

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

March 24, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee D. Colburn, Multi-cultural Task Force Chair
Trustee B. Esslinger, Multi-cultural Task Force
Trustee K. Shipka, Multi-cultural Task Force

SUBJECT: Multi-cultural Task Force: Interim Report

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE
STAFF: Gloria Chalmers, Karen Bardy

INFORMATION

Background

On November 12, 2008, the Board of Trustees approved Terms of Reference for the following motion:

That the board establish a multi-cultural task force to examine and make recommendations on how to enhance the education of the growing segment of our student population from other cultures. The terms of reference would be developed by the task force and approved by the board.

Since November, a variety of consultation activities have been implemented. This is the first interim report regarding the work that has been undertaken.

Activity Update

Background information in relation to the District's current policy on multi-culturalism and policies from other jurisdictions was reviewed by the Task Force. Based on the Terms of Reference (Appendix I), a consultation process with the following stakeholders was developed and implemented, beginning in December 2008:

- immigrant and refugee junior and senior high youth and parents at Balwin and Queen Elizabeth Schools
- representatives from immigrant-serving organizations
- a representative group of non-immigrant and refugee serving organizations
- a symposium of community members
- a sample group of staff

Meetings were held in schools, at the Reception House for immigrants and refugees who have been assigned to Edmonton by Canada Immigration, at the Edmonton Mennonite Centre, and at the Centre for Education. Discussions at the meetings and symposium focused on three questions: What is working well? What are current barriers? What are your hopes and aspirations? Immigrant-serving organizations included:

- Multi-cultural Health Brokers
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- African Centre

Non-immigrant and refugee serving organizations included:

- Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations
- Canada Immigration
- University of Alberta, Secondary Education Department
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Family Centre
- Community Services, City of Edmonton
- Diversity Office, City of Edmonton
- Head Start
- Settlement Services, Catholic Social Services
- Strategic Alliance on the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth

Information about the Saturday symposium was advertised extensively to a variety of cultural communities in Edmonton. Approximately 80 members of the community attended. Participants were organized into discussion groups, which were facilitated by members of cultural communities. In addition, a music group of immigrant youth performed at the symposium.

A report describing the input received in each of the consultation groups has been provided to the participants. This interim report will also be shared with each of the stakeholder groups. The amount spent by the Task Force to date is \$7,800, which includes costs for refreshments and food for the meetings; and costs for refreshments, food, space, facilitation, and advertising for the symposium.

Next Steps

Final consultation meeting will take place in March and April with cultural brokers from a small group of immigrant and refugee-serving organizations, the Interfaith Centre, and Volunteer Edmonton. Information received through the consultation process has been organized according to the source of the input (students, parents, staff and community) and subdivided into what is working well and suggestions for improvement. Information from the last set of consultation meetings in March and April will be incorporated into this summary. The interim and final reports will be translated into several languages.

Background and consultation information will be used by the Task Force to develop recommendations that will be brought to Board in May 2009.

GC:ch

APPENDIX I – Edmonton Public Schools’ Multi-cultural Task Force Terms Of Reference
APPENDIX II – Information from the Consultation Process

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS' MULTI-CULTURAL TASK FORCE
TERMS OF REFERENCE

Composition

The Multi-cultural Task Force consists of three trustees approved at the Organizational Board meeting, September 2008, to serve until the next Organizational Board.

The Superintendent of Schools has assigned appropriate staff to support the work of the Multi-cultural Task Force.

Parameters

All recommendations from the Task Force will be presented to the Conference Committee for recommendation to the Board of Trustees at a public board meeting.

The Task Force will support but not duplicate the administration's work with external partners in improving the achievement of immigrant and refugee students.

Purpose

To support the Board's strategic plan in the provision of direction regarding diversity which includes English language learning, transition programming and supports for refugee students.

To identify ways to strengthen and encourage relationships between the Board of Trustees and the multi-cultural community it serves.

To increase Board awareness and understanding of multi-cultural education needs, opportunities and priorities in order to guide the Board's education policy leadership and political advocacy efforts in support of improved achievement of immigrant and refugee youth.

Process

- The Task Force will review literature, district data and policies from other school jurisdictions (October 2008).
- The Task Force will meet with broadly representative multi-cultural groups of people (November 2008 to February 2009).
- The Task Force will meet with broadly representative groups of people serving the immigrant and refugee population (November 2008 to February 2009).
- The Task Force will meet with district immigrant and refugee students and district staff that serve this population (November 2008 to February 2009).
- The Task Force will develop interim and final recommendations to the Board of Trustees (January to May 2009).

Amendment to the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference may be amended upon recommendation of the Multi-cultural Task Force and approval of the Board of Trustees.

