

President's Speech – SAHLA Symposium – June 17, 2023

On behalf of SAHLA, I wish to welcome everyone to SAHLA's 2023 Symposium, ***“Languages learning for Educational, Social, Cultural and Economic Development.”***

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.

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 45 different international language schools, with over 7,000 Alberta students. There are over 600 teachers and parent volunteers 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, the ethnocultural community and the community at large, all in support of languages education for all Calgary and Alberta students.

SAHLA provides unduplicated and essential languages education coordination, teaching, learning and promotion; best practices in curriculum development and professional development for language instructors; teaching resource financial support for language schools; and SAHLA Resource Centre and staff. SAHLA's vision is for every

student to have the access and opportunity to learn an international/heritage language as part of their basic education.

SAHLA and its community language schools provide the teaching and learning of international heritage languages in support of Canada's Multiculturalism Act, and Alberta Education's mandate of teaching languages to K-12 students as a valued part of their learning.

SAHLA's 45 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.

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 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. 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.

According to the **Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills Profile**, Canadian employers need a person who has the academic skills and experience to **communicate, understand, speak and write effectively in the languages and cultures in which business is conducted**. Languages learning also helps a business leader or employee to listen and learn other cultural perspectives with knowledge, to also think critically and act logically to evaluate situations, solve problems and make decisions.

**Statistics Canada's 2021 National Census has shown, multilingualism and diversity continues to rise in Canada.** One in four (9.2 million) Canadians had at least one mother tongue other than English or French, and one in eight (4.6 million) Canadians spoke predominantly a language other than English or French at home. In Canada, four in ten people could conduct a conversation in more than one language. In the Calgary Ward 5 NE constituency which I represent, many languages are spoken in addition to English and French; including Punjabi, Tagalog, Arabic, Vietnamese, Polish, German, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Nepali, Spanish and Mandarin.

**As seen in Canada's immigration statistics, this trend will continue to grow.** Millions of people from all over the world have chosen, and continue to choose Canada as their new home. Almost one in four people (23.0%) counted during the 2021 Census are or have been a landed immigrant or permanent resident in Canada. This was the highest proportion since Confederation, topping the previous record of 22.3% in 1921, and the largest proportion among G7 countries. Just over 1.3 million new immigrants settled permanently in Canada from 2016 to 2021, the highest number of recent immigrants recorded in a Canadian census.

**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.

We are pleased to have Keynote Speaker, Calgary City Councillor **Raj Dhaliwal**, who speaks four languages – English, Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi.

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) **Predictable, 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 \$75/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 \$700,000/year which would provide the much-needed regular, predictable and sustainable funding required to support SAHLA language schools.

**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 thank SAHLA board members, school representatives, principals, teachers, students, parents and volunteers. We especially thank all SAHLA schools for your invaluable ongoing contribution of teaching young Albertans to learn international languages.

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.

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.

Thank you.

Michael Embaie, President, SAHLA.

## **Southern Alberta Heritage Language Association (SAHLA)**

Since 1985, SAHLA has been, and continues to do vital work in the teaching and learning, coordination, development and promotion of international heritage languages.

SAHLA is a not-for-profit umbrella educational organization established in 1985, based in Calgary, representing 45 community heritage/international language schools teaching approximately 7,000 students from kindergarten to high school, as well as adults.

Non-profit language associations like SAHLA, and community-based international heritage language schools across Calgary, Alberta and Canada, are coordinating the teaching and learning of international heritage languages to Canada's young people and for our city, province and country's bright educational, social and economic future.

SAHLA's non-profit community schools teach 36 languages from countries around the world. SAHLA's schools represent 600 language instructors, all from diverse linguistic and cultural associations across the city.

**SAHLA's mission is to lead, promote and provide resources for the teaching and learning of international languages to Calgary students.**

Canada is made of two official languages, English and French, along with several Indigenous languages spoken by First Nations peoples, and many languages spoken by Canadians from around the world. The teaching and learning of international and heritage languages strengthens Canada's multicultural identity. Together, multiculturalism and multilingualism strengthens Calgary, Alberta and Canada's

commitment to systemic anti-racism, anti-discrimination, diversity, inclusion, social cohesion and community development.

Language and culture, and by extension, multiculturalism and multilingualism, are directly connected and inseparable. and our country's unique peaceful, respectful and vibrant multicultural way of life.

SAHLA and its community language schools provide the teaching and learning of international heritage languages in support of Canada's Multiculturalism Act, and Alberta Education's mandate of teaching languages to K-12 students as a valued part of their learning.

SAHLA provides unduplicated and essential languages education coordination, teaching, learning and promotion; best practices in curriculum development and professional development for language instructors; teaching resource financial support for language schools; and SAHLA Resource Centre and staff. SAHLA's vision is for every student to have the access and opportunity to learn an international/heritage language as part of their basic education.

**There are many benefits for Canadians to learn languages, including:**

- Cognitive development, brain health and memory retention;
- Enhanced learning opportunities and academic achievement;
- Positive effect on first language and communications skills;
- Cultural awareness, understanding and multicultural respect;
- Active citizenship; Enhanced opportunities for employment and career development;
- Strengthening Canada's diplomacy, trade and economic development with other countries.

By teaching languages, organizations like SAHLA are helping to prepare young Calgarians, Albertans and Canadians to become multicultural and multilingual Canadian and global citizens who can strengthen Canada's competitive workforce, small and large business, international trade and diplomacy with governments and businesses in other countries around the world. International heritage languages education helps prepare Canadians as social and economic leaders, and gives them enhanced career choices in the private and public sectors, including trade and industry, energy, science and technology, travel and tourism, banking, communications, law, medicine, education and research, social services etc.

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SAHLA's language school programs are excellent and vital, not only in the teaching of languages, but also in promoting multiculturalism, diversity, inclusion, anti-racism, and social cohesion.

Thanks to non-profit language associations like SAHLA and community language schools across Calgary, Alberta and Canada -- languages are taught in support of public education. This helps give students and graduates the passport to a bright and hopeful future as global multilingual/multicultural citizens, value-added entrepreneurs, business leaders, employees and contributors to economic development, trade and diplomacy and community social cohesion.

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.