

**Continued Growth of
Community-Based Dual-Track
French Immersion
in Prince George:
Solutions for the
École College Heights Area**

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***Submitted by Concerned ÉCHE Parents and
Community Members***

Continued Growth of Community-Based Dual-Track French Immersion in Prince George: Solutions for the École College Heights Elementary Area

Introduction

It takes a village to raise a child. We know this from experience – our own experiences as a child and those we have every day as parents. We cannot raise our children in isolation. We depend on the community around us to help us do a good job. Community is about getting to know our neighbours and helping them out when needed. It is about getting to know our neighbourhoods and identifying the various parts that make them our home – the parks, ice-rinks, sledding hills, bike-riding routes, favourite forests, crucial short-cuts, and the way to school.

So much of our time as youth and as parents is spent at school. We become connected to our local small-scale community schools because they become the centre of our and our children's lives for so many years. So much of what happens there – formal learning, sports events, plays, musical performances, cultural exchange, field-trips, environmental stewardship, forming lasting friendships, socializing, and giving back to the community through various projects or fundraisers – is contiguous with our values and expectations around the growing of bright, well-adjusted, capable and thoughtful individuals. The entire community around such a school is fully invested in the success of the cohorts of children that work their way through the elementary years and head off to high-school full of confidence and with bright futures ahead. This is because vibrant communities are those in which schools are located. People want to live where stable, multi-generational communities are supported. And they *are* supported in such neighbourhoods. Schools are the heartbeat of our communities and provide the continuation of the village we depended on to help us raise our children up to, and beyond, school age.

Why small schools? Because we know our children will be known, recognized and cared for by teachers, parents and other students alike within this setting. Because we know that the safety of our children is assured in a small-scale school designed for younger children. And because we know that our children will succeed in a setting that allows for individual growth and development within a comfortable educational setting with committed and caring educators as role-models and mentors. They, and their needs, will not get lost in the shuffle or the numbers. Small-scale community elementary schools foster the development of our children as a whole, and not just from a 3R's point of view. Education at the elementary level is seen as much more than just curriculum and content mastery, although it is clear that learning outcomes are enhanced in small-scale settings. Education also embraces social and psychological health, awareness, and development. These important aspects of our children's holistic education cannot and will not be addressed through access to improved physical resources alone.

Dual-track French Immersion has been happening in three of our smaller school community-based elementary schools for many years and has grown into one of, if not the, most successful program(s) in the District. The families that have chosen French Immersion for their children have done so for a number of important reasons. These include valuing the acquisition of a second language (and a third and fourth, as this becomes easier with each language learned),

perceived improved educational outcomes and future career benefits, challenging children academically and helping to ensure they are reaching their maximum learning potential, and developing a better understanding and acceptance of our multicultural heritage and makeup leading to citizens with fewer stereotypes and prejudices.

Parents have also chosen French Immersion because it is available in a dual-track setting in a choice of smaller community schools that are accessible to the majority of the population without having to travel too far. The advantages to the dual-track setting have, for most, far outweighed any potential disadvantages (see Appendix, Tables 2 & 3). The dual-track setting reflects the bilingual nature of society with bilingualism normalized in these schools. Cultural activities in both languages benefit all children in the school. In a dual-track setting, Immersion students can still access home language resources, which is a vital component of Immersion education. Children within the same family can be placed in either track without separating siblings. Those who may not succeed in French Immersion can move into the English track with little disruption to their lives. In a dual-track school, Immersion students are not regarded as elite or special, rather, the social fabric of the school is special because of both languages. Parental investment and volunteerism is significant and an important part of the school culture and is enhanced because the school is close to most of the children's homes. And all children can access enhanced curriculum such as excellent music and gym programs because the schools are full and successful.

With the obvious success of these dual-track community elementary schools in three locations in this city, we have to ask, why fix something that isn't broken? Dismantling and displacing a thriving program forces families to make impossible decisions about their children's futures, not because their children are not succeeding in the Immersion program, but because the choice has been removed. Our Superintendent has clearly stated that the issue for dual-track programs is solely one of allowing for growth. There must be another solution than to centralize and single-track the three schools.

As a collective, we have come up with a proposal that will not only solve the space crunch caused by all-day Kindergarten at our own school, but will also solve this same problem for two other local community schools. It will eliminate the need for portables at two of the schools thereby saving money, while at the same time, providing space for growth within these schools. It also saves the District considerable costs associated with renovations to the proposed centralized school, as well as those needed to house Kindergarten at each of the local schools. We propose a vibrant community-group linked Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre that can only succeed.

We believe that, amongst others, one of the priorities that our Board should set for the long-term success and sustainability of our public school system is to stick with what is working well. Dual-track French Immersion in smaller community schools is working. And it is working because parents like and have committed to this configuration, and because students excel academically and socially in this setting. In fact, we 'chose' it. Please keep this priority in mind as you read our proposals for dealing with the space crunch and future growth. Our children and their futures depend on it.

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Proposal for Gladstone Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre

Space at all three dual-track schools is a big issue, and is part of the reasoning behind the proposal to amalgamate French Immersion programs. In particular, all-day Kindergarten means that each school must double the classroom space currently devoted to Kindergarten. The dual-track schools are already at capacity, and there simply is no room for more.

Dual-track schools are not the only ones feeling the crunch. In the catchment areas adjacent to École College Heights Elementary (ECHE), Southridge Elementary is also at capacity with a portable, and Malaspina Elementary is comfortably full. Space for English and French programs in ECHE is at a premium. In the ECHE catchment alone, twelve children are unable to attend because there is no room. This needs to be addressed now.

All-day Kindergarten, and plans for 3-4 year-old learning programs, means that each school must not only find classroom space, but also retrofit to include washrooms for each Kindergarten classroom, and an enclosed play area within the larger school yard that is devoted only to preschool children.

At the same time, there is overwhelming support for maintaining dual-track programs. French and English benefit each other immeasurably, and allow both programs the benefits of a neighbourhood-based education. Removing the French Immersion program from its current locations leaves three schools unfilled (Austin Road/Heather Park, Spruceland and College Heights Elementaries). They could be the next to close.

To make space in all neighbourhood schools, save money, *and* to enhance our neighbourhood in general, we propose a Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre specifically for all-day Kindergarten and, in the future, preschool students in the area, housed at Gladstone Elementary. Neighbourhood Kindergarten students from the catchment areas for ECHE, Southridge and Malaspina Elementaries would attend their first year at this centre, and join their regular *home* schools beginning in Grade One.

The School Board has challenged school communities to come up with cost-cutting alternatives to school closures. We are accepting that challenge and in turn, are challenging Trustees to work with us to be creative and to find innovative new ways to make maximum efficient use of district resources.

Space

The District Sustainability Report recommends closing Peden Hill Elementary. Many children would then attend Westwood Elementary, which is within walking distance for them. Others would attend ECHE.

Several children from the Peden Hill catchment area already attend ECHE. We estimate that we need to find space for about 40 extra children. While the Sustainability Report suggests that approximately 80 children would be moved to ECHE, more realistically many of them would attend Westwood to preserve friendships and community relationships.

Moving Kindergarten to Gladstone frees two classrooms. That is enough to ensure that all children within the catchment area who wish to attend ECHE are able to do so. Other measures, such as monitoring enrollment to consider catchment area children first, may need to be considered in the future.

If the catchment expands, we estimate continuing to use portables for the next four years. However, as enrollments decline, those spaces will become unnecessary. At Southridge Elementary, a portable has been used for quite some time. There is potential to remove this portable if more space is available inside the school.

Malaspina Elementary is set to expand with the completion of the Malaspina Ridge housing development. An influx of students at that school could mean that portables may be required there. Having all-day Kindergarten at another location would prevent this from occurring.

Impact on budget: Positive. Savings of about \$12,000 per year within four years. Potential to close second portable at ECHE within 6 years with a net of another \$12,000 per year. Possible removal of portable at Southridge Elementary with a savings of \$12,000 per year.

Resources and Administration

Malaspina Elementary, Southridge Elementary and ECHE could share Kindergarten resources and administration, reducing costs for all. Instead of each school bearing the brunt of implementing all-day Kindergarten individually, each would contribute a portion to the Gladstone centre. Principals, secretaries, learning assistants, librarians and music teachers could take turns spending time at Gladstone.

Kindergarten teachers would work with other preschool and Kindergarten teachers, to their benefit and that of the students. Resources such as books and learning materials would be specifically geared towards early learners. Each of the three home schools could contribute resources, and it would be only a matter of moving items, not purchasing new.

Impact on budget: Negligible to cost-neutral

Facilities Upgrades

All schools need to upgrade in order to implement all-day Kindergarten (washrooms in each room, enclosed play yard specifically for preschool students). With all-day Kindergarten located at Gladstone, one school would require facilities upgrades rather than three, with a significant financial savings. **Note: If the Immersion program does move to John McInnis, the three home schools would still need to upgrade facilities.**

Assuming two to three Kindergarten classes per school, each school must install dedicated washrooms, and potentially rearrange current school configurations to find space for these facilities. At Gladstone, classes could be arranged to accommodate shared washrooms. The result is that fewer washrooms would need to be installed, and current space configurations at the schools could remain the same.