Financial Resources

A maximum of \$12,000 will be provided to support the work of the Task Force.

INFORMATION FROM THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

1. INPUT FROM STUDENTS**What is working well for immigrant and refugee students?**

- School programs:
 - learning new things, opportunity to continue one's education
 - helping think about the future and creating a feeling of hope
 - enthusiastic students
 - improving English language skills
 - good teachers; teachers are always there to help
 - good principal
 - sports activities
 - homework clubs, all school clubs
- Making new friends
- Elementary and junior high together

Suggestions for improvement

- Need more advanced English skills and to progress more quickly:
 - more help with reading and writing, exam practice, translation help; peer help; more time to take more courses; more help after school, more sports teams,
 - to pursue post-secondary, need to advance quickly
- Increase interaction with non-ELL students
- Increase cultural awareness: increased understanding among staff and students about the challenges of learning English; educate staff and students about this
- Provide homework help: regular homework help as parents and siblings often cannot help students at home
- Develop home language : don't want to forget own language
- Create a transition school or classrooms for immigrant and refugee children and youth: enable students to adjust to Canadian society and school system, as well as acquire some basic English
- Use K-9 organization: provide assistance in transitioning into school and between divisions: consider a K-9 school for immigrant and refugee children and youth
- Extend stay at high school: enable immigrant and refugee students to stay at high school for year 4 or 5 rather than move to Centre High so that they have more time to learn English
- Have someone to introduce students to a new school
- Create transition strategies to post-secondary
- Need summer programs for immigrant and refugee students
- Recognize financial challenges faced by immigrant and refugee students:
 - older students may be working after school to help their families and thus can't participate in homework clubs or other after-school activities; other strategies are required
 - some immigrant and refugee students are affected by poverty and this creates challenges when placed within a middle-class culture

2. INPUT FROM PARENTS AND FAMILIES

What is working well for immigrant and refugee students?

- K-9 organization
- Development of English language skills
- School overall
- Teachers
- Feeling comfortable at this school; being open to suggestions and to support for immigrants
- Parent program, meetings with families
- Homework club and culture club
- New leadership program for refugee students
- Recreational activities
- Can talk to trustees

Suggestions for improvement

- Improving English skills and courses:
 - show growth for students
 - improve skills more quickly
 - provide after school tutoring
 - place students by ability not age
 - help with writing and comprehension problems
 - provide exam practice
 - learn grade level to mastery
 - provide more homework; daily homework club
 - need more field trips; in Quebec, the ELL program included camps, visits to other cities, trips to stores, and other places in the city
- Create a welcoming school environment:
 - provide someone to show students around when they first come to school
 - provide information to parents about how they can help their children with homework
 - provide a room for the community to come and be part of school
 - help students and parents who are shy
 - recognize challenges experienced by students and families; limited finances means students have to work after school
 - have volunteers make home visits
 - provide translated information
 - provide parents with help re: housing and medical needs
- Use culturally sensitive discipline:
 - provide classes to educate students about school rules
 - use alternatives to suspension as suspension is harmful to students
- Provide orientation information:
 - more information for students about being a Canadian citizen
- Provide information for parents:
 - more information about how to help their children
 - more meetings with parents
 - information about parenting teenagers
 - ELL classes for parents at the school on weekends

- Provide more encouragement:
 - address students' perception that they cannot succeed
- School overall:
 - enable students at high school to stay at school one more year
 - provide more clubs and after school activities: sports, music, recreation as families do not have the resources for their children to participate in these after school
 - provide a K-9 school
 - ensure safety of students
 - improve communication between students with limited English and teachers
 - provide transportation to school as some families cannot afford transportation costs
 - help families keep their children at the school even though they have moved

3. INPUT FROM STAFF

What is working well for immigrant and refugee students?

- Current programs and services: support from the English Language Services Support Centre, Metro programs, English Language Learner Cluster Initiative, support from Programs
- Specific strategies:
 - ELSSC: assessment of student needs, multi-lingual support, professional development support, proficiency level information, support for parents
 - ELL Cluster Initiative: holistic support from the team; e.g. ELL specialist, psychologist, social worker, and working with entire school staffs
 - Early Learning Initiative: including school-family liaison
 - Metro: offering orientation and ELL instruction to parents
 - Schools:
 - taking care of all of their students
 - increased understanding about the length of time it takes to develop language fluency, the needs of immigrant and refugee students, and the increased diversity in the district
 - strong literacy programs
 - smaller class sizes, classes with educational assistants
 - professional development support for staff including coaching
 - work with parents
 - awareness of trauma and depression
 - use of translated materials
 - use of community volunteers
 - sharing stories of the children and youth
 - cultural brokers working with families
 - celebration of diversity in schools
 - Multi-disciplinary approaches and collaboration with community partners: to create homework clubs, culture clubs, leadership programs for students, recreation programs, obtaining other supports for families; involving many partners such as multi-lingual workers, consulting services, external agencies
 - Other supports: Field team and Personnel support

