



ILA 2016.2017 Academic and ITC Calendar

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Overview of the Academic/ITC ILA Calendar

One of the many unique aspects of the International Leadership Academy is its academic calendar which goes from early September to late June with the option for year round school or summer camp. The calendar follows a repeating teaching cycle of seven weeks of intense age-appropriate academic immersion instruction followed by two weeks of **ITC (Immersion through Culture)**, an additional layer of immersion: culture in a fun, relaxed atmosphere. This helps children recover physically but also connects them to the French language in a non-academic yet meaningful way, just as francophone children develop their deep engagement to their language—without even noticing—through the influence of their culture.

This academic cycle is based on cutting edge science with three goals in mind:

- (i) increase retention of foreign language and academic content for our learners;
- (ii) protect parent investment in language immersion pedagogical environment;
- (iii) improve quality of life at school both for students and teachers (and quite possibly parents as well).

ILA achieves these goals by following the French **teaching rhythms** and pace (*rythmes scolaires*), based on many years of scientific studies in **chronobiology** (a multidisciplinary effort—including pedagogy, cognitive science, and neuroscience) interested in establishing at what times of the day and what intervals students show best learning outcomes and when not so much and why.

Science behind the ILA Teaching Cycle

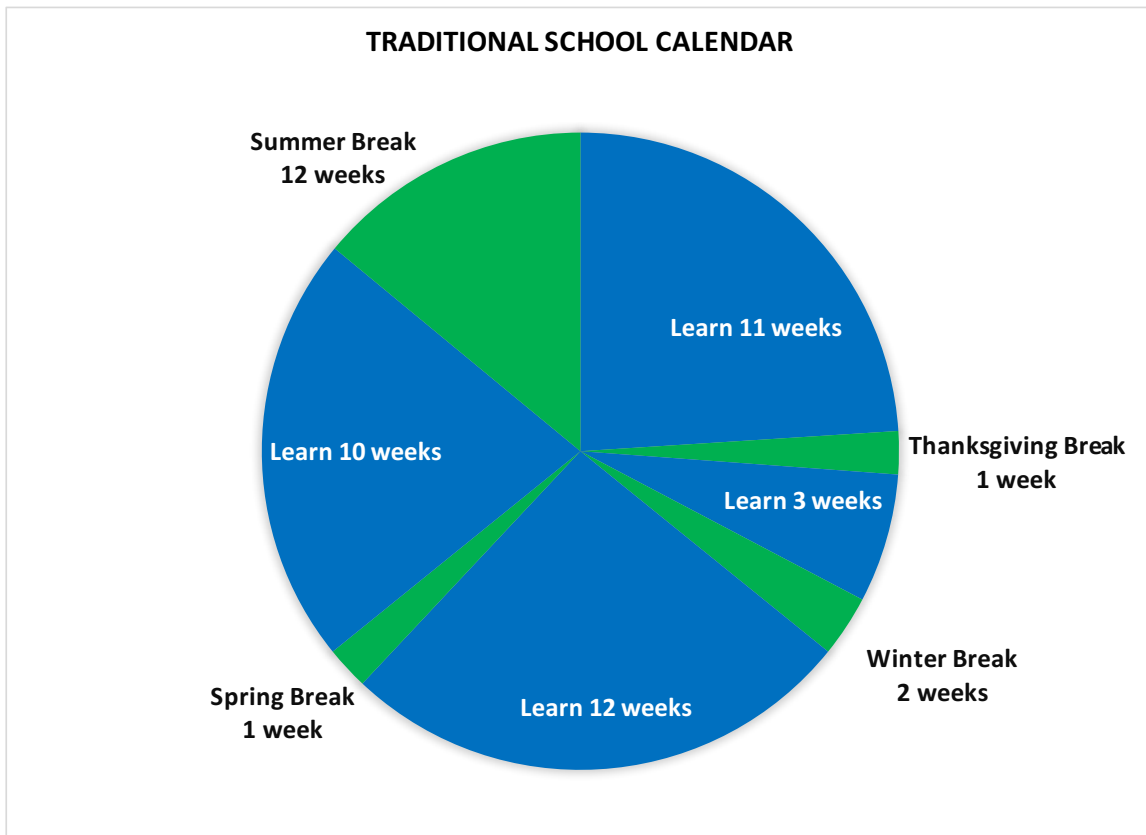
1. The Science

The French Ministry of Education expended considerable energy into a large scale study—as well as a vast stakeholder consultation—into questions about school schedule, pace, and learning intervals. It relied heavily on the disciplines of chronobiology (how time affects our bodies, and more importantly our ability to learn) and **chronopsychology** (how time affects our behavior). The 2011 French study concerns the **length** of the French school day (very long to account for a four day a week schedule in France), and the **times** of the day (and days of the week) at which children's ability to learn happens to be most available. The analysis is fine-grained in that it distinguishes between the times of the day when knowledge is best acquired and when it is best reinforced. ILA has incorporated these findings into its daily schedule already.

One relevant section of the study explores the length of time students can learn efficiently before requiring a break from structured academic activity. The *education nationale* has relied on chronobiology to conclude that after 7 weeks of intense academic activity children's ability to focus and stay on task diminishes considerably.

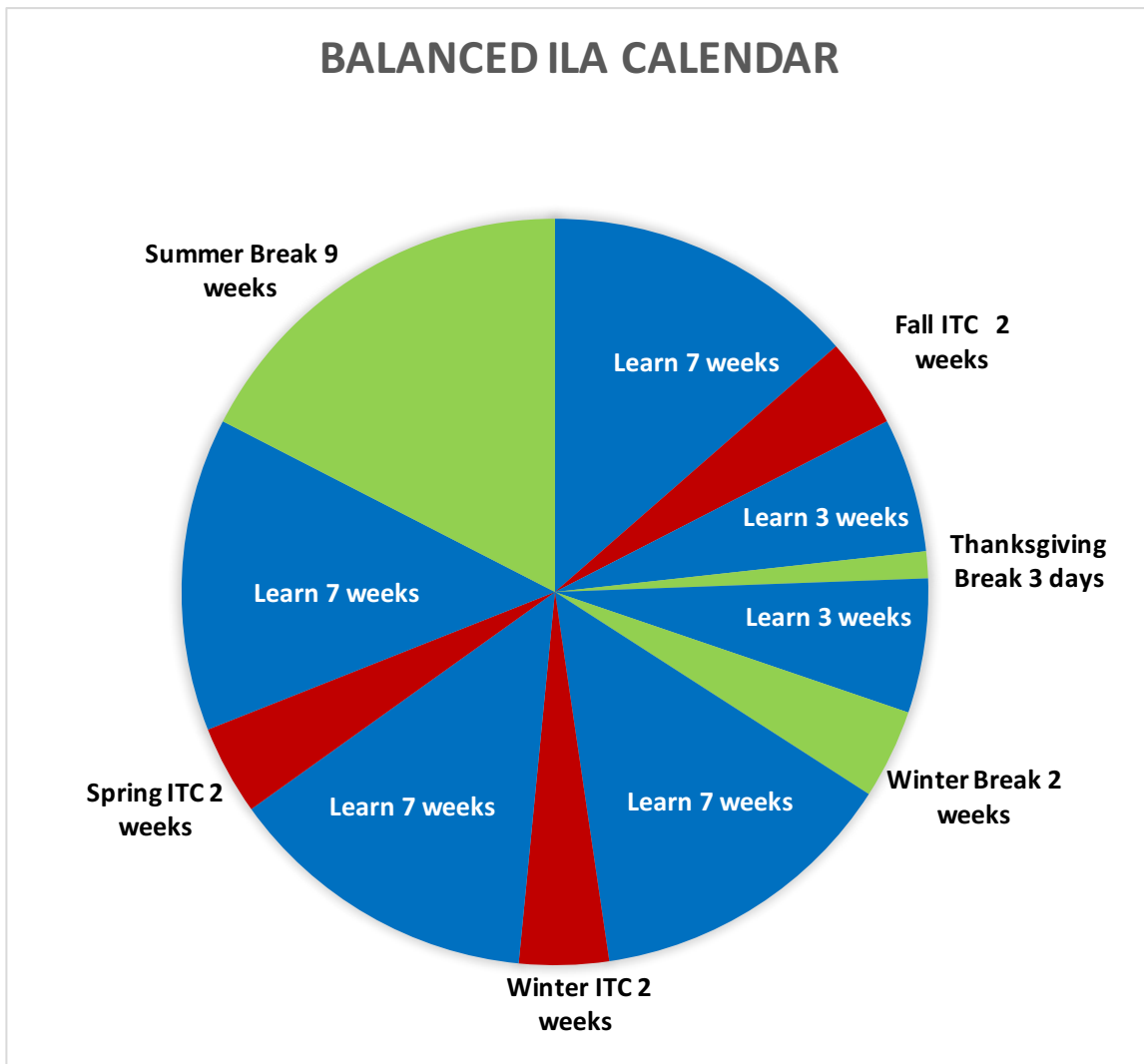
Chronopsychology suggests that after 7 weeks, behavior begins to deteriorate, and there is an increase in inattention, and social conflict. The report concludes that the optimal pace of teaching is **7 weeks of intense academic learning, with 2 weeks downtime.**