Each school must also install an enclosed play area to meet Ministry standards for a separate play area for preschool students (see *Northern Health's Child Care Facility Regulations, Play Area and Equipment*). At Gladstone this would be unnecessary, as the yard would be devoted to this age group. At neighbourhood elementary schools, an enclosed play yard also means moving or installing new playground equipment specifically for that yard, with a significant delay to fundraise for new equipment.

All-day Kindergarten is not scheduled to be implemented across the board until the 2011/2012 school year. This gives the District and the schools plenty of time to plan for this and accommodate necessary changes.

Impact on budget: Positive. Cost of washrooms at one school is less expensive than rearranging and outfitting at three schools. No need to spend funds on John McInnis to make it ready for elementary school children. No need to enclose play yard at the home schools.

Early Learning Environment

The Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre would be an environment where children ease into the idea of a full-day program. This will benefit children socially and educationally, and meets ministry guidelines for an early learning environment.

Many children do not currently attend full day programs and are first exposed to a structured learning environment in Kindergarten. Many parents have concerns about an all-day program and fear that their children are not ready for a situation that requires them to be focused and attentive all day.

A Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre could be structured much like a preschool, and could also offer space to preschool programs. Strong Start is already located at Gladstone with 81 children currently enrolled. A natural partnership would form with these programs to create the best possible learning environment. When early learning schooling for 3-4 year olds begins, Gladstone could be the centre.

Children can stay in their neighbourhood in a smaller and more intimate setting than a larger school with older children. And they can still access neighbourhood after-school care programs, which are all threatened (for French Immersion children) by a move to John McInnis. The parking lot at Gladstone allows parents and childcare providers to park and walk their children to and from the facility easily and safely.

More children can be exposed to a dual-track system. With French Immersion Kindergarten at Gladstone Elementary, children from Southridge and Malaspina Elementaries will be exposed to French language and culture. Sharing languages and cultural activities normalizes the multicultural nature of our country. The Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre could also be set up to offer a French preschool, expanding language programs to younger learners.

For teachers working in the early learning environment, such a centre can offer a highly collegial atmosphere. Concerns and issues regarding early learning and school readiness can be dealt with among invested professionals, with dedicated and appropriate resources.

Community Partnerships

Currently, a seniors' group and the Strong Start Program use Gladstone Elementary. There would be space for community groups, including these ones, thereby continuing to generate funds for the District. The Strong Start Program is a natural fit, and partnerships with seniors' groups are socially and educationally beneficial. The Ministry of Education suggests co-locating complementary programs for early learning.

There is a daycare centre right next door, which currently uses space at Gladstone school. This is also a natural partnership. There is potential for the daycare, or another similar program, to expand with the influx of children into the school. Other natural partners, such as community garden groups, adult learning opportunities and even health or fitness groups could have space available to them. Encouraging community groups to make use of the school generates further money for the District.

Impact on budget: *Positive, as community groups generate funds for the District*

Positive Use of Surplus Space

The British Columbia Ministry of Education has stated that School Districts are expected to use surplus space to implement all-day Kindergarten (see *the Ministry of Education, All Day Kindergarten FAQ*). Gladstone Elementary is surplus space, even more so after the District Resource Centre relocates to Lakewood. It is central to three neighbourhood schools (ECHE, and Malaspina and Southridge Elementaries), and is located right beside a daycare centre.

The District Sustainability Report suggests that the District Resource Centre be moved. This leaves a large chunk of space at Gladstone empty. Community groups alone cannot fill this space, and still the District must pay to heat and maintain the building.

Filling the school with children in a plan that benefits the whole neighbourhood is a positive use of surplus space.

Neighbourhood Learning Centres have been constructed in several school districts across the province. There are centres in Peace River South School District (SD 59) at Pouce Coupe Elementary School, Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte School District (SD 50) at Port Clements Elementary School, and in our own Prince George School District (SD 57) at Valemount Secondary School. A new one was announced on February 26, 2010, in Oliver, BC. The Ministry of Education states emphatically that Neighbourhood Learning Centres are the cutting edge of educational environments and that they are to be encouraged.

This one, however, would not have to be newly constructed, but rather would use existing, surplus space. And with recent reminders that School Districts are not able to sell their empty school buildings, the Gladstone Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre makes full use of a building that would otherwise remain nearly vacant.

Impact on Budget: *Positive or cost-neutral. Maximum use of space reduces carbon footprint. Also maximizes efficiency at four schools (ECHE, Malaspina, Gladstone and Southridge).*

Neighbourhood and Environmental Benefits

As a society, our fitness levels continue to drop. Maintaining neighbourhood schools encourages children to walk to school along safe routes. Gladstone Elementary School is centrally located and within walking distance for a great number of children in the College Heights area. Start times could be staggered (perhaps 9:00 a.m. for Kindergarten children) so that families with children in Kindergarten and older grades could get to both schools on time.

Children benefit by staying in their neighbourhoods. The attachments we form at a young age help us feel secure and grounded as we grow up. As we encourage children to form attachments to their neighbourhoods with community schools, we teach them to have more of a stake in the neighbourhood's success.

With a Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre, and with the space generated by having Kindergarten children at Gladstone, not only are the Kindergartners creating attachments to their neighbourhood, but also the children at ECHE who can continue at the school to which they have already become attached.

Parental involvement in our neighbourhood schools is high. We see the same faces every day and feel a very strong sense of belonging at our schools. We know our neighbourhood and each other, and are able to recognize and react when something isn't right. Equally important, the children recognize us, and even if they don't know us by name are able to feel safe accepting help from us if they are hurt or in trouble.

Our teachers and principals know us as well. Our schools rely on parent volunteers for many daily operations. Parents are far more willing – and able – to volunteer at a school in their neighbourhood, close to home. Maintaining neighbourhood schools is vital to the growth and success of the neighbourhood and the school. People buy houses where their schools are located. People want to locate close to schools. People care more about their neighbourhoods when they feel connected.

Dual-Track Benefits

This plan would maintain dual-track programs at ECHE. If Austin Road Elementary is maintained or Heather Park Middle is converted to a dual-track school, and if Spruceland Elementary were able to house their all-day Kindergarten (or to start a similar learning centre), then the vibrant French Immersion program would remain truly immersed in our communities.

Also, as a dual-track school, the Gladstone Neighbourhood Early Learning centre may be eligible for Federal French Immersion funding.

It is extremely important that we reflect the diverse nature of our society. We are a bilingual country, and French and English thrive in an environment where acceptance and respect are expected. Increasing exposure to both languages in a Kindergarten environment benefits French and English children from ECHE, and Southridge and Malaspina Elementaries. They can then go back to their home schools with added understanding of one another and of Canada's multicultural society.

Impact on Budget: *Positive with Federal French Immersion funding, no money spent on John McInnis.*

Conclusion

Families at all three dual-track schools want to maintain their programs in their neighbourhoods. There is overwhelming support for dual-track environments. The impetus for moving the Immersion programs is not financial, but is rather due to projected space deficits when all-day Kindergarten is implemented, and also to allow for program growth.

Finding creative ways to generate space is imperative, and we suggest that our resources be maximized in a cost-neutral or cost-positive way. A Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre does just that. It takes care of overcrowding at two of our neighbourhood schools, and maximizes use of a building that the District must pay to maintain, yet sits nearly empty. It also allows for program growth and maximizes use of the three dual-track schools, which risk future closure if Immersion programs are removed.

The benefits to children, first and foremost, are huge. Socially and environmentally, the Gladstone Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre is a place where young learners can thrive and get the best possible start. Locating this program with other community groups enhances the learning benefit for all, while still generating funds for the District. As well, community partnerships strengthen the ties we all feel for our neighbourhood.

The financial benefits are also great. The District will not have to retrofit John McInnis Junior Secondary, resulting in a savings of at least \$200,000, probably much more. Federal French Immersion funding could be applied to the Gladstone Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre. As well, if three neighbourhood schools share the possible (negligible) costs for preparing Gladstone Elementary, it would be less expensive than those three schools having to do the same work at each. Finally, at least one school could dismantle a portable, and another may no longer need one portable within four years, at a cost savings of another \$24,000 per year.

When this program succeeds, it can be a model for other districts. The School District 57 Board and our local MLAs can also be held up as an example of forward-thinking and creative management with minimal resources in challenging fiscal times. With the School Board and District staff being proactive and positive, the Gladstone Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre can be a place where early learning programs are given the best possible chance for success. The early learning programs can be expanded, which allows for future growth, and space at four neighbourhood schools will be used creatively and efficiently.

By implementing other cost-saving measures as well, it is still possible to implement this program for the 2011/2012 school year, which is when all-day Kindergarten is scheduled to be rolled out for all across the province.

Dual-track Alternate Proposal for French Immersion in SD 57

“The Government of Canada considers linguistic duality not only as a basis of Canadian identity, but also an essential tool for ensuring Canadian’s openness to the world.... The provincial objectives match the outcome domains identified by the federal action plan for both French minority language education and French second language instruction: student participation, provision of programs, student performance, enriched school environment, access to post-secondary education and support for educational staff and research.”¹

“Recruitment, integration and retention of students are key to meeting the overall objectives of the Protocol. Given projections for further decline in the school age population, the greatest challenge will be to sustain, and hopefully increase, the number of students in both French minority language education and French second language programs by 2012–2013.”²

The current dual-track model for French Immersion (FI) education is supported by the majority of parents who have students in this *choice* program. The District Sustainability Committee (DSC) Report proposes complete structural change to this very successful model. The proposal to amalgamate the FI program into one single-track school is of great concern to parents for several reasons. The most notable one being, it is not what we *chose* for our children.

