

HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD SUPPORTING NEW STUDENTS FROM SYRIA

PURPOSE: To provide the Governing Board with information on the supports provided to new Syrian students enrolled in HRSB schools.

BACKGROUND: In November 2015, the Government of Canada committed to accept 25,000 Syrian refugees to Canada by the end of February 2016. To support this commitment the Government of Nova Scotia offered to resettle up to 1,500 Syrian refugees in Nova Scotia.

The HRSB has many years of experience with supporting newcomer children and their families. *Report No. 14-10-1490 – Focus on Learning: English as an Additional Language* was presented to the Governing Board on October 22, 2014. This report provided an overview on the significance of immigration to our school populations while addressing the requirement to support culturally and linguistically diverse students in our classrooms.

The 2016-17 General Fund budget included an increase of six English as an Additional Language (EAL) full-time equivalent (FTE) teaching positions, bringing the total number of EAL positions to 25.5 FTEs.

CONTENT: To support schools with the expected influx of Syrian students, Superintendent Elwin LeRoux created a multi-departmental team comprised of the Coordinator, School Administration, Coordinator, Student Services, Coordinator, Communication Services, and the Consultant, English as an Additional Language.

The team met regularly to discuss how best to support schools as newcomers enrolled as well as address any challenges. Information was shared with schools regularly through the Principal's Memos and in a meeting with principals on January 21.

Syrians who have arrived in Nova Scotia typically fall in one of two categories: Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) and Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs). The majority of GARs have been settled in Halifax and are supported by the Immigrant Settlement Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS). Privately Sponsored Refugees are being settled across Nova Scotia in the various communities who have sponsored them.

From January until April, GARs were housed temporarily at the Best Western Chocolate Lake until they could be assigned permanent housing. Once permanent housing was assigned, students were then registered in their neighbourhood school according to the HRSB's *Student Registration Policy*. Typically, the process would take between 14-21 days from the time a family arrives until a child is enrolled in school.

The HRSB has finished with the initial intake and settlement of GARs although we will continue to receive newcomers from Syria over the coming months for the remainder of the calendar year. This is in addition to our regular enrollment of immigrants and refugees, of which the province has increased the number over previous years.

As of June 10, 320 students from Syria have been enrolled in 33 schools with an additional six registered to begin Grade Primary in September.

To successfully support this influx of students, additional resources were assigned including, classroom teachers, EAL teachers and substitutes, Educational Program Assistants and lunch monitors. Classroom resources, additional book bureau resources, medical equipment and furniture were also added.

The HRSB has worked closely with ISANS and the YMCA School Settlement Program to successfully integrate students into both the school and community. There has also been support provided by many volunteers and community partners. A specific example is a weekly tutoring program offered at Duc d'Anville Elementary by students in the Bachelor of Education program at Mount Saint Vincent University.

- COST:** \$240,000 February – June, 2016 (estimated)
- FUNDING:** General Fund Budget
- TIMELINE:** Ongoing
- APPENDICES:** N/A
- RECOMMENDATIONS:** It is recommended that the Governing Board receive this report for information.
- COMMUNICATIONS:** For further information please contact:
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- To:** Senior Staff: June 14, 2016
Governing Board: June 22, 2016