occur in single track FI schools only.

While these four options were meant to highlight issues for consideration such as capping, intensity of French language instruction, school type (single vs dual track) and entry point, it was made clear that these 4 options were not the only options that could be considered. Hybrid options, or new options, would be considered as part of the ongoing feedback, discussion and analysis. It was also made clear to stakeholders that this was not a “vote” for an option and due consideration would be given to stakeholder feedback, research and other Halton specific factors such as our current FI model, Primary Core French implementation, potential boundary reviews, staffing, population growth, etc...

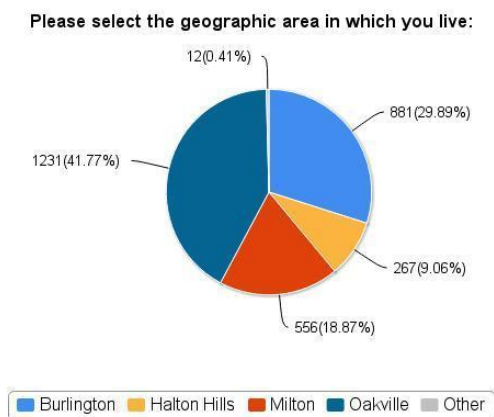
All data, perspectives and opinions were considered in concert by the Program Viability Committee from March 2015 to April 2016 and were used to shape the direction of the Program Viability recommendations moving forward. Feedback from each of the consultation options that follow were all considered.

Public Feedback

Using input from several areas of the HDSB organization including Planning, Communications, Research and School Programs departments, a feedback form was created to capture valuable demographic and opinion-based information regarding the viability of English and French programming in the Halton District School Board. Further to this, the feedback form also provided an opportunity for open comments and suggestions by each individual respondent.

The survey was created using Checkbox software and the invitation was sent via a Syner-email message delivered to all parent/guardians. In addition, a link was posted from the PVC information page on the Halton District School Board website. The feedback form was open from January 6th, 2016 through January 29th, 2016. School principals were also sent a hard copy of the feedback form to distribute to any stakeholders who wished to complete their responses on paper.

There were 2979 complete responses to the feedback form. None of the items on the survey required a mandatory response, so the number of responses varied by item. The first chart shows the response rate by geographic area.



When asked about their child’s grade range, the responses were:

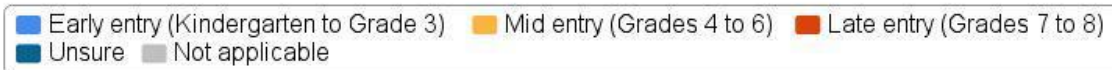
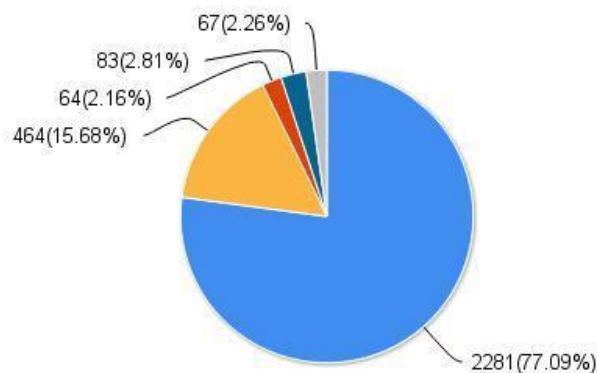
Not yet enrolled in school (e.g., age 0-3.8)	4.19%
Kindergarten (JK or SK)	22.42%
Grades 1 to 3	34.47%
Grades 4 to 6	23.63%
Grades 7 and 8	7.83%
Grades 9 to 12	6.28%
Unsure	0.1%
Not Applicable	1.08%

- Of all of the respondents who indicated that their child was in elementary school:
 - 33.92% were in an English program, 63.66% were in French Immersion and 1.08% were in the extended French program.
- Of all the respondents who indicated that their child was in secondary school:
 - 57.75% were in an English secondary program, while 37.43% were in a French Immersion secondary program and 1.6% were in an Extended French secondary program.
- 1.47% of respondents indicated that their child was an English Language Learner
- 10.39% of respondents indicated that their child had an IEP

The feedback form also contained a series of questions aimed at gathering information about preferences in overall program delivery, specifically in the areas of entry point (early entry versus mid-entry), school model (single-track versus dual-track) and intensity of language.

