

**No matter how you cut it, Early French Immersion is a success story**!

Since the change of Government in New Brunswick, the Early French Immersion debate seems to be gaining momentum. Debate is always welcomed and necessary. However, Canadian Parents for French New Brunswick hopes that the new round of debate will be based on facts, and for this reason, we have decided to write this article.

First of all, we must understand that in learning French, students develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. So, when evaluating a program, all skills should be considered.  Criticism aimed at Early French Immersion, more often than not, looks only at the grade 12 oral interview results and overlooks all other evaluations the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD)has done throughout the 12-year program.

The grade 12 oral interview was not designed as a system check and the scale is not easily adapted to determine appropriate levels to be expected of students. The Oral Proficiency Interview is designed to assess the students’ ability to interact using French when speaking.  Each level from Basic to Superior contains a multitude of language functions the students must be able to do in order to be assigned that level.

In New Brunswick, the goal of the Early French Immersion (EFI) program is that students reach the Advanced Level of Proficiency. There is nothing wrong with having such a high goal. Where the problem occurs, is when this goal is used as the indicator of a satisfactory performance when doing a system check.

Let us take a look at a part of the description of an Intermediate Plus speaker. This is the level just below the Advanced Level.

**“Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school, and work situations. Can discuss topics relating to special fields of competence as well as subjects of current public interest.  Normally does not have to grope for words. Often shows a significant degree of fluency and ease in speaking.”**

This level of proficiency does not meet the proficiency goal of the program. However, can we honestly say that a student able to do the above-mentioned functions, has failed the program?  Anyone who has attempted to learn a language other than their mother tongue, understands that the Intermediate Plus Level of proficiency is not an insignificant accomplishment.

Now let us look at some results: the 2015 results are used because this is the last year the EFI grade 1 entry point students were still in the system.

2015 results show that in grade 12, 84.3% of the students who took the test, scored at the Intermediate Plus Level or better. Of these, 41.6 scored at the Advanced and Advanced Plus Level. It is at best misleading to look at these results and say that the program is failing.

We are sure that the people who claim that EFI is not working do not understand that Intermediate Plus Level speakers have achieved a level of proficiency that allows them to work, socialize and live using the French language.

Often when making a case against EFI, grade 12 students who did not take a French Immersion credit, are counted as students who failed the test. Of course, this skews the results. One must understand that the students who choose not to take a French Immersion credit in grade 12, may do so because of scheduling conflicts, or career choice that make it necessary for them to take extra math or science courses. Most likely, these students after having spent 10 or 11 years in an immersion class, would be at an Intermediate Plus or Advanced Level.  To count them as having failed the test, is once again misleading.

We would ask politicians, educators, or anyone who feels the urge to participate in the Early French Immersion debate, please look up the Oral Proficiency scale on the DEECD’s website.  We ask them to do this because we feel that it is unfair to students, teachers and the education system in general, to consider students who finish the program with an Intermediate Plus Level to be considered failures.

When reporting program evaluations for most subjects, the DEECD Gives the percentage of students achieving an **“Appropriate Level”** and “**Appropriate or Above Level”.** When reporting results, we suggest that the DEECD considers making **Intermediate Plus** the **Appropriate Level of Proficiency** for EFI and that the **Advanced Level** be the **Appropriate Level or Above Level.**

Identifying an appropriate level proficiency will make the oral proficiency interview a more accurate evaluation of the French Immersion program. It will also discourage the false use of results of an evaluation that was from the very beginning meant to be an individual evaluation and never meant to be used as a program evaluation.

Board of Directors,

Canadian Parents for French New Brunswick