

Language Education in British Columbia: A backgrounder...

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BC is a multicultural province, and language classes at public schools reflect the province's rich diversity. In addition to the popular choices of French Immersion, public schools offer German, Japanese, Spanish, Mandarin, Punjabi, Russian and First Nations languages.

Schools are encouraged to offer a second language based on community demand, teaching resources, student enrolment, and availability of provincially or locally developed curriculum.

The BC Ministry of Education's language policy requires that all students learn a second language in Grades 5 to 8. Students going to university are required to have a second language at high school level.

Most popular languages in British Columbia

English	83 per cent
Chinese (all)	6.7 per cent
Panjabi (Punjabi)	3 per cent
Korean	1 per cent
Tagalog (Filipino, Filipino)	.6 per cent
Persian (Farsi)	.5 per cent

Because of the great number of immigrants coming to British Columbia from China and India, more and more services are being provided in Chinese and Punjabi, especially in Greater Vancouver.

The languages spoken vary from community to community. The Okanagan Valley, Abbotsford and Surrey, for example, have large Punjabi populations, while Vancouver and Richmond have attracted Chinese immigrants.

To find out what languages are spoken in specific communities across British Columbia, visit:

<http://www.bcmulticulturalprofiles.gov.bc.ca/2001/index.htm>

There are 34 distinct Aboriginal languages in British Columbia, still spoken by First Nations people (see: <http://www.welcomebc.ca/en/choose/aboriginal.html>) across the province. In fact, two thirds of the Aboriginal and First Nations languages spoken in Canada are here in B.C. These distinct languages (see: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/map.htm>) are part of 11 different language families, and First Nations and the provincial government are making a great effort to protect and revitalize them. Many places in the province are derived from the Aboriginal words used to describe their setting.

Second Language Education

- ▶ Heritage / International languages are languages other than English or French that are taught by non-profit schools/programs outside of the provincial curriculum. Heritage / International languages can also be referred to as second languages.
- ▶ A typical school will hold its classes on weekends or after-school or evenings during the week, and is run by volunteer administrators and instructors. After-school, weekday evening and Saturday language programs not only have the positive benefit of language acquisition and/or retention, but also provide for a safe and constructive activity outside of school hours for children and youth.
- ▶ Numbers in BC: in 2005, there were approximately **35,000+** second language learners in supplementary schools/programs and **over 1,000** instructors and volunteers involved in the delivery of these language programs.
- ▶ Parents enrol their children in language classes for a variety of reasons: for family continuity of communication with relatives, for positive self-identity and self-confidence, academic enrichment, cultural enhancement, and active participation within their communities.
- ▶ Second languages offered within the public school setting include: Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese), German, Italian, Japanese, Punjabi, Russian, and Spanish. CLA works closely with various school districts across the province to ensure that a choice of languages offered within the public school system.
- ▶ Languages that are offered in heritage/international language programs (outside the public school setting) include: Arabic, Amharic, Armenian, Burmese, Chinese (Mandarin/Cantonese), Croatian, Czech, Danish, Estonian, Dari and Pashtu, Farsi, Finnish, German, Greek, Gujerati, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Khmer, Korean, Kurdish, Nepali, Persian, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Russian, Sinhala, Somalian, Spanish, Swedish, Tagalog, Tamil, Trigrigna, Twi, Fanti, Ewe, Ga, Akwapim, Ukrainian, Urdu, and Vietnamese.
- ▶ As of 2001, BC government funding ceased for after-school and weekend HL programs.
- ▶ Rental for classroom space from district school boards for evening and weekend programs varies from \$15 - \$35 plus per classroom.
- ▶ Several multilingual centres operate in a number of high schools in Vancouver and Burnaby.

BC Ministry of Education Initiatives

- ▶ BC Language Education Policy came into effect on September 1, 1997.
- ▶ School boards must offer a second language in Grades 5 to 8 and choose which second languages will be offered.
- ▶ **As per the BC Ministry of Education - Second Language Requirement Grade 5 to 8:** *School boards should attempt to coordinate the second languages offered to ensure there is continuity of instruction in the same language for a student in Grades 5 to 8. Curricula for second languages offered in Grades 5 to 8 must be provincially approved. School boards may choose to submit a locally developed language course to the Ministry of Education for approval as a provincial course.*
- ▶ Core French is the language offered if no other alternative is offered by a school board.
- ▶ Second language programs which have a government approved curriculum are eligible to meet the second language requirement for Grades 5 to 8.
- ▶ In 1997, French, Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin, Punjabi and German had government approved curricula.
- ▶ School boards may develop their own curricula for second language education, and often do so based upon community request.
- ▶ Many aboriginal language courses have been developed by local aboriginal groups.
- ▶ Credit may be earned through Equivalency, Challenge, External Credentials, Post-Secondary Credit, and Independent Directed Studies.

For more information about the BC Language Education Policy go to: www.bced.gov.bc.ca

Recent BC Education Ministry Announcement re: School Language Programs

Perhaps the most interesting and controversial recent development is the announcement that Beijing will pay to develop credit courses for BC high schools.

The money will come from the Beijing-funded Confucius Institute at Burnaby's BC Institute of Technology (BCIT) and will go towards developing a language curriculum for Grades 10 through 12. It is unclear just how much money is being set aside.

The BC government is hailing the initiative as a "gift" and "an important step forward in building on the existing social, economic and educational ties between jurisdictions." As China positions itself as an economic powerhouse, BC is looking to create cultural and business ties that prove fruitful in the future.

But the latest announcement has led many to wonder about BC's intellectual sovereignty. How much control will Beijing have over the public high school curriculum under such a scheme?

The Education Ministry says that the deal with China is not unprecedented – in 1997, BC signed a similar deal with the Italian government and in 2005, BC accepted money from a Korean community group for the development of Korean language classes.

In both cases, the money was earmarked for the development of Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs), basic information packages of background materials teachers can use in the classroom in support of the provincially-approved curriculum.

The real questions will arise when the details of this latest agreement are released, says assistant professor of politics at the University of BC, Yves Tiberghien.

"This could end up being harmless but it really depends on how much influence China will have on the curriculum itself," said Tiberghien, who returned from China last week.

"And of course, from the Chinese perspective, this is more successful than having a separate institution that competes with mainstream education."

