

President's Speech – SAHLA Symposium – June 22, 2024

On behalf of SAHLA, I wish to welcome everyone to SAHLA's 2024 Symposium, "***Languages learning for Culture, Communications and Careers.***"

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.

Since 1985, SAHLA continues to be 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 tens 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.**

We are pleased to have the honourable Rajan Sawhney, Minister of Alberta Advanced Education with us today as our keynote speaker.

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.

We had an excellent meeting last fall with Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides to discuss the essential and unduplicated role that SAHLA and our 45 language schools play in the teaching and learning of international languages for Alberta students. Minister Nicolaides told us that he supports SAHLA's and our schools' vital languages education work. He agreed to increase our annual funding by 12%, and to provide SAHLA with a three-year funding model instead of one year, as we have had for over the past 20 years. This will help SAHLA continue to coordinate our services, including professional development for teachers, curriculum development and financial support for teaching resource for schools, teachers and students.

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

- 1) **Affordable and accessible classroom rental space for students and teachers on weeknights and weekends** to assist our schools with operational costs. Right now, 17 of our language schools rent classroom space from CBE, which charges our schools with the formula of \$77/hour for 7 classes + gym on weekends. This costs each of our schools thousands to tens of thousands of dollars for the rental of public school space for providing language programs that support and enhance public education.
- 2) **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 per student per year, or approximately \$700,000 per 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 now and 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.