

April 30, 2003



Aboriginals, non-Aboriginals share in project's success
Additional \$1 million provided for integrated program

Edmonton... The early success of a project aimed at improving the school experience for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in Edmonton Catholic Schools has earned an additional \$1 million in funding to continue its good work.

Making the funding announcement for the Rainbow Spirit Project, Alberta Learning Minister Lyle Oberg cited the success the project will result in an unprecedented increase of Aboriginal high school graduates in 2004, as well as heightened awareness for non-Aboriginal students and teachers of the many great contributions Aboriginal Canadians have made to this province and country.

"We are committed to enhancing the school satisfaction of Aboriginal students, parents, elders and the community, while exposing non-Aboriginal students and their families to a different world view," said Dr. Oberg. "I've been impressed with the positive results that have been achieved in many areas and I am looking forward to seeing the program grow."

The project, which includes more than 5,000 students and 300 staff, was piloted in six Edmonton Catholic schools in September 2001. Early indications have shown encouraging results such as greater Aboriginal student retention, as well as giving students a better self-image. Continued funding will allow the schools to learn more about how to deliver a culturally sensitive education to Aboriginal students.

Edmonton Catholic School Board Chairperson Charlie Koester has this to say about the additional funding, "This will mean that our school district will be able to continue its important work with our Aboriginal students and our research into best practices in Aboriginal education. The funding will assist in providing supports for curriculum adaptation, cultural awareness programs, professional development for staff and career development opportunities for students such as our annual 'Aboriginal Youth Career Fair'."

"Our goal is to provide Aboriginal students with educational environments that promote a sense of belonging and community, and more importantly an environment that promotes Aboriginal student success," Koester went on to say.

In a study conducted by the school district in January 2000, it was determined that the vast majority of Aboriginal students identified the need for schools to be more responsive to the distinct needs of Aboriginals, but they also wished to attend integrated schools in the district.

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What is the Rainbow Spirit Project?

- The Rainbow Spirit Project is a joint project of Edmonton Catholic Schools (Aboriginal Learning Centre) and Alberta Learning.
- The Rainbow Spirit Project is designed to identify and implement a series of “Best Practises” into six district schools in order to assist schools to meet the needs of integrated Aboriginal students.
- The six schools in the Rainbow Spirit Project are:
 1. St. Francis Xavier High School
 2. St. Joseph High School
 3. St. Alphonsus School
 4. St. Patrick School
 5. St. Elizabeth Seton School
 6. Annunciation School
- The key elements of the program are:
 1. **Aboriginal On-Site School Liaisons**– Each school will have a full-time teacher liaison or community liaison person who will provide on-site support to Aboriginal students, connect with students/families, support school staff, and access appropriate resources for enhanced school programming.
 2. **Curricular Adaptations** – Rainbow Spirit Schools will work cooperatively with Aboriginal Learning Centre consultants and facilitators in weaving Aboriginal Perspectives into existing K – 12 curricula in the areas of English language arts, physical education, health, life skills, social studies, mathematics, and science.
 3. **Educational Resources** –Resources that support the mandate of the project will be provided to pilot schools. This may include curricular materials and general library materials.
 4. **Enhanced Cultural Programming** – Pilot schools will receive increased access to programming in the areas of fine arts, recreation, student leadership and life work/career development.
 5. **Professional Development** - The staff of Rainbow Spirit Schools will develop effective professional development programs for each particular school based on the desired outcomes of the Rainbow Spirit Project and the unique culture of each school.
- The project was first implemented in schools in September 2001.
- Ongoing evaluation and data collection commenced in September 2001 and will continue throughout the duration of the project.

What does this mean for Aboriginal Students?

Short Term

- Students will have an Aboriginal adult (teacher or community person) as a role model and advocate at their school.
- Students will have access to this adult on a daily basis.
- Students will come in contact with Aboriginal perspectives in a number of curricular areas and in the materials they have access to.
- Students will encounter teachers who are better informed regarding issues that confront Aboriginal people in Canada.
- Students will have access to enhanced and culturally relevant programming in the areas of fine arts, recreation, and life work/career development, English language arts, physical education, health, life skills, social studies, mathematics, and science. This programming will be integrated into class time and beyond the classroom.
- Students will experience curricular extensions beyond the school to a wider environment that includes natural areas within the school community, city and surrounding areas.
- Students will have greater access to elders and traditional teachings within their school.

Long Term

- Students will experience increased academic success in terms of graduation rates and access to post secondary institutions.
- Students will find school environments more welcoming and feel they have a variety of schools that will meet their educational needs.
- Students will feel that school staff have an understanding of the issues facing Aboriginal people in Canada.
- Students will feel that they are able to retain their unique identity while being part of the greater school environment.
- Aboriginal students will feel that their non-Aboriginal classmates have a more positive view of Aboriginal people.
- Aboriginal students will have optimistic views of their personal future and the future of Aboriginal people in general.

What does the Rainbow Spirit Project mean for non-Aboriginal Students?

Short Term

- Students will have positive experiences with members of the Aboriginal Community.
- Students will be exposed to Aboriginal perspectives within the school curriculum.
- Students will have the opportunity to view and participate in Aboriginal cultural activities.
- Students will have opportunities to view life in Alberta today through a filter that is indigenous to Alberta.

Long Term

- Students will have a positive view of Aboriginal people and their contributions to society on a local, national and international level.
- Students will value the richness of the Aboriginal world view.
- Students will feel comfortable in their interactions with Aboriginal people.
- High school students will be able to enter meaningful discussions on issues involving Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people based on enhanced knowledge of all perspectives.
- Students will perceive their schools as modeling Edmonton Catholic Schools' Gospel values.