

# EIPS Frequently Asked Questions

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FRENCH IMMERSION PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: WINTER 2023

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# FAQ: FRENCH IMMERSION PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

## Introduction

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) has begun a three-year public engagement initiative to enhance programming offered throughout the Division. One of the programs EIPS is looking at is French Immersion. Specifically, it's exploring ways to enhance programming, address enrolment pressures and boost retention at the junior high and senior high levels. Before EIPS makes any decisions about French Immersion programming, it's conducting public consultations with school families, students and community stakeholders to ensure a solution that's in the best interest of all students. The following are frequently asked questions the Division has received about its French Immersion engagement effort. EIPS will update the document as new questions come forward.

## General

**Q:** Why is EIPS consulting with the French Immersion school community?

**A:** As part of the Division's reporting requirements to Alberta Education, EIPS reviews programs, enrolment transitions and boundaries regularly. When areas of concern are identified, the Division determines how best to resolve the issue. In the case of French Immersion, EIPS wants to find ways to enhance the program, address current enrolment pressures and increase retention at the junior high and senior high levels. To determine the best possible solution, EIPS is seeking feedback from the French Immersion school community.

**Q:** How is EIPS' French Immersion program different from a French francophone program?

**A:** French Immersion programming is offered by English-language school divisions and open to all students, kindergarten to Grade 12. The program is specifically designed for children whose first language isn't French. And, through the program, they acquire fluency in speaking, reading, writing, listening and communicating in French. Children start the program in kindergarten or Grade 1—the curriculum is taught entirely in French. And, in Grade 3, teachers begin to introduce English language arts. The goal: for students to become functionally fluent in French, develop an appreciation for French culture and achieve all the same learning outcomes as the regular programs of study. On the other hand, the French francophone program, is offered through the Conseil scolaire du Nord-Ouest and is only open to learners with a parent whose first language is French.

**Q:** What supports and services do schools offer to families with a child enrolled in the French Immersion program?

**A:** Finding ways to support a child enrolled in the French Immersion program is sometimes challenging. It's important to remember, EIPS has no requirement or expectation for families to speak or understand French to support their child enrolled in French Immersion. Instead, teachers and staff at all EIPS schools work together to assist students with any questions they may have. That allows families to support their child at home the same way they would in the English program—by asking questions, engaging in learning activities, and establishing regular routines for completing homework and reading.

That said, there are many resources available for families. To access these, simply contact your child's school and tell them you're looking for French Immersion support resources. Most resources are available online and focus on literacy, numeracy and career planning.

## Enrolment Pressures

**Q:** [What enrolment pressures does EIPS face?](#)

**A:** For EIPS, it has two main areas of concern: Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County. In Fort Saskatchewan, EIPS anticipates enrolment pressure issues in all its schools for the foreseeable future. So much so, it's becoming challenging to accommodate all students living in the region. In fact, the Division projects fewer than 753 student spaces available by 2027—that's for every grade level and at every school.

In Strathcona County, four new residential developments are underway—[Ardrossan East, Cambrian Crossing, Bremner and Hillshire](#). For French Immersion, Ardrossan East is a concern. As it develops, it will create enrolment pressures at both Ardrossan Elementary and Ardrossan Junior Senior High, making it challenging to offer dual-track programming—the regular English program and French Immersion. In fact, the Division projects fewer than 339 student spaces available by 2027—for every grade and school in rural Strathcona County. That, coupled with an influx of students from the Cambrian Crossing, Bremner and Hillshire developments, in Sherwood Park, will create even more enrolment pressures on schools in Strathcona County.

To alleviate some of the anticipated enrolment pressures, EIPS has requested new and replacement schools through its [2023-26 Three-Year Capital Plan](#). However, the province needs to approve funding for these, which will likely take years.

**Q:** [How do EIPS enrolment pressures impact French Immersion programming?](#)

**A:** For the most part, the Division's biggest concern, in terms of French Immersion programming, is with the new Ardrossan East development. As it expands, it will create enrolment pressures at both Ardrossan Elementary and Ardrossan Junior Senior High. That anticipated enrolment pressure will make offering dual-track programming—the regular English program and French Immersion—at both schools challenging. As well, an influx of students from the Cambrian Crossing, Bremner and Hillshire developments, in Sherwood Park, will create even more enrolment pressures for schools in Strathcona County.

**Q:** [Why can't EIPS build a new school to house the anticipated influx of students?](#)

**A:** EIPS has several replacement schools listed as key priorities in its [2023-26 Three-Year Capital Plan](#)—including a kindergarten to Grade 9 school to replace École Campbelltown and Sherwood Heights Junior High, a grades 7-12 school to replace Rudolph Hennig Junior High and Fort Saskatchewan High, and a kindergarten to Grade 6 school to replace James Mowat Elementary. However, the province has yet to approve funding for any of these capital requests—design funding was approved for the Sherwood Park replacement school but not construction funding. Typically, funding approval takes years, as does the actual construction after approval is granted. So, EIPS needs to find solutions now to address its student accommodation issues.