Some of the other concerns include the health and safety of our children, loss of community schooling, drastic changes to the social fabric of the affected neighbourhoods, loss of access to extensive English resources, the difficulty that families will have when siblings are in different tracks, and the consequences to the children if they are not able to continue in French. In addition, several studies³ show that large elementary schools do not enhance learning, have increased security risks and violence, and contribute to “lower student achievement”⁴.

There is a total of 604 elementary students currently in the FI program in Prince George⁷. From the information available in the DSC Report, the working capacity at John McInnis School is 489 students. We understand that by utilizing elective space, the capacity can be increased to around 600. If the SD assumes that a large number of FI students will exit the program, the existing space at John McInnis School may suffice. However, if all FI students transfer to John McInnis School, the capacity is immediately capped at the present enrollment numbers. Neither of these two scenarios addresses positive growth in the FI program.

According to the DSC Report, there has been a 41% increase in FI enrollment in BC over the last 5 years⁵. As a direct result of the increased FI enrollment in our district, Federal funding for the FI program in SD 57 has increased from \$115 677.00 in 08/09, to \$164 851.00 in 09/10⁶. However, recent surveys conducted at all three affected dual-track schools indicate that FI enrollment will significantly decrease if the proposed amalgamation were to be implemented, thereby deleteriously affecting the Federal funding amount.

Our surveys show that 11% of ECHE parents would transfer their children to the English program, and that 35% are undecided as to whether they would keep their children in the FI program⁸. 70% of parents at Austin Road Elementary would transfer their child(ren) out of the FI program⁹. 8% of parents at Spruceland Elementary would transfer their child(ren) out of FI, and 29% are undecided¹⁰. In fact, this month, three students at Spruceland Elementary were

transferred out of the FI program because of its uncertain future.

The DSC Report suggests that the savings made by amalgamating the FI programs at John McInnis School would be \$250,000 (\$80,000 from each of the three dual-track elementaries and \$10,000 from Heather Park Middle School). According to information received through an FOI request to the School Board indicates that savings from closing John McInnis completely would be \$547,470¹¹.

The estimated costs of running a single-track FI program at John McInnis School are difficult to arrive at due to lack of information, but will include:

- Base allocation: \$110 000
- Custodial and utility costs: \$88,000 (conservative guess, based on Peden Hill)
- Renovation costs: \$700 000¹² (or \$250 000^{12.1} or \$10,000 - 40,000^{12.2})
- Decreased Federal funding amount due to fewer students in FI
- Safety fencing installation: unknown
- Playground installation: unknown
- Immediate increased demand for Teacher Assistants at schools where students transfer into the English program, as well as ongoing costs for students who transfer over time

Based on current numbers in the Sustainability Report, costs per student at each of the schools involved are all within a mean range, and can be considered equivalent for the purpose of this proposal.

The above information makes clear that the costs associated with amalgamating the FI program at John McInnis School far outweigh the amount saved from closing the school outright or reconfiguring it for another purpose. Add to that the potential losses in Federal funding due to a significant decrease in enrollment, the increased costs associated with assisting former FI students to achieve grade-level English skills, the loss of the investment, both monetary and social, that has been made in growing this program to its current level of success, and the incalculable cost of losing community support for the FI program. With the proposal to go from a dual-track to a single-track FI program, there is a risk that this district will not continue to grow in FI numbers but will decline, putting in peril this district's ability to meet federal and provincial objectives as stated above. At a time when the government identifies decline in the school-aged population as a challenge, we need to ensure that the plan we use to make space for FI to grow and flourish will, in fact, do just that. Therefore, we propose to open a fourth dual-track FI school, which will allow the District to maintain and grow the FI program, while at the same time sustaining the positive influence FI currently has in our community.

A Fourth Dual-Track Option

Open another dual-track French Immersion program that begins with a Kindergarten cohort and grows with the children.

How to do it:

- Consider capping FI enrollment at current schools
- Ask each of the current schools to contribute a portion of their dual-track supplement to establish and support the new FI program
- Ask each FI school to contribute some primary level books and learning resource material
- Ask FI parents to contribute French language books
- Search for surplus FI resource materials from other districts

Benefits:

- Maintains the current successful choice programs in which parents chose to enroll their children
- Increases student population in a school with lower enrollment thus bringing more resources to that school
- Supports cultural and societal understanding and acceptance that is a vital reflection of Canada
- Relieves Kindergarten and all-day Kindergarten pressures at current schools
- Meets the School District's goals to support and grow the FI program, and allows it to thrive
- Maintains or increases Federal funding support
- Supports community schools to which children and families have become attached and in which they have developed pride and allows communities to thrive
- Allows families to keep children in both French and English tracks in the same school
- Decreases stress on children who may have to leave the FI program, since they will not have to change schools
- Financial savings as discussed above

Possible locations:

- **Van Bien:** 2009 Occupancy: 89%; Space Available: 2009 – 28; 2014 – 80 (move training centre if necessary)

- **Foothills:** 2009 Occupancy: 79%; Space Available: 2009 – 72; 2014 - 59
- **Highglen:** 2009 Occupancy: 78%; Space Available: 2009 – 63; 2014 - 102
- **Vanway:** 2009 Occupancy: 78%; Space Available: 2009 – 28; 2014 – 80 (Note: 66 students from Vanway and Beaverly catchments currently attend ECHE. Ref: B. Ballantyne, Catchment Documents)
- **Central Fort George:** as it already hosts a choice program, it may also be an appropriate location

Establishing a new dual-track school would maintain and support the desires of the majority of FI parents. It will relieve enrollment pressure at the current schools, allow the program to grow, and support another school with dwindling student numbers, preventing the closure of yet another school in the future. Opening a fourth dual-track FI school is both a viable option for the continued success of FI in our School District, and is the most supported option by the majority of FI parents and students.

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Environmental and Health Impacts of the Proposed Changes to French Immersion in SD 57

A significant impact of the removal of “community schools” is the increased environmental footprint associated with increased travel distances for the students. Most obviously, students who walk or ride their bikes to their community school would be unable to continue getting to and from school in such an eco-friendly manner. Of the remaining students who were previously brought to school in vehicles, the average distance driven to the new school increases. With greater distances driven, the environmental impact increases proportionately as a result of gas consumption.

Calculation of the carbon footprint (see Table 1) incurred by the proposed amalgamation of the four French Immersion elementary/middle schools into one centrally located school (John McInnis Junior Secondary) reveals a significant increase in greenhouse gas emissions, and an accompanying increased cost of gas to the families transporting the students. An additional 244 tonnes of CO₂ per year will be emitted, as a result of an extra 745,000 km driven, and 86,000 litres of gas burned at a cost of \$94,000, assuming that 2 children are transported in each car. With a total of 604 French Immersion students, this represents an average additional cost of \$156 per child, per year. Note that this is an incremental cost, both environmentally and financially, above what is currently incurred in transporting the children to school. It is somewhat astounding to imagine that within a city the size of Prince George, the creation of a single amalgamated school with the students from only four community schools results in travel distances almost equaling those required to circumnavigate the earth 19 times each year. See Table 1 for details, including a breakdown on the impact for each school.

The health issues that emerge as a direct result of increased time in automobiles for young children are obvious. In this era of rising awareness of the hazards of sedentary lifestyles, habituating children to routine longer periods of time driving in vehicles goes against the work being done to encourage greater levels of activity in today’s generation of children. Childhood obesity rates have tripled in Canada in the last 25 years. Both the Canadian Pediatric Association and Health Canada state that physical inactivity in children is an epidemic, and that more than half the children and youth in Canada are not active enough for optimal growth and development. The CDC (Centre for Disease Control and Prevention) wrote a School Based Obesity Prevention Strategy in 2007 for State Policymakers and included the recommendation that the politicians support campaigns to include walking to and from school as part of a solution to combat inactivity and obesity.

Of equal concern is the increased exposure to pollutants during the commute. Studies (Fruin et al. 2007) have shown significant increases in pollution exposure that correlate directly to the amount of time spent in a car. Travel on highways that also contain diesel-fueled trucks, such as Highway 16, has been found to be a major source of pollutant exposure. In a recent major study conducted in British Columbia, traffic-related pollutants were found to be the prime contributors

to asthma in young children (Alderson 2010). Increased pollution exposure would also result from the effect of idling or slow-moving cars caught in the general congestion around the school twice a day.

Beyond the commute, there are concerns over the location of the proposed amalgamated school. John McInnis is approximately 750 metres from Highway 16, with few if any trees to buffer the pollutants coming from the highway. The associations between vehicular pollutants and adverse health effects in children are well documented (Gauderman et al. 2005), with much of the research directly linking childhood asthma to traffic exposure. The younger the child, the more adverse the effects. The children in an elementary school would face far more deleterious effects than those in a high school. These effects are compounded by the amount of time the younger children spend outside at recess, and further compounded by the greater levels of activity they exhibit when outside.

