

## ASK AUNT MALKIN

*A veteran of the school wars herself, with the scars to prove it, Malkin Dare has all kinds of advice for parents. This is the first in this series. If you would like some been-there-done-that advice from Aunt Malkin on a schooling issue that is worrying you, click [here](#) to send in your question. This month, Aunt Malkin answers a parent's question as to whether or not she should enroll her child in French immersion.*

### **Answer**

There are two main reasons for choosing French immersion (FI). The first reason is because you want your child to learn French, and the second is so that your child will receive an enriched education.

With regard to the first reason, you should be aware that few children emerge from existing FI programs with fluent French, as most school boards offer a sort of “whole language” French program, as opposed to the very structured, clearly-taught program that works best.

In addition, there are few FI graduates with fluent French since almost every student drops out at some point along the way. Locally, only about one percent of FI students graduate from high school with a FI diploma. As well, the shortage of native-tongue French teachers means that most FI graduates end up speaking a kind of Frenglish with a heavy English accent and lots of ungrammatical Anglicisms. On the other hand, students with some FI typically understand spoken French well and they tend to be supremely confident of their ability to make themselves understood.

With regard to the second reason for choosing French immersion (an enriched education), it is true that the stronger students tend to be in the FI classes, since the struggling students mostly drop out as they rise through the grades. This is of course great for the survivors, but it is quite hard on the drop-outs, who tend to regard themselves as failures, especially in the early years. In addition, the English language spelling of FI students takes terrible hits, as the students often randomly add the letter “e” here and there, nor do they ever really master the concept of double letters. An English word like “address” can show up as “adresse” or “adresse” or “adress,” for example.

Yer pays your money and yer takes your chances!