

# Chapter 15

## Language Programs

### What Are Language Programs?

Language programs assist Alberta students in developing oral and written proficiency and cultural competency in a language other than English. Alberta Education has developed provincial programs of study for Blackfoot, Cree, Chinese (Mandarin), French, German, Italian, Japanese, Latin, Punjabi, Spanish and Ukrainian.

Within each language, there are different types of programming.

- French as a second language or international language and culture course series – in these streams, French or an international language is taught as a separate subject.
- French immersion or bilingual programs for international languages – in these streams, students study some of their other subjects, such as mathematics, language arts and science, in French or an international language.

### French Language Learning

Because Canada is an officially bilingual country, special provisions are made in the *School Act* for French language learning. Students may learn French as a) part of a second language course series, b) through an alternative French language program (also known as French immersion), or c) if one of their parents meets the criteria of section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, they may attend a school within a Francophone school authority and complete their studies entirely in French.

- a) Second language course series – French as a second language (FSL) refers to courses in which the French language is taught as a subject, often between 30 to 40 minutes a day in elementary and junior high schools or as 5-credit (125 hours) courses in senior high schools, to enable students to communicate in French in a variety of school, travel, leisure and job-related contexts. For more information on FSL, visit <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/fsl.aspx>.

- b) Alternative French language programs – Also known as French immersion programs, these programs use French as the language of instruction for most of the school day (usually from 75 percent to 100 percent in grades 1 to 6 and from 25 percent to 70 percent in grades 7 to 12) and use English for the remainder. All core subjects and many complementary subjects are taught in French. Students attending a school with an alternative French language program are required to take English language arts, starting in Grade 3. Students enter the program either in Kindergarten or Grade 1 (early immersion) or in Grade 6 or Grade 7 (late immersion). For more information on French immersion, visit <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/educationsys/frenchlanguage/immersion.aspx>.
- c) Francophone education – Under section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and section 10 of the *School Act*, parents whose first language is French have a constitutional right to have their child educated in French. They also have the right to govern these schools themselves. There are a number of Francophone regional authorities operating schools in Alberta. For more information on these authorities, visit <http://education.alberta.ca/apps/schauth/lookup.asp?type=francophone>.

For more information on available French programs, visit <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/educationsys/frenchlanguage.aspx>.

## International Languages

International languages are offered through bilingual or language and culture streams. Bilingual programs are “partial immersion programs in which the target language is the language of instruction for up to 50 percent of the school day. Subject areas, such as fine arts, health, mathematics, physical education, science and social studies may be taught in the target language. Bilingual programs are available in Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), German, Hebrew, Polish, Spanish and Ukrainian. Programs begin in Kindergarten or Grade 1 and may continue to Grade 12.”<sup>1</sup> To support bilingual programs, Alberta Education has developed provincial programs of study for Chinese (Mandarin), German, Spanish and Ukrainian language arts.

### Myth

Learning an additional language at too young an age can compromise a student’s proficiency in their first language.

### Fact

Learning a second language does not negatively impact a child’s acquisition of his or her first language. Rather, research has shown that children who develop “... abilities in two or more languages throughout their primary school years ... gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively.”

Cummins

In a language and culture course series, the language is studied as a subject to develop communication skills and cultural knowledge. Language and culture courses may be taught in elementary or junior high schools for 30 to 40 minutes per day or as 5-credit (125 hours) courses in senior high schools. Alberta Education has developed a number of course sequences in international, French as a second language and Aboriginal languages to provide students with flexible entry points into language learning programs. The course sequences are:

- twelve-year program – students begin studying another language in Kindergarten or Grade 1
- nine-year program – students begin studying another language in Grade 4
- six-year program – students begin studying another language in Grade 7
- three-year program – students begin studying another language in Grade 10.

For information about course sequences in international languages, visit international languages programs at <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/interlang.aspx>.