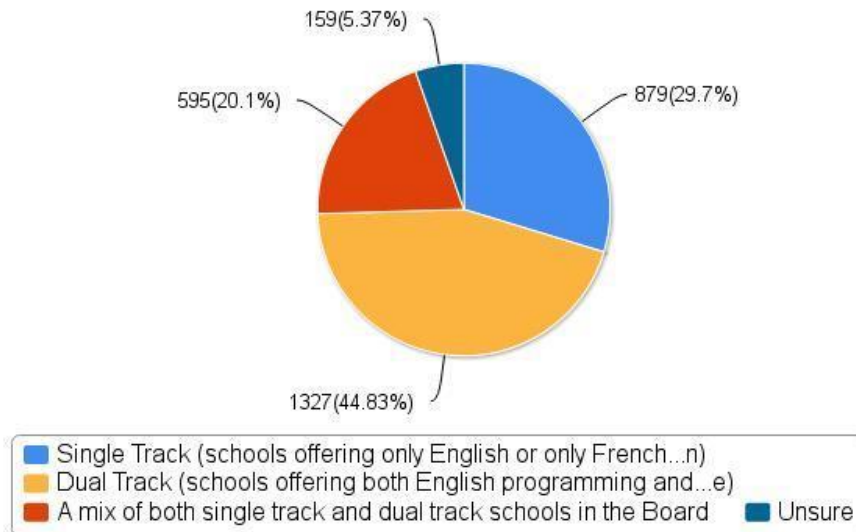
With regards to **entry point** for students into a French Immersion program, the responses from all participants who chose to respond to this item are aggregated below:

In your opinion, when is the best time to begin a French Immersion program?



With regards to preferred **delivery model** for an immersion program, the responses from all participants who chose to respond to this item are aggregated below:

Please indicate your preferred type of school for the delivery of a language program



When asked about preferred **intensity** levels in an early entry French immersion program, the largest portion of respondents (59.6%) indicated that a 50% English and 50% French delivery model was most favourable. When asked about the preferred intensity level of a mid-entry French Immersion program, the largest portion of respondents (49.3%) indicated that less than 80% intensity in French is preferred.

When asked to respond specifically to the idea of enrolment caps;

- (22.8 / 10.9) 33.7% of all those who responded to this item agreed or strongly agreed that caps are an appropriate method of ensuring viability in English and FSL programs, whereas (22.2 / 24.8) 47.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed
- In terms of capping methods, there was 74.2% general disagreement to the statement: ‘Use of a lottery is an appropriate method of determining which school a student will attend for FSL’
- Similarly, there was 60.6% general disagreement to the statement: ‘Use of first-come, first-served is an appropriate method of determining which school a student will attend for FSL programs’

Participants were also invited to provide additional feedback in the form of an unlimited, open text response. What follows are some general conclusions based on trends observed in the final open text opportunity in the feedback form.

These open text responses indicated:

- A very strong early entry voice
- A very strong voice for neighbourhood schools
- A very strong voice against changing the models of current schools with consideration given as to why many families had relocated and/or purchased their homes in the locations where they did
- Many assumptions and some misinformation on the part of the respondents:
 - Several suggestions that the HDSB invest in strong recruiting practices to find high quality, qualified French teachers (e.g., go outside of the province)
 - Several suggestions that the HDSB review academic research around language acquisition
 - Several participants expressed anxiety about their children who are currently enrolled in a program, assuming that any future changes will impact students who are currently enrolled in programs as they exist today

- Though many respondents wondered why the feedback form did not explicitly ask about parent/guardian perceptions of the French Immersion program overall (i.e., why did you enroll your child in a French Immersion program? What is your perception of children who are enrolled in a French Immersion program?), many offered *de facto* opinions on this anyway, beginning several such statements with phrases like “I’ve heard from all of the parents on my street that…” or “all of the parents at my child’s school think that…”
- A strong voice for the status quo
- A strong voice for the rights of parents and students to French Immersion education, often tied to our status in Canada as a bilingual nation
- A strong voice against capping or limiting access in arbitrary or discriminatory ways, often tied to rights of the taxpayer or the rights of all children to an equitable education.

Parent Focus Groups

Ipsos Reid was commissioned to conduct community focus groups between February 16th and March 10th, 2016. Over twelve sessions, 116 people participated from all over Halton [randomly selected from a group of 717 who responded to the initial invitation]. The participants all identified themselves as belonging to one of the following groups: parents of children attending single track English elementary schools; parents of children attending the French track of a dual track elementary school; parents of children attending the English track of a dual track elementary school; parents of children attending a single track French Immersion elementary school and finally, other interested and engaged parent stakeholders.

The focus groups centered discussions and feedback around three key themes: capping or limiting enrolment in a specific program, early versus mid entry into French Immersion and dual-track versus single-track French immersion schools. Feedback on the four options originally presented in the online community feedback form was also sought.

In their detailed presentations of their findings, Ipsos Reid stated that “The main objectives of the focus groups were to provide parents with an opportunity to receive more information on the challenges facing the HDSB and to discuss and deliberate on the options for moving forward”. They also caution that – just as with the online feedback form, “due to the small number of people taking part and the fact that random sampling / statistical weighting have not been applied, the findings cannot be extrapolated to the population at large. This should be borne in mind when ...interpreting the findings”.

Broadly shared among all parents who took part in the focus groups was the idea that capping was the least preferred option. A cap was seen as unfair; it could potentially contribute to what some perceive as “existing elitism” of the French Immersion community and it also could potentially divide communities. Should capping become necessary, however, a first-come, first-served model for selection was seen as a more preferable option, especially in contrast to a lottery selection method.

In terms of **entry point**, the respondents were divided in their preference. Many parents who supported early entry also cited research showing that early exposure to languages is best. Those who supported mid-entry recognized that this option allowed for a more informed decision on the part of both parents and students in terms of learning style and the child’s potential for success.

In terms of the preferred **delivery model**, there was no clear consensus on whether French Immersion should be offered in a single track or dual track setting. Single track schools were seen to be better at fostering a cohesive school community, whereas dual track schools were preferred because they create and support communities around schools.

Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Feedback

During the month of December, Director Miller shared the Program Viability information with SEAC. Associate Director Boag then followed up with an abbreviated presentation at the February 2016 SEAC Meeting. Following this presentation and discussion, SEAC members were asked to discuss the implications of the proposed options for students with special education needs.

Though members recognized the benefit of an early entry program in terms of overall exposure to a second language, several concerns were raised around the implications of early entry to French Immersion for students with special needs. It was felt that immersion programming might complicate or mask the identification of special needs of younger students, which in turn could possibly delay the provision of accommodations and supports for students. The possibility of a middle entry was discussed as a positive option for students who, it was felt, would have the opportunity to develop a stronger foundation in English language skills. Additionally, later entry in French Immersion would provide more time for educators to understand the learner's profile and needs. SEAC members also noted that a middle entry timeline aligns more favourably with the typical timing of psycho-educational assessments.

Dual track schools likely present fewer transitions for students with special education needs (especially those who may transfer from one stream to the other). On the other hand, dual track schools with small cohorts in English programs produce challenges with increased need for combined grades and lower diversity among the peer group. SEAC members also had questions about the consistency in the level of support from Educational Assistants (EAs), Special Education Resource Teachers (SERTs) and other school staff available for support in French in single track French Immersion schools.

Students with special education needs should be supported and encouraged when making a choice to enrol in a French Immersion program, regardless of the delivery model. English is mandatory; French Immersion is optional; Special Education is not optional.

School Council Feedback

During the month of February, 2016, all school administrators were asked to make Program Viability a priority for their agenda at School Council meetings. School principals were provided with a presentation to deliver information on the issues of program viability in Halton. After the presentation, school administrators led their school councils in discussion and feedback gathering so that the PVC could have a summary view of the perspectives of program viability from every elementary and secondary school in the Board.

Seventy elementary and seven Secondary schools provided written feedback. Among all responses, there were an overwhelming number of questions, largely centered on the process and details of any implemented change. Many school councils were in favour of an earlier entry point, as they felt that more and earlier exposure to a language is better for learning. Many elementary school councils also expressed an interest in offering core French, starting in grade 1, at all schools. Though not the majority, a significant number of elementary school councils did support a middle entry French Immersion model. These schools most commonly suggested that a later start in an immersion program was important to ensure that students had the appropriate skills and characteristics required to be successful in a French Immersion program.