Table 1 (assumes 2 students per vehicle)

	ECHE	Spruceland	Austin Road	Heather Park	Total
Ave. extra km to J. McInnis	3	5	15	15	
Total student # (09/10)	463	385	316		1164
# FI students 2009/10	279	185	105	35	604
km/day, all FI students	1674	1850	3150	1050	7724
km/year, all FI students	323082	357050	607950	202650	1490732
Extra km driven per year	161541	178525	303975	101325	745366
CO ₂ (tons/year)	53	59	100	33	244
Litres of gas used/year	18577	20530	34957	11652	85717
Cost of gas/year, \$/year	20435	22583	38453	12818	94289
Cost per child for gas alone, \$	73	122	366	366 Ave:	156

References

Alderson L 2010. Traffic Marker? Early Exposure to Air Pollution Associated with Childhood Asthma. *Environ Health Perspectives*

S. Fruin, D. Westerdahl, T. Sax, C. Sioutas and P.M. Fine. "Measurements and predictors of on-road ultrafine particle concentrations and associated pollutants in Los Angeles," *Atmospheric Environment* (2007)

W.J. Gauderman et al., Childhood Asthma and Exposure to Traffic and Nitrogen Dioxide, *Epidemiology* 16 (Nov. 2005): 737-43.

Safety Issues

Transit Routes and Road Safety

Our main concern with regards to child safety is the fact that children will have to cross Highway 16 at Cowart Road. Children will be crossing that intersection going both ways - FI students to John McInnis School and former Peden Hill Elementary students to ECHE. Not only do they have to cross an extremely busy highway, they will also have to cross Vance Road at the intersection to get to the left-hand side of the road where there is a sidewalk.

The intersection at Cowart Road and Highway 16 requires children to cross five lanes of traffic. The green walk light is only active for 5 to 6 seconds, which is not quite enough time to get across one lane of traffic. The 'red hand' flashes for approximately 5 - 6 seconds crossing Vance Road and approximately 10 seconds crossing Highway 16. Children who see the 'red hand', signifying 'don't walk,' may stop walking and become stranded in the middle of an extremely busy intersection. In addition, there are no safe places for the children to stand while waiting for the crosswalk light. Cowart Road has no sidewalks (a section by Rona is so short that it is not worth mentioning), bike lanes or proper lighting. During the winter months, there is even less room for vehicles because of the plowed snow, which leaves no room for pedestrians. Likewise, Vance Road has one sidewalk on the left-hand side of the road, forcing the children to cross yet another busy crosswalk. There are no bike lanes.

This intersection, on a daily basis, has very high traffic volume, which will be further elevated if the proposed change goes ahead. There will also be an increase in vehicular travel on both Cowart and Vance Roads. In addition, parents from the Upper College Heights neighbourhood and further west will utilize Highway 16 and travel down Peden Hill, further contributing to the increased volume of traffic at the Highway 16 - Vance Road intersection. In the winter, Peden Hill can be a treacherous road to travel, and with increased traffic volumes, it is likely there will be an increased number of traffic accidents.

Given the lack of development of Cowart and Vance Roads, neither is a safe road for children on which to walk or bike to school. For a variety of reasons, however, children will use them. These safety concerns will be exacerbated by the increased traffic due to FI students being driven to John McInnis School and former Peden Hill Elementary students being driven to ECHE. The distance from the intersection at Simon Fraser and Cowart Road to John McInnis is 2.5 km with steep banks on one side and limited space on the other on which to walk or ride. In the winter, these roads will be dark in the mornings, and the plowed snow will further restrict the width of the roads and pedestrian and driver visibility. This is of particular concern along Cowart Road. It will be simply a matter of time before these conditions ultimately lead to a tragedy.

Children in the Charella Gardens/Foster/Baker area who have transferred to ECHE will have to utilize the crosswalks at Highway 16 and Domano in order to get to school. Some already do, and have reported close calls when crossing at this 'improved' intersection. This is a five-lane crossing, infamous for the high rate of collisions. There will be increased traffic volumes as some parents opt to drive their kids. Still others will, for various valid reasons walk and ride their bikes (e.g. trying to be environmentally minded and attempting to stay fit, or do not own or

have access to a car, amongst others). Unfortunately, 'safety in numbers' doesn't apply at high volume intersections.

There will also be increased vehicle congestion on Westwood Drive and the arteries feeding this road as a result of children being driven to John McInnis. A significant number of the children attending the FI program will not be living within walking distance of the school. This could result in upwards of 300 extra vehicles attending the area twice a day. An associated concern is speeding vehicles related to the flat and straight nature of this stretch of road.

For parents having to commute from the Hart who will be utilizing Foothills Boulevard, icy conditions and the fact that during the winter months it is often not sanded or plowed until after 8:00 am will place these families at increased risk of accidents and injury.

Collision Statistics

We have collected collision information from Sgt. Steinhauser of the Prince George Traffic Unit. He advised the following:

- the Cowart Road-Highway 16 intersection is presently not a high collision area and is not one of the top ten focus intersections
- there have been two reported collisions on Westwood Drive in the last 7 years. One of the collisions involved a child (incident known to the SD and remains unresolved), and the other was vehicular.

Sgt. Steinhauser further advised that although the Westwood area near John McInnis is not presently considered a high traffic area, the volume is increasing steadily due to recent development. He stated that the road is not suitably designed for the major increase in traffic that will be seen as a result of the medium density housing that has recently been built. He further explained that the road, which is presently two lanes, will have to be increased to four to accommodate the infrastructure plans for the area, which will see a two- to three-fold increase in traffic volume.

Schoolyard

There is presently no contiguous fencing around John McInnis. This will have to be remedied in order to house elementary children at this site. The costs associated with this have not been identified. There is also no playground on the property. Children will have to either walk across an unsupervised parking lot, past an abandoned building to get to the Peden Hill playground, or else the School District will have to move the existing brand new playground (put in last year as a result of fundraising efforts by the Peden Hill PAC), or install another playground on John McInnis property. How long will that take and at what cost?

One of our biggest concerns is the chance that a child might wander out onto Westwood Drive in an attempt to access the playground at Peden Hill. Not a comforting thought.

Conclusion

As parents with a great deal at stake in the consultation process, we can appreciate the position in which Trustees find themselves. At a time when cuts and downsizing are necessary, there is a program that is thriving, and putting pressure on the capacity of three schools. It may seem that an amalgamation is a viable option.

However, we feel very strongly that amalgamation, while perhaps the right choice for some School Districts, is not the right choice for Prince George. Our district has French Immersion programs in three locations at present. They are popular and successful, both in terms of enrollment and in terms of students' academic achievements. The layout of our city is much more conducive to the success of neighbourhood dual-track programs.

Cost-saving is important. Educational, social, health and safety concerns need to be equally important. When these concerns are satisfied in a way that can save money and programs, we may have a win-win situation. Parents and concerned community members from three neighbourhoods have collaborated to present solutions that will satisfy all concerns, including the School District's bottom line.

Parents worry about an amalgamated French Immersion program, particularly at John McInnis School, for several legitimate reasons. Health and safety concerns, financial forecasts and educational and social upheaval all contribute to parents' anxiety about the proposed amalgamation. There are enough red flags that at the very least, this proposal should receive extra time, consideration and consultation to fully understand the implications.

Getting to John McInnis School poses safety concerns for those travelling on icy winter roads, and for those who may walk or bike across Highway 16. Families with children in both streams may be financially and physically unable to get their children to both schools on time, and similar logistical barriers may exist for many others as well.

Environmentally, an amalgamated program is not the right choice for our city. Our airshed is already compromised, and will become even more so with extra cars on our roads for longer periods of time. It is ironic that our School District must purchase carbon offsets because it is unable to meet its environmental targets, while forcing parents to contribute further to the problem. The increased exposure to vehicle exhaust and fumes, and the increased time that young children must spend in vehicular travel each day has health and environmental implications that we must take seriously.

Our current configuration of dual-track schools gives choices to parents of children with asthma and respiratory difficulties. Issues with travel and air quality are not new in our city, but they have been important factors for parents choosing neighbourhoods and schools. We are not a city that enjoys clean air, and we must do everything in our power to reduce the risks to our children and ourselves.

Children who have to switch streams simply because their parents cannot get them to John McInnis School, children who are doing brilliantly in French Immersion, will suffer academically and socially when they must switch to English. This will cost the district money and resources, not to mention the profound effect on children's self-esteem. As well, renovating

John McInnis School within such a short period of time raises questions as to how it can be accomplished, as well as how much it will cost. Closing John McInnis School altogether would save more money.

Parents enrolled their children in a dual-track program. French Immersion in dual-track settings is a choice that our District has supported and encouraged for many years. The sudden upheaval and removal of that program from neighbourhood schools increases the likelihood that parents will remove their children from the program, for the many reasons outlined above. The program faces a serious challenge, then, in that its inaccessibility leads to drastically reduced enrollment, something with which our district already struggles. It becomes harder to sustain and justify, and the program is at risk of failing.

