

Types of French Immersion Programs

Reference (2016):

<http://archive.education.alberta.ca/francais/admin/immersion/handbookimm/01approach/models/>

In Alberta, two types of immersion programs are offered.

Early French Immersion

- Begins in Kindergarten or Grade 1 and is intended to continue through Grade 12.
- The most popular delivery model in Alberta and across Canada.
- Provides the best access and the greatest length of exposure to French to the most diverse range of students.
- No entry requirements; parents make the decision to enroll their children.
- Based on research that young children learn languages more easily than older learners. A young child's vocal structures are more flexible than an adult's, making the development of an authentic accent easier. Also, young children are more tolerant of ambiguity and do not feel as socially awkward when they find themselves in situations they do not understand.
- With very few exceptions, suitable for any child. Researchers have found that early immersion students with difficulties—learning disabilities, low intelligence, behavioural problems—will do as well academically as they would in a regular English program (provided they receive the same assistance as they would in the English program).
- Gifted students can thrive in an immersion program (if they also receive the benefit of special programming).
- Initially concentrates on French language development to give students a sufficient understanding of French to learn to read and write in French and learn subject areas content in French.
- Research and experience have clearly demonstrated that student proficiency in French is strongly correlated to the amount of time spent learning and using the language.
- Recognizing that many local factors may determine the time allocated to instruction in the French language, the *Guide to Education* recommends the following percentages of time to support the goals of the French immersion program:
 - Kindergarten: 100%
 - Grades 1-2: 90% - 100%
 - Grades 3-6: 70% - 80%
 - Grades 7-9: 50% - 80%
 - Grades 10-12: 40% - 80%

Late French Immersion

- Begins in Grade 6 or 7 and is intended to continue through Grade 12.
- Late immersion attracts a smaller student clientele with a more homogeneous range of abilities than early immersion.
- Enrolment is usually a decision made by the student, with parental support and encouragement.
- Attributes late immersion students usually possess are:
 - a predisposition for language learning;
 - strong English skills;
 - a keen interest to learn French;
 - efficient study skills and work habits;
 - a willingness to take risks and enjoy a challenge; and
 - a tolerance for change and ambiguity.
- While not essential, prior study of French is advantageous for the late immersion student.
- Late immersion students have more complex communication needs than early immersion students, and the academic demands upon them are greater. Therefore, the speed with which late immersion students must acquire skills in French is more crucial than in early immersion.
- For optimum language development, 90% to 100 % of class time should be spent in French in the first few months. This development progresses more rapidly than in early immersion.
- Initially, students can be expected to feel tired and stressed as they learn to cope with the greater demands of late immersion: paying close attention at all times, searching for the right words to express themselves, and extra homework. Teachers, students and their parents must expect and be prepared for this stage.
- After the first few months, the recommended instructional time in French is the same for late immersion as for the early immersion program at the same grade levels.
- While late immersion students are expected to cover the same content as regular English program students, in the first year or two, some of the complex concepts in some subject areas may be simplified. These are revisited in later months and years when students' language skills have increased.
- Graduation requirements for late French immersion students are the same as for all other students.

Comparison – Early and Late Immersion

- Both early and late immersion programs produce graduates with high levels of French language proficiency. However, generally students who have had the most number of hours in French demonstrate the highest achievement.
- Early immersion students, despite representing a more diverse range of abilities, consistently score higher in speaking ability and listening skills than late immersion students and have been found to have greater confidence in using French. Researchers have also found a positive correlation between the relative second language proficiency of late immersion students and their IQ scores—a finding that does not apply to early immersion students.
- While little research has been done on the effects of combining classes of early and late immersion students in junior and senior high, researchers caution that the presence of late French immersion students in a combined class may slow the progress of the early immersion students.