Many school councils voiced concern over the attrition rates in French Immersion, particularly by the end of grade 12. In addition, some schools expressed concern that if the current French Immersion delivery model were to be changed too drastically, the Halton District School Board may lose students to our coterminous Board or local private institutions. Overall, school councils of both elementary and secondary schools expressed concern at how changing the current French Immersion model may change the composition of their school communities and neighbourhoods (e.g., students and families changing designated schools).

Student Senate Feedback

During the December Student Senate meeting, Director Miller spoke to the group and presented the issues on program viability. At the February Student Senate Meeting, Associate Director Boag followed up with an abbreviated presentation, similar to the presentations for SEAC and school councils. After the presentation, Student Senators were asked to complete an abbreviated version of the public feedback form in order to gain their opinions regarding program viability in Halton.

Twenty four student senators completed the feedback form. Of these responses, there was a strong preference toward an early entry point for French immersion. Generally, this group also preferred a mix of dual and single track schools for immersion programming, as in the current model, with a slight preference for purely dual track schools over purely single track schools. Half this group disliked the idea of capping enrolment to French Immersion.

Staff Feedback

During the period from February 29th, 2016, through March 13th, 2016, all HDSB staff were invited to provide feedback to the Program Viability Committee via an online feedback form. This form collected some demographic data specific to employee groups and workplace setting; however the remainder of the items were the same as the questions found on the public feedback form.

In all, 181 complete responses to the feedback form were recorded. Of these, 72.9% identified as ETFO employees (elementary teachers), with 7.7% identifying as OSSTF employees (secondary teachers) and 7.7% identifying as HEPA employees (elementary administrators). The remainder of respondents were distributed in smaller numbers across all other employee groups. 46.4% of respondents indicated that they worked in a dual track setting, while 27.6% responded that they worked in a single-track French Immersion setting and 21% indicated their place of work as a single-track English school. Of all ETFO and OSSTF members who responded to this survey, 49% indicated that they provide instruction in Core French, French Immersion, or Extended French.

When asked about their preference between single track and dual track for French Immersion, respondents indicated a strong preference for single-track French Immersion (53.4%), followed by a mix of dual and single track schools and then by dual track only. When asked explicitly whether delivering French Immersion in single-track schools only would ensure the viability of both the French and the English program, 69% indicated that they believed it would.

The respondents also came out strongly in favor of early entry (66.9%) over middle entry (26.1%) for students to begin a French Immersion program. Of the early entry options, grade 1 was the most desired starting point (37.9%).

When asked explicitly about capping as a method to ensure viability of both the English and French programs in the Halton District School Board, 52% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that capping was appropriate, whereas 35.9% disagreed or strongly disagreed. In terms of specific methods of capping, however, 67.4% of all respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the use of a lottery to determine a student's admittance into a French Immersion program and 64.2% disagreed or strongly disagreed with a first come, first-served method of capping.

In terms of the intensity level of a French Immersion program, 48.3% of all respondents support a 50% English / 50% French delivery model, whereas 39.8% support a greater level of French intensity in an immersion program.

Additional Feedback Shared with the PVC

During the course of the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years, the Program Viability Committee frequently met and examined other sources of information and data surrounding English and French as a Second Language programming options. Some of this information examined past practices at other Ontario school districts, the New Brunswick Ministry of Education, as well as the European Framework of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In addition, the PVC was presented with comprehensive information regarding the current and future staffing needs and recruiting strategies in place at the Halton District School Board.

Analysis and Discussion of Feedback:

The Program Viability Committee spent several meetings reviewing the stakeholder feedback. The committee also reviewed other French Immersion delivery models across the province prior to discussing the advantages and challenges of each option. During deliberations, two additional options were also considered. These options were tabled to allow due consideration of early entry, higher intensity options which exist in many other districts across Ontario.

OPTION 5: Early Entry with Increased Intensity

Grade 1 entry in both dual and single track schools (current sites). Increased intensity to 100% in grade 1 and 2, reduced intensity to grade 4 as shown below:

Gr 1 – 100%

Gr 2 – 100%

Gr 3 – 75%

Gr 4 – 50 %

OPTION 6: Grade 2 Entry with Increased intensity.

