

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

September 13, 2005

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: District Actions to Support Achievement of Students from Diverse Cultural Backgrounds

ORIGINATOR: D. Barrett, Executive Director

RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

Background

Over the years, Edmonton has increasingly become multicultural. Information from the City of Edmonton Planning Department¹ indicates that the multicultural nature of the city continues to change. There are increasing numbers of Edmontonians who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, that the range of cultural backgrounds is different than in the past, and that some of the new immigrants coming to Edmonton are refugees.

For example, from 1996 to 2001, there were 19,000 Edmontonians who came from other countries. Almost half of these immigrants came from south, south-east, and east Asia, and from a range of language backgrounds. Some of these new Edmontonians were refugees with complex needs in terms of English language learning, knowledge of the school system, mental and physical health, housing, employment, and training. The census also indicates that in 2001, over 30,000 Edmontonians did not speak English nor French.

In addition, Edmonton's Aboriginal population has grown substantially during the 1996 to 2001 period. Of all Canadian cities, Edmonton now has the second largest number of Aboriginal people; Winnipeg has the largest. The census indicates that in 1996, there were 25,285 people in Edmonton who identified themselves as Aboriginal which includes North American Indians, Metis, and Inuit. In 2001, this had increased to over 30,000 Aboriginal people. There were also over 40,215 Edmontonians who indicated that they had Aboriginal ancestry. Census projections indicate that by 2017, the Aboriginal population in Edmonton could increase by 45% and reach 44,000.

Responding to the Diverse Needs of Students and Families

Over the years, the district has recognized the multicultural character of students and their families by putting in place policies, professional development, and resources to assist staff in responding to the range of student needs (Appendix I). However, during the last few years, the district has recognized the increasing diversity in classrooms and has initiated additional supports for staff.

¹Edmonton Socio-Economic Outlook 2005-2010 City Forecast Committee, City of Edmonton March 2005

By incorporating cultural diversity into the district's priorities, the Board of Trustees has provided direction for schools in recognizing diversity. During the past two years, the district has reviewed its programming for students who are English language learners and, as a result of this review, this summer established an *English Language Support Services Centre* at John A. McDougall School to provide services for these students and their parents, particularly those new to the district. Also, over the past two years, schools have been developing intervention plans to assist English language learners and Aboriginal students who are reading and writing below grade level. Results show that some students are making progress, however they also indicate that we need to continue to focus on the achievement of these students. This year district professional development for principals and teachers will provide information on best practices to further promote success of these students. As well, the district has identified a district representative to work with organizations, such as the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations (NAARR), and has made available to staff workshops on cross-cultural; understanding offered by this group and other community organizations such as the Multicultural Health Brokers.

District Process

Understanding that the cultural diversity of the city will continue to evolve, the district acknowledges the need to continue and to strengthen its work in the area of diversity. Consequently, the district has developed a process that will enable it to plan and provide supports to schools in response to the changing needs of students and families from a range of cultural backgrounds. As part of this process the district will:

- collect and make available to schools current information about the evolving educational needs of new immigrants, refugees, and Aboriginal families in the city's communities.
- work on an ongoing basis with community organizations to identify supports and resources available for schools in working with students and families from a range of cultural backgrounds. Supports and resources will focus on cross-cultural understanding, anti-racism, and creating positive learning environments and communities.
- establish a district advisory group on diversity consisting of representatives from community organizations that provide service to students and families from a range of cultural backgrounds; the purpose of the group will be to share information about the needs of the diverse cultural community in Edmonton and to identify resources that would be useful to schools.
- support diversity in terms of a range of student needs in order to provide information as needed to schools. For example, the district has and will continue to provide schools with information on gender and achievement.

District staff have begun meeting with the following agencies and organizations in order to identify the possible supports and resources that are available in the community to provide support to schools.

- Alberta Teachers' Association
- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- Catholic Social Services
- Edmonton Immigrants Association
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre
- Edmonton Multicultural Society

- Metis Child and Family Services
- Multicultural Health Brokers
- University of Alberta, Faculty of Education

One recent outcome from these meetings has been the opportunity to work this September with the Multicultural Health Brokers and the Community Partnership Enhancement Mapping Initiative (CPEMI) in the development of a map that identifies where refugee families are residing in the city. District staff will be making this information available to schools in order to assist them in preparing for students who are refugees. In addition, the CPEMI has provided district staff with a map that illustrates what areas of Edmonton have high percentages of Edmontonians who are immigrants (Appendix II). This map will be useful in identifying what schools will benefit from information about community supports for students from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Next Steps

This fall, district staff will continue to meet with a range of community organizations in order to collect information that can be shared with schools and to identify representatives for the district's advisory group on diversity. In the spring, information will be provided to the Board of Trustees regarding the progress of this work.

All of these actions are intended to build understanding and provide support that will maximize the achievement of students across the district.

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Appendix I: Summary of District Support

Appendix II: Total Edmonton Immigrant Population By 1996-2001 Period

SUMMARY OF DISTRICT SUPPORT

District Policies: There are a number of Board policies that promote the creation of positive learning environments and cross-cultural understanding in schools. A few examples are described below:

- **District Priorities 2005-2008:** The Board priorities address "cultural diversity". In addition, the policy indicates that the school environment should respond to linguistic and cultural needs of students, nurture self-worth and dignity, promote development of productive global citizens, and strengthen program delivery for Aboriginal students.
- **Student Behaviour and Conduct:** This policy indicates: "Students should be treated with dignity, respect, and fairness by other students and staff." and "Students shall be provided with a learning environment that is free from physical, emotional, and social abuse." Each school is expected to establish and communicate expectations for student behaviour based on this policy.
- **Basic Beliefs, Commitments, and Expectations:** This policy indicates that 100% of district students should complete high school.
- **Multiculturalism and National Identity:** This policy describes the Board's belief in the importance of "the promotion of individual and group relations in which ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic similarities and differences are valued, respected, and exchanged."
- **Discrimination and Harassment:** This policy indicates that the district is "committed to providing and to promoting a learning and working environment for all persons that is free from discrimination and harassment". As well, the policy states: "A staff member or student who subjects any other person to discriminating or harassment shall be subject to disciplinary action as deemed to be appropriate, including dismissal from employment or expulsion from school".

District Initiatives: The district has put in place a number of initiatives to assist schools in creating positive and successful learning environments for all students; for example:

- **Supporting Teaching and Learning:** District-wide professional development is focused on strategies and resources that will assist all students to experience school success and to complete school. This year, there will be information provided regarding strategies that promote success for students who are English language learners and for students who are Aboriginal.
- **Character Based Citizenship Education:** The district has developed and made available to school staffs a framework of virtues, current research on Character Education, professional development, and resources which schools can use for enhancing the development of character and citizenship. One of the outcomes of the framework is "Respect individual and cultural diversity, and common Canadian values".

- **Aboriginal Education Infusion Project:** This is work undertaken for Alberta Education that involved incorporating Aboriginal culture into the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum. This work is now being piloted in several schools.
- **Aboriginal Education services:** Information and support is provided regarding effective strategies to promote learning, communication strategies with families, and agency referrals.
- **English Language Support Services Centre:** The district has established this centre at McDougall School in order to provide services from kindergarten to grade 12 to English language learners and their parents.
- **Multilingual Services:** Service for schools includes cultural and language interpretation and a liaison with both the home and the cultural communities.
- **International Students Program:** Provides information and services regarding international students to parents, guardians, schools and community.
- **Conflict Mediation and Resolution:** In-servicing is available for schools in developing student conflict management teams and implementing conflict resolution strategies.

Total Edmonton Immigrant Population By 1996-2001 Period

