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MEMO TO: Chair of the Board and Trustees

FROM: Heather Boswell, Superintendent of Program

SUBJECT: Impact on ESL Learning in a Dual Track French-English School

Report Classification: Information

Background:

The Upper Grand District School Board approved the following motion at the June 9, 2009 Board meeting.

“That the Program Department provide a report responding to the concern of impacts on ESL learning in a dual track French-English school.”

During the Central Guelph Accommodation Review deliberations last spring, some concerns were raised regarding programming for English Language Learners (ELLs) in dual track schools with French Immersion. They focused on the perceived negative effects of French Immersion on ELL’s language acquisition. It had been expressed that exposure to French in and around the school might confuse and confound ELL students. As an example, it has been cited that school signage or announcements in French would be confusing for ELL students as they are already grappling with learning their second language. The introduction of a third language might quite simply be overwhelming.

Staff endeavoured to find educational research that explored this question. A search of research at Ontario Institute of Education (OISE), and University of Toronto search engine resulted in no findings. There was no research current or previous that addressed this question. Further, staff contacted Dr. Jim Cummings, Professor and Canadian Research Chair in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department at OISE. Dr. Cummings confirmed no research exists in this area.

Appendix A:

Staff explored the question from another angle. Was there research and scholarly literature which demonstrated the best practice on how students learn a language? This appendix explores the results of this research on language acquisition and the works of Dr. P. Tabors, author of *One Child, Two Languages*.

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Upper Grand District School Board

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- Bruce Schieck
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Appendix B:

Staff also reviewed the policy of the Ministry of Education and their support document, *Supporting English Language Learners: A practical guide for Ontario Educators Grade 1 to 8*. Appendix B provides the results of this search.

Appendix C:

Data on ESL population in Guelph schools.

Summary:

No research was found to suggest that ELL students are disadvantaged in a dual track school model.

Issue:

To provide research to inform the impact on ESL learning in a dual track French-English school.

Recommendations:

1. That the report entitled Impact on ESL Learning in a Dual Track French-English School, dated November 24, 2009 be received.

Rationale:

No research exists to support the expressed concern in this area.

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Through the Ontario Institute of Education (OISE), and University of Toronto, staff endeavoured to find educational research in this area. Further, staff contacted Dr. Jim Cummins, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning department at OISE. He is currently conducting a research review on English Language Learner's academic trajectories. Dr. Cummings confirmed no research exists in this area. Staff subsequently reviewed the literature related to First and Second language acquisition and discovered two distinct models of language learning. The analogy of filling up containers which represent the child's cognitive capacity to acquire language was used by the researcher. First a single container theory and second a multiple container theory was explained.

Single container theory:

With this theory, the child begins to learn the home language and the container begins to fill up. When the second language is introduced, it starts to compete for space in the container. In this theory the two languages flow together and neither language is learned very well. (Subtractive model of bilingualism) *Research has shown that this model is not accurate and that the results of such policies have been detrimental to both children and families*

Multiple container theory:

With this theory, the child begins to learn the home language and begins to fill up the container. When a second language is introduced another container is added. Some of the learning from the home language is transferred into the second container. (Additive model of bilingualism) *Research has demonstrated that there are a variety of cognitive, emotional and cultural benefits to first-language maintenance as children learn a second language.* The additive model of bilingualism would suggest that having even a third language, French in this case, would not be detrimental.

Understanding the bilingual advantage

Students who see their previously developed language skills acknowledged by their teachers and parents are more likely to feel confident and take the risks involved in learning a new language. They are able to view English as an *addition* to their first language, rather than as a *substitution* for it.

There are numerous positive outcomes that result from continuing to promote the ongoing use and development of ELLs' first languages. Respect and use of the first language contribute both to the building of a confident learner and to the efficient learning of additional languages and academic achievement, including:

- developing mental flexibility;
- developing problem-solving skills;
- communicating with family members;
- experiencing a sense of cultural stability and continuity;
- understanding cultural and family values;
- developing awareness of global issues;
- expanding career opportunities.

Students who are able to communicate and are literate in more than one language are better prepared to participate in a global society. Though this has benefits for the individual, Canadian society also stands to gain from having a multilingual workforce. The children now entering Ontario schools are a valuable resource for Canada.

Experts tell us

... does the school language policy view students as bilingual, with talents in both their home language and English, or just as learners of English whose home language is irrelevant to academic success?

Jim Cummins, *Promoting Literacy in Multilingual Contexts, Research Monograph #5*, The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007. p. 3

Students with well-developed skills in their first language have been shown to acquire an additional language more easily and fully and that, in turn, has a positive impact on academic achievement.

Fred Genesee, Kathryn Lindholm-Leary, William Saunders, and Donna Christian. *Educating English Language Learners: A Synthesis of Research Evidence*. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

ELLs use what they know in one language to help develop other languages. This positive transfer effect has been found to be particularly strong in reading.

Claude Goldenberg. "Teaching English Language Learners: What the Research Does – and Does Not – Say," *American Educator*, Summer 2008: 8-23.

English language learners are extremely resourceful learners with a unique bilingual reservoir of skills and experiences.

Fred Genesee, from a speech at TESOL 2008, "Learning to read a second language: What does the research say and what do we do about it?"

The development of two languages in childhood turns out to be a profound event that ripples through the life of that individual.

Ellen Bialystok, *Bilingualism in Development*. Cambridge University Press, 2001, 247-248.

Students who use their bilingual skills have been shown to develop both cognitive flexibility and divergent thinking.

Jim Cummins, "The Influence of Bilingualism on Cognitive Growth: A Synthesis of Research Findings and Explanatory Hypotheses" in Colin Baker and Nancy H. Hornberger, eds., *An Introductory Reader to the Writings of Jim Cummins*. Multilingual Matters, 2001.

ESL Population - Guelph Schools
(based on September 2009 Data)

School	Total Students	Percentage of School Population
Aberfoyle	6	1.59%
Brant Avenue	8	5.06%
Central	10	5.10%
F.A. Hamilton	11	4.60%
Gateway Drive	19	6.09%
Jean Little	22	7.26%
John McCrae	3	0.51%
June Avenue	1	0.45%
Ken Danby PS	5	0.88%
King George P.S.	1	0.24%
Kortright Hills	16	3.04%
Laurine Avenue	3	2.17%
Mitchell Woods	66	13.17%
Ottawa Crescent	4	1.60%
Paisley Road	16	3.87%
Priory Park	30	10.00%
Rickson Ridge	4	0.76%
Sir Isaac Brock	46	5.80%
Taylor Evans	73	14.12%
Tytler P.S.	2	1.59%
Victory	5	1.20%
Waverley Drive	2	0.47%
Westwood	52	10.61%
Willow Road	53	10.62%