Grade 2 entry in both dual and single track schools with 100% intensity and reduced intensity after that as shown:

Gr 2 – 100%

Gr 3 – 80%

Gr 4 – 50%

In addition to the discussion about the advantages and challenges associated with each of the 6 options, consideration was given to the number of potential boundary reviews required to transition to a new model. Boundary reviews are required when there is a significant change in the grade or program configuration of a school that results in students being redirected to other schools. In these circumstances a boundary review is conducted to determine the new boundaries for both English track and French track students in the affected school community. Boundary review analysis was prepared by the HDSB Planning Department and is shown for selected options in Appendix A.

Consideration of the Boundary Review analysis showed that there were some options that stood out as being much more practical to implement because of the reduced need for boundary reviews. These were Option 1 (Status Quo with capping), Option 5 (Grade 1 Entry, 100% Intensity) and Option 6 (Grade 2 Entry, 100% Intensity). In each case the proposed model is a modified variation of our current model and as such we would predict minimal additional boundary reviews. Other options that cause a significant change to the grade or program configuration of schools result in substantially more boundary reviews. For example, a change to a single track only model would require all dual track schools to become English only or French only schools and thus students would need to be displaced to other sites. Similarly, a change to a dual track only model would require single track schools to now accommodate an additional track causing movement of students from other sites. In both these examples, boundary reviews would be required to create new boundaries to determine English and French boundaries for affected schools.

In addition, a hybrid of Option 3 and 4 was considered ie: a grade 4 mid entry in our current complement of single and dual track schools. It had a relatively low number of boundary reviews associated with it because of the mix of single and dual track schools thus minimizing the change in school types associated with a pure single or pure dual track entry model.

Three Options Preferred by The PVC:

After considerable discussion, analysis and deliberation, the PVC has identified three options that best fit the criteria for program viability. These options are outlined below.

OPTION 2: Early Entry with Single Track Schools Only

*Grade 1 (early) French Immersion model remains at 50% French and 50% English. However, all French Immersion programs will be delivered in **Single Track** French Immersion schools. French Immersion will be phased out of dual track schools and no new dual track schools will be considered. The location of the single track schools will be determined at a later date.*

HDSB data shows that when students need to leave their school to access a French Immersion program, the uptake is significantly reduced e.g. an uptake on average of 27% vs an average uptake of 61% in dual track schools. This option would eliminate dual track schools as they would be morphed into either single track French Immersion schools or single track English schools. Having only single track French Immersion schools is very likely to significantly reduce the uptake into French Immersion and therefore resolve both the issues of French teacher recruitment and hiring and small English cohorts in dual track schools.

There are some challenges associated with this model. First and foremost is the loss, or perceived loss, of the neighbourhood school concept. Having only single track French Immersion schools would mean that students would need to be directed to a French Immersion school potentially outside of their immediate neighbourhood. Students living near these single track French Immersion schools wanting the English program would also need to access single track English schools outside of their immediate neighbourhood. In both cases, there may be an increase in transportation costs.

Converting dual track schools to single track French Immersion schools or English schools will require numerous boundary reviews and the movement of students from one school to another. Boundary reviews will be required as new boundaries would need to be created for every existing dual track school as it morphs to either single track French or single track English schools. Catchment areas will either shrink, expand or be redefined to accommodate students in the new configuration of each school. Boundary review analysis can be found in Appendix A.

Moving to single track schools has implications for kindergarten. First, moving to a grade 1 – 8 configuration, means that schools would need to convert existing kindergarten spaces back to regular classroom spaces. The current design of kindergarten classrooms looks quite different from a more traditional primary classroom and so there could be potential costs involved. The second issue regarding kindergarten is connected to recent amendments to legislation (O. Reg 224/10 and O.Reg 221/11) that requires all elementary schools hosting grade 1 classes to also host kindergarten classes, unless the school is a single track French Immersion school in boards (like HDSB) that have a grade 1- 8 FI model for single track FI schools. To convert a dual track school to a single track French Immersion school would require that all English program students, including kindergarten, move out of the school in the year of transition. Grandfathering of students currently in the English program could not occur because as long as there are English track students in the school, the school is not deemed to be a single track FI school and therefore must also host kindergarten.

