



Canadian Parents for French – Hamilton Wentworth

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Trustee Judith Bishop
Chair, Policy Working Sub-Committee
Hamilton Wentworth District School Board

March 3, 2005

Dear Trustee Bishop:

The Policy Working Sub-Committee will be discussing the notion of choice and eligibility for transportation service at its meeting of March 8, 2005. Would you kindly provide copies of this letter to the Sub-Committee members for their consideration during this discussion.

Canadian Parents for French is a national organization which works with teachers, administrators and community leaders to strengthen French second language programs in Canadian schools. Members of the CPF Hamilton-Wentworth Chapter have been following the HWDSB's review of its Transportation Policy with great interest and would like to raise the following two points:

1. The provision of transportation for French Immersion should be considered by the School Board as a distinct and separate decision from the provision of transportation for Programs of Choice.

French Immersion is different from Programs of Choice:

- French Immersion has been a successful part of the Hamilton District School Board's curriculum for over 25 years.
- The Province of Ontario has set out a specific Ontario Curriculum for French Immersion, whereas Programs of Choice operate within the regular Provincial core curriculum documents.
- The French Immersion program has more in common with the optional Kindergarten program than it does with Programs of Choice. The Ontario Curriculum document for FSL states that "the provision of ...a French Immersion program is optional". An Ontario Curriculum document also exists for Kindergarten, although attendance at school is optional before a student is 6 years of age. Transportation is provided for Kindergarten students.
- The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has separate approved policies for French Immersion (Policy No. 3.01 Curriculum) and for Programs of Choice (Policy No. 7.17 School Management).
- The Province of Ontario provides specific, additional funding for French Immersion students at both the elementary and secondary school levels.

- Other School Boards provide bussing for French Immersion, but not for Programs of Choice (eg: Trillium Lakelands District School Board offers an optional International Baccalaureate program at the high school level. Students in this program are not bussed, unless they are also in the French Immersion program. Should they drop out of Immersion, they are no longer eligible for transportation.)

2. Transportation should be provided for French Immersion students.

- The Policy Working Sub-Committee has already suggested that transportation services “are to be used to increase enrolment and retain students”. French Immersion enrolment would increase if bussing was provided and parents would be less likely to transfer their children to the separate school board or the Halton school boards which do offer transportation.
- Transportation will increase French Immersion enrolment, which will increase the amount of Provincial FSL funding to the Board. Transportation for French Immersion will also help retain students in the HWDSB, which will increase the student grants to the Board. This increased funding can be used to help off-set the costs of providing bussing.
- The Sub-Committee has also stated that transportation should be “provided in a safe manner and concerns for students’ pedestrian safety will be a consideration in the provision of services”. Currently the lack of bussing and huge catchment areas of French Immersion schools such as Norwood Park is resulting in over 400 students being dropped off and picked up by car each day –an accident waiting to happen. The Board should consider its liability in creating such a situation.
- The federal government's Action Plan for Official Languages has challenged education stakeholders to double the number of functionally bilingual high school graduates by 2013. The provision of transportation for Immersion students would show the Board’s endorsement and support of this initiative.
- Every Canadian should have the right to be bilingual. Every child in Hamilton should have the equitable right to attend French Immersion. A child’s attendance should not depend on the affluence of his family or their ability to drive him to school. Providing transportation is the fair thing to do.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rosalind Minaji
Chair, CPF Hamilton-Wentworth