

EIPS Questions and Answers

FRENCH IMMERSION PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT: PHASE 3 – PART 2

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Q&A: FRENCH IMMERSION PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) is in year two of 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, increase retention at the junior high and senior high levels, address anticipated enrolment pressures in Ardrossan and balance enrolment at the elementary level. Through three phases of engagement, EIPS solved how best to balance the elementary enrolment—by expanding the elementary French Immersion boundaries for Heritage Hills Elementary—which the Board of Trustees approved at a public meeting on June 15.

For the remaining concerns, EIPS is engaging stakeholders on three [viable options](#) that address enrolment pressures and help to enhance program retention—Phase 3 – Part 2. The Division will use the feedback from Phase 3 – Part 2 to ensure a solution that's in the best interest of all students. The following are answers to recent questions the Division has received about its French Immersion engagement effort. EIPS will update the document as new questions come forward.

General

Q1: [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 is seeking feedback to determine the best solution that addresses retention issues at the junior high and senior high levels, addresses anticipated enrolment pressures in Ardrossan and meets the program's vision and guiding principles.

Q2: [What is the vision for EIPS' French Immersion program?](#)

A: In Spring 2023, EIPS developed a vision and guiding principles for its French Immersion program—based on feedback from Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the French Immersion engagements and evidence-based research about immersion language programming. Both the vision and guiding principles are available online at eips.ca.

[EIPS French Immersion: Vision and Guiding Principles](#)

Engagement Efforts

Q3: [How is EIPS using the feedback collected from the French Immersion engagement efforts?](#)

A: EIPS has reviewed all feedback collected to date from the French Immersion engagement efforts. It used the input from phases 1 and 2 to develop a vision for the program and a potential draft solution, which it presented to stakeholders and collected input in April 2023—Phase 3 – Part 1. From the feedback offered in April, EIPS' Board determined the best way to balance the enrolment issue is to expand the French Immersion attendance boundaries at Heritage Hills Elementary.

The feedback from April also made it clear EIPS needed to explore multiple options to address the French Immersion enrolment pressures and program retention numbers. So, that's what senior administration did.

It's currently consulting stakeholders on [three possible options](#). EIPS will spend the next month consulting stakeholders on each option through a survey running from June 16 to July 13. All are viable and meet the Division's long-term program needs and criteria.

Q4: Who is EIPS seeking feedback from through the French Immersion engagement efforts?

A: For Phase 1 to Phase 3 – Part 1, EIPS sought feedback from all French Immersion staff, students, families and community members. Now, it's expanding stakeholders to also include all EIPS families and staff within Strathcona County. The reason: Two of the [proposed solution options](#) for the French Immersion program impact other programming within the Division—in terms of specialized system programs, alternative programs and boundary designations.

Programming Location: Secondary French Immersion

Q5: Why can't EIPS offer a French Immersion senior high program in all three communities—Ardrossan, Fort Saskatchewan and Sherwood Park?

A: It's simply not viable. The capacity to offer French Immersion in each community EIPS serves is currently out of reach because of the program's enrolment numbers, and two of the three communities are experiencing student capacity issues that prevent EIPS from growing the program. It's imperative EIPS continues offering a fulsome secondary French Immersion program. Providing it within all communities also requires sufficient funding and resources—EIPS has a fiduciary responsibility to operate all programming at sustainable levels.

Q6: If EIPS relocates the secondary French Immersion program, 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 has yet to happen. If there is a program or boundaries change, EIPS will contact all families to inform them about the details, including information about grandfathering, timelines, the registration process and student transportation implications.

Q7: French Immersion is the heart and soul of the community. Why do rural families have to be affected by the decision?

A: It's not that EIPS wants to impact rural families specifically. The issue is Ardrossan Junior Senior High will soon experience enrolment pressures. Already, the school is 92% utilized. In fact, EIPS expects 77 new students to reside within the Ardrossan East development by 2027. At full buildout of Ardrossan East, EIPS expects more than 715 school-aged children to reside within the development area. With the influx of families, Ardrossan Junior Senior High simply can't accommodate a dual-track program, and also, grow the secondary French Immersion program.

And, the reason French Immersion is impacted over the regular program is because, under Alberta's *Education Act*, it states: "Where a board establishes an attendance area for a school, a resident student of a board who resides in the attendance area for the school must be given priority over a student who does not reside in the area." As French Immersion is an alternative program that enrolls students from attendance areas across the Division, when space issues become a concern, the location of the alternative program needs to be reviewed.

Q8: Why is EIPS considering moving the program out of Ardrossan—it makes the appearance the Division doesn't care about Ardrossan and Fort Saskatchewan students?