Finally, the neighbourhoods around Spruceland and College Heights Elementaries will suffer. Schools operating at half capacity will be considered at-risk for closure. People may choose to live elsewhere. Students lose the connection to their home neighbourhood, and a school considered *elite* will have difficulty fitting into the social and cultural fabric of the new neighbourhood.

Instead, we have proposed options that will allow the District to save money, will keep our neighbourhoods vibrant and growing, and will allow the Immersion program at dual-track schools to flourish and grow. As our Superintendent has stated, finances are not the driving force behind the proposal to amalgamate. Our proposals account for District financial shortfalls, however, and will save the District considerable time, effort and money.

A Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre will accommodate all-day Kindergarten from three schools, alleviate space concerns at two schools, will be far more inexpensive to initiate than an amalgamation, and will be safe and centrally-located. It will also help to raise funds for the District with its partnerships. A Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre uses pooled resources and exposes children from other English-only schools to the idea of French Immersion. It saves the District from having to renovate three or more schools to accommodate all-day Kindergarten, and frees up space at College Heights Elementary to allow French Immersion to grow.

Another way in which the District can continue to support and encourage French Immersion is by opening a fourth dual-track program at a school with lower enrollment. This will make French Immersion accessible to even more children, can help alleviate space concerns at current dual-track locations, and can send a strong message to the people of Prince George and prospective inhabitants that ours is a District that supports and encourages diversity. It can also increase enrollment at a school that is not operating to full capacity.

As enrollment declines, naturally there will be increased space at our dual-track schools, again allowing for growth. If, in the future, the School Board decides that a single-track French Immersion school is the right thing to do for our city and our children, we strongly encourage taking time to fully consult with families, wholly study the location and the implications, and make it a real collaborative endeavour and therefore a real *choice* program. For the time being, we strongly urge our Trustees to allow our dual-track programs to stay in their current locations, for the benefit of our children.

Appendix

Scenarios We Have Considered:

1. Proposal goes ahead as planned:

An amalgamated French Immersion program is not the preferred choice for most families in dual-track schools.

- The cost involved in renovating John McInnis is projected to be roughly \$200,000. The real cost may be much higher, given the tight timeline with which the District has to work.
- Dedicated French Immersion and resources all being directed toward a common goal
- Enrollment may drop by as much as one-third, based on parent surveys conducted at École Austin Road and École College Heights Elementary.
- Health, geographical, social and safety concerns raise barriers to accessing Single-Track at John McInnis
- Families may be reluctant to enroll their children in a program that carries such high risk if their children don't succeed
- Many children, if they are not succeeding at French Immersion, switch streams at about Grade Two. An amalgamation would see many older children having to switch streams, while at the same time losing many of their social supports. The District will need to find physical and financial resources to accommodate these children.
- Parent involvement in the school may drop, as it becomes a challenge to volunteer at a school so far away. Children, teachers and families suffer, PAC involvement declines, fundraising efforts not as well received
- Estimate that Spruceland and College Heights Elementary would sit at roughly 50% capacity, in a time when declining enrollment and under-utilized schools is a major issue. People may not enroll their child in these schools if it at risk for closure.
- Prospective inhabitants of Prince George may see the single choice for a French Immersion school as a potential barrier to relocating here

2. Single-track for ECHE and Spruceland; Hart students remain in Hart:

- Will benefit Hart area families who cannot access a Single-Track location for health or logistical reasons
- Smaller school setting may alleviate some concerns about the loss of community in a larger school setting
- Still may see some enrollment decline for families with children in both French and English
- Still need to spend same amount of money renovating John McInnis

- Same concerns remain about concerns with proposed location, taking risk with the program, children changing language instruction mid-stream, as well as enrollment concerns for remaining schools
 - Somewhat more parental involvement, though not as great as at current neighbourhood schools
3. Fourth dual-track school opened: Financial, educational, social
- Allows dual-track programs to remain in current settings while alleviating enrollment pressures
 - Increases enrollment at a school that may be currently under-utilized
 - Sends strong message that French Immersion is supported and encouraged in Prince George
 - Saves money: John McInnis can be closed altogether
 - Allows even more children to enroll in the Immersion program
 - A thriving Immersion program can attract people into Prince George, including high-quality teaching and administrative staff
4. Dual-track schools remain in current locations with measures taken to allow growth:
- Current success, both in terms of academic achievements and enrollment numbers, will be allowed to continue
 - District saves money by not having to renovate John McInnis
 - Measures such as a Neighbourhood Early Learning Centre have space, health, safety and financial benefits extending well beyond one school and even one neighbourhood
 - Families can enroll their child in French Immersion, knowing that their children will not be unduly traumatized if it turns out not to be the right choice
 - Students can continue to thrive in their current neighbourhoods, reinforcing their attachment to their neighbourhoods and their current schools
 - Integrating into a dual-track high school will be much easier for both French and English students, who will be well-accustomed to having a culturally diverse environment
 - Parent support and involvement, which is so strong at dual-track schools, will continue, benefitting students, teachers and neighbourhoods
5. Delay decision on Single-Track. Fully study and understand all implications before a decision is reached. Make it a real collaboration and Choice Program if it proceeds:
- District, parents and teachers can spend time delving in-depth into all implications of a Single-track program
 - District can use work they have put in thus far and extend efforts beyond a group with a tight timeline
 - True collaboration and open dialogue allows for a fully-informed decision

- All parties feel better about outcome when open consultation occurs
- Delays any outlay of precious resources; no money spent on renovating John McInnis at this time
- Families have more time to consider and work with the District to either accept a Single-Track or find alternatives
- The District financial situation may change in time, changing the viability of Single-Track. Continuing declining enrollment may in itself take care of the issue of space concerns at dual-track schools
- The District may decide that another location or format is more suitable, or decide not to proceed at all, after having time to study all of the implications

Keeps dual-track programs in limbo for an undetermined amount of time, may increase anxiety on part of all involved, may have detrimental effect on enrollment if families are unsure of the future of dual-track

Survey Results

The School District has proposed to move all French Immersion programs to a centralized location thus making École College Heights Elementary School a single-track English-only school. Parents were asked for their input (voluntary) to aid in voicing our concerns at the School Board’s January 26 public meeting. Every student was provided with a survey on Friday January 22. A total of 229 Surveys were returned on Monday January 25. If there were duplicates from families, only one was used, so the total number of surveys represents the approximate number of families who returned them.

QUESTION	ANSWERS						
How many children do you have in the English Program at CHE?	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total
	41	36	9	-	-	-	86 (31%)
How many children do you have in French Immersion at CHE?	1	2	3	4	5	6+	Total
	68	114	9	-	-	-	191 (69%)
Are you in favour of our present dual-track French/English program?	Yes		No		Undecided		
	249 (94%)		7 (3%)		8 (3%)		
Are you in favour of a centralized French program?	Yes		No		Undecided		
	37 (15%)		174 (70%)		38 (15%)		
If ECHE becomes a single-track English-only school, would you:							

1. Move your children to a centralized single-track French school	101 (48%)
2. Switch your children to the English program (if in French)	21 (10%)
3. Move your children to a different school in the public system	7 (3%)
4. Move your children to a private school	9 (4%)
5. Undecided	70 (33%)
6. <i>Home School</i>	2 (1%)

Total Surveys Returned	
Families with students in French-Immersion	168 (67%)
Families with students in English	64 (26%)
Families with students in both English & French Im.	18 (7%)
Total	250

Additional Comments

FROM FAMILIES WITH STUDENTS IN BOTH ENGLISH & FRENCH IMMERSION:

- I think the French program is a wonderful opportunity in our school. My child has learned so much from it but I will not hesitate to take him out if the French is moved to such an unsafe environment, among plenty of other reasons
- If all French Immersion programs were to be moved to a centralized location, I would have no choice but to move/switch my child to the English program. I chose ECHE for the location and that both of my children can go to the same school
- This centralized schooling would cause difficult situation, as we have 2 children in private schools, one in English at ECHE and one in French at ECHE. The morning drive would be a large, frustrating commute

- As parents, we are very happy with both programs being offered at ECHE. It demonstrates to children that there are differences within the world. In addition, we would be sending one of our children to another school if this proposal takes place. This would be unnecessarily inconvenient!
- This is a poor decision that was made up quickly with not much thought or reasoning going into any of these suggestions. It's best to leave the school as is.
- I do not agree with moving all French Immersion programs to a centralized area. By doing this, they would be segregated from the rest of their peers.
- Need more info on numbers in these new schools
- We would be driving our children to 2 separate schools each morning. Our drive would be much more demanding with our family of 5 children.
- Not a terrible idea, do not like the location (*speaking on a centralized French program*). Bussing children is a concern. I need to know what the numbers will look like at these schools before making a final decision (*speaking on where their children would go if the French program moves*)
- We are very reluctant to see this change. Currently, the demand at ECHE warrants dual-track English/French. Also, we chose to live and raise our children in the College Heights area because of the close proximity of ECHE and the French program.