OPTION 3: French Immersion will commence at a later entry point (mid entry)

*Grade 4 Entry. This will result in the delivery model of French Immersion moving from a 50% model to at least an 80% French Immersion model. In addition the delivery of French Immersion will occur in **Dual Track** schools only.*

A key advantage identified with a grade 4 entry model is time for families to understand their student as learners prior to making the decision to enrol in French Immersion. Three years in addition to kindergarten provides time to develop foundational English language and numeracy skills. The grade 4 entry means students will have also had three years of core French, thereby establishing some competency in French prior to entering French Immersion. By the end of grade 3, students also know themselves better as learners and have more ‘voice’ than they would have had in kindergarten and therefore are more able to participate in the decision making process. All these factors contribute to families having more information and being in a better position to make a decision about whether French Immersion is the right program for their child. This later entry model combined with the increased intensity (80%), will require a more thoughtful decision by families and is likely to reduce uptake into the French Immersion program, ultimately reducing demand for French teacher hiring and recruitment and reducing the issue of small English cohorts in dual track schools, which were the two key areas identified for program viability.

The dual track mid entry model supported by the PVC has some drawbacks, most notably a number of potential boundary reviews caused by the morphing of existing single track French Immersion schools to dual track schools. These boundary reviews will result in a redistribution of students as new English and French boundaries are created for these schools. A modification to this model would be to maintain a mixture of dual and single track schools e.g. our current school configurations. Some boundary reviews would still be likely as populations change and adjust to the later French Immersion entry. For example, current single track schools (gr 1 – 8) would need to change to single track schools (gr 4 – 8), or morph to dual track schools, both of which are likely to cause a small number of boundary reviews, albeit significantly less than the number predicted with a mid-entry dual track only option.

An additional challenge with this model is the implementation plan. With a grade 4 entry, a decision would need to be made about timing. One option would be to wait for students in the current FI program to continue and not start the new mid entry until the grade one FI cohort for 2016/17 is entering grade 5. The new grade 4 cohort could then start the program in school year 2020/21. Alternatively, grade 4 entry could begin in 2017/18 with two distinct models running concurrently for five years. The challenge in this case is that most students entering grade 4 would already have had an opportunity to enrol in French Immersion when they were in grade 1 and chose not to.

There may be some students interested in entering at grade 4 in 2017/18 if they are new to the system, or if families were not initially thinking about French Immersion in grade 1 and have since changed their mind. Numbers of students could be quite small for this entry point and there may be a challenge forming viable FI classes for these cohorts until after the students in the current model have moved on to grade 5. Should numbers of students entering the program be significant, reasonable size classes could be formed but this would cause additional teacher hiring pressures for the five years that both distinct models are operating. A third alternative would be to end our current early entry mode and redirect students back to the English program until students enter grade 4 to re-enter French Immersion. This approach would cause considerable disruption including students experiencing additional changes in schools.

Further challenges with this particular model will be a readjustment by schools of their staffing expertise. For example, in our current model, there are significant numbers of primary teachers with French expertise. In this new model there will be a need for a reduction in the need for primary French teachers and an increase in junior and intermediate French teachers. Adjustments to teacher assignments, hiring and teacher training in specific curriculum areas, will be required to accommodate this change.

Lastly, a potential drawback of this model is that students in grade 5 – 8 will have only 20% of each day in English. This will mean that students will have either only English language taught in English and therefore math in French for grades 5-8 or math taught only in English and have no English language instruction for grades 5-8. In either case, there may be some implications in adequately preparing students for expectations entering high school.

OPTION 6: Grade 2 Entry, 100% intensity in both Dual and Single Track Schools

Grade 2 Entry into French Immersion at both dual and single track schools with 100% intensity and reduced intensity after that as shown:

Gr 2 – 100%

Gr 3 – 80%

Gr 4 – 50%

This model provides for an early entry option, although not as early as Option 2. A grade 2 entry means students will have a year of primary core French and the grade 1 year to develop English language skills prior to making a decision about entering French Immersion. Grade 1 is an important year for students to learn to read in English and this additional time will allow teachers and parents/guardians to acquire a better understanding of the student as a learner in a more typical classroom environment and understand whether French Immersion is the right fit for their student. The slightly later entry combined with the increased intensity (100%) presents a more significant decision for families. It is likely to reduce uptake into the French Immersion program creating viable English program cohorts in dual track schools and reducing the demand on French teacher hiring and recruitment.

Two years (grades 2 and 3) of increased intensity has the added value of truly “immersing” the student in French language for 2 years to help support French language acquisition prior to returning to an intensity of 50% in grade 4.

