



March 14th 2008

To the attention of:

The Honourable Kelly Lamrock, Minister of Education
John Kershaw, Deputy Minister, Department of Education, New Brunswick

Subject: FSL: Report of the French Second Language Commission

The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT), a professional association of over 4,000 educator members who work in every province and territory of Canada, has followed closely the process followed by the Commissioners completing the review of FSL programs in New Brunswick. In the fall of 2007, CASLT submitted a letter expressing our strong support for New Brunswick's planned expansion of Intensive French as a method of enhancing the second language oral and written proficiency of students enrolled in the regular English program, by providing more intensity and time in the second language. But it also clearly stated our concern that Intensive French cannot be a one size fits all solution for FSL programming and that meeting the varying needs of all students, in all contexts, requires choice in entry points and program intensity. Intensive French is not a replacement for Early French Immersion, and it is unwise to eliminate a program, which has produced graduates who meet a proficiency standard well above what other FSL program alternatives achieve in your province and elsewhere. The Canadian French Immersion program success has been recognized and modelled internationally.

CASLT strongly believes in decision-making based on sound research. Our Board of Directors and membership includes well known researchers and educational experts from across Canada. We have consulted many for reactions to the recent report provided by the Commissioners. Our experts believe that this report is quite biased, selecting elements of research to provide a skewed interpretation of results (for an example, see attached appendix). Our experts strongly believe that the decision, announced on Friday March 14, to eliminate the Early French Immersion program is based on incomplete information.

With respect to English literacy testing at Grade 2, the report is silent on how many of the early French immersion students/classes had been exposed to formal instruction in English language arts by the Grade 2 level. Certain New Brunswick immersion classes have no formal instruction in English until Grade 3 or 4; therefore to report English literacy test scores for these children is misleading. In any event, we know from multiple research studies that within one year of instruction in English language arts, early immersion students catch up with and sometimes surpass regular English program children (Genesee, 1987; Swain & Lapkin, 1992; Turnbull, Hart & Lapkin, 2000). It is noteworthy that no program other than early French immersion sets the goal of attaining Advanced proficiency (based on oral language testing usually done in New Brunswick at grade 12) or above. Eliminating the early immersion alternative therefore implies that this goal may be unattainable for any student in the province (the standard for late immersion being below Advanced.)

Many of our members are also members of the Consortium des universités, a sub-group of university researchers who belong to l'Association canadienne des professeurs d'immersion. We know that they have written a letter to you with similar concerns and we join them in asking you to re-think your decision and reject the analyses and recommendations included in your Commissioners' report.

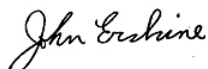
CASLT believes that the Commissioners did not consider the long-term effects of cutting all early second language learning programs from the Anglophone Sector schools. Many Canadians believe in raising bilingual children and that an early start in second language learning enhances this success rate. Therefore these individuals will begin to look outside the Anglophone sector schools for programs that fit these values. CASLT has witnessed a broadening of the provincial departmental and school board interpretations for official language rights and access to education in Francophone sector schools across the country. We believe this could affect New Brunswick Anglophone schools and develop a competition between the two sectors.

CASLT believes that a significant opportunity has been missed. Combining the recommendation in the report related to mandatory completion of FSL programs to graduation with a well-supported Early French Immersion Program could provide New Brunswick with the highest quality program offered in Canada, underlining this province's leadership in second language education in Canada and truly fulfilling the goals established by this government. Providing two entry points for French Immersion (Early and Late) and a strong Intensive French program will enable parents in New Brunswick to choose the appropriate pathway to bilingualism for their child. **CASLT strongly suggests that the Minister rethink the decision to eliminate the Early French Immersion Program in New Brunswick.**

Learning a second language goes beyond the utilitarian perspective of employment opportunities and should include broader personal benefits including enhanced problem-solving ability and creativity, as well as societal benefits: developing competence in various languages promotes linguistic tolerance, and is essential in consolidating democratic citizenship, sustaining social cohesion and providing a global perspective for students, which is so much a part of New Brunswick's outlook on education. Emphasizing the broader benefits of learning both of Canada's, and New Brunswick's, official languages will foster an atmosphere for students to remain in their French second language courses until graduation. Eliminating any successful second language program would be counter productive.

CASLT would like to offer our assistance to the Minister and the New Brunswick Department of Education as it considers the recommendations put forth in this report. Our experts would be pleased to share a more inclusive perspective and a more exhaustive interpretation of existing research in second language education. Please contact our Executive Director, Nicole Thibault, at 1-877-727-0994, or direct@caslt.org.

Sincerely,



John Erskine
CASLT President 2007-2009

References:

- Carleton Board of Education. (1994). *French immersion update*. Ottawa, ON: Author.
- Genesee, F. (1987). *Learning through two languages*. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House.
- Rehorick, S. (1993). *French second language learning in New Brunswick schools: Paradigms, challenges, and strategies*. Fredericton, N.B.: University of New Brunswick.
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Example of a misleading analysis and interpretation from the Report of the French Second Language Commission

The report suggests that the superior results recorded in the case of early immersion can be explained by the fact that a greater proportion of students with exceptionalities are found in the regular English program. Therefore, French immersion is somehow 'inequitable'. Are exceptional children being counseled out of early French immersion? If so, it's a simple matter to decide to include them.

The tables and graphs in the report are inconsistent in reporting statistical significance and effect size and therefore the analyses can lead to misinterpretations of the information provided. For example, if we inspect the data (pages 59-60) on grade 5 math performance, we learn that early French immersion students (mean 64.47) outperformed the regular English program students (mean 59.33) and that this difference is statistically significant. The effect size, however (page 60, part of Table 25) is .012 or weak. Therefore the difference between the means, though statistically significant, is not meaningful because of the minimal effect size.

Elsewhere in the report, effect size is not reported systematically, so the reader cannot assess to what extent differences reported are meaningful.

The authors of the report attribute great importance to the fact that the immersion and regular program populations are dissimilar with respect to the proportion of students with exceptionalities. So they decide to inspect some data *excluding* such students. In Table 26, therefore, they present a comparison of grade 5 math results for the top 50 percent of the grades in math for the two groups (immersion and regular). We find out that (p. 61) "67% of the English Core program students and 76% of the French Immersion students" achieve either 'strong achievement' or 'appropriate achievement' ratings on the grade 5 provincial math assessment. Remembering that this analysis is based on only the top-performing half of all students tested, we then encounter the incongruous statement that "This is despite the fact that 27.97% of the English Core program is made up of students with special needs while they constitute only 6.3% of the French Immersion program" (p. 61). Such a complete non-sequitur calls into question many of the statistical comparisons and interpretations of the data throughout the report.