FROM FAMILIES WITH STUDENTS IN THE ENGLISH PROGRAM:

- The things I worry about if they turn ECHE into an English only school is one, the funding would lose and two the possibility of losing Mme. Crandell
- If my children had been exposed to French before we moved here or if they didn't have any problems with the English language then I would of for "sure" put them in the French Immersion program
- I chose to put my children in a dual-track program for the exposure they would have to both languages at an early age.
- I've heard that Southridge is overflowing. If we become English only, wouldn't some of those children be able to come down to ours? Also, how many English students have been turned away because we are full and they live in the area? A lot of French students do not live in the area, correct?
- We think it is essential to have the dual-track system not only for the benefit to our kids culturally, but also to ensure that we maximize the capacity of our school to ensure its longevity.
- Even though both my children are in the English program I enjoy the benefits they receive by being exposed to the French language in an informed way.
- What's keeping ECHE from closing if the French Immersion leaves? Community schools give kids roots not centralized!!!
- As a parent of 2 English program students I value the dual-track program and will do what I can to influence administrators, Board members & Government to protect CHE's model
- My children were in private school previous to the 2009-2010 school year. I have a VERY hard time enrolling my daughter in CHES. I was told it was overfull and there was no room – we spent over 4 months waiting in line for an opening. Our other option was bussing her to Southridge, when her brother was already enrolled in Kindergarten in CHES. I live in the "catchment" are and one of my children couldn't be enrolled in the

school because of “no room”. It was an agonizing wait all summer to not know where one of my 3 kids would be going to school for September '09. My kids walk to school and this works for us!

- By changing to a single-track school the children in the English program will suffer because 2/3's of teacher & student population will be new and the kids learn French better by being surrounded by it.
- I am not in favour of the centralized French Immersion program and will write a letter
- My child would stay in the English program! I think this school is overcrowded to begin with. Moving all French programs together is a great idea!
- French Immersion is a “choice” program and therefore should be privately funded. Parents should be satisfied that the SD is not going to get rid of the program completely!
- ECHE seems to be a very popular school for the French program it would be a shame to see it gone. Where else are the cuts going to come from if they don't centralize – single-track a French school. I strongly believe that they won't close CHE.
- I moved Hell and High Water to move across the street from ECHE because it's such an amazing school – vibrant and positive and successful – and I think it's criminal to mess with something that's working so well for so many children and their families.
- Our children are in the English program and would not be affected by the proposed changes in that they would not need to move to another school, at least not at this time – However, concerns are – how will the programs and quality of the school experience (which we feel is of high quality currently) change with moving out the French program, moving in new students, changing teachers, reducing potentially the number of students.
- Prefer the English and French together. Many of the French students are good friends with the English students (since Kindergarten!). Enriches both the French and English students – like REAL LIFE! English and French.
- Bigger classrooms are not the solution for our children.
- In a dual-track school I feel my children have probably benefited from the exposure to French as a second language in the curriculum as well as in the school setting. Inclusion is what I favour, over segregation, in the public school system.
- My daughter is in the English programs but has made many friends with the kids in French. She is heartbroken about this. College Heights is rich in culture and a great school with great teachers. Why break a good thing? I will write some letters. Thanks for bringing this to our attention.
- Our son is in Grade 3 in the English program and we were hoping to start our daughter in the French program in September 2010 but if we have to have them in two different schools we may have to start her in the English program instead which would be upsetting because she would miss out on that opportunity and she has already been attending a French Immersion preschool 2 days a week since September 2009 that will help prepare her for Kindergarten in September 2010 in the French Immersion Program. She is really enjoying learning the language, which is important to me since it was my mother's first language.
- I like the current feel of the school – very welcoming and a family feel with both English and French as a whole. I am strongly in favour of community schools and fear that the decision will cause the French program to lose that community.
- I feel CHES is functioning well as a full school that includes French and English students. It is full and the families are happy with that, so why change it!

- I fully support the School District with the recommendations that have been purposed! Yes...there will be some changes for students/parents; however, I do believe that the changes will prove to be very positive as time goes on. Remember...F.I is a “specialized” program and parents in most cities don’t have the privilege having the program in their neighbourhood school.
- Our school is full and vibrant – as is our neighbourhood – the dual-track is a big reason for this – many people have made real estate commitments to be in our wonderful catchment area precisely because of our unique and fully utilized wonderful school.
- My children have benefited from a dual-track school. ECHE provides opportunities that my children wouldn’t normally receive in a single-track English only school. My daughter participates in extra-curricular activities in which both English and French students are combined. Through this experience she has developed friendships, peer support and positive interactions with girls who share the same interests. We’ve also noticed a higher number of French students participating, which makes up the team. This provides good representation of ECHE at school sporting events. ECHE provides a setting in which both English and French students can succeed while offering a dual-track system. These programs compliment each other, giving children exposure to the unique experiences and learning each program offers.
- Please leave the school as it is. It is working. Great school with English and French programs.
- We like having the French program at ECHE because the English students learn French as well. She has friends in French Immersion and she does not want to leave.
- I support schools that serve the families who live in the communities near the school and appreciate the cultural diversity promoted by the dual-track system. Please do not ghettoize the public schools.
- I do not support segregating the schools by language and urge the board not to force children to travel everyday from the school in their own community.

FROM FAMILIES WITH STUDENTS IN THE FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM:

- We don’t want an all-French school. Figure out another way to solve problems that doesn’t mess with a school that works.
- We chose to live here because of French Immersion program that they offer. I don’t agree of what they wanted to be. I definitely not in favour of French Immersion programs to be centralized.
- We moved to PG 4 years ago and chose to buy our house near CHE so that our kids could attend French Immersion and be able to walk or bike there. Can’t imagine switching to English but with 3 kids? What if French isn’t for all of them? The dual-track has so many positives.
- Grade 5 will continue with French. Grade K will be moved to English at Malaspina. (*Speaking of their two children*)
- My second child is in the Kindergarten French Immersion program. If it is decided that this is not a good match for her and she is moved to the English program, then my two children will be attending different schools. Also, I have made arrangements for transportation with my daycare provider and she would not transport out of the College Heights area.
- I am concerned about bringing children across the highway to my daycare.

- I do not want my children in a big single-track elementary school. But I do not know all my options and how to influence a different decision.
We are in favour of a dual-track school. The dual-track environment is one of the reasons we chose this school! A centralized school will only segregate the French students from the English.
- I prefer a smaller school setting.
- If there is an \$11 million deficit then changes have to be made. If the proposed single-track French (.one more year) so that there is one move only. Please no temporary school for one year. Thank you.
- I have serious concerns regarding the choice of John McInnis as the location for centralized French Immersion. It is not an appropriate building/ environment for elementary-aged children, nor do I know how it will be ready for September 2010. I would like to see the current dual-track school preserved at École College Heights.
- Concerned regarding: loss of community, what happens if my other kids can't do the French program (in a single-track that means separating them), safety at John McInnis
- The French program will not provide equitable opportunity in a centralized location. The French program will suffer future enrolment among other problems.
- I really want (*daughter's name*) to stay in French Immersion. I also want her to stay at ECHE. If she has to change schools that would also mean a change in daycare. I really hope the change doesn't happen.
- I don't believe John McInnis is a good choice for the single-track. Should consider Lakewood Jr.
- Safety concerns about centralized French school. Drug house directly across from Peden Hill. This is a fact. Busy area, no fence. Also concerned about class sizes – too large?
- We are pro-French, however we are uncertain about the location and class size of the proposed new French school. There is a drug house directly across from Peden Hill right now (Fact!) and no fence. As parents we are questioning safety at John McInnis School.
- We are concerned about the ratio of children to teachers as well as the location of the school at John McInnis. We are also concerned about *the* Public Consultation.
- My son is going into Grade 8 next year, so only my daughter will be affected. I have to drive her either way. On a positive note, centralizing would give her an opportunity to meet new Immersion friends before the big transition to high school. On the other hand, we are certainly happy with the way things are now. Just trying to see the “bright side” during difficult times.
- Difficult decision for us. Community school, close to home benefits versus opportunity to acquire a second language, but further from home.
- We must ensure continued access to French Immersion. French Immersion is an important opportunity that needs to be accessible to all. By centralizing French Immersion to only one school in the city it can create barriers to attendance (e.g. transportation issues), it will create safety issues (how will recess and lunch be effectively supervised ensuring the safety of well over 500 elementary students in a very urban environment) and finally it creates a barrier in cross-cultural opportunities between French and English students (and “us & them” attitude). As parents we are very concerned about the proposed centralization and highly advocate for the need to continue with dual-track access.