## Why Is It Important to Learn a Language?

Communication and transportation technology have made the world a smaller place. We are encountering people from other countries and cultures more readily today than ever before. How do we communicate effectively with one another if we do not speak each other's languages? Learning another language enables us to develop diplomatic relationships and personal relationships across borders, thereby encouraging global solidarity.



Businesses, governments and other organizations are also increasingly working with and for people in other parts of the world, and are looking for individuals to bridge the traditional divides of language and culture. After graduation, students who study another language have a greater number of work opportunities; many elect to work in the fields of international business, diplomacy or development, and often have opportunities to travel or work overseas.

As students learn a new language and culture, there is a natural tendency for them to compare it with their own. Many students leave a second language learning experience with a heightened awareness of their own language and culture. Not only does language learning encourage students to reflect upon other cultures and appreciate diversity, it encourages them to self-reflect as well.

The following documents discuss the benefits of learning another language in greater depth and can assist school authorities with the promotion of language learning to students, parents, teachers and community members.

- Alberta Education's *Impact of Second Language Education Study* demonstrates that the following benefits of learning another language are much broader than simply the ability to speak in another language.

#### **Intellectual Potential**

- Students fluent in two languages score higher in both verbal and nonverbal intelligence testing.
- Students studying a second language are superior in divergent thinking tasks and in memory ability and attention span.

#### **Scholastic Achievement**

- Second language students have higher test scores in reading, English language arts and mathematics.
- Each additional year of second language training creates a greater positive differential compared to students not receiving second language instruction.

#### **Effect on First Language**

- Second language education significantly strengthens first language skills in areas of reading, English vocabulary, grammar and communication skills.
- The earlier the start, the greater the positive effect on the first language.

#### **Citizenship**

- Students studying a second language have superior cross-cultural skills and adapt better to varying cultural contexts.
- Students studying a second language display greater cultural sensitivity.

#### **Economic Potential**

- There is an urgent requirement for qualified speakers of languages other than English in areas of science, technology, medicine and global commerce.
- *A Review of the Literature on Four Aspects of Second Language Learning* by the University of Calgary's Language Research Centre also outlines the benefits of language learning and provides a strong rationale for making language learning an integral part of educational programming. This document can be accessed at <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/learnlang/educators/litreview.aspx>.

- The *Advantage for Life* video, developed by the University of Calgary’s Language Research Centre, “provides an accessible overview of the cognitive, economic and social advantages that come with learning another language.”<sup>2</sup>
- The *Tool Kit for Teachers, Schools and School Authorities: Learning Languages in Alberta* was developed by Alberta Education to help promote language courses and programs to students, parents, teachers and other groups in the community. The tool kit can be downloaded from the Alberta Education Web site at <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/resources/learnlang/educators/toolkit.aspx>.

## Where Do We Start?

### Resources

The *Guide to Education: ECS to Grade 12* outlines the variety of international and French language programs and includes basic information on implementing them. The Guide is available on the Alberta Education Web site at <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/resources/guidetoed.aspx>.

The programs of study for international languages may be found at <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/interlang.aspx>; for French language programs, visit <http://education.alberta.ca/francais.aspx>.

To support the implementation of the languages programs of study, Alberta Education also authorizes and/or develops learning and teaching resources and assessment materials. The following are some key documents.

- The *School Administrator’s Guide to Implementing Language Programming* outlines the variety of language programs available in Alberta schools. It also provides guidance on how to select and implement a language program and includes practical strategies for working with students, parents, teachers and the surrounding community. This document can be accessed at [http://education.alberta.ca/media/632761/schadm\\_rev07.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/632761/schadm_rev07.pdf).
- The *Handbook for French Immersion Administrators* provides a wealth of information on implementing alternative French language programs. Copies of the handbook are available for purchase from the Learning Resources Centre at <http://www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/pro/resources/item.htm?item-no=481797>.