Boundary reviews and disruption to the system are much less likely with this option since the current school configurations will remain the same and the changes in overall enrolment numbers will not drastically change in any one year. While boundary reviews will continue to be something that occurs because of normal growth and decline within HDSB schools, this model is not likely to have a significant impact.

With respect to implementation, this model could provide for almost 2 years of planning time prior to implementation. Current grade 1’s in French Immersion could be “grand parented” and the new model starting in school year 2018/19 in grade 2. A challenge associated with this model will be connected to curriculum, resources and teacher training because of the change in French emphasis in grade 2 and grade 3. While this may not be a huge undertaking, the planning time associated with a 2018/19 implementation, could be used to continue to focus on French Teacher recruitment in addition to investigating any training or curriculum needs associated with this model. See Appendix B for details related to implementation.

In our current FI model, mathematics is generally taught in English. A potential criticism of this option might be that in a 100% model, students must learn mathematics in French and would therefore be exposed to mathematics in both English and French during their elementary years. This is a reality of a 100% model. A second potential criticism is that there will be less emphasis on English language instruction in the early years and that students might fall behind in this area due to the increased emphasis on French language instruction. While this may be true, research has shown that in early French Immersion programs where there has been a high intensity of French, English language skills may lag in the early years, but English language skills catch up or surpass the rest of the grade cohort in the junior years. The foundation in French language has been shown to cause an accelerated learning of an additional language, in this case English.

Financial Implications:

Each of the three options outlined in this report have financial implications associated with them as would be expected with any change. Determining exact costs are challenging because it is difficult to predict with certainty, student enrolments, exact impact on numbers of teachers and classes, results of boundary reviews including the identification of specific sites (e.g. what schools would be identified as single track FI schools in Option 2) and transportation requirements. However, with each option there are areas that are likely to result in costs or potential cost savings as outlined below.

Option 2 (Gr 1 Entry, 50% French, Single Track Schools)

- Boundary Reviews – significant allocation of staff time and resources for more than one year
- Facility modifications to convert FDK classrooms into grade 1 classrooms
- Probable increase in transportation costs

Option 3 (Mid Entry, 80% French, Dual Track Schools)

- Boundary Reviews – significant allocation of staff time and resources for more than one year
- Facility modifications to create FDK classrooms in the existing single track FI schools
- Staff development – curriculum, instruction and assessment
- Curriculum resources for grades 4 – 8 (purchased or developed in house)
- Probable decrease in transportation costs

Option 3 (Mid Entry, 80% French, Single and Dual Track Schools)

- Boundary Reviews – some possible boundary reviews
- Staff development – curriculum instruction and assessment, (grades 4 – 8)
- Curriculum resources for grades 4 – 8 (purchased or developed in house)

Option 6 (Gr 2 Entry, 100% French, Single and Dual Track Schools)

- Boundary Reviews – some possible boundary reviews
- Staff development – curriculum, instruction and assessment (grades 2 and 3)
- Curriculum resources for grades 2 and 3 (purchased or developed in house)

Selected Option 6:

The three options preferred by PVC were shared with Administrative Council. Administrative Council deliberated and provided advice to the Director and the recommended option is Option 6. This option has been chosen for the following reasons:

1. This option meets the criteria set by the Program Viability Committee to address the challenges of both English and French program viability.
2. Parents will have an additional year compared to our current model to better understand their child as a learner prior to making a decision to enroll in French Immersion in grade 2. This additional time provides more opportunities for teachers to speak to parents about their child and for parents to make a more informed decision about whether FI is the right fit for their child.
3. This option still provides for a relatively early entry compared with some other models considered. Early entry was supported through stakeholder feedback.

4. Higher intensity in the first two years of FI will “immerse” students in French language to support French language acquisition in the first two years of the program.
5. The implementation plan for this model is not likely to cause significant challenges related to boundary reviews as in other options. Current dual track and single track configurations can be maintained and as such, implementation and transition to this model should be much less disruptive than other options.

Primary Core French:

As noted earlier, Primary Core French is currently in its second year of implementation with plans to be fully implemented in school year 2017/18. The Primary Core French model provides for 40 minutes per week of French language instruction in grades 1 to 3. Currently in the 2nd year, implementation of Primary Core French has been considered to be successful by students, families and educators. Staff looked at the possibility of a modest increase to 50 minutes per week which can be incorporated into an elementary timetable structure. As part of the ongoing discussion of options moving forward, the Program Viability Committee considered an increase in the number of minutes of French in the primary years, but was not supportive of a change from the current 40 minutes a week.