- If ECHE becomes single-track English only, I will home school my children (My second should start Kindergarten in September).
- I want my children in a dual-track school, in a nice neighbourhood, with caring good teachers and Mme. Crandell as principle. I want the school left as it is – it's successful, so why change it!?
- One of the main reasons we bought our house here in College Heights 3 ½ years ago was because of this school – this is where we wanted both our children to be. But now, if we decide to stick with French we will have to go.
- We fully support dual-track (French/English) it's what attracted us to ECHE and the area. Please contact if we can assist in keeping this as it is.
- I really want my daughter to attend a French Immersion program where there is a dual system.
- My child cried because he felt he wouldn't see his friends anymore and thinks the French kids are getting “kicked out” of their school.
- I see many benefits in having a dual track school. I worry about a huge school and about all the students who need to switch to English for various reasons. However, having one French Immersion school would mean more resources in French for all French Immersion students of the district, provided the chosen school is easily accessible by all of PG's families.
- I would prefer not to have to move my children, as the school is the reason we bought our house in College Heights. I also feel with all the new families moving into the area, that perhaps they should think of reopening Gladstone to handle the overflow.
- Why ruin something that is a phenomenal success?
- My kids 9yrs and 7yrs actually think it would be “cool” to go to an all-French school (and my spouse and I do not speak French). We are also hoping the Madeleine Crandell would be the principle of a centralized French School (if there is one)
- I think removing students from a community-based school is appalling. How will one large school improve their learning environment?
- Perhaps bussing will be provided at some cost to parents for the unfortunate Austin Rd kids.
- My second child is in the Kindergarten French Immersion program. If it is decided that this program is not a good match for her and she is move to the English program, then my two children will be attending different schools. Also, I have transportation arranged with my daycare provider and she would not be willing to transport out of the College Heights area. Lastly, the school is very community oriented and this is another reason why I chose this school for my children to attend.
- This is ridiculous. There are many more options to consider and adopt before this step. How much bus travelling will the SD pay to move all children....They will HAVE to pay for transport for everyone.
- The PAC is unnecessarily rousing negative sentiment toward the school district. It was difficult decision-making on the SDs part and they are doing the best they can with reduced government support. The SDs recommendations will benefit children at ECHE and all over the district. Change is not necessarily bad; consider the jobs that will be saved with rural school closures. Consider the welfare of all instead of just your children and convenience.

- My biggest concern is my son who is in French K. If he struggles with the French program I will have to move him to English. It is very important that our family be kept together at the same school.
- I would have no choice since I would not want to pull them from French. However, if they were in lower grades, I may have made the choice to switch them to English.
- We moved to College Heights area in order that our children would walk to school. We specifically chose the French Immersion program. We are committed to the program and will send our children to John McInnis if we have to. Our preference is certainly that the kids will stay at École College Heights
- Absolutely not! *(by question asking if they will switch their children to the English program at CHE)*
By the question asking if they will move their children to the centralized French school, they state Yes, if I have to as she is in Gr. 6 already immersed in the French programme. And we would move her to the French school regardless as we feel it is very important for our kids to be bilingual.
- We do not wish to switch schools!
- How would going to a centralized school change the students access to quality music and athletics programs they currently have or if CH became English only, they will lose these programs.
- I am very concerned about the viability of the French Immersion program if it is moved out of the community schools. Will there be enough interest in the future for the program to continue?
- The proposed location of John McInnis by the School Board 57 clearly shows a lack of planning on their part, one in which the children will suffer if this goes through. What a gong show! John McInnis is not equipped to be an elementary school i.e. no playground equipment (and we know the school board/gov't has no money to fund such needs), the school is not set-up for smaller kids – bathrooms, fountain sizes, desks, etc. The location is not in the most desirable are of town (pubs commercial area and not to mention the fact of numerous predator encounters over the last several years AND drug, gangs in the area as well). The parents and PAC of ECHE have put a lot of time and energy over the past 10 years since my kids have first started there. In more recent years, the school community has come together and fundraised for new/safe playground equipment, and a new stage and sound system. It's frustrating to see the efforts of such a school community go in vain due to lack of financial planning on part of this government. Talk about counter-intuitive reasoning. This is a step backwards!
- Although undecided, we feel very strongly about being able to walk/bike to a local community school.
- I understand budget cuts but this is not a good solution, also the suggested location is terrible. Won't the entire school need to be retrofitted? And what a great way to encourage an elitist attitude amongst families, as another parent pointed out to me that "French immersion is the poor mans private school".
- I do not want my children in a big single-track elementary school. But I do not know all my options and how to influence a different decision.
- This is not a positive change for all the students because the proximity to their friends is no longer close enough to allow relationships to develop easily outside school hours.

- If there was a non-religious private school with small class sizes and specialist programs I would consider removing them from a large French Immersion school – I do NOT support larger class/school sizes than we already have.
- I think the school district is doing what it needs to do in order to meet its budget. I have always believed that the French immersion should have its own school.
- If we want our girls to continue French Immersion, we have no choice but to switch schools. Of course we would stay at ECHE if it remained dual-track. We live up the street, and having to drive them to school is environmentally wrong.
- We're just so upset about this. It disrupts our family, our neighbourhood and our community. We moved to this neighbourhood to be close to the school. What a disappointment.
- How is everyone driving their kids instead of walking to school in their own neighbourhoods going to affect air quality? I will lose my daycare lady too, and don't know anyone in the proposed new neighbourhood. If one of my kids needs to drop French, will I then need to take them to TWO different schools? Ridiculous!
- It is a good idea to pool the resources, but I don't want to lose out on ECHE (*referring to question asking if they are in favour of a centralized French program*)
- I want my kids to get the best education possible, we choose ECHE because it has a good reputation and is a dual-track school. I don't want to move my kids to diff. school, unless there is no other option, they are quite concerned, since they have friends in the English program. I hate to say, there is some discrimination on "the French kids", and ECHE does a good job at socializing between the French and English programs. I would also have to change daycares because my daycare is in College Heights – its hard to find a good daycare, especially that can take 2 kids together. We do not live in College Heights, but our daycare is there because the kids go to school there. Lets keep the French Immersion programs the way they are – they are working fine. We just fundraised for a new playground and now moving the children to a school with no playground – how is that fair.
- Mostly we are too stunned to comment about much of it. However we are not in favour of this suggestion. Budget shortfalls happen and cuts need to be made. Is this the right thing? And John McInnis is a terrible, terrible location.
- We plan to explore all new options and we are strongly considering switching our kids to English!! I personally think this change could severely damage the French Immersion program. Our numbers were expected to increase in the future. I cannot see this happening if there is a centralized French program. The people living in the Hart will, in my opinion, switch to English to avoid travelling to John McInnis. I'm not too thrilled with that location to send my kids to school there!
- We like our school here at College Heights. We love all the teachers and principals.
- We only have 1 year left in elem. school. If my children were younger, I'd switch them to English
- I would like things to stay the way they presently are
- Of what benefit is it to centralize?! It will only cost the district more money to keep another school open. This will tear families apart (I will NOT send a 4 year old to a school in an unsafe area) and will destroy the idea/pride of a country with 2 official languages. If you centralize you will KILL the program – which I suspect is your goal.

It costs NO extra money to have this program as integrated in a community school. Do you really want to lose more numbers/funding with having parents go to a private school?

- Will only move children to a centralized single-track French school if children who struggle with French in future years are able to return to the English program at ECHE
- I really like the current dual-track French/English program. I really hope the school district can find another solution if not I have to reluctantly have my kids to the centralized single-track French school.
- Need to know more about the pros and cons of a centralized “single-track” French school. Such information needs to be unbiased. Does John McInnis School have enough space for current and future student numbers? What happens to the “French” track teacher – do they move?
- I think that a single-track French would be great for immersion students to be more truly “immersed”. I worry for families that have students in both tracks, or if they only have children in French, but it is recommended that one change to English – what do they do?
- I am not sure if I will continue with the French program due to the size and location of John McInnis School. I am dedicated to the dual-track program because it celebrates diversity and integration
- No change, please!!!
- Currently our children are within walking distance to school. Transportation to a new location outside of a neighbourhood is a concern for us. Will bussing be an option?
- I chose ECHE because of convenience, location from where we live and the most important is the standard way of teaching and “REPUTATION”. We choose to live here because of French immersion program that they offer; don’t agree of what they wanted to be; not in favour of centralized programs
- Wrote letter to trustees detailing my opposition and why. More research needed and time to make informed decision.
- We will be putting our son into English Kindergarten at CHE (our catchment area) in Sept ’10, so our kids will now be in different schools if French becomes centralized. Our whole family is very sad about this, not to mention the inconvenience of having kids at different schools.
- I currently do not live near the school. I would commute where needed to keep my child in the French program. My child currently socializes only with classmates (French). PG has other opportunities in sports and other groups for socializing in English. English/French is not different than CHES/Van Bien.
- I believe that there would be a much greater “drop-out” rate from the Hart French Immersion students if this were to go ahead. Also, I think it will decrease the # of people who choose French Immersion in the future.
- It depends on where/how it is offered (*speaking about the centralized French program*). We have always had our daughter in dual-track so know of its benefits but there may be benefits to a centralized (single-track) program as well, its hard to answer this question based on our singular experience so far (i.e. if it meant keeping it in the current neighbourhood with the current teachers, single-track French might be OK for many who don’t have siblings in English for example)
- We don’t want any change!!!
- Centralizing is a completely ridiculous idea. What does it accomplish? It will cost more to have another school open and will eventually kill the program – which may be what

the board is hoping for. Why kill something valuable and successful?! Without a doubt you will lose the BEST district students to private schools - do you really think you can afford this funding loss?! Why is the board completely willing to risk a HUGE amount of money of a first Nation choice school, but not willing to keep a great program?