## Program Retention

**Q:** [How is program retention an issue at the French Immersion junior high and senior high levels?](#)

**A:** In terms of retention, fewer students are deciding to stay in the program at the secondary level. For example, as of Sept. 29, 2022, EIPS has 129 Grade 6 students enrolled in French Immersion. But, in Grade 9, there are only 85 students enrolled in French Immersion. And, in Grade 12, only 37 students enrolled. Based on historical trends, the two grades with the lowest rate of retention are Grade 7, 86 per cent, and Grade 10, 69 per cent. Such a significant drop in students at the senior high level makes providing robust programming challenging.

So, through the French Immersion public engagement efforts, EIPS wants to better understand the barriers to continuing with the junior high and senior high French Immersion program. Is it because there's a disconnect between the [location of French Immersion programs](#) and where students reside? Is it because of academic challenges? Or, is there of lack of motivation to learn French as children grow older? There are likely myriad reasons. The hope is the engagement effort will reveal the barriers, so the Division can develop solutions that encourage more students to remain in the program.

**Q:** [How many students are enrolled in the French Immersion elementary program compared to the secondary program?](#)

**A:** The below table shows EIPS' French Immersion enrolment, as of Sept. 29, 2022. Essentially, what it demonstrates is the Division can only support one senior high French Immersion school site.

School	Grade												Total		
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		12	
<b>Ardrossan Elementary</b>	27	26	22	33	26	27	34								<b>195</b>
<b>École Campbelltown</b>	50	42	60	54	57	54	47								<b>364</b>
<b>École Parc Élémentaire</b>	48	40	50	35	40	29	33								<b>275</b>
<b>Heritage Hills Elementary</b>	21	23	25	22	19	16	15								<b>141</b>
<b>Sherwood Heights Junior High</b>									49	49	39				<b>137</b>
<b>Ardrossan Junior Senior High</b>									38	45	46	57	33	37	<b>256</b>
<b>GRADE TOTALS</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>157</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>1,368</b>	

**Q:** [Can EIPS offer a French Immersion senior high program in Sherwood Park, Fort Saskatchewan or in both communities, instead of in Ardrossan?](#)

**A:** At this point, it's premature to speak about changing French Immersion site locations. Currently, EIPS offers a fulsome program at Ardrossan Junior Senior High. There aren't enough senior high students enrolled in the French Immersion to offer it at a second site.

**Q:** [Why doesn't EIPS offer French Immersion senior high programming in all communities?](#)

**A:** The capacity to offer French Immersion in each community EIPS serves is currently out of reach. The reason: the program's enrolment numbers. It's imperative EIPS continues offering a fulsome senior high French Immersion program. Providing it within all communities requires sufficient funding and resources. That's because EIPS has a fiduciary responsibility to operate all programming at sustainable levels. Given current enrolment, the more locations the Division offers senior high French Immersion reduces the available resources to support programming. At present, the only way EIPS could offer the senior high program in all communities is by offsetting the costs with funding from the regular program, which is neither sustainable nor equitable.

**Q:** [How does EIPS plan to address the barriers people have around continuing with French Immersion at the secondary level?](#)

**A:** At this point, it's still too premature to speak about how the Division will address the retention issues. The hope is the Division's French Immersion engagement efforts will reveal the barriers, so the Division can develop solutions that encourage more students to remain in the program. The goal: To develop a Board-approved, community-derived solution.

## Programming

**Q:** [Where is French Immersion currently offered within EIPS?](#)

**A:** French Immersion is offered at schools throughout EIPS. Each school follows the Alberta curriculum and provides a range of educational courses and extracurricular classes to enhance the growth and success of all students. Visit each school's website for specific program details.

ELEMENTARY (K-6)

[École Parc Élémentaire](#) – single-track program

[Ardrossan Elementary](#) – dual-track program

[École Campbelltown](#) – single-track program

[Heritage Hills Elementary](#) – dual-track program

JUNIOR HIGH (7-9)

[Ardrossan Junior Senior High](#) – dual-track program

[Sherwood Heights Junior High](#) – dual-track program

SENIOR HIGH (10-12)

[Ardrossan Junior Senior High](#) – dual-track program

**Q:** [Do all French Immersion schools have staff fluent in French?](#)

**A:** EIPS French Immersion teachers are fluent in French, and every school offering the immersion program has a French-speaking administrator. EIPS tries to ensure all staff working in French Immersion schools also speak French. However, it's not always feasible with support staff—such as educational assistants, secretaries, library technicians.

