

President's Speech – SAHLA Symposium – June 18, 2022

On behalf of SAHLA, I wish to welcome everyone to SAHLA's 2022 Symposium, ***“Languages learning for cultural understanding, social cohesion, multicultural harmony and employment/economic and trade opportunities.”***

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the Indigenous people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

I'd also like to say, after two stressful years of Covid-19, it's wonderful to be back at SAHLA meeting together in person!

SAHLA is a not-for profit educational association based in Calgary whose mission is to lead, advocate and provide resources for the development, promotion of international/heritage languages education.

SAHLA is the coordinating body of a diverse community of language schools across Calgary. SAHLA represents 50 different international language schools, with over 7,500 Alberta students. There are over 600 teachers at SAHLA schools, along with the support of thousands of parents and volunteers from diverse ethno-cultural and linguistic communities. SAHLA works actively in partnership with Alberta Education, the Calgary Board of Education, the University of Calgary and the community at large, in support of languages education.

As you know, multiculturalism and multilingualism are a true reflection of our Albertan and Canadian society's increasing cultural, racial and

linguistic diversity. Given this reality, the teaching and learning of languages to Calgary students by SAHLA's 50 schools contributes towards a creating a conducive multicultural, multilingual environment that would help build a stronger, respectful, peaceful, cohesive society for people of all backgrounds.

Both multiculturalism and multilingualism, if properly applied in the teaching of language, cultures and multiculturalism in our education system could create and promote an atmosphere that would help to strengthen cultural identity; sense of belonging and cross-cultural understanding. These are assets we can all use to create a society that would help create civic participation, social and economic justice, enhanced career opportunities, international trade and cooperation.

Alberta Education currently offers education in core subjects in 8 different international languages, including **Arabic, Chinese, German, Italian, Japanese, Punjabi, Spanish and Ukrainian**. Alberta Education also offers two Indigenous languages, **Blackfoot** and **Cree**. During the past two years of Covid, the Alberta government sent Covid health and safety updates and news releases in 12 different languages.

Alberta Education Minister Hon. Adriana LaGrange was invited as SAHLA's Keynote Speaker, but unfortunately was not able to attend today. She sends her regrets and best regards to all in the SAHLA language learning community for a productive and inspiring Symposium.

Longtime international languages education champion and friend of SAHLA, Hon. Jason Luan MLA, Minister of Community and Social Services was also invited to bring greetings in person on behalf of the Alberta Government. Unfortunately he was not able to attend today. Hon. Jason Luan MLA has shared a letter of support (enclosed).

I know I have mentioned this before. On October 28, 2013 our past-Premier, Ms. Rachel Notley stated in the Alberta Legislature. Let me quote what she said:

“I do support the promotion and support of more access to International Heritage Language programs within Alberta and within the public system, or at the very least the non-profit basis, **where no additional funds are being asked from the people who would access those programs and being paired with government funds.**”

These are also principles that SAHLA has been leading, supporting and advocating for many years and fully agrees with Ms. Notley’s statement above.

As you may remember over the last few years, SAHLA has been advocating and putting forward at our SAHLA Symposiums and other meetings the need for Alberta Education to fund SAHLA language schools.

SAHLA once again would like to take this opportunity to request Alberta Education to support languages education in the following three areas:

- 1) **Sustainable funding for SAHLA community-based languages education programs and services** including: professional development for teachers, curriculum development and teaching resources for schools, teachers and K-12 students.
- 2) **Affordable and accessible classroom rental space for students and teachers on weeknights and weekends** to assist our schools with operational costs. Right now, 26 of our 50 language schools rent classroom space from CBE, which charges our schools with the formula of \$70/hour for 7 classes + gym on weekends. This costs each of schools thousands to tens of thousands of dollars for

the rental of public school space for providing programs that enhances access to languages education.

- 3) **Honorarium for language instructors** to assist schools with instructional costs. On average, language instructors teach 3 hours per week, or approximately 100 of instructional hours per year. SAHLA finds it imperative that the Government of Alberta reinstate a community-based language school grant in the amount of \$100/student/year, or approximately \$750,000/year which would provide the much-needed regular, predictable and sustainable funding required to support SAHLA language schools.

When the economy was struggling these past two years, the Alberta Education grant to SAHLA was also cut in half for each of these past two years. The economy is stronger now. SAHLA is asking Alberta Education to restore our previous \$150,000 annual SAHLA project grant later this year.

We strongly believe that these critical funding requests for languages learning are realistic, affordable and doable.

Therefore, we are asking our Minister of Education to please address these critical issues. These funds will definitely help make our SAHLA language schools stronger and more sustainable for many years to come.

At this time, we also thank SAHLA board members, school representatives, principals, teachers, students, parents and volunteers at all of our 50 schools.

We especially thank SAHLA schools for your invaluable ongoing contribution of teaching young Albertans to learn international languages.

And we are so proud of our SAHLA schools for their excellent efforts during the past two years of Covid, when all our schools needed to quickly adapt to Zoom and Teams meeting technology to teach language classes to students online. We know its been a challenging time for everyone, keeping our schools, teachers, students safe from Covid through masking and vaccinations. Especially since the teaching and learning of languages is most optimally done face to face in an interactive classroom environment, where we can see one another's mouths.

We look forward to continuing to work actively with all our SAHLA schools in partnership with Alberta Education, the University of Calgary and the Calgary Board of Education in order to prepare our students to succeed in learning languages.

Our language school graduates become effective multilingual communicators. They can speak more two, three or more languages. They become citizens, employees, entrepreneurs and leaders who embrace the value of linguistic and multicultural understanding and respect in our diverse communities, schools and workplaces. Citizens who work, volunteer and live respectful harmonious lives in our multicultural, multilingual communities, city, province and country and beyond.

As our Symposium theme says, ***“Languages learning for cultural understanding, social cohesion, multicultural harmony and employment/economic and trade opportunities.”***

Today, we are pleased to have Julie Sedivy, Professor of Linguistics and Psychology at University of Calgary and Brown University, USA as our Symposium keynote speaker. Julie is the author of the excellent new

book **“Memory Speaks: On Losing and Reclaiming Language and Self.”**

SAHLA’s 50 language schools are preparing our students and graduates to become lifelong learners, global citizens, multicultural ambassadors and multilingual leaders in our city, province and country.

Let’s continue to build Calgary and Alberta as a kind, welcoming and respectful multicultural and multilingual city and province for all, for many generations to come.

At this time, I would like to ask everyone to please join me in a minute of silence, as we honour two past SAHLA board members who sadly passed away in late March this year.

-Vinay Dey, former SAHLA Treasurer

-David Gaskin, former SAHLA Director

Thank you.

Michael Embaie

President, SAHLA.