- Guides to implementation and authorized resource lists have been developed for each language program. Educators may access these documents by visiting <http://education.alberta.ca/teachers/program/interlang.aspx>, clicking on the language of study and scrolling to the bottom of the page.

School administrators interested in offering language programming should also consult with their central office personnel to discuss school authority policies and practices regarding language programming. In some school authorities, language support is provided by consultants who may also provide guidance on language selection, staffing, financial support and professional development.

## Special Language Advisors

Alberta Education has signed Memoranda of Understanding with educational authorities in various countries. In some cases, these memoranda support the provision of special language advisors to Alberta, who provide program implementation supports to school authorities and teachers. There are currently five special language advisors who work with Alberta Education and Alberta school authorities. They come from China, Germany, Japan, Spain and Ukraine. To contact the special language advisors or inquire about the specific supports they provide, contact Alberta Education's International Education Services Branch.

## Language Institutes and Support Centres

Beyond the work of Alberta Education, the following language institutes and support centres promote and support language learning in Alberta. While the specific functions of each institute vary, most offer language-specific resources and professional development opportunities for language teachers. Many also organize or sponsor events and festivals that promote cultural understanding.

**Confucius Institute.** The Confucius Institute was established in Edmonton as a result of an agreement between the Office of Chinese Language Council International (HANBAN) and Edmonton School District No. 7. For more information on the Confucius Institute in Edmonton, visit <http://www.confuciusedmonton.ca/>.

**Spanish Language Resource Centre.** Sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Education and located in Edmonton, the Spanish Language Resource Centre is operated under the joint supervision of Edmonton School District No. 7 and Alberta's Spanish Language and Culture Advisor. It is the third accredited Spanish Language Resource Centre in Canada. For more information on the Spanish Language Resource Centre, visit <http://www.educacion.es/exterio/centros/edmonton/es/home/index.shtml>.

**Instituto Cervantes.** Sponsored by the Government of Spain and housed within the University of Calgary, Instituto Cervantes is a public, not-for-profit institution that promotes Spanish language teaching and knowledge of the cultures of Spanish-speaking countries throughout the world. For more information on Instituto Cervantes, visit <http://fis.ucalgary.ca/home/instituto-cervantes>.

**Ukrainian Language Education Centre.** Located within the University of Alberta, the Ukrainian Language Education Centre provides language and cultural support for schools offering bilingual Ukrainian programming. For more information on the Ukrainian Language Education Centre, visit <http://www.ualberta.ca/~ulec/>.

**Goethe-Institut.** The Goethe-Institut in Toronto is responsible for promoting German language and culture in Ontario and the four western provinces. It works with the German language and culture advisor in Alberta to organize professional development for German language teachers and provide German language resources. For more information on the Goethe Institut, visit <http://www.goethe.de/ins/ca/tor/enindex.htm>.

**Japan Foundation.** The Japan Foundation in Toronto supports the promotion of Japanese language and culture across Canada. It houses facilities for cultural and educational events, as well as a public-lending library that has approximately 16 000 Japan-related print and audiovisual materials. Mailing service is available for out-of-town patrons. With the assistance of the Embassy and the Consulates-General of Japan, the Japan Foundation disseminates grant program announcements and receives applications for Arts and Cultural Exchange, Japanese-Language Education, and Japan Studies and Intellectual Exchange. For more information, visit <http://www.jftor.org/>.

## Conclusion

Language learning is particularly exciting and rewarding when students have the opportunity to use their language skills in a real-world context. International education programs, such as international school partnerships and student exchanges, can complement classroom-based learning and provide students with more experiential forms of language learning.

**You may find the following sections in this handbook helpful:**

- Chapter 16: Hosting International Visitors
- Chapter 17: Educational Travel Abroad

## Endnotes

1. Alberta Education, *School Administrator's Guide to Implementing Language Programming* (Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, 2007), p. 12.
2. University of Calgary, Language Research Centre, "Advantage for Life" 2008, <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/lrc/research/advantage-life> (Accessed August 5, 2010).