Office of

Trustee Paynter

Greater Victoria

School District

 TO: Education Policy and Directions Committee

FROM: Trustee Rob Paynter

Re: Dispensation for Secondary Level French Immersion Students impacted by COVID-19

DATE: 14 September 2020

**Background**: French Immersion students in BC may qualify for both a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood Diploma) and a *Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires en Colombie-Britannique* by meeting the requirements laid out in Table 1 of the Graduation Program order, as well as:

* At least 16 credits at the Grade 12 level (including a Français langue seconde-immersion course at the Grade 12 level).
* Français langue seconde-immersion 10 (4 credits).
* A Français langue seconde-immersion course at the Grade 11 level (4 credits) or IB French A2 (SL) 11.
* Français langue seconde-immersion 12 (4 credits).
* At least 12 credits in Grade 10, 11, or 12 courses that are in French with at least 4 of these credits at the Grade 11 or 12 level.

Reference: Ministerial Order M302/04 Effective July 1, 2019 (provided)

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/graduation-credentials-for-francophone-and-french-immersion-students>

The BC Human Rights Code includes physical disability within its list of protected personal characteristics. Examples of physical disabilities described on the BC Human Rights Tribunal include:

* addiction, amputation, asthma, acne, diabetes, cancer, epilepsy, high blood pressure, hypertension, obesity and impairments to mobility. It includes people who are Deaf, hard of hearing, or blind.

Reference: Human Rights Code is available online at <https://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96210_01>

**Rationale:** For pedagogical reasons and also due to funding and staffing considerations, the Greater Victoria School District (SD61) is unable to deliver Français langue seconde-immersion instruction or other qualifying French courses in other than a face to face setting.

While an unavoidable consequence of the current pandemic, this results in students who are immune-compromised or otherwise unable to attend classes in person during the 2020/2021 school year unable to meet the Dual Dogwood graduation qualifications established by the Province of BC. While the circumstances are most critical for students poised to graduate from Grade 12, students currently in Grade 10 and 11 may also be unable to meet all the identified course requirements within their remaining time in secondary school. This is a regrettable outcome for students who may have already completed as many as 12 years for French Immersion instruction at District 61 schools.

With respect to consideration of a physical disability, I propose that a health issue that is sufficiently significant for a medical professional to determine that a student is at increased risk of becoming infected by COVID-19 and/or of experiencing more significant consequences due to becoming infected with COVID-19, is likely to meet the standard described for a physical disability within this context.

Recognizing that the Board of Education is unable to provide the required instructional requirements except in a manner that could result in immune-compromised students facing an elevated health risk relative to their peers, requesting that the Ministry of Education loosen its requirements for identified students is a reasonable “next best” step.

As the recommended action is limited to writing an advocacy letter on behalf of students, this proposal is not expected to inordinately strain available staff resources.

**Alignment to the Strategic Plan**: This proposal aligns with:

**Goal 1**: Create an inclusive and culturally responsible learning environment that will support and improve all learners’ personal and academic success.)

* **Strategy 2**: Engage and collaborate with students, families and staff to provide an inclusive learning environment that will enhance and support student learning, identities and well-being;

And would fall under the category of **Advocacy**.

**Recommendation:**

***That the Board of Education of Greater Victoria (School District 61) instruct the Chair to write a letter to the Minister of Education asking that Graduation Program Requirements for the Diplôme de fin d'études secondaires en Colombie-Britannique be relaxed for secondary students unable to attend in person classes to receive French language instruction during the 2020/2021 school year.***