

C'est fantastique!

Excitement, anticipation grows for launch of French Immersion programs



Callie, Tessa, Nicole and Brad Bested stand in front of St. André French Immersion Catholic Elementary School. Callie will begin kindergarten there in September, and her little sister will follow in her footsteps.

(Tecumseh, Ontario, April 23, 2015) – At the age of three, little Callie Bested can already count to 10 in French, and one of her favourite books is in that language too. So she should have a pretty good head start when she begins junior kindergarten at the brand new St. André French Immersion Catholic Elementary School in September.

“This was a perfect decision for us,” Callie’s mother Nicole said of her family’s choice to enroll their daughter at the new school, open for students from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 2. “I just believe that French Immersion is so good for kids. They pick up on languages so quick and it opens up so many doors for them for future careers.”

At a special meeting in January, the WECD SB approved a recommendation to launch two new French Immersion programs: a dual-track French Immersion program at St. Joseph elementary

school in River Canard, and a single-track program at the former St. Gregory's school site in Tecumseh.

So far, 43 students are already registered at St. André, and more are expected before September, according to Laura Guglietta, the school's new vice-principal. Judging from the feedback she's received so far, parents are thrilled to be part of a small school setting, and to participate in building a brand new school community from the ground up, she added.

"There's a huge level of excitement in the community," she said, "and I'm just so pleased to be a part of that."

At St. Joseph, meanwhile, 36 students have already enrolled in the French Immersion program.

"The parents know that the school has a very good reputation, and they're very excited that this wonderful opportunity is being offered in a well established school," said principal Linda DiPasquale.

Prior to approving its expansion plan, the board conducted a survey of more than 700 people to gauge the level of interest for French Immersion in certain geographical areas, and the respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the Tecumseh/Lakeshore and Amherstburg/LaSalle regions were the most popular choices, said Tecumseh trustee Susan Tope.



"There's so much French heritage in both of these areas, so we genuinely believe that launching French Immersion in these communities will contribute to the preservation of that heritage," she said.

In the Amherstburg/LaSalle area, trustee Frank DiTomasso said a French Immersion program has been long overdue.

"People have wanted this for a long time, and now that it's coming, everyone is very excited," he said. "I'm hearing nothing but positive feedback."

As for benefits to students, there's plenty of research demonstrating that learning a second language enhances further development of first-language skills, Guglietta said, adding that fluency in French is an asset many employers are seeking.

“So having that second language is only going to give the student more advantage and more opportunity,” she said.

Callie’s father Brad Bested couldn’t agree more.

“I have two cousins who went to French schools and that really helped them get jobs,” said Bested, a supervisor at Fiat Chrysler Automobiles Windsor Assembly Plant. “It just opens more doors, being the bilingual country that we are.”

Looking ahead, it’s notable that when those students from St. André graduate from Grade 8 they can move on to the French Immersion program at St. Anne Catholic High School in nearby Lakeshore, Guglietta said. Until now, that school has been without an elementary Catholic French Immersion feeder school.

“That’s really important because now there’s a continuum in French Immersion,” she said.

NOTE: Family Fun Days will be held at both schools on Sunday, May 3 (12-2 p.m. at St. Joseph, and 1-3 p.m. at St. André). There will be games, face-painting, clowns, and other fun activities for the whole family. All are welcome to attend.