A: It's not a case of not caring about students from Ardrossan and Fort Saskatchewan. EIPS absolutely cares about all students and works hard to ensure each child is successful and has access to high-quality educational experiences. There are two factors at play regarding the need to relocate the French Immersion program.

The first. Ardrossan is growing, and that's a reality. Ardrossan East is already under development, and homes are currently being built. As it grows, it will create enrolment pressures at Ardrossan Elementary and Ardrossan Junior Senior High. Already, both schools have [utilization rates](#) of more than 90 per cent, meaning both schools are already close to capacity. EIPS can't manage both the influx of students from Ardrossan East, and also, grow the French Immersion secondary program. There just isn't enough space.

As mentioned, the reason EIPS needs to look at relocating the secondary French Immersion program instead of the regular English program is because it's mandated by Alberta Education, under the *Education Act*. Again, the Act states school divisions are required to prioritize students living in an attendance area over students attending a school for special programming. French Immersion is an alternative program, or a program of choice, and it enrolls students from across the Division. That means, when space becomes limited, the location of the alternative program needs to be reviewed, and not the regular program, as it only accepts students living in the attendance area.

Q9: [Fort Saskatchewan is defined as a city, so why can't there be a French Immersion program there?](#)

A: Fort Saskatchewan is experiencing similar enrolment pressures as in Ardrossan. In Fort Saskatchewan, EIPS anticipates enrolment pressure issues in most of its schools for the foreseeable future. Schools within the city are already 81 per cent utilized. Four are above 87 per cent utilized, and two are expected to exceed 108 per cent by 2027. That, in turn, puts enrolment pressure on underutilized schools within EIPS. That, mixed with new developments underway in the Industrial Heartland, such as the Fort Saskatchewan Hydrogen Hub, EIPS anticipates further population growth for the region for the foreseeable future. So, simply put, Fort Saskatchewan doesn't have the student capacity to relocate the program there or the ability for EIPS to grow secondary French Immersion to ensure robust programming.

Q10: [Is there another option other than relocating secondary French Immersion to solve the enrolment pressures in Ardrossan? What about regular English programming students?](#)

A: EIPS is currently exploring three possible [viable options](#). Each option addresses the program concerns and there are possibilities in all of them. The Division is consulting stakeholders between June 16 and July 13. That said, the proposed options involve relocating secondary French Immersion. Again, the Division can't explore relocating Ardrossan Junior Senior High's regular English program. That's because Alberta's *Education Act* states: "Where a board establishes an attendance area for a school, a resident student of a board who resides in the attendance area for the school must be given priority over a student who does not reside in the area." As such, because French Immersion is an alternative program with students from attendance areas across the Division, when space issues become a concern, the location of the alternative program needs to be reviewed, not the regular English program.

Q11: [Is the current secondary French Immersion program sustainable?](#)

A: Yes. EIPS offers a sustainable French Immersion program at Ardrossan Junior Senior High. However, the program would be robust with more students, and that's the program's vision.

Potential Solution

Q12: [Why is EIPS considering a junior high program at Bev Facey Community High?](#)

A: Overall, relocating the junior high and senior high program addresses all the Division's concerns, it meets the program vision, and incorporates the feedback heard during Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the engagement efforts. Briefly, moving the program to Bev Facey:

- allows the alternative and specialized system programs offered at the school to remain there—Advanced Placement, GOALS, Place and Focus;
- allows for closer proximity to where most French Immersion students live;
- allows the school to dedicate a French Immersion section in the building to maximize French-speaking opportunities;
- allows for robust, linguistically, and culturally rich programming;
- allows for robust careers and technology foundations (CTF), careers and technology studies (CTS), and extracurricular programs;
- allows for minimal transitions—at a point when most students drop out of the program;
- allows for continuity in teaching and learning from grades 7 to 12.
- allows the school to maximize French teachers as they can teach French full time, or almost;
- it’s sustainability into the future; and
- allows for reasonable bus ride times.

Q13: Why does EIPS want to put 12-year-olds with students in grades 10 through 12?

A: Moving the junior high French Immersion program to Bev Facey Community High is a viable solution that addresses the enrolment pressures at Ardrossan Junior Senior High; will help to boost program retention; and allows for robust programming, fewer school transitions and strengthens continuity in teaching, among other things. Already, EIPS operates four schools that offer grades 7 to 12 programming—one of which house the current secondary French Immersion program. All four schools operate without issues, and the Division has policies to ensure schools are welcoming, caring, respectful and safe. The Division will also ensure it has a plan in place to ensure smooth transitions for everyone.