- I do not see the advantage, financially or otherwise, of changing the current condition of the students in the French program at ECHE.
- I would like the school to keep the same way –French and English school together. We moved to College Heights because it is the best school – why sacrifice this good school. We have a good environment and good teaching and learning atmosphere here. We don't need big community school. My kids are taking away the chance to learn more about English by interacting with English students.
- Would like to see “pros” of single-track French?
- I am very uncomfortable with this decision. The reason we chose this school to begin with was a lot because of its location and its French immersion. I do not want my son's school disrupted, or the location where he goes to school changed.
- Need to know more about the pros and cons of a centralized “single-track” French school. Such information needs to be unbiased. Does John McInnis School have enough space for current and future student numbers? What happened to the “French” track teachers – do they move?
- I would prefer our child stay at ECHE. I had a choice to send her to Spruceland as it is near to our home, but ECHE is a much better school.
- Had the option of putting children into the French school, but I chose the French Immersion instead, so my children can socialize & learn together with English in one place
- We chose ECHE because it is walking distance from our home in a safe neighbourhood. If we have to transport, we choose Franco Nord. We are saddened because we love M. Crandell and M. Hiscock. They have enriched our daughter's life. They have provided quality education.
- I think that parents of all 3 schools need to unite and present a viable alternative – this would be most effective in the form of a protest march to the SD – initially to protest the move, then later to present viable option
- If my kids were not so far along in the program I would have switched them over. We chose French Immersion because it was our neighbourhood school. We live so close and this is very disheartening. I certainly would not choose to put my K or 1 child in a mass Fr. Immersion school – how overwhelming! Concerns about safety and the whole feeling of what has been built at École worry me
- I am currently looking into private school for the kids as I can't imagine larger class sizes. We've been very happy with ECHE French program and LOVE Mme. Crandell as our principal. Can't imagine our school without her.
- We are against segregation. This is a bilingual country; as such children should have equal opportunity to learn both languages in the same setting. Also John McGinnis is too big for elementary students
- A centralized dual-track Fr/English program would be okay (but not in the present suggested location of John McInnis – though Lakewood might be an option). A central French-only program would be less than ideal – it becomes French segregation, not French –Immersion and this defeats the purpose.

- I think that exposing our kids to children from other areas of the city isn't necessarily a bad thing. The School District is going to jam this through, so I am looking at the positive aspects of this. I am concerned about the proposed facility. Is a former Jr. High school really the best place to send primary and elementary-aged kids?

Table 2. The Benefits and Banes of Dual vs Single-Track French Immersion

Dual-track benefits	Dual-track banes	Single-track (immersion centers) benefits	Single-track banes	Citation
	Budgeting for both English and French materials, teachers			1
	Training technical, logistical problems			1
		3 of 4 measures had higher scores in immersion center		2, cited within
		English vocabulary, comprehension, usage, better		2, cited within
		Better in science and mathematics tests		2, cited within
		French language skills higher		2
More talking French to teachers in class	More conflict between English/French teachers	More French materials on display	More bussing is required	2
		Teachers here have better English and French skills		2
		Teachers better satisfied with resources		2
More parent involvement from tight knit community – keep immersion where folks live	Managing programs with different languages	More exposure to French		3
Sharing of expertise		More		3

Dual-track benefits	Dual-track banes	Single-track (immersion centers) benefits	Single-track banes	Citation
among English/French teachers		opportunity to learn French		
Reflection of community life – get greater range of English language resources		Students can speak French in the hallways		3
Learning from diversity – kids see how French and English can co-exist		More French resources available	Transporting all FI students to once center is a big challenge	3
Development of multicultural awareness/understanding			Too far for many parents to get involved	3
Class sizes smaller in dual-track			Single-track likely viewed as elitist	3
Dual-track has higher enrollment – parent like better			Many parents feel no place for English speaking only parents in single-track	3
Students are better prepared for high school (e.g. In PG we have a dual-track high school) so dual-track elementary prepares them better			Segregating kids from K to Grade 8 is not desirable practice	3
If had to switch from French to English – a better transition – can still play with French kids – not completely isolated from French				3
Dual-tracks have wider range of teacher expertise so more learning assistance is available				3
English speaking parents aren't as intimidated	Cant use French in school assemblies			3
Parents are more at ease in dual-track – many	Too much English spoken			3

Dual-track benefits	Dual-track banes	Single-track (immersion centers) benefits	Single-track banes	Citation
would not send kids to single-track	in hallways and classrooms			
	Principals may not be bilingual			
	Less welcoming environment for students and teachers	Less peer pressure		4
			Run wholly by "French Money"	5.
Individual differences, political beliefs, professional interests, class loyalties, are subordinated with an eye towards the overall group relationship and social environment of the integrated school				5 & 7
The school mirrors the community				6
For the last 30 years shift has been away from language acquisition in isolation from reality				6
Dual-track high schools are the school of choice for immersion students and teachers	Immersion teachers may feel isolated from English speaking			8
	Many principals of dual-track centers lack necessary French skills			9
Beyond the acquisition of a second language, there is an aspect of cultural appreciation, respect and mutual understanding. Reflects Canadian heritage			Perception that some parents may select immersion center because would be fewer special needs kids there	Others, not cited here down

Dual-track benefits	Dual-track banes	Single-track (immersion centers) benefits	Single-track banes	Citation
allows French to benefit English students				
			Immersion centers may exclude special needs and boys and as such may be discriminatory (two tiered system)	
			If kids are bussed to center could be seen as elitist because it's mostly girls and no special needs. If no bus, then perceived as elitist because only rich parents have time and means to drive to the special school	
			Single-track is not a statement of inclusivity	
			Extra costs of busing, disrupting neighborhoods, affecting home values	
			Other groups are not being offered entire buildings (traditional schools, special needs, gifted etc) even aboriginal schools still allows English (non native) kids	
			Segregation – kids	

Dual-track benefits	Dual-track banes	Single-track (immersion centers) benefits	Single-track banes	Citation
			are not being segregated in any other facet of life – why school?	

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Table 3. Pros and Cons considered in our Decision-Making Process

PROS TO SINGLE-TRACK FI AT JM	CONS
	Does not pass the “fair and equitable” test
Dedicated Resources to French Immersion	Farther to go
True Immersion, more language focus	Dangerous highway crossing, district will not consider safety issues as a concern
Eventual possibility for great school spirit, possible increase in feelings of school pride if cons can be overcome	Hart and rural families probably will not attend, slashes program immediately
Chance for children to attend school with friends from other parts of the city	More expensive to get children up to speed in English if they switch mid-stream, much harder transition for the children
Argument that single-track improves learning outcomes for students	No proof that single-track improves learning outcomes for students.
Newly renovated school	Renovations done in a hurry, or else no guarantee that it will be a priority for the district to complete in a timely fashion
Lots of fundraising power in a big school	No parking
	Traffic flow
	No other immersion choice if someone needs to change schools for whatever reason
	Caps enrollment because of space constraints, therefore caps the program. Kitchens and other non-classroom space will not be removed.
	Rapid demise of French Immersion in PG. Within 10 years, program becomes too expensive to maintain at all due to declined enrollment because it’s inaccessible to most areas of the city. It becomes harder to justify spending money and resources on fewer children
	Becomes an elitist program
	Larger school removes “community” immediately; this will take longer to recreate
	Will take longer to fundraise for necessities, as PAC will be starting over. Results in a lag time for fundamentals such as playground, school resources, programs such as hot lunches and field trips. Not just a matter of months, could be years. Immediately puts program at a disadvantage
	Environmental and health concerns associated with extra driving

	How long will it take to make JM ready and what happens to our children in the meantime?
	Cost to renovate JM
	No fence or playground
	Very challenging for families who have children in both English and French, especially in the Hart!
	Single-track does not represent Canadian society, dual-track does
	Removes access to community after-school care programs, thus makes it very difficult for working parents
	Increased traffic, noise and pollution in Westwood neighbourhood
	Increased safety concerns for children walking to school at Westwood (and Peden Hill if it remains open) due to extra traffic in their neighbourhood
	Children become targets for bullying if they're sent to an "elite" school, program is challenged to justify itself ("why do <i>they</i> get funding?")
	Lack of resources for English instruction, which is a very necessary part of the immersion program
	Harder to find bilingual staff for programs such as music, library, arts. In a single-track school, staff would need to be French-speaking. In a dual-track school, these staff members can be English. Ultimately affects quality and availability of these necessary programs
	Increased chance that small students will get hurt trying to access playground, if they can access it at all, much harder to supervise
	Much bigger chance that students at risk will be left behind
	Much bigger transition if a child needs to switch to English mid way through the program
	Much bigger transition to high school from a single-track to a dual-track. Increases "separation" between streams, making it harder to integrate later
	Children lose connection to their neighbourhood
	Much harder for working parents to juggle morning and after school routines

	Totally inaccessible for rural families, especially those north of the city. The extra drive becomes unmanageable
	Many families in Westwood area are excluded because their parents would have to learn a third language. Results in a complete inability for school to integrate into the neighbourhood
	Families unable to volunteer because school is too far away. Decreased resources for teachers, as parent volunteers are crucial to the success of a school, therefore decreased resources for children. Children take longer to form a connection to new school if their parents, who previously volunteered, are no longer able to do so
	2 schools who have at least half of their populations removed will suffer and likely close. Property values drop, people stop moving into those neighbourhoods
	3 neighbourhoods suffer culturally because French is no longer an option for many, no longer a “choice”