



## *Report to the Board of Trustees*

**Re: Middle French Immersion**

*December 18, 2006*

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### **Introduction**

Since its inception in 2004, the Early French Immersion Program at St. John Elementary has succeeded beyond expectations. Increasing demand necessitated the establishment of a second site at St. Anthony as enrolment in the program has increased from 135 in 2004 to 368 in 2006. In fact, combined JK entry at both schools is now 74% higher than the JK size in 2004. Enrolment in the Early Program is expected to increase as the program matures, perhaps influenced in part as the Federal government continues to emphasize greater functional bilingualism in the province by 2013.

Increased Early Immersion enrolment has, however, led to accommodation concerns at St. John as the program has 'caught up' to the Middle Program and grades will soon overlap. The following report examines accommodation issues and reviews advantages of allowing the Early Program to expand while at the same time phasing out the Middle Program. The goal is to build upon the success of the Early Program and to provide a greater degree of stability and long-term accommodation for French Immersion students in the future.

### **Background**

In January 2003, the Board received the French Immersion Program Review Committee report, entitled "French Immersion Program: A Look at Possible Change". On April 28, 2003, the Board approved the establishment of an Ad Hoc French Immersion Advisory Committee to review, among other things, the introduction of an Early French Immersion program. A survey was then conducted to determine London-Middlesex and Elgin parental interest and anticipated participation in Early French Immersion. Based in part on the survey results, a recommendation was put forward in the Final Report of the Ad Hoc French Immersion Advisory Committee, and the Board approved the following resolution at its regular meeting on June 9, 2003:

*"That the London District Catholic School Board introduce an Early French Immersion Program, beginning at JK, SK, and Grade 1, in September 2004 at the St. John Catholic School site".*

In response to growing enrolment in French Immersion Programs, the South London/ French Immersion ARAC was established in the fall of 2005 to assess accommodation concerns. The introduction of the Early French Immersion Program at St. John in 2004 and the concurrent presence of the Middle Immersion Program resulted in overcrowding at the school. To facilitate the relocation of part of the Early Program, the Committee recommended the consolidation of St. Anthony at Sir Arthur Carty and the retention of the Middle Program. However, the Committee also recognized the

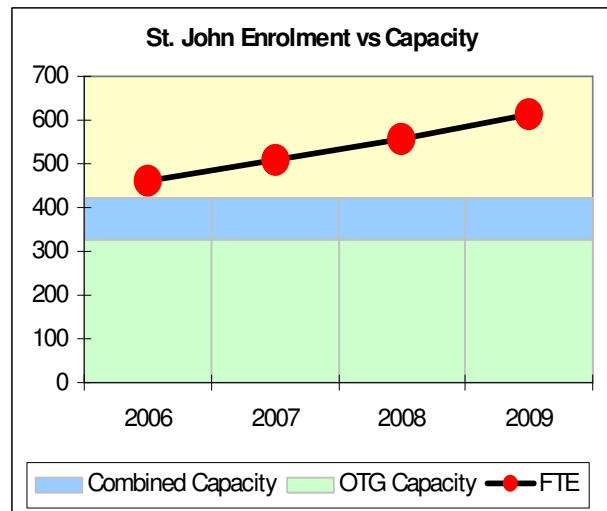
continuing accommodation issues and concluded;

*“that in the absence of a viable (accommodation) solution, (the) Middle French Immersion will be phased out”.*

### **Accommodation Review**

In 2006, enrolment in both programs exceeded capacity at St. John and two additional portables were required. The school site, however, has limited space and is unable to accommodate more temporary units. Each subsequent year the school will face significant enrolment increases as the Early Program begins to overlap the Middle Program grades. This coming September, for example, there will be two grade four groups; one from the Middle and another from the Early Program. As grades overlap in 2007, enrolment will grow by approximately 48 students. In fact, accommodation cannot be offered to both the Early and Middle Programs at the St. John site any longer than the current school year.

