

**LEAD programming:
Calgary Board of Education Response for Serving Refugees with Limited Formal Schooling**

When support workers call from the Refugee Reception Centre to make an appointment for registration and assessment at the Calgary Board of Education central intake centre, we know that the children are classified as convention refugees. We label these assessments as possible LEAD (Literacy, English and Academic Development) students. When the students arrive, they are assessed to gather as much information as possible about their academic background. The assessment includes family interviews, behavioural observation, English Language proficiency assessment (oral and reading and writing) and, with the assistance of an interpreter when possible, collecting information about first language reading and writing. A mathematics screener is helpful for determining previous educational experience. Students who meet the criteria for the LEAD program are usually unable to read and write in their first language, or may have limited literacy; demonstrate unfamiliarity with school routines and skills such as handling books or using pen and paper; have limited mathematics computation skills and may not be familiar with number script used in Canada; may not be able to interpret information presented visually; and may demonstrate anxiety, hyper-arousal or withdrawal due to the effects of trauma.

These students require instructional programming which focuses on literacy, numeracy and English Language Development. Some of them may have some simple social English (BICS) but have limited literacy. Junior and senior high school aged students generally score as first or second grade students on standardized assessments and can be called emerging literacy readers. The gaps in academic skills are enormous when compared to peers in a Canadian school. These students have educational needs that will not be met in mainstream classes and not generally met by regular English as a Second Language programming. Inclusion is not immersion for these students; it is submersion. These students can be up to ten grade levels behind their age-equivalent peers (if High school age), some of whom have never attended school. The LEAD classes offer a sheltered congregated setting 100% of the school day in the early phases of LEAD, with students being gradually integrated into complementary classes such as Physical Education, and finally transitioned into ESL classes and some mainstream classrooms. The staff of LEAD classrooms and schools utilize numerous resources to support the settlement and psycho-social needs of the students, including Diversity Advisors, settlement workers and the COPE (Community Outreach of Pediatrics and Psychiatry in Education) partnership.

The school district provides each LEAD class with one full time equivalent teacher and an educational assistant. The classes have a pupil/teacher ratio of 1 to 15. There are 13 LEAD classes located in 9 different community schools. The locations for LEAD classes were chosen based on the common settlement patterns of the families and classroom availability. Transportation is provided for the students in Elementary and subsidized in Middle and Senior school. The classes span divisions 2, 3, and 4 (grades 4-12). It is assumed that division 1 students are exposed to rich language learning environments and their needs can be met through strong ELL pedagogy in the universal classroom. Transitioning from LEAD programs to ESL and mainstream programs is carefully managed. High School counsellors and teachers assist students to transition to adult programming such as the Bow Valley College Literacy program.

The LEAD Program is an accelerated program with high expectations for students who have had limited opportunities to access academic programming in a formal school setting. The students are expected to achieve up to five grade levels in twenty months. LEAD programming provides *an array of interventions* (academic and behavioural) for these students who are at risk for school failure. It is not a remedial program for ESL students experiencing learning difficulties because of identified special education needs. A LEAD program is not appropriate for beginner ELL students who have a background of formal schooling and have acquired age/grade appropriate first language literacy and academic knowledge.

Since there are no provincial guidelines or programs of study that meets the needs of these unique learners, the ELL specialists and LEAD teachers have collaborated over the past five years to develop a common understanding of programming shared through professional learning opportunities and an online community (D2L). The LEAD program has developed Learning Indicators with General and Specific outcomes. A report card tracks student progress through the phases of learning for each general indicator. Personalized learning plans are established through Student Growth Plans, which are informed by thorough assessments conducted at the beginning and end of each year.