

Arabic Corner

The Arabic Bilingual Program

Rationale

More and more parents are valuing second-language learning as one of the best long-term investments they can make for their children. Research tells us that instruction in second languages can

- improve scholastic achievement,
- improve and enrich students' first language,
- positively affect the intellectual potential of students,
- enhance qualities of citizenship, and
- improve the economic and career potential of students.

The Arabic Bilingual Program at a Glance

The program started under the auspices of Edmonton Public Schools during the 1982/83 school year with only three classes—K–2. Since then, the program has kept on growing and enrolment this school year sits at more than 700 students.

Students

Our students come from various ethnic backgrounds (Arabs and non-Arabs) and nationalities, such as Lebanese, Palestinian, Somali, Jordanian, Syrian, Iraqi, Moroccan, Tunisian and Egyptian. The great majority of them are second-, third- or fourth-generation Canadians.

Religious Affiliation

Not all Arabs are Muslims, nor are all Muslims Arabs. Arabs belong to Islam, Christian and Judaic faiths, and the majority of the Muslim world is non-Arab.

The greatest percentage of our students are Sunni Muslims, which is a sect of the three major Islamic sects, the other two being Shia and Druze.

Common Terms, Names, and Phrases

Allah: God, Lord

Muhammad, Mohammad: The great prophet of Islam

Qura'n, Koran: The Muslim holy book

Eid: Feast-day, festival

Ramadan: Holy month of fasting, which follows the lunar calendar

Hajj: A pilgrimage to the holy places in Saudi Arabia

Friday is the Islamic world's weekly holy day, on which people go to mosques (places of worship) to offer collective prayers

Salam Alaikum: Peace be upon you (greeting)

Marhaba: Hello

Ahlan: Welcome

Ahlan Wasahlan: Welcome/welcome home

Salat: Prayer

Wallah: In God's name/Honest to God

Yallah: Hurry up/Let's go/Come on

Zakat: Almsgiving, giving for charity, tithe

Sabah Elkheir: Good morning

Masaa Elkheir: Good evening

Christ and Christmas: Muslims revere and believe in Christ and his message. They hold Mary, the mother of Jesus, in high regard—one whole chapter of the Koran is named after Mary (Mariam in Arabic); however, Muslims do not celebrate Christmas.

Major Celebrations

Eid Al-Fitr (feast of breaking the fast) is the celebration of the end of **Ramadan** (month of fasting). During this month, most of the students in the Arabic bilingual program observe the duty of fasting from early morning to sunset. A fasting person must refrain from having any food or drink unless he or she feels sick or very weak. Teachers must guard against making a decision to break the fast of a child without informing the office or the parents. Since the lunar month is either 29 or 30 days, the times and dates of fasting and breaking the fast rotate during the year and are not fixed to a certain date.

Eid Al-Adha is the feast of completing the pilgrimage to Makkah (Mecca) (the holy city in Saudi Arabia) and performing certain prescribed rituals. Eid Al-Adha, for this school year, was on November 16, 2010.

Muslim students can miss up to three days of school during each of these Eids.

Dietary Restrictions

Muslim students are not allowed, under any circumstances, to eat pork or any of its derivatives, such as ham, bacon and gelatin-based products (for example, gummy worms or marshmallows).

Dress Code

There is no specific dress code for Muslim boys. Some female students choose to wear a headscarf (or hijab) as part of their religious beliefs, and we must respect their choice.

We hope that this very brief introduction to the program and students will give you a better idea of the Arabic program and culture. If you have any queries or need more information about any issues related to the program, please do not hesitate to contact any of the schools that offer it.

Hassan Seinfeldine

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