As illustrated in the accompanying chart, enrolment increases will continue as grade overlaps result in approximately 50 additional students each year. St John has a permanent capacity of 328 and a current FTE of 459.5. The two portables introduced this year offer a combined capacity of 420 but space is restricted and there is no room for additional units. As a result, the capacity deficit will continue to grow until the Early Program extends across a full range of grades (JK-8) in 2011. Given historical entry patterns of both programs, it is possible that the maximum FTE could reach as high as 777.5. The Early Program alone could have an FTE of 459 in 2011 when it extends through the grade range.



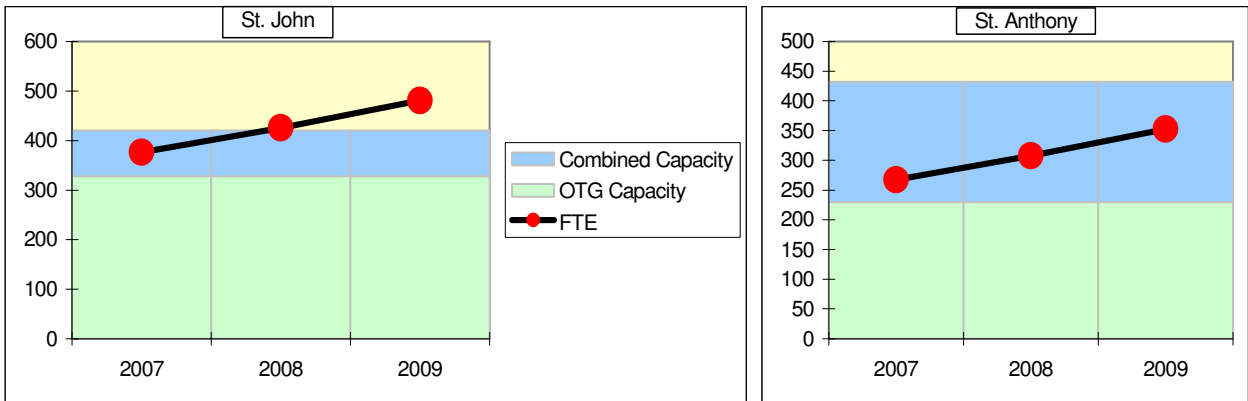
There is simply no possibility of accommodating both the Early and Middle Immersion programs at St. John and action must be taken to avoid a crisis in **September of 2007**. If no action is taken, enrolment will be approximately 507 FTE in 2007, 87 greater than the combined permanent and temporary capacity.

In September 2006, part of the Early French Immersion Program at St. John was relocated to St Anthony to provide a long-term accommodation solution for the program. Students living south of Commissioners Rd in London attend St. Anthony and all others in the city, Middlesex, and Elgin attend St. John. There are currently grades JK through grade two at St. Anthony and the FTE is 98.5.

The permanent capacity is 230 and is supplemented by an 8 room adjoined demountable unit that raises the combined capacity to 414. Enrolment in the Early Program is expected to exceed capacity by 2013 (421 FTE) and may grow to over 500 FTE by 2017. A similar split could be implemented to divide the Middle Immersion Program and offer it at both St. John and St. Anthony. This option, however, does little to address the long-term accommodation of the program, as its presence would only be viable for, at most, an additional two years at St. John. A boundary split at the Thames River, for example, would divide the students presently in the Middle Program into two similarly

