

Second Languages Education is Thriving in Edmonton Public Schools
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¡Saludos! Grüße! 挨拶! Salutations ! 問候! Greetings! I wonder how many languages you can speak and understand. I am limited to being fluent in English and in a pinch, I can get by in French. When I meet people who grew up in Europe and can speak four to five languages, I am envious.

For today's students, in an era of globalization, a second language has many advantages. Alberta Education lists positive impacts in five areas: 1) intellectual potential (for example, superiority in divergent thinking tasks and in memory ability and attention span), 2) scholastic achievement (eg. higher test scores in reading, language and mathematics), 3) citizenship (greater cultural sensitivity), and 4) good economic job prospects.

The fifth area of positive impact is one that made me ask at an April board meeting why *all* children aren't taking a second language in our schools! "Second language education significantly strengthens *first* language skills..." states Alberta Education, and "the earlier the start, the greater the positive effect on the first language." But first things first! In addition to offering immersion and bilingual programs in Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew, Ukrainian, French, German, and Mandarin, Edmonton Public Schools is busy implementing its commitment to ensuring that *all* Grade 4 - 9 students will have the opportunity to study another language (which is not yet the case in other parts of Alberta). This new requirement came into effect last September and will roll out one year at a time in schools that are not already offering a second language, and by 2014, the district estimates that 65,000 students will be exposed to a second language. Given the list of positive impacts above, isn't this wonderful?

I am also proud that the district is unique in North America in providing internationally recognized language assessments as authorized by government authorities in China, Germany, Spain, France, Japan, and the Ukraine, and that last September, it launched the Institute for Innovation in Second Language Education (IISLE). As the first comprehensive language institute in North America, IISLE's purpose is to develop excellence in second language education. Finally, on May 4, Edmonton Public Schools was delighted to celebrate its new partnership with the prestigious Confucius Institute of China, which will operate out of the Alberta School for the Deaf. The Institute allows us to significantly enhance our ability to support Chinese language and cultural education, provides new opportunities for exchanges for teachers and students, and is a resource on Chinese language and culture for all Edmontonians (including business people).

The options for second language education in Edmonton Public Schools are diverse and plentiful, including immersion or bilingual opportunities for French, German, and Spanish right within Ward H (southwest Edmonton). I encourage you to celebrate, support, and take advantage of these opportunities. If you have questions about second languages or any other issue, please feel free to contact me at 887-1002 or Catherine.Ripley@epsb.ca ¡Gracias! Danke! ありがとう! Merci! 謝謝!