

HDSB comes up with compromise with French and English programming

By Tim Whitnell
Metroland Media Group

It's taken more than a year but Halton District School Board senior staff has come up with what it describes as a compromise to deal with the widening French and English programming dichotomy in some of its schools.

A Program Viability Committee, consisting of several senior board administrators, elected trustees, principals, vice-principals and board research and planning staff, took more than a year, including conducting several rounds of public consultation, to whittle 14 possible options down to four for public feedback.

The committee settled on one recommendation (Option 6), which was presented by Associate Director David Boag at last week's board meeting.

That option is expected to be voted on at the June 15 board meeting.

Option 6 would see Grade 2 as the entry point for 100 per cent French Immersion (FI) instruction in existing single-track (FI or English programming only) and dual-track (FI and English students together) schools.

In a report to the board, co-authored by Education Director Stuart Miller, Option 6 is described as providing parents with an extra year, beyond the current Grade 1 FI entry model, to understand their child as a learner prior to making a decision to enter French Immersion.

The recommended option also presents few, if any, additional school program boundary reviews and would keep the current single- and dual-track

school configurations intact, meaning less change for students, according to Boag and Miller's report.

We're not looking for an ideal solution but what's going to work best in our Halton context for French and English learners. It's a compromise on early-ish (FI) entry, Boag told trustees.

We know we'll hear some differences of opinion on both sides.

Miller chimed in saying the proposed one-year delay to FI could be valuable.

In that Grade 1 year teachers will talk to parents about the appropriateness of (FI) placement because they know the child as well.

He said the board is struggling with the twin peaks of challenges: high FI student numbers and low English numbers in some schools along with difficulty in hiring the required number of high-quality French teachers.

If this (new model) is unable to control the uptake (of FI pupils), we'll have to do it by other means, (just) like around the province.

Trustees know what I mean, said Miller. I'm not at all supporting we

go to capping (FI enrolment), but if this (option) does not work, we have to consider all means.

Miller added that he would like to see the resurrection of a French advisory committee.

The new model, if approved by trustees, would begin in Grade 2 for

the 2018-19 school year. FI entry in Grade 1 would stop after the 2016-17 year with all new 2017-18 Grade 1s being in the English program only.

However, pupils enrolled under the current French Immersion model would be grandfathered and allowed to finish elementary school under the

current FI model.

The board says a steady and large influx of young students into FI in recent years has created an imbalance at many dual-track schools where English programming is also offered.

Continued on page 35



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