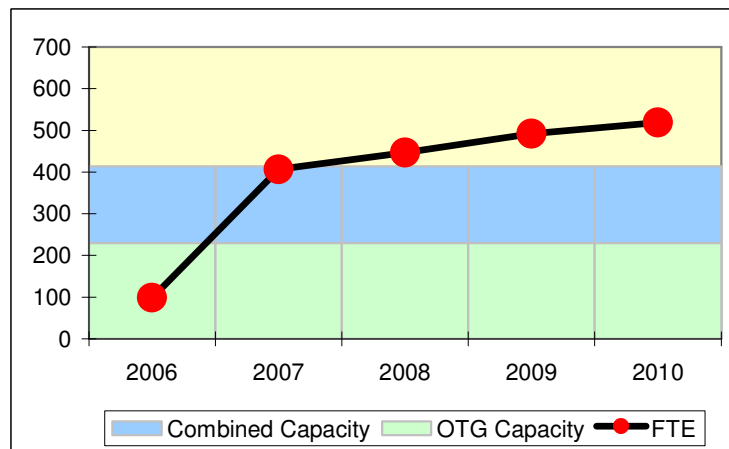
sized groups. In this scenario, St. John enrolment would reach an FTE of 425 by 2008 (5 more than capacity) and 480.5 by 2009. The overlapping grades would contribute approximately half the enrolment increases that would be experienced in the status quo scenario (i.e. approx. 27 students per year), however, even the smaller increases cannot be accommodated for any longer than two years. A boundary split for the Middle Immersion Program would create increased costs in delivering the program (e.g. teaching resources, administrative costs, etc.) and the only gain would be a brief delay in the accommodation crisis at St. John.

**Boundary Split: St. John and St. Anthony Enrolment vs Capacity**



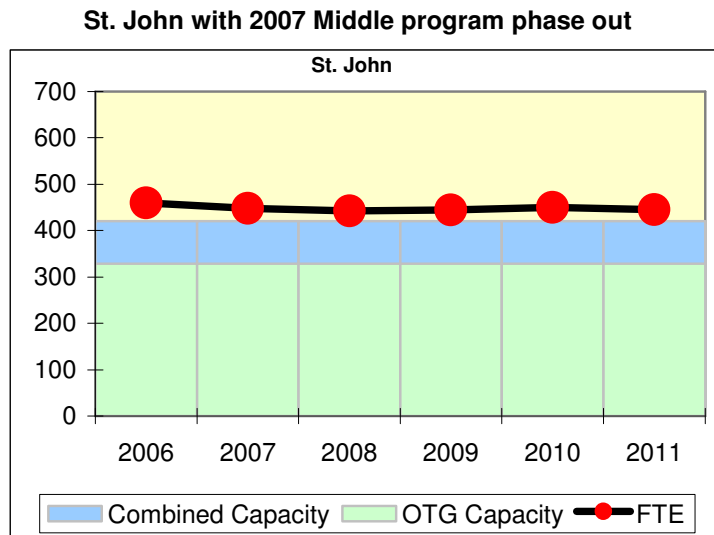
The entire Middle Immersion Program could also be moved to St. Anthony where there will be capacity for a short time until the Early Immersion Program grows and matures. This option, too, gains a little time but does not address the long-term needs of the Middle Immersion Program. Presently the Early Program extends from JK to grade two. If the Middle Program was moved to St. Anthony in 2007, there would be no gap between programs, the combined FTE would be approximately 406, and both programs could be accommodated by the combined permanent and temporary capacity (414). By 2008, however, there will be two grade four groups at the school and the overlap will cause the exact same problems witnessed at St. John. Enrolment in 2008 would reach 446 and would increase each year until both programs are fully populated in 2012.

**St. Anthony with Middle Immersion Relocation**



Moving the program only gains a single year of accommodation before more portables would be required at St. Anthony and as the Early Program matures as many as 10 additional portables would be needed by 2012. In total, the Middle Immersion Program itself requires 10 to 12 rooms to accommodate the 276 currently enrolled students. The relocation of the Middle Program therefore is not recommended as a long-term accommodation solution due to the lack of available permanent capacity at St. Anthony or any other school in London.

If the decision is made to phase out the Middle Immersion Program, action must be taken for September 2007. There can be no delay or enrolment will grow to approximately 85 students more than St. John can accommodate. A phase out of the program would mean that entry into the program would no longer be offered and existing students would continue until the last group (currently in grade four) graduates from grade eight in 2011. The removal of a grade four Middle Immersion entry point for 2007 would eliminate the grade overlap, avoid the associated enrolment increase, and bring enrolment levels closer to existing capacity. The following chart shows that enrolment would stabilize as the Early Program matures and the Middle Program is phased out and concludes in 2011.



