



**ALMADINA LANGUAGE CHARTER
ACADEMY**

**EVALUATION REPORT
February 2014**

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A. INTRODUCTION

Background

Almadina Charter Language Academy has been in operation since 1999. It serves approximately 979 students in two separate campuses in south east Calgary – Mountain View for students in Kindergarten to grade 3 and Ogden for students in grades 4 – 9. The buildings are owned by the Calgary Board of Education.

The mandate of the Almadina Language Charter Academy is to provide educational programming for Kindergarten through Grade 9 students who are English Language Learners (ELL).

B. EVALUATION PROCESSES

The findings of the evaluation were established using the following processes:

1. A self-assessment prepared by the school and reviewed by a team from Alberta Education.
2. An onsite visit that included focused conversations with:
 - two teacher groups (eight teachers per group)
 - the two principals,
 - the superintendent
 - the superintendent and board chair
 - Dr. Hetty Roessingh
3. The following artifacts were reviewed:
 - Student writing samples (on-site)
 - Binder of ELL best practices (on-site)
 - A random sample of student files for ELL coding and documentation (on-site)
 - 3YEP 2013-2016 and AERR 2102-13
 - Technology Plan
 - School based surveys administered to parents and staff with results
 - Board Policy Handbook
 - Director's Handbook
 - Charter Agreement Revised, 2011
 - Action Plan on Governance
 - Board Evaluation May 2012

C. EVALUATION CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and evidence obtained throughout the evaluation process, Almadina Language Charter Academy meets the evaluation criteria on the eleven essential questions of a Charter School Evaluation. The specific conclusions are as follows:

1. **The school meets the terms and conditions of its charter and has performance measures that show clear evidence of success.**

Yes

Goal 1: To provide opportunities for students to optimize their potential while focusing on English Language learning.

The Charter goals and requirements are appropriate and are being addressed in the operation of the school. Students are assessed with the Alberta K-12 ELL Proficiency Benchmarks. The school is

committed to providing English language learners with appropriate teaching and learning strategies. Dr. Roessingh's "Learning by Design" is used to integrate ELL planning that aligns with the Alberta Program of Studies.

Goal 2: To support staff in acquiring knowledge and skills for English Language Learning instruction.

All the teachers have received professional development on ELL teaching. The school calendar has nine professional development days during which staff participate in activities that support the school's focus and priorities. Teachers are provided with \$800 to pursue professional development of their choice. The school works closely with Dr. Hetty Roessingh, who is a professor at the University of Calgary specializing in ELL, and conducts research in collaboration with the school.

Charter School Outcomes:

Almadina students will demonstrate:

a) successful achievement of the skills and concepts in the Alberta Education Curriculum.

According to the Accountability Pillar Overall results, all Almadina PAT achievement results are "High" or "Very High", except Science 6, Standard of Excellence that has an "Intermediate". In Language Arts and Math, students scored above the provincial average, not only as compared to all provincial ELL students, but compared to all students, in both the standard of excellence and acceptable standard.

b) the characteristics that are taught through the values and virtues program

The school has the Virtues Program that teaches students the skills needed to be successful in school and in life by cultivating good character and citizenship values. It provides the foundation for a safe and caring learning environment at the school. Dr. Michelle Borba has provided professional development for all staff that focused on her Moral Intelligence Program, which correlates with the school's Virtues Program. Evidence of the Virtues Program is seen throughout the school, and parents surveyed have indicated that this is a very important part of the Almadina program.

2. The school operates in a manner consistent with all applicable provincial requirements.

Yes

Based on the findings and evidence, Almadina Language Charter Academy meets the provincial requirements of the *Charter Schools Regulation (Alberta Regulation 212/2002)* and the *School Act*. The school follows the *Alberta Programs of Study* and provides required amount of instructional time. Students participate in Provincial Assessment Tests. The school complies with Alberta Education planning, reporting and funding requirements in providing complete and timely information, and is completely compliant with the class size guidelines. The Alberta K-12 ELL Proficiency Benchmarks, as developed by Alberta Education, are being used.