The traditional school calendar is represented here in a pie chart:



The ancient Greek poet Hesiod (c. 700 BC) once remarked, "The right timing is in all things the most important factor," or as we all know, "timing is everything." We can observe from this chart a grueling 11 week period following a 12 week summer vacation. This period was originally set in the 1840s following the medical thinking of the day, which considered that children risked diseases of insanity and nervous disorders from "overstimulation of the mind," or that sweltering classrooms might promote the spread of disease. The school schedule naturally meshed with the agrarian calendar (when both French and American societies were far more rural than they are now), allowing children to help out on the farm. Today, sociologists study the "summer learning gap," the way in which summer learning rooted in family and community influences widens the achievement gap across social lines, while schooling offsets those family and community influences (Alexander, Entwisle, Olson: 2007). The French report focuses on summer vacation's negative effect on the "equality of chances" that public school is meant to ensure, as studies show that only one in three French children travel in the summer. No matter how accustomed we all are to a long summer break from school, the initial reasons for this practice no longer appear justified or even rational.

The ILA calendar has a different sort of balance:



This balanced calendar ensures no more than 7 weeks of instruction in a row and offers gaps for holidays as well as fun-based cultural breaks to restore energy and promote **integrative learning**.

2. Immersion Through Culture Weeks

A better use of time is already great news for our children. (It is also good for their teachers' health and stamina! And arguably, when students and teachers are happier, so are the parents.) However, in the context of a French immersion school, our 7-2 schedule has an added advantage. The ITC two weeks downtime is devoted to a light, playful cultural **intersession** taught by both internal and outside specialists, in which children connect, in a non-academic way, with the same cultural activities that entertain their francophone peers. This is not just school immersion; it is break from school and an enjoyable exploration of the lighter side of French and other francophone cultures.

We know how quickly and how well young children learn French (or other foreign languages). As children grow older, however, their social connection to their surrounding culture increases. And it is an English-speaking, American culture. Exposure to, and engagement with the fun, age-appropriate popular culture of France and the Francophonie cements your child's genuine relationship with the French language, not just as something she is learning in school (and alien to the culture that surrounds her) but as a culture that she is invited into, and desires to be a part of. Some examples of past ITC weeks are **gardening, African drumming, international cooking, puppet making, circus arts with Cirque du Soleil artists, French cooking, French fashion and art, video production and a three night outdoor school to a French camp in the San Juan Islands for older students.**

Over the years, your child sees French as a genuinely living language; one that is not only taught in school, but one that entertains, and deserves to be sought out. This in-depth cultural experience protects parent's investment in a language immersion environment for their child as French becomes something desirable in and of itself as opposed to something that parents impose. This is known as "integrative learning," which relies on the students' motivation to learn as a result of a desire to participate in a culture. (Byran and Feng, 2004).

