

Feedback on French Immersion Focus Group Meeting – October 8th, Horton High School

On Oct. 8th, Maura Ryan and Jennifer Bolt represented MNES at a focus group session held by the AVRSB at Horton High School. This session was the second of two focus groups held in the Region to ask parents for their feedback to a list of questions and issues that was circulated prior to the meeting. Our session had 10-12 parents representing elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the Annapolis Valley. The discussion was lively and lasted for more than 3 hours.

Key Issues discussed (and feedback) included:

- Ideas to improve communications about the French immersion program (everyone agreed that the Board could make better use of their website; parents generally thought that program information needed to come earlier in their decision-making process; people appreciated the communication from their school, though this varied a lot, but agreed that more support from the Board would be useful.)
- Where to focus resources (there was no consensus on this issue, only that the Board needed to more strongly advocate for the program at the provincial level, and that we, as parents, cannot afford to stop fighting for what is clearly a uniformly well-regarded program. Not surprisingly, parents at the elementary level were keen advocates for early immersion, and those at the high school level were supportive of resources focused on late immersion programs. There was some discussion of how to ensure that ALL students get access to excellent French curriculum, rather than just the “privileged” few in French immersion.)
- How to provide access and continuity (There was a lot of discussion about the benefits of regionally-based programs, like NMES, versus school-based programs, like KCA, with no consensus on suggesting any changes. There was agreement that one of the most difficult aspects of the French immersion program is the uncertainty about what will be offered especially at the high school level, because of shrinking class sizes. It was recognized by all that the numbers required by the Board to fill the program combined with limitations on class sizes meant that the future of the program was always going to be threatened by low class numbers as some attrition is inevitable.)
- The importance of good teaching (Parents were asked what was working in the French immersion program and there was enthusiastic response for the quality of teaching. The importance of attracting good teachers, especially at the high school level, is seen as one of the key to success for the program.)