Q14: Why is EIPS considering removing the dual-track program at Sherwood Heights Junior High, when part of the Sherwood Park replacement school ask included dual-track junior high programming?

A: There are three main reasons why EIPS proposed a solution that moved Sherwood Heights Junior High’s junior high French Immersion program to Bev Facey:

1. To ensure robust secondary French Immersion programming—with a goal to have the same number of students who start the program in kindergarten, end the program in Grade 12.
2. A dual-track program at the Sherwood Park replacement school, requires the Division to explore relocating programs currently offered at Sherwood Heights Junior High—Junior High Honours, Impact and Logos Christian—to ensure sufficient student capacity, long term.
3. The new replacement school doesn’t allow the Division to maximize French-speaking opportunities for junior high students because the replacement school doesn’t have the space for a dedicated French Immersion area.
4. Feedback from Phase 1 and Phase 2 indicated a desire for fewer school transitions. Placing the junior high French Immersion program at the new replacement school only minimizes transitions for students attending elementary there—not for anyone else.

Q15: If EIPS decides to relocate the French Immersion junior high program to Bev Facey, as a single-track junior high program, will students have as many options as they have now?

A: Yes. If the decision is to offer a single-track junior high program at Bev Facey Community High, EIPS projects 265 to 270 students to enrol in that program. That’s similar to Lakeland Ridge’s and Strathcona Christian Academy Secondary’s student enrolment. And, it’s higher than the junior high enrolment in Lamont and Vegreville. All four of these schools offer fulsome optional courses and extracurriculars. Plus, Bev Facey has extensive careers and technologies studies space, which the junior high program can take full advantage of for careers and technologies foundations classes.

Enrolment Pressures

Q16: What are the enrolment pressures EIPS is facing?

A: For EIPS, it has two main areas of concern: Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County. In Fort Saskatchewan, EIPS anticipates enrolment pressure issues in most of its schools for the foreseeable future. Schools within the city are 81 per cent utilized. Four are above 87 per cent utilized, and two are expected to exceed 108 per cent by 2027. That, in turn, puts enrolment pressure on underutilized schools within EIPS. That, mixed with new developments underway in the Industrial Heartland, such as the Fort Saskatchewan Hydrogen Hub, EIPS anticipates further population growth for the region for the foreseeable future.

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 schools. In fact, by 2027, the Division projects enrolment to increase by 182 students at the two schools, with a utilization rate of 99 per cent. That, coupled with an influx of students from the Cambrian Crossing, Bremner and Hillshire developments, 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 [2024-27 Three-Year Capital Plan](#). However, the province needs to approve funding for these, which is years away. As such, EIPS must use existing infrastructure to balance school enrolments among overcrowded and under-used schools.

Q17: Where do most students who are enrolled in the French Immersion program live?

A: Most students enrolled in EIPS’ French Immersion program live in Sherwood Park—elementary, junior high and senior high. On Page 6 is a high-level breakdown of where most students in French Immersion live. For more detailed information, see the [2022-23 French Immersion Student Heat Map](#), as of Sept. 29, 2022.

SECTOR OF RESIDENCE	STUDENT TOTALS
Sherwood Park	621
Strathcona County	370
Fort Saskatchewan	331
Lamont County	16
County of Minburn	0
Out of Division	30
TOTAL STUDENTS	1,368

Q18: 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 [2024-27 Three-Year Capital Plan](#)—including, a grades 7 to 12 school to replace Rudolph Hennig Junior High and Fort Saskatchewan High, a kindergarten to Grade 6 school to replace James Mowat Elementary and a new school in Cambrian Crossing. However, the province has yet to approve funding for any of these capital requests. Recently, it did approve a replacement school in Sherwood Park, which was a priority on the capital plan for more than 10 years. Funding approval generally 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

Q19: 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 historic trends, the two grades with the lowest retention rates 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.

Q20: Why are students leaving the secondary French Immersion program?

A: What EIPS learned through Phase 2 of the French Immersion public engagement efforts is there are a few key factors influencing program retention. These include the student's [proximity to French Immersion programs](#), academic achievement, wanting fewer transitions, a desire for more robust programming that comes with a larger student base and a general lack of motivation to continue to learn French as children grow older.

Q21: How many students are enrolled in the French Immersion elementary and secondary program?

A: The below table shows EIPS' French Immersion enrolment, as of Sept. 29, 2022.

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

Q22: Why does EIPS want to grow the French Immersion secondary program if it's sustainable?

