

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 19, 2001

TO: Board of Trustees  
FROM: E. Dosedall, Superintendent of Schools  
SUBJECT: Mandarin Language Arts K-12  
ORIGINATOR: M. de Man, Department Head Designate  
RESOURCE  
STAFF: Anthony Chow; Julia Elashuk; S Kong; Jeannette Lee; Jon Loomis;  
Manfred Malzahn; Jutta McAdam; George Rice; Haijun Shao; John  
Sokolowski; Eric K. Tong; Stuart Wachowicz; Marion Xie; Lou Yaniw

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the following courses for use in Edmonton Public Schools be approved:
  - Chinese (Mandarin) Language Arts K-9
  - Chinese (Mandarin) Language Arts 15/25/35
2. That characters and phonetic systems used in the Chinese (Mandarin) Bilingual Program be in accordance with the implementation section of this report.
3. That for the extension of the Bilingual Program at Division III there be a recommended time allocation of 150 or more minutes of instruction per week be allotted, to permit teachers sufficient time to implement the new curriculum and to teach both the traditional and simplified characters.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Background:**

The Mandarin Bilingual Program has been operating in Edmonton Public Schools for nineteen years. Thanks to the hard work of district principals and teachers and especially the support of the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association (ECBEA), the program has become the largest and fastest growing bilingual program in the district.

Two years ago teachers and central services staff began the development of a new Chinese (Mandarin) Language Arts (K-12) curriculum. This was based on the requirements of the Western Canadian Protocol Framework for Bilingual Programs. The process produced a high quality curriculum, but did not at the time address the issue of characters usage and which phonetic system would be employed.

To help the district arrive at a decision in this sensitive matter a committee was formed. The committee was composed of principals and teachers from the Mandarin Bilingual Program, representatives from the ECBEA, and representatives from the district planning office, curriculum, the University of Alberta and Alberta Learning. The committee met many times over the course of a year, created surveys for parents, students and teachers and discussed at length a variety of input information. Representatives of the committee met on two occasions at public meetings of the ECBEA.

The recommendations above are the results of those extensive deliberations.

### **Implementation:**

The Chinese (Mandarin) Bilingual Program will be implemented according to the following guidelines:

1. That traditional characters be the foundational writing system first introduced and developed throughout the program.
2. That an exposure of simplified characters be created in division II, with formal introduction of simplified characters occurring in grade 7, enabling all students in the program to become proficient in the use of both traditional and simplified characters by the end of grade 12.
3. That a research study be conducted, in partnership with the federally funded Language Research Institute (University of Calgary), to determine the linguistic impact and pedagogical value of the two phonetic systems, Zhu Yin Fu Hao and Han Yu Pin Yin, on students entering a bilingual program.
4. That, pending the results of a research study, Zhu Yin Fu Hao be the phonetic system by which students in the Bilingual Program are introduced to pronunciation of Chinese characters.
5. That an exposure of Han Yu Pin Yin be created in Division II, with a formal introduction of Pin Yin occurring in grade 7, enabling all students in the program to be proficient with both Zhu Yin Fu Hao and Pin Yin by the end of grade 9.
6. That a committee of teachers and central services staff be struck to develop a scope and sequence to guide the awareness and introduction of simplified characters and Pin Yin.

### **Rationale:**

The traditional character is the context of Chinese culture in Edmonton and in Chinese communities in North America. Learning traditional characters permits the student to immediately connect with the Chinese culture in local context and Chinese history to allow the student to develop an understanding of the origin and logic behind a given character.

Throughout history there have been a number of efforts to simplify characters to make the writing process faster and the characters easier to remember. Today in China and in many other locations, as well as in much modern literature and writing, a number of characters (about 20 per cent of the most commonly used characters) are written in simplified form. Due to the increasing use of these characters it is becoming essential for students to know them. Hence the recommendation for simplified characters to be introduced (in addition to traditional characters). The introduction should come after the student has developed a good vocabulary base of traditional characters.

The phonetic system used in Edmonton Public Schools has been Zhu Yin Fu Hao. The alternative is Han Yu Pin Yin, a system based upon the Latin alphabet. It has been postulated in a number of locations in North America that the use of Zhu Yin in introducing Mandarin pronunciation to students eliminates potential confusion of sounds with the English sound for the letter such as would be used by Pin Yin. This is thought to be especially important because the majority of students entering the Mandarin program at present in kindergarten or grade one are Cantonese speakers, who are learning both Mandarin and English in kindergarten and grade one. There is an argument from some in favour of eliminating the use of Zhu Yin and only using the Pin Yin system from K-12. It is deemed important to make this a sound educational decision, and to do so will require a carefully planned research study

to assess the impact of Zhu Yin and Pin Yin on students entering a Mandarin program in kindergarten or grade 1. Early discussion on the design of such a study is underway with the federally funded Language Research Institute at the University of Calgary. The study will take two years and a report and subsequent recommendation will be brought to Board in the spring of 2004. This report will be shared with district staff and the parent organization (ECBEA).

The recommendation, at this time, will see Pin Yin introduced once a good base of pronunciation has been developed using Zhu Yin. The addition of Pin Yin will facilitate student computer usage in the Mandarin program, given keyboards are in Latin characters.

In order to phase in the use of simplified characters and Pin Yin, it is important that a committee of teachers meet to identify a scope and sequence of vocabulary of traditional and simplified characters that will be introduced through the grades. The sequence of character simplification rules will need to be addressed, as will the order of Pin Yin introduction. For this purpose in division II “awareness” or “exposure” can be defined as recognition of Pin Yin symbols and simplified characters identified in the scope and sequence. During awareness time, the students will be exposed to simplified characters during teaching, but are not required to use them and are not tested. The committee will be chaired by a language consultant. The committee will also provide for a sharing of information with the parent organization (ECBEA) to keep them well informed of the process.

In the period of time prior to formal introduction, if a student, not aware of a traditional character, uses a simplified form that is correct in application, the character will be accepted as correct, and the teacher shall require the student to write and learn the parallel traditional character.

At the present time the K-6 portion of the program runs for up to just under 50 per cent of the school day, about 700 minutes per week in Mandarin. The high school program is set at 125 hours of instruction or 200 minutes per week. The junior high program, which is an extension of the Mandarin program, due to timetabling issues, being offered in the optional time block, has been offered in some cases for considerably less time. Given that these recommendations will add content to the curriculum, and given that the new curriculum, based on the Western Canadian Protocol Framework also adds considerably more content than was previously the case, time will be an issue in permitting the teacher to accommodate the demands of the curriculum. The International Language Frameworks require at least 150 minutes per week to enable an instructor to meet the content requirements. The Bilingual Framework has more content. Therefore, in order to assist administration to timetable for student success in the program, the recommendation is made to set a recommended minimum of 150 or more minutes per week in order for the curriculum to be covered and the additional work in characters and phonetics to be learned.

The impact of these recommendations will be monitored by the curriculum unit and be reported to the superintendent, principals of schools in the Mandarin Bilingual program and the parent organization (ECBEA).

Copies of the resources are available in the Trustees’ Reading Room.

SW:dh

APPENDIX I: Parent Opinion on Introduction of Simplified Characters and Pin Yin