**Accommodation Summary**

The Middle Program needs to be phased out, or moved from St. John in 2007 or the school will face unmanageable growth as the two FI programs overlap. A partial relocation based on a split boundary gains little time and produces inefficiencies in program delivery. The relocation of the entire Middle Program to St. Anthony could be accommodated for a single year without requiring additional portables. There is not sufficient permanent capacity, however, to offer long-term accommodation to both programs at the school. By 2008, the grade overlaps would result in the same accommodation challenges currently emerging at St. John and 10 additional portables would be required by 2012 when the Early Program extends through the full grade range. A phase out of the Middle Program

beginning in 2007 does allow the St. John facility to manage enrolment as the Early Program matures.

As noted earlier, the final report of the South London/ French Immersion ARAC in November 2005 recommended that the Board retain the Middle Immersion Program but recognized that “in the absence of a viable (accommodation) solution, (the) Middle French Immersion will be phased out”. There is currently no existing space to offer long-term accommodation and the Board does not have sufficient New Pupil Place (NPP) grants to fund a permanent addition for the program. There is also no indication from the Ministry that any special program funding will be made available and certainly there will be no grants available in time to solve the grade overlap problems that will begin in 2007.

It is important to recognize that, if the Middle Immersion Program is withdrawn, the Early Program will simply have more room to grow. Accommodation capacity at St. John and St. Anthony is sufficient to allow the program to mature and, most importantly, establish a greater degree of long-term stability. An accommodation perspective, therefore, supports a phase out of the Middle Immersion Program beginning with the withdrawal of a grade four entry effective September 2007.

### **Early Program Assessment**

If there were no capacity or budget constraints, there may be some merit in supporting the growth of both Early and Middle Immersion Programs. Accommodation limitations, however, constrain the Board’s options and the relative advantage of phasing out the Middle Program, while preserving and allowing the Early Program to grow, must be considered. There are many reasons, from both program delivery and student achievement perspectives, to recommend the Early Program over Middle Immersion. For example:

- Resources for Early French Immersion are more readily available.
- Program planning, PD and In Services would be consistent with Holy Family and St. Anthony French Immersion.
- Sharing of resources is possible between the Early programs.
- JK/SK is the universal entry point for school programs.
- JK/SK presents greater equity of access.
- The 2006 Canadian Parents for French (CPF) Annual Report states that “Early immersion programs have generally produced better French language results than other programs” (pg.7).
- The CPF report also notes specifically that, “Generally speaking, early immersion students perform better (than Middle, Late, Partial Immersion students) on tests of French listening, comprehension, reading comprehension, general French achievement, and overall French proficiency”.
- In addition, broader output skills are seen from Early Immersion Programs since literacy and numeracy skills are learned through the second language rather than through a transfer of knowledge later [OISE].
- Early Immersion enhances first language skills (Harley, Hart, Lapkin 1986) and students perform as well as or better in first language proficiency than regular English program

students (Halsall 1988).

- Early Immersion students have more spontaneous contacts with francophone peers and have more positive attitudes to their second language and culture than those in Middle and Late Immersion programs (Swain/ Lapkin 1988).
- Community building and connections to French language and culture increase with the number of years of exposure to a second language.
- Early Immersion is the most prevalent program in the province as 26 of the 35 (74%) Boards with French Immersion Programs opt to offer only an Early Program.

Though evidence supports the value of the Middle Immersion Program, Early French Immersion delivers greater advantages in program delivery and student outcomes.

### **Financial Considerations**

The annual intake of grade 4 students into the Middle Immersion program for the past three years has averaged fifty-five, but of these, only an average of two have not come from the Board's schools. It is reasonable, then, to assume that the absence of the Board's Middle Immersion program would result in a very minimal loss of students and corresponding grant revenue. The maximum loss would be approximately \$20,000 per year.