A: EIPS wants to grow the secondary French Immersion program because of its value statement: "[EIPS'] French Immersion program offers robust, high-quality, linguistically and culturally rich learning environments where students, K-12, are engaged in becoming highly proficient in Canada's two official languages" There's significant demand for French Immersion at the elementary level. That's not the case at the senior high level. So, finding a solution to improve program retention will ensure the Division can provide robust, linguistically and culturally rich learning environments for students, K-12, long term.

Facts and Figures

Q23: Can EIPS provide current and historical data on its French Immersion student populations, retention levels and transitions?

A: Yes. The information is posted online on the French Immersion Engagement web page under [Facts and Figures](#) (see pg. 5, "EIPS French Immersion Program Enrolment 2000-22"). Briefly, since 2000, EIPS' French Immersion Program has grown to 1,370 students from 741 students. For example, the current Grade 12 cohort has 37 students, and when they started kindergarten, the cohort had 117 children enrolled. For the cohort, the largest single-year enrolment drop was when it moved to Grade 10—dropping to 45 students from 75. The next was in Grade 7, dropping to 87 students from 101. Each grade cohort shows a similar trend.

Q24: Looking ahead to five years, the [Resident French Immersion Student Heat Map](#) will look different, will EIPS need to explore relocating the program again?

A: EIPS recognizes demographics change over time. Regularly, EIPS reviews projected growth trends in all areas it serves. Doing so provides insight into how EIPS' demographics will—from the next five years to the next 50 years. When developing [viable solution options](#), the Division used this growth data to ensure each account for the projected growth and can accommodate that long-term growth.

Q25: Can EIPS break the [Resident French Immersion Student Heat Map](#) into elementary, junior high and senior high enrolment per community?

A: Yes. The information is posted online under the French Immersion Engagement web page under Facts and Figures (see pg. 2, "Total French Immersion Student Enrolment by Community of Residency"). The charts detail the communities students reside in and are broken down into elementary, junior high and senior high enrolments.

Q26: How can EIPS address the elementary enrolment pressures through modular classrooms?

A: Every year, EIPS reviews its modular classroom unit needs as part of the province's Modular Classroom Program. Specifically, the Division looks at the schools needing new modular units, surplus units that can be relocated to another school and required modular demolitions. It then submits a request to the province for funding consideration. EIPS will use this process to accommodate student growth at Ardrossan Elementary.

Q27: What is the student capacity of the Sherwood Park replacement school?

A: The new Sherwood Park replacement school has a student capacity of 1,015.

Busing

Q28: 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 bus services during the new or returning student registration process. Families simply indicate on the online form busing is required for their child.

Q29: What will bus ride times look like for the different options:

A: All the bus times are reasonable. Below is a breakdown of ride times for each option.

OPTION 1:

- Shorter ride times for urban Fort Saskatchewan riders;
- similar ride times for students living in rural Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County; and
- longer ride times for current direct-bus Ardrossan students—but reasonable and comparable to other riders coming into town.

OPTION 2:

- shorter ride times for urban Fort Saskatchewan riders;
- similar ride times for students living in rural Fort Saskatchewan and Strathcona County; and
- longer ride times for current direct-bus Ardrossan students—but reasonable and comparable to other riders coming into town.

OPTION 3:

- similar ride times for students living in Fort Saskatchewan and rural areas; and
- longer ride times for current direct-bus Ardrossan students—but reasonable and comparable to other riders coming into town.

Q30: Will relocating the secondary French Immersion program to Sherwood Park increase bus-ride times for rural students and Fort Saskatchewan students?

A: If the program relocates to Sherwood Park, ride times would be similar to what they are now for students living in rural areas and shorter for riders living in urban Fort Saskatchewan. For Ardrossan-based students, who currently have a direct-bus, ride times will increase, but will be reasonable.

Q31: Where do riders who currently attend Ardrossan Junior Senior High's French Immersion program typically live?

A: Ardrossan Junior Senior High enrolls French Immersion students from across the Division. EIPS provides bus services to any resident students who request transportation services.

Q32: Is it possible to offer direct busing to all secondary French Immersion students?

A: No, not currently. A direct-bus ride time would be much longer for students attending the French Immersion program than routing students on transfer-site bus routes.

Next Steps

Q33: If changes are made to the secondary French Immersion program, when will they take effect?

A: Any changes made to the EIPS secondary French Immersion program will take effect when the new Sherwood Park replacement school opens. So, the earliest is in the 2026-27 school year.

Q34: 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. 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.

Q35: Can students register at a French Immersion school that's different from their designated French Immersion school?

A: Yes. Families wanting 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.

Q36: 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.