



Southern Alberta Heritage Language Association

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Motion 513: *Heritage Language Schools* passes in the Legislative Assembly

The Southern Alberta Heritage Language Association (SAHLA), a Calgary-based not-for-profit umbrella educational association in Calgary representing 38 language schools, is pleased to learn that Calgary-Hawkwood MLA Jason Luan's Motion 513: *Heritage Language Schools* was passed with unanimous consent on October 28, 2013.

Motion 513's aim is to urge the government to promote and assist international or heritage languages schooling in collaboration with local school board authorities by bringing attention to the issues community-based language schools face.

SAHLA President Michael Embaie said that "this motion is a very positive step forward in demonstrating the Government of Alberta's seriousness in recognizing the essential and unduplicated role that community-based language schools play in enhancing learning opportunities for Alberta students. Languages learning has numerous benefits, including cognitive, academic, social, cultural, economic and trade. More recent studies show that learning languages can even help slow down memory loss or dementia.

"SAHLA its community language schools play a crucial role in teaching languages to students. Our work directly supports the mandate of Alberta Education and our local school boards. Our schools go a long way in working with parents and communities in preparing students to become multilingual citizens and leaders. SAHLA looks forward to witnessing this motion going further into a bill that would further assist community-based language schools in performing their invaluable work of teaching international languages, in partnership with Alberta Education and local school boards."

"I am pleased with the success of Motion 513 as it addresses an emerging need in Alberta, potentially touching on the lives of hundreds of thousands of Albertans." said MLA Jason Luan, "Heritage language schools are a valuable experience for children across the province and will continue to enrich Alberta's families and communities, producing some of the brightest minds in the country. Learning additional languages will give our children increased competitiveness to succeed in the 21st century global economy."

SAHLA, its schools, MLA Jason Luan and local MLA's will be holding a celebration of Motion 513 at the SAHLA office this Thursday at 4:00 pm. Media is welcome to attend.

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SAHLA statement in support of Motion 513 – International Heritage Languages
Michael Embaie, President of SAHLA

On behalf of the Southern Alberta Heritage Language Association (SAHLA), it's a pleasure for both me and all my colleagues to witness the historic sharing of Motion 513 – Heritage Language Schooling, presented by Jason Luan, MLA, and passed unanimously by all MLA's and all parties in attendance. This was a truly inspiring occasion for us to witness!

We are deeply encouraged by this motion, as well as the discussion that took place on Monday in Legislature. As you know, we heard several MLA's speak and share important and insightful words about the educational, cognitive, health, social, cultural and economic importance of international languages education in our culturally and linguistically diverse province and country.

As the Hon. Cal Dallas, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations said, "As we continue to build Alberta and open new markets abroad, it's hard to ignore that we are living in an increasingly globalized civilization and economy. Building lasting and favourable relationships with trading partners overseas; this is a key aspect to securing access to important markets. A part of building these relationships is developing a higher level of cultural competence, including linguistic competence. This knowledge is supported by the very existence of heritage language schools."

MLA Jacqueline Fenske shared important and insightful words about the educational, cognitive, health, social, cultural and economic importance of international languages education in our culturally and linguistically diverse province and country. She also shared concerns about a number of obstacles that can impede community language schools' success and can inhibit their sustainability. "The intent of this motion is to recognize the systemic problems that impair the ability of heritage language schools to run efficiently."

As MLA Stephen Khan stated in Legislature, Ontario's international language program is particularly useful as a case study... Ontario's work on international languages programs recognizes the benefits and opportunities that such programs can offer." As we know, Ontario has been a leader in languages education since 1989.

We appreciate Education Minister Jeff Johnson speaking in support of this motion, and for acknowledging the MLA's who helped push it to the fore. We thank him for speaking in support of community-based language schools, and acknowledging the importance of the schools and the work that heritage language schools and organizations like SAHLA and IHLA are doing across the province. "It really is about collaboration and trying to work between Alberta Education, these organizations and the school boards to make sure that these organizations have proper access to facilities.... Embracing the work that the heritage language schools and others are doing is important".

In addition to the PC MLA's mentioned above, we also heard supportive comments from MLA's Bruce McAllister (WRP), David Swann (ALP) and Rachel Notley (NDP) We are also encouraged that all MLA's from the governing party and all opposition parties supported this motion.

SAHLA also wishes to thank Premier Redford for her strong recognition of the importance of international languages education for our young people and future multilingual leaders. SAHLA also thanks Premier Redford for her strong support of the vital role that SAHLA and community-based languages schools play in international languages education.

As we prepare for the introduction of a bill to follow up on Motion 513, we look forward to working together with Alberta Education to find meaningful solutions to enhance the teaching and learning of international languages at the community level, including improved access for community-based language schools to affordable classroom instructional facilities, and equitable funding to assist community-based language schools in covering operational costs such as classroom rental and teacher honorarium.

SAHLA also hopes that Alberta Education will continue to provide sustainable operational funding to our association as the coordinating body that oversees the 38 different language schools in southern Alberta. This will assist SAHLA in overseeing and coordinating our many services to develop and enhance community based languages education, including assisting linguistic communities in setting up new language schools and providing much-needed resources including curriculum, instructional, and professional development opportunities for principals, teachers and volunteers, as well as referral services to Albertans who wish their children and/or themselves to learn an international language.