

Reception Centre begins one of its busiest times of the year. Last summer about 1,000 students were registered. Many guest assessors will be joining the Reception Centre team throughout the summer to ensure that the students are registered to attend school.

As many of the district's regularly scheduled programs get set to enjoy the summer sun, services from a variety of programs and partnerships in our district continue to support students and their families as needed throughout the summer. A diverse learning teacher will support students in each of the high schools that provide summer school courses. A literacy/numeracy program for high school students (Grades 10–12) will run during July.

Southern Alberta

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Meeting the Needs of an ELL School Population



Fact: A high percentage of ESL and immigrant youth do not complete high school. Almadina Language Charter Academy has 600 students in Grades 1–9 and 60 ECS students. Recently, the minister increased capacity of the school to 979 students and

registration started right after the Christmas break. The school first opened in 1996, and its charter focus is teaching language to non-native English speakers.

Almadina provides programming that focuses on ESL students; classes are small and there is individual and group support. The Tell Them from Me program measures student engagement and provides a strategic framework for high school completion. Student survey results showed that Almadina students believe that they spend more time reading for pleasure and doing homework and less time playing video games than the average Canadian child. They also rate the value of their education higher.

Further, Almadina is taking the leadership role among the charter schools to cater to the linguistic learning needs of ELLs. Almadina organized a meeting between charter schools in Calgary and Edmonton and ELL guru Hetty Roessingh to discuss the needs of the growing population of ELLs in Alberta. Superintendents, principals and ELL leaders attended the meeting at Almadina School, Ogden Campus. Roessingh presented on academic literacy and challenges for charter schools.

Almadina held an in-school World Café for its 50 teachers to discuss the seven competencies under the ELL umbrella.

Almadina has an ELL and an AISI coordinator. All teachers at the school are ELL teachers. Language is taught through curriculum to all students and linguistic strategies are embedded within all extracurricular activities. The ELL/AISI position allows the coordinator to work collaboratively with teachers in and out of their classroom. The AISI project focuses on literacy and project-based learning because it is important to see the different ways that students can showcase what they know, especially ELL students. Technology provides a different platform for students to showcase what they know. Encouraging teachers and students to improve their current methods and also to try others is the most important part of the ELL/AISI position. The coordinator is able to show students skills that are transferrable beyond the current classroom and grade that they are in.

Although Almadina's general academic progress has been excellent over the years, a significant number of students are not meeting grade-level expectations. An underlying factor leading to academic struggles and frustrations of ELL learners is their inability to comprehend what they read. For years, we have searched for effective and innovative strategies that would enhance reading and writing skills. We realize that a gradual developmental process needs to take place before reaching the reading comprehension stage. Reading comprehension is the result of this developmental process. Consequently, Almadina piloted the Discover Reading program in the primary grades. Teachers were invited to participate, and Merton Palmer, a reading and literacy specialist from the Reading Foundation, provided four days of training

on how to deliver the program. Thus far, the Almadina project has added six educational assistants (EA) to the program. The addition of the EAs allowed us to expand the program.

The reading program methods range from look-and-say sight words to whole language methods. The Discover Reading program emphasizes the need to realize that “reading and spelling are reciprocal activities: Spelling is encoding and reading is decoding what has been written.” This reading program is logically and systematically taught to beginning or struggling learners of all ages. The main steps to reading in this program are

1. oral language,
2. phonemic awareness,
3. code knowledge,
4. fluency,
5. vocabulary and
6. comprehension.

Grade 9 High School Transition Activities to Promote a Successful Transition

Student tours—expose students to the high school environment and identify what each high school does to meet the diversity of students’ cultural and religious beliefs; for example, girls-only time in the physical fitness centre, prayer rooms and adapting such courses as working in the hair salon (girls can take off their hijabs because boys are in a different area or class).

High school counsellor meetings—promote discussions on how to fit in with a diverse school population.

Parent high school information night—help parents to understand the Canadian school system. Parents’ personal school experiences can be very different and vary by country of origin. These info nights encourage parents to share challenges and successes.

School website—outlines high school planning dates, presentations and up-to-date information on high school preparation activities.

Class presentations—offer information on registration, option choices and social-emotional factors that will best prepare students for high school success. Talk about living in two cultures and

maintaining one’s family culture and beliefs while integrating into Canadian culture.

Career day—looks at a variety of career choices that matches students’ interests. Provide information to parents on career choices available to their children.

High school registrations—help parents and students complete and submit registrations before deadlines.

Transitions: Wellness Empowerment Program—provides sustainable programming in the school and community to facilitate the identification of strengths and resiliency, and foster positive mental health in a diverse school population. Develops a variety of community partnerships with the school and promotes mental health.

Community partnerships—encourage student and family participation in extracurricular activities and community services. A number of community groups were invited to the Almadina welcome back day in September. Community activity information was provided to parents and students.

- Calgary Recreation provides outreach programs in the school at lunch time.
- Calgary Immigrant Women’s Association provides services to families and two programs at lunch time: the Girls’ Culture Club and the Girls’ Leadership Program.
- Digital Citizenship presentation is provided for all students. Information and a family contract are provided to parents on Internet safety.

Almadina is also participating in two University of Calgary Research projects, maintains teaching partnerships with the U of C by hosting student teachers and by participating in BEd class learning projects in ECS and Grade 1.

Almadina provides extensive professional development in early literacy and oral language development:

- Revised ELL Benchmark assessment schedule and system
 - All teachers trained in Basic Reading Inventory
 - All teachers completed Benchmark Assessments
- Re-established focus on oral language development