3. The students, parents, staff, school council and community members consider the school program to be successful.

Yes

Students, parents and staff see the school as being effective and successful. There is strong stakeholder support for all areas of the school operation including the delivery of the instructional program. The school's approach to English Language Learning is embraced by the staff and supported by the administration. A very high percentage of stakeholders consider the school program to be successful according to the Accountability Pillar (School Improvement 95.7%) and the school

administered surveys (97.84% Satisfied or Very Satisfied with the quality of education the students at the school are receiving).

Dr. Roessingh considers the school program to be successful.

4. The school is financially viable and responsible.

Yes

Based on a review of financial information Almadina has been in a healthy and viable financial position and is able to support its programming. The school has an accumulated operating surplus of \$1,258,558 representing 16% of total expenses. Almadina has been compliant with all reporting requirements.

5. Student achievement at the charter school is consistently strong or improving.

Yes

As noted previously, a review of the Provincial Achievement Test results confirms achievement has been consistently strong and/or improving. In 2006, PAT: Acceptable results were at 69.4% and in 2013 these results are at 93.7%. In 2006, PAT: Excellence results were at 10.9%, and in 2013 these results are at 27.7%.

6. The charter school is committed to engaging students, teachers, parents and community members in a model of continuous improvement.

Yes

The Accountability Pillar results indicate that “Parental Involvement” is “Very High” at 86.8%, up from the 2011 results which were 75.3% and rated at “Intermediate”. The school has implemented its own survey processes to provide opportunities for further input into the school’s activities and direction. The School Council is very involved in community activities (e.g. flood relief) and communicates initiatives to the board monthly.

The superintendent, principals and vice-principals demonstrate great energy and passion for the work they are doing. They nurture a culture of openness and provide positive support that enables the staff to seek continuous improvement and be great teachers. The staff is regularly involved in reflecting on what is working or not, and providing input on ways to improve the system. The school has taken action on feedback provided by offering more option classes, and is exploring the feasibility of implementing a high school program.

Board communications are provided in English, Arabic and Urdu. Translation to parents is provided by teachers or family friends as needed.

7. The charter school uses research-informed practices to create innovative learning environments and improve student learning.

Yes

The primary purpose of the school is to provide educational programming that meets the needs of students who meet the criteria of English Language Learners, as defined by Alberta Education. All teachers have been trained in strategies for teaching ELL and the school works closely with Dr. Roessingh, a University of Calgary professor and researcher focusing on the instructional needs of English Language Learners. The school has participated in all the Alberta Initiative for School

Improvement (AISI) cycles. The school is in its second year of piloting the Discover Reading program.

8. The charter school shares its innovative practices and learning outcomes with others in the educational community.

Yes

Principals, vice-principals and teachers are all keen to share their experiences and insights and do so through participation on the Calgary Regional Consortium advisory committee for ELL learning. Some administrators and teachers have published papers on good ELL practices and the school has presented information at AISI conferences and local universities. There has been networking with other charter and private schools. It has formed a partnership with the Reading Foundation for a research project, and collaborates with the University of Calgary (Dr. Roessingh) and Ambrose University to engage in research opportunities. One of the schools' teachers is on the executive of the Alberta Teachers' Association ELL Specialist Council.

9. The charter school reaches out beyond its walls to demonstrate broad and sustained levels of community engagement.

Yes

Through the combined efforts of the board, superintendent, administrators, school staff and school stakeholders, the school has reached out beyond the walls of the school to engage with the community. The school has participated in numerous community activities, including hosting barbecues, fund raising for charities, and through direct service opportunities. Examples include raising \$2,370.00 in the "CIBC Run for the Cure", and providing help to people affected by the Calgary area flood in June. Furthermore, the School council along with the grade 8 students served premade sandwiches at the Calgary Drop-In Centre. There is a tab on the school's website called "Almadina Gives Back" to highlight the school's efforts and successes in this area. A representative from Almadina Language Charter Academy has attended the Ogden community meetings to represent the school. Part of her role is to discuss some community-based learning projects that would forge new partnerships and establish a greater presence in the community.

10. The charter school is governed effectively.

Yes

Board governance has been an issue since the school began operating in 1995. In response to serious issues about governance over the past number of years, Alberta Education has worked with Almadina to develop and implement several Actions Plans. Some of the issues included the board members' understanding of their role, the role of the superintendent and administrators, board protocols during board meetings, and communication to stakeholders. It is important that the board members support and work collaboratively with the superintendent, especially when issues arise.

