

## EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

December 8, 2009

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Improving Student Achievement by Embracing Multiculturalism

ORIGINATOR: J. Bidulock, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE  
STAFF: Louise Osland, Corrie Ziegler

### INFORMATION

The Board believes that Canadian traditions and values are enriched by the presence and involvement of diverse, multicultural communities of students, staff, parents, community members and groups. The District supports an environment in which all members of diverse communities are welcomed, respected and feel a strong sense of belonging that supports full engagement and participation.

In recent years, there have been significant increases in the number of English language learners (ELL) in district schools. Students come to school with varying experiences which reflect their cultural backgrounds. As a result of these demographic changes, the District is increasing its focus on ethno-cultural education and working collaboratively across central departments and with community partners in meeting the needs of students and families from culturally diverse backgrounds.

### **District Initiatives to Support Culturally Diverse Students**

#### **1. English Language Support Services Centre (ELSSC)**

ELSSC is one central department that engages in extensive work with ELL students. The focus of the Centre is to provide a comprehensive range of supports to schools with high numbers of ELL students, many with complex needs, through a multi-partner team of support. The support includes:

- student assessment on site with provision of student background information and assessment-based programming recommendations to schools
- professional development and consultant support in ELL instruction and cultural proficiency for teachers and administrators
- support network meetings for school staff
- a district newsletter
- ethno-cultural consultant support for school, students and families to assist with:
  - parent engagement
  - parent orientation and information
  - parent referral to community services
  - cross-cultural and communication liaison support
  - initial support for crisis situations
  - home visitations with professionals from other district disciplines

- first language screening
- provision of multilingual materials for use by schools and central services.

## **2. Information for Newcomer Parents and Community Workers**

Programs has produced a booklet that is intended primarily for cultural brokers and other community workers who support parents new to Canada. Newcomer parents, who have a good grasp of English, receive the booklet directly as a learning tool. In other cases, community workers can adapt it as a resource for parent information sessions and discussions. The focus of the booklet is on assessment processes in school settings, the role that parents can play and the supports available to newcomer parents to enable them to fully participate in decisions about their children's education.

## **3. English Language Learning Cluster Initiative**

This initiative involves the partnering of Programs, ELSSC, other teams within Consulting Services and the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers. Schools in the cluster will receive support from a dedicated ELSSC consultant, professional learning, psychology and social work and a cultural broker. The intent is to tailor the support to the needs of each cluster and to work with community partners to determine what other services may be helpful to students. Students are identified with the assistance of ELSSC.

## **4. Joint ELSSC and Programs Planning**

ELSSC has been collaborating with Programs and community partners in several district initiatives related to supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students including:

- planning of the Transition program for implementation in the fall of 2010
- culturally sensitive assessment processes
- a federally-funded project that provides in-school settlement supports
- drafting of the new District Multicultural Education Regulation

## **5. Collaboration in Schools to Support Cultural Diversity**

Groups of schools create opportunities for students to share and celebrate their cultural heritage, ensure that racial and cultural issues are appropriately addressed and work collaboratively with community members and groups to increase intercultural appreciation and understanding. For example all public elementary schools in Mill Woods participated in a unique professional learning day. School staff attended a choice of sessions including: growing up in two cultures; cultural stigmas around discipline; the Muslim faith; the Somali, Senegalese and Aboriginal cultures; the role of women from other cultures; and poverty. Presenters consisted of community partners and representatives from the Edmonton Mennonite Centre, Catholic Social Services, Centre for Family Literacy, ELSSC, the University of Alberta, the Edmonton Police Service and the Islamic Family and Social Services Association.

## **Summary**

The District will continue to focus on programming, services and resources to support all students and staff in realizing their potential by creating environments that recognize and embrace the richness of diverse school communities. Celebrating and capitalizing on the benefits of a multicultural population will be a critical factor in creating bright futures for all.

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