

FOCUS ON EDUCATION

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Mandarin program readies students for world opportunities

When it comes to giving today's students an advantage in tomorrow's competitive economy, few things will serve them as well as having a language other than English. And for an increasing number of students in Edmonton Public Schools, the second language of choice is Mandarin Chinese.

Available at five elementary schools throughout the district, EPS's Mandarin Bilingual Program allows students to pursue the Alberta Program of Studies in both English and Mandarin Chinese. Students do not require any knowledge of the language before beginning at the kindergarten level.

While some families choose the program because of personal or cultural connection, many others see the potential economic and educational advantages the language offers. For John Yee, a parent of two children, the program appealed on both levels.

"I was raised in a small town and rebelled against the language and culture," says Yee, who is an agent with Cooperators Insurance and the president of the Edmonton Chinese Bilingual Education Association (ECBEA). "Now in the work I do, having the language is a real advantage."

It's an advantage he wants his kids to have as well.

"I think the job market will be so competitive in the future, that having Mandarin as a language will make them that much more marketable to employers, here and around the world."

Mandarin is becoming an increasingly popular choice. Chinese is the second most spoken language in the world next to English, and is an essential skill for anyone wanting to pursue international education or career goals.

The importance of studying a language other than English was recently underscored by an Alberta government initiative that will make it mandatory for all students in Grade 4 to be studying a second language by September 2006.

"Research tells us that studying a second language offers a wide range of advantages, both academically and economically," explains Julia Elaschuk, principal of Caernarvon school, which offers the program.

All of the Mandarin Bilingual Programs make a point of including cultural elements such as celebrating many of the Chinese holidays and traditions.

For more information on the program, call any of the participating schools directly, or call Edmonton Public Schools at 429-8000.