Most recently, through the efforts of Alberta Education and Superintendent DePeel, progress has been made in the development and implementation of Action Plan strategies to improve board governance. These include:

- An evaluation of the board
- Training sessions for board members related to board governance and procedures
- The development of a Board Member's Handbook, clearly outlining roles and responsibilities of board members, the superintendent and school staff
- A review of policies at each board meeting

- Consistent attendance at board meetings

The review team is satisfied that the present governance practices are appropriate and that procedures are in place to build capacity in this area. However, given the past record of Almadina boards, Alberta Education will need to continue to monitor governance practices into the foreseeable future. Specific commendations and recommendations in regards to board governance are on page seven of this report.

11. The school is administered effectively.

Yes

The school is being administered effectively by a focused and committed administrative team (superintendent, principals, vice-principals) who are fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in regards to the safe and effective management of the school's operations. The superintendent is working collaboratively with the board, ensuring that the school is in compliance with all requirements, and providing leadership to the principals. The principals and vice-principals are providing strong instructional leadership and supervision of the school staff. They participate in the school's Professional Learning Communities, the analyses of data, and ensure professional development for school staff. They provide feedback to staff in both formal (e.g. evaluation process) and informal ways. School routines, lines of communication, shared responsibilities for non-instructional duties, collaborative decision-making and a sense of common purpose are evident in the school.

As a result of our evaluation processes, the team is satisfied that Almadina Language Charter Academy is meeting the requirements of legislation and regulations for charter schools.

D. COMMENDATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, REQUIREMENTS

The review team provides the following commendations, recommendations and required changes as part of continuous improvement.

Commendations

The school is to be commended for:

- Meeting the terms and goals in their charter;
- Strong committed leadership and shared vision demonstrated by the superintendent, secretary-treasurer, principals, and vice-principals;
- Enthusiasm and commitment of teachers as they create a learning environment that is sensitive to the academic, social and emotional needs of their students;
- Commitment on the part of teachers to ongoing enhancement of their expertise in the field of education for English language learners. This commitment is supported by the school through the professional development support for the teachers;
- Superintendent and principal leadership to enable the provision of additional instruction through practices such as opening the school on Saturday for those students who require more support;
- Numerous opportunities for professional development made available to staff;
- Staff being very involved in Professional Learning Communities within the school;
- A school atmosphere that is positive and welcoming;
- The large majority of students, parents and teachers are very satisfied with the programming offered at the school;

- Effectively, and with intention, integrating the best strategies for English language learning;
- Using the results of the Provincial Achievement Tests, and other measures conducted at the school level, to plan improvements in instruction;
- Including articles published by Almadina teachers on the school's website.
- Assistance to grade 9 students to transition to high school;
- Integration of technology for students and the use of google docs to facilitate sharing amongst teachers;
- An active and supportive School Council;
- Progress made by the board in providing appropriate governance to the school;
- Monthly review of board policies to ensure alignment with legislation and current practices, as well as to ensure awareness and understanding of these policies; and
- The board's initiative to have a Board Oversight Representative at their meetings to provide feedback regarding the board's operations;
- By board policy, ensuring governance training requirements for new board members.

Recommendations for Future Consideration

- In order to keep stakeholders informed of the good work the school is doing, include a synopsis of the work that is happening with Dr. Borba and Dr. Roessingh on the website;
- With support from Alberta Education, track students beyond grade 9 to monitor high school completion data and see how the students who transition from Almadina are doing;
- In order to provide a different or more objective perspective, consider having a Director on the board who is not a parent of the school – this could be done through an amendment of the board's bylaws; and
- To help with continuity of good board governance practices, consider an amendment to the board bylaws that would allow for half the members to stay on the board and half to be newly elected;
- To ensure that only the most current resources are referenced on Almadina's website, consider linking directly to the Alberta Education documents on Supporting English Language Learners, rather than re-posting copies of Alberta Education documents and resources.
- Continue to review regulations and updates regarding Provincial Achievement Tests.
- All school policies will need to be reviewed to ensure alignment with the new Education Act and regulations when these are finalized.

Required Changes:

- Policies are to be signed and updated on the website as they are reviewed monthly.