While some of the costs of operating Middle Immersion are readily determinable, others are not. It is estimated that the phasing out of the program would reduce teacher salary and benefit costs by the costs for two teachers per year, or approximately \$156,000. It is unlikely that approximately 55 students remaining in 45 widely distributed schools would generate additional teachers at their home schools. Transportation costs are more difficult to ascertain, as much would depend upon whether those students who would have entered Middle Immersion would stay at other board English language schools or would, theoretically, have entered the Early French Immersion program during the years of intake (JK – grade 1). Bussing costs are considerably higher per pupil for centralized specialty programs than for pupils attending schools within their school boundaries. While it is likely that overall transportation costs would be reduced by the elimination of the Middle French Immersion program, the savings in the first year of a phase-out may well be minimal, so they have been ignored in the following calculations.

<b><i>Year 1</i></b>		
Estimated Expenditure Reductions		
Teacher Salaries and Benefits		\$156,000
<u>Less Potential Maximum Grant Loss</u>		<u>20,000</u>
Net Reduction in Expenditure		<u>\$136,000</u>
<b><i>Full Elimination</i></b>		
5 Years @ \$136,000 (based on 2006/2007 costs)	*	<u>\$680,000</u>
* This excludes likely savings on transportation, text books and instructional supplies, and accommodation.		

### **Staffing Implications**

The potential of two less teaching positions for Middle Immersion would be offset by the two additional teachers required for the expansion of the Early French Immersion program. There would be no job losses and no need to recruit additional FSL teachers and incur additional costs.

### **Summary of Financial Implications**

With the Board's current difficult financial situation and the likelihood that declining elementary enrolment in 2007/2008 and beyond will dramatically reduce future grant revenue, it is imperative that the Board take whatever steps it can to reduce costs, while continuing to offer quality programs, including French Immersion. When faced with the unfortunate, but likely, reality of cutting programs and eliminating positions in 2007/2008 and thereafter, it would be difficult to justify maintaining a second variation of an optional program, when the remaining program fully meets the needs of most Catholic parents.

### **Summary**

The accommodation concerns recognized in the 2005 French Immersion ARAC have indeed materialized as the leading edge (i.e. Grade 3) of Early French Immersion Program at St. John is now a year away from overlapping the Middle Program. There is not sufficient capacity at St. John to accommodate even a single year of program overlap and some action must be taken to avoid an accommodation crisis in 2007. Although there is a short-term opportunity to relocate the Middle Program to St. Anthony, difficulties redevelop in 2008 when the same grade overlap occurs and portables are required. Ultimately the Middle Program could be maintained at St. Anthony in temporary accommodations, though by 2012 as many as 10 portables would be required. There are clear program delivery advantages in providing a single immersion program and the Early Program seems to offer the most advantages for students. A phase-out of the Middle Immersion program would provide better long-term accommodation options and ensure a greater degree of stability for the Early French Immersion Program.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing report suggests that there are reasons from the viewpoint of pedagogy, system wide consistency and efficiency of program offerings, accommodation and finances, to propose to the Board of Trustees that the Middle French Immersion be phased-out, grade by grade, beginning with declining to accept intake into Grade 4 in September, 2007.

Senior Administration unanimously believes, that, when combined, the above reasons are compelling enough to recommend this course of action to the Board, but understands that the Board of Trustees will likely wish to consult with its constituents before making a final determination.

### **Communication Process and Recommendations**

It is important that the public be adequately informed about the possible phase-out of the Middle Immersion program. It is also very important that an opportunity be provided for Trustees to receive public input on this proposal, prior to making a decision on the matter.

**Administration is therefore recommending the following process and time-line:**

1. That the Middle Immersion report be made available to all schools, school councils and employee groups and that it be posted on the Board's website.
2. That opportunity be provided at the Board Meeting of January 29th, 2007 to receive input from the public.
3. That Administration provides recommendations to Trustees on the future of the Middle Immersion program at the Board meeting of February 12, 2007.