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PUBLIC RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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ALBERTA SCHOOLS NOT IN SYNC WITH CHANGING DIVERSITY

ESL students and parents give lukewarm ratings to school responses to ESL education and cultural diversity

CALGARY- Growing cultural diversity has transformed the student population in the K-12 education system. Between 1988 and 2008, the number of identified ESL students in Alberta has tripled from 14,673 to 48,346.

But a new report, based on the survey of 242 ESL students and parents in the Calgary Board of Education, Calgary Catholic School District, Edmonton Public School Board, and Edmonton Catholic School District, finds that Alberta schools have not adequately provided quality ESL education and addressed cultural diversity.

Too little ESL instruction provided, and terminated too soon

According to the report, only 67.2 % of ESL student respondents reported that they had been enrolled in an ESL program at some point in their K-12 educational experience. Among those who were enrolled in an ESL program, 67.5 % indicated that they received 5 hours or less of ESL instruction per week. Many respondents said that their schools stopped teaching them ESL when their reading (42.6 %), writing (53.2%) and speaking (39.9%) were “average” or “poor/very poor.”

“Even though ESL students generate over \$300 million in instruction monies annually to school boards across Alberta, they have received minimum ESL instruction.” says Hieu Van Ngo, the primary researcher of the study.

The report points out that there is an overall lack of strong, coherent relationships among various aspects of ESL services: identification of ESL students, assessment, instruction, resource allocation, tracking of learning progress, and home-school communication.

Cultural diversity not well represented and integrated in Alberta schools

The report further points out that only one in three ESL parents (34.5%) and one in two ESL students (55.2%) felt that their teachers reflect cultural diversity in their communities. ESL students were particularly critical of the lack of integration of cultural diversity into school practices. Less than half of ESL student respondents felt that their schools considered cultural diversity in their methods of teaching (39.1%), curriculum (27.5%), school support services (44.3%), selection of textbooks (43.1%) and extra-curriculum activities (29.3%).

“Alberta schools have yet to fully appreciate and realize the diversity advantage,” says Hieu Van Ngo. “A culturally competent school system would provide richer educational experience for all students because it would tap into diverse ways of knowing, teaching, learning and doing. It would prepare citizens to be effective in cross-cultural interactions both at home and abroad.”

Recommendation

“The K-12 education system cannot continue to deal with ESL education and cultural diversity in an ad-hoc manner” says Eunice Mahama, the Executive Director of the Coalition for Equal Access to Education.

The report urges Alberta Education and school boards to work collaboratively with stakeholders to:

- ✓ Develop standards for identification, assessment, placement, explicit ESL instruction, and tracking of progress for both language proficiency and academic performance;
- ✓ Conduct system-wide cultural audits with due attention to policies and guidelines, business plans, curriculum, funding allocation, accountability, and professional requirements for staff; and
- ✓ Develop plans and allocate resources to integrate cultural diversity into all aspects of governance, administration and management, and services.

For more information

The Coalition for Equal Access to Education will host a forum to present the findings of the survey in Calgary. Members of the press, community members and service partners are invited to attend the events.

Date: Wednesday, October 14, 2009
Time: 10:30AM – noon
Location: Prospect Building
915 – 33 Street NE (Behind Canadian Tire/ T&T Market)
Calgary

For more information, contact:

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The full reports are available on the Coalition for Equal Access to Education website at www.eslaction.com