**Q:** [What are the requirements for French Immersion?](#)

**A:** The French Immersion program requirements and learning outcomes are the same as the regular program. The only major differences are the grades English language arts is introduced and the time allotments for specific subjects. French Immersion students are taught entirely in French from kindergarten to Grade 2. Then, in Grade 3, English language arts is introduced. Throughout the student's educational journey, French remains the primary language of instruction for a significant part of each school day—all except English language arts. A complete list of program requirements is available in Alberta Education's [Guide to Education](#).

**Q:** [How do I register my child for French Immersion?](#)

**A:** There are several ways to register, depending on if your child is a new or returning student.  
[Kindergarten](#) – Children starting kindergarten complete the online Kindergarten Registration Form. During this time, students indicate the school they plan to attend, select programming and request Student Transportation services, if applicable. Runs February to school startup.

[New students](#) – All new students, grades 1-12, complete the online New Student Registration Form. During this time, students indicate the school they plan to attend, select programming and request Student Transportation services, if applicable. Students can all apply to attend a non-designated school—acceptance is based on available space. Runs February to school startup.

[Returning students](#) – All returning students complete the online Returning Student Registration Form. During this time, students indicate the school they plan to attend, select programming and request Student Transportation services, if applicable. Students can all apply to attend a non-designated school—acceptance is based on available space. Runs February 1-28.

**NOTE:** To register in kindergarten or Grade 1, no previous knowledge of French is required. Students entering the program after Grade 1 are considered on an individual basis.

**Q:** Can I register my child in a French Immersion school different from their designated French Immersion school?

**A:** Yes. Families that want their child to attend a non-designated school, or school of choice, must make the request during the returning student registration process. The only exception: students who move into the Division from outside the geographic area, or another community within the Division, after the returning student registration closes. The Division contacts all families who apply to a non-designated school to advise if they can attend the school in the upcoming school year. Acceptance is based on available space.

**Q:** If EIPS changes any French Immersion program locations, can affected students be grandfathered into their current school?

**A:** At this point, it's too premature to answer that question. Typically, the Board makes decisions about grandfathering when it reviews the final recommendation from administration, which isn't close to happening yet. If there is a change in the boundaries, EIPS will contact all families to inform them about the details, including information about grandfathering, timelines, the registration process and student transportation implications.

**Q:** If EIPS changes any French Immersion program locations, can siblings of affected students continue attending the same school?

**A:** Yes, if the older child currently attends a school and will attend the school at the same time as the younger child. In this scenario, the sibling clause applies—simply register to attend the school during the returning student registration process in February. The only way this wouldn't apply is if the Board decides to limit the application of the sibling clause.

## Busing

**Q:** How will busing work for students requiring transportation services?

**A:** EIPS provides an enhanced transportation service for both eligible and ineligible riders. So, anyone who wants to access existing Student Transportation can do so by requesting busing services during the new or returning student registration process in February. Families simply indicate on the online form busing is required for their child. Before the end of the school year, the family will receive their child's tentative busing information, including the associated fees.

**Q:** How are families charged for busing?

**A:** EIPS offers enhanced transportation services for students, using the below fee structure.

*Eligible Fee:* Riders who attend their designated French Immersion school and live more than 2.39 kilometres from that school. For 2022-23, the eligible fee is \$121 per year.

*Ineligible Fee:* Students who attend a non-designated French Immersion school or live less than 2.4 kilometres from their French Immersion designated school. For 2022-23, the ineligible fee is \$346 per year.

## Next Steps

**Q:** What is the general timeline for EIPS' French Immersion public engagement effort?

**A:** In total, three public consultation phases are planned.

*Phase 1* took place in November 2022 and included a drop-in, public meeting and an online survey to gather feedback from the French Immersion school community about what's most important about the program—building off the public engagement work done in the 2017-18 school year.

*Phase 2* takes place in Winter 2023. Public consultations will focus on possible solutions to manage anticipated student growth and ways to improve junior high and senior high French Immersion program retention.

*Phase 3* takes place in Spring 2023. Public consultations will focus on fine-tuning a solution to address the anticipated student growth and ways to enhance the junior high and senior high French Immersion program retention.

**Q:** When will EIPS make a final decision about any changes to the French Immersion program?

**A:** In June 2023, EIPS will present the Board of Trustees with a report about the French Immersion engagement efforts. Any Board-approved changes will take effect in the 2024-25 school year. Before making a decision, the EIPS Board will review all relevant data and the feedback gathered through the engagement efforts. EIPS is committed to keeping the community informed about the process and will provide information as it becomes available.

**Q:** If EIPS does make a change to French Immersion programming, how will the Division support the transition for students?

**A:** At this point, it's premature to speak to a transition plan. EIPS hasn't determined a solution or made a decision. Furthermore, the Board won't make any decision until it reviews the community input from all public engagement efforts. That said, anytime changes are made to attendance boundaries, EIPS puts a transition plan in place. The plan involves consultations with students, school council groups, school administration, staff and EIPS senior administration. The goal: To ensure a smooth transition for all students.