Suggestions for improvement

- Develop a coordinated district strategy, plan, framework: in relation to quality ELL teaching, assessment protocol, cultural responsiveness, resiliency, asset-building, understanding the impact of poverty, high expectations, sharing of effective strategies among schools, information from experts, working with provincial departments
- Professional development for all staff: in ELL strategies, assessment, being culturally responsive, understanding trauma, engaging parents, collaborating with community partners
- Improved transitions for students:
 - coordinated support re: transition into the district, a school system, and Canadian culture
 - coordination between school divisions
 - a transition program for students with limited English, limited experience in school, and suffering from trauma; provide support for parents as well; could serve as an exemplary ELL site
 - provide more time for students at the high school level to complete
 - provide career counselling
- Translated materials at different levels: basic information for parents that all schools can use
- Helping parents with information and support
- Provide more resources:
 - ELL staff, settlement staff, cultural brokers in schools
 - research to staff in this area
 - one to one teachers or educational assistants in classrooms
 - classroom resources for ELL teachers that are culturally responsive
 - mental health support for students, especially those experiencing trauma
 - homework club help for students
 - wrap-around services; e.g. social-emotional, health, cultural
 - after school and summer programs; extended days
 - information

4. INPUT FROM COMMUNITY

What is working well for immigrant and refugee students?

- Schools:
 - homework clubs
 - monthly meetings with parents
 - effective communication with the principal
 - parent sessions on language and culture
 - support for home language
 - focusing on positive self-esteem for students
 - more ELL students being accurately assessed
 - increased awareness and understanding of diversity in schools
 - recognition that racism is part of organizations
 - educators interested in diversity
- District initiatives and work:
 - being able to talk to Multicultural Task Force
 - district Cultural Diversity Committee

- English Language Services Support Centre
- English Language Cluster Initiative
- Early Learning Opportunity at Balwin School (intercultural preschool program)
- Programs' guide on culturally sensitive assessment
- building relationships between community partners and the district
- volunteers being welcomed in school
- commitment of superintendent, district staff, passion of ELL teachers
- seeing schools are more than education
- Collaboration between schools and community partners:
 - provides cultural brokers from community organizations; the brokers are involved in their own communities and are trusted by community members
 - provides tutoring and mentoring supports, homework clubs, social and recreational support, and referrals to other services
 - provides support from the school rather than a community location

Suggestions for improvement

- Staff:
 - adopt an intercultural way of thinking and behaving
 - focus on the assets of immigrant and refugee children, youth, and families
 - provide professional development in ELL instruction, cultural responsiveness, increasing understanding of immigrant and refugee experiences
- Parents:
 - develop assertiveness and confidence in parents
 - help parents understand processes re: special needs students
 - help parents understand how to help their children in school
- Schools:
 - curriculum, assessment:
 - reflect the voices from other parts of the world in the curriculum
 - bring student experience into classrooms
 - use culturally sensitive assessments for placement
 - discipline:
 - re-examine processes for suspensions and expulsions as current process is harmful to immigrant and refugee students
 - after-school programs needed
 - counseling and career guidance support for students
 - mentoring support for first days of school
 - effective ways to engage and communicate with immigrant and refugee parents
 - create welcoming environments
 - offer additional supports for immigrant and refugee students who need them
- Transition program
 - create a transition program for newcomer students
 - create a school location for students who are refugees with significant gaps
 - provide orientation to students and families
 - create the program in partnership with the community

- Racism:
 - recognize racism and put in place strategies to prevent it; anti-racism should be part of policy
 - use equitable hiring practices
- collaborate with community:
 - use community resources to have a first point of contact for new families in schools
 - create more multi-partner tables for discussion
 - create nurturing relationships with communities
 - promote collaborative relationships with community partners
- District:
 - recognize the complexity of challenges
 - have role models of immigrants and refugees in schools
 - work on poverty and health issues
 - create opportunities for youth and parent voice
 - focus on junior and senior high; supports in elementary are in place
 - need more diversity in district staff
 - provide more resources for students who are vulnerable
 - provide mental health supports
 - provide support in classrooms for home language
 - increase understanding of teachers of what ELL proficiency is
 - encourage individuals from cultural groups to pursue teaching
 - change expectations that expect immigrants to be under-achievers
 - create district motivators for reflecting and respecting diversity in schools
 - promote cultural awareness days in schools
 - have a holistic view of the needs of students
 - coordinate resources
 - put in place accountability
 - communicate with provincial departments regarding needs