

My name is Robin Ross. I was in the first French Immersion class in Palmerston 39 years ago. This long standing and successful program may be drastically changed by the Upper Grand District School Board if we are unable to convince the board to make amendments to a review committees recommendations. My son is currently in French Immersion JK and our family will not be affected by the changes to the program but I believe that public school boards should be striving to create equal access to all students and not finding ways to limit opportunities. I am representing a group of parents that are working to find effective solutions the UGDBS could use instead of those presented by the committee. We believe some of the recommendations will be quite harmful to our school and community. Our group is also presenting to Wellington North and Mapleton councils, requesting help to solve these problems in a positive way.

The UGDSB has completed a review of it's primary school French programs. This included French Immersion and Core French throughout the board. The board has two very clear problems. Overcrowding at French only schools (in Guelph) and a lack of accredited teachers to meet the demand for French programming.

As part of the review process, the committee was asked to create recommendations for the board to adopt that would solve the problem. There are 19 recommendations in total. We completely support the committee's recommendations to improve teacher recruitment and retention. As parents living in Northern Wellington, it is recommendations 12 and 13 that are of great concern. Recommendation 12 only allows students to enter French Immersion in JK not SK or Grade one as is currently allowed. When combined with recommendation number 13 (capping JK enrolment), we believe it will create a French Immersion program that will fail here in Northern Wellington as numbers in higher grades will dwindle. The Palmerston Public School cap is 25 based on the board's view that we are a negative growth area. There is a somewhat standard 90% retention rate in French Immersion programs. If you only allow 25 students to start each year, there are only 10 students in the grade 8 class. We were told at the public meeting that this cap would not affect the residents because it is high enough to meet the demands of the population.

We disagree. There are currently 37 French Immersion JK in Palmerston with a similar number registering for next year. That is significantly more than 25.

We are objecting to the board's analysis of our area for these reasons:

1. In a committee of 37 people, one represented the entire Northern Wellington area and he is the Norwell Principal. We believe that there was no representative that was able to clearly speak about the conditions of French Program in our area. All they had to do was look at this year's enrolment and they would see that their projections of a diminishing demand for French Immersion here is inaccurate.
2. If the French Immersion program becomes capped, it will negatively affect our area's ability to encourage people to move here. According to the board's own survey, people are choosing French Immersion to enhance their children's future opportunities. There are no other enhanced educational programs available in this area for people to choose.
3. The French Review has created these recommendations based on the assumption that there are no other solutions. In essence, the problem is too big so let's just cut the program instead of trying to fix it.
4. The Review doesn't take into account the larger distances between home schools and the French Immersion schools for some students. For example, if a family has a student in

grade 3 and their second child does not get into capped JK program we believe more families will decide to remove their older student from the program because our schools are far apart. In Guelph, the distance between home schools and French Immersion ones is not as great and people may be able to keep their students in separate schools. For a family living east of Arthur, it will be very difficult to have one student in Arthur and one in Palmerston.

We are asking Minto council to support our efforts in working with the school board to find other solutions to these problems, in the following ways.

1. We ask Minto Council to agree with our assessment the capping the French Immersion program will have a negative impact in recruiting residents to our municipality.
2. We ask Minto Council to offer support to the school board's recruiting efforts to bring new teachers to the area, through the sharing of information and the municipalities expertise rural resident recruitment efforts.
3. We ask Minto Council to also offer us any ideas they may have that will help us keep the French Immersion program open to all North Wellington residents that want to enrol their children.
4. We ask Minto Council to communicate with the UGDSB, in whatever manner it chooses, how vibrant our municipality is and that we are not an area of loss and negative growth.