Summary:

The Program Viability Committee (PVC) has been in existence for just over a year to review both English and French program viability in HDSB elementary schools. Considerable stakeholder consultation was done and feedback was brought to the PVC for review, analysis and recommendations. After careful analysis of the feedback provided, the PVC identified 3 preferred options. Of these options, Option 6 has been recommended as the preferred option. This option has been recommended as it will provide an additional year for parents to understand their child as a learner prior to making a decision to enter French Immersion, it provides a relatively early entry point as preferred by stakeholders and provides for a greater intensity in the first two years of the program which supports French language acquisition. The recommended model also requires few if any additional boundary reviews, maintains our current dual and single track school configurations and as such will provide for a simpler and less disruptive implementation plan and transition to the new model.

Respectfully submitted,

*David Boag
Associate Director*

*Stuart Miller
Director of Education*

APPENDIX A: POTENTIAL BOUNDARY REVIEWS

Burlington

Area	Option 2	Option 3	Option 6	Option 3 Dual and Single Track
ERA100	- boundary review required	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews
	- program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA101	- boundary review required	- no boundary reviews	- no boundary reviews	- no boundary reviews
	- program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 102	- boundary review required	- boundary review required	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews
	- program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- program changes required + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 103	- no boundary reviews	- boundary review required	- no boundary reviews	- no boundary reviews
	- no program changes - no grade reconfiguration	- program changes required + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 105	- boundary review required	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews
	- program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 106	- boundary review required	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews
	- program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 107	- boundary review required	- possible boundary reviews	- no boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews
	- program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required

ERA 108	- boundary review required	- possible boundary reviews	- no boundary reviews	- possible boundary reviews
	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA 109	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary reviews	- possible boundary review
	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA 110	- boundary review required	- no boundary review	- no boundary reviews	- no boundary review
	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required

* School undergoing phased single-track FI implementation.

^ JK/SK classes may be moved

+ Grades 1 to 3 FI classes removed

~ Grade 1 FI classes removed

Oakville

Area	Option 2	Option 3	Option 6	Option 3 Dual and single Track
ERA 111	- no boundary review	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review
	- no program changes	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes
	- no grade reconfiguration	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA112	- no boundary review	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review
	- no program changes	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes
	- no grade reconfiguration	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA 113	- boundary review required	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review
	- program changes required	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA 114	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review
	- program changes required	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
	- boundary review required	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review

ERA 115	- program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- program changes required + grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 116	- boundary review required - no program changes ^ grade reconfiguration required	- boundary review required - program changes required + grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 117	- no boundary review - no program changes - no grade reconfiguration	- boundary review required - program changes required + grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 118	- boundary review required - program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required

*Phased FI implementation underway.

^ JK/SK classes may be moved

+ Grades 1 to 3 FI classes removed

~ Grade 1 FI classes removed

Milton

Area	Option 2	Option 3	Option 6	Option 3 Dual and Single Track
ERA 119	- boundary reviews required - program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 120	- boundary reviews required - program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required
ERA 121	- boundary reviews required - program changes required ^ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes ~ grade reconfiguration required	- possible boundary review - no program changes + grade reconfiguration required

ERA 123	- boundary reviews required	- no boundary review	- no boundary review	- no boundary review
	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA 127	- boundary reviews required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review
	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required

*Phased FI implementation underway.

^ JK/SK classes may be moved

+ Grades 1 to 3 FI classes removed

~ Grade 1 FI classes removed

Halton Hills

Area	Option 2	Option 3	Option 6	Option 3 Dual and Single Track
ERA124	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review	- possible boundary review
	- program changes required	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA 125	- boundary review required	- possible boundary review	- no boundary review	- possible boundary review
	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required
ERA 126	- boundary review required	- no boundary review	- no boundary review	- no boundary review
	- program changes required	- no program changes	- no program changes	- no program changes
	^ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required	~ grade reconfiguration required	+ grade reconfiguration required

^ JK/SK classes may be moved

+ Grades 1 to 3 FI classes removed

~ Grade 1 FI classes removed