ITC weeks are different from the traditional seven weeks of academic instruction. The lightly structured, fun-based cultural activities attain two separate and crucial goals: first, to permit students to recuperate physically and mentally after 7 weeks of work, and secondly, to provide an atmosphere where children are immersed in an entertaining and attractive culture, thus increasing their motivation to return to structured learning once the two weeks are over.

Benefit to the parents: Parents are encouraged and advised to take their family vacations during ITCs rather than during the academic learning weeks. ILA does not take a traditional spring break, but parents can travel with their family during the ITC weeks when it is low season with smaller crowds and lower airfare and hotel prices.

The ILA calendar offers 40 weeks of instruction plus ITCs, while traditional schools only offer 36 weeks of instruction, increasing childcare/camp costs for parents during the additional four weeks.

Concluding Remark

This 7-2 week teaching cycle throughout the year sets ILA apart from many other schools in the Portland area. Approaching the calendar from a rational, even detached way, we implemented the best recommendations from an impressive study based on solid science. But, also on a more emotional level, we know that this teaching cycle is good primarily from the perspective of our young learners. However, the changes are beneficial to teachers (and indeed the parents) as well.

Satisfied parents are the best ambassadors for our school, enabling them to tell other parents (of prospective ILA students) what is special and unique about ILA.

I. 2016-2017 ILA Calendar

August 2016						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

September 2016						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

October 2016						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

November 2016						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

December 2016						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
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11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

January 2017						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

February 2017						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28				

March 2017						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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26	27	28	29	30	31	

April 2017						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

May 2017						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
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14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

June 2017						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

July 2017						
Su	M	Tu	W	Th	F	S
						1
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9	10	11	12	13	14	15
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23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

- School Closed/ Holidays
- Teacher in-Service Days (no school for students)
- Grandparents Day
- First and Last Day of School
- Wine event
- Immersion through Culture (ITC)
- Gala

II. References

Alexander, K.L., Entwisle, D.R., and Olson, L.S. (2007). Lasting Consequences of the Summer Learning Gap. *American Sociological Review*, vol. 72, April, 167–180.

Byram, M. and Feng, A. (2004). Culture and language learning : teaching, research and scholarship. *Language Teaching*, 37 (3). pp. 149-168

Conférence nationale sur les rythmes scolaires [2011]. Des rythmes plus équilibrés pour la réussite de tous: Rapport d'orientation sur les rythmes scolaires

III. Glossary of Important Terms

Autonomy: In our context this word refers to the ability and freedom to implement the best available pedagogical ideas and policies on our own without concerns for political or economic reasons that might slow or halt meaningful reforms in a country as big as France.

Chronobiology: A multidisciplinary study of the impact the timing of various activities (or periods of rest) can have on learning.

Chronopsychology: A multidisciplinary study of the impact the timing of various activities (or periods of rest) can have on behavior.

Cultural immersion: Another layer of immersion offered by ILA, aimed at imparting motivation to use French to seek out entertaining or other contents by students. In this way we prevent the erosion of command of the French language as a result of the impact of the dominant culture presented in English language.

Downtime: Used here as synonymous with “intersession” (see below).

Integrative learning: Motivation to learn a language based on attraction to a culture.

Intersession: In our context this word refers to the time (two weeks) between two periods of intense academic learning (seven weeks each) devoted to relaxing and fun-based cultural immersion.

Teaching rhythm: A schedule that carefully plans the best periods of the year devoted to teaching, downtime, and vacations.