

# SUPPORT FOR NEWCOMER STUDENTS

From the People for Education Annual Report  
on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2011



# SUPPORT FOR NEWCOMER STUDENTS

*Our success depends not only on our ability to attract new immigrants, but on providing an environment where new Canadians can maximize their potential...we have to work harder both to attract and maximize the potential of talented people.* Gordon Nixon, President & CEO, RBC Financial Group

The development of a Canadian identity has been tied to immigration since the earliest colonial days, and Ontario now welcomes over 100,000 immigrants each year from all over the world<sup>1</sup>—many of them are highly skilled professionals travelling with their families to build a better future.

Some children, with or without their families, are fleeing persecution and seeking a haven in Canada. At their best, schools can help create safety, connection and opportunities for newcomer children and their families.

## PROVIDING PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS NEW TO CANADA

Ontario has English-language and French-language schools, and in both systems, there are students who need language support. In English schools, we refer to English Language Learners (ELLs), and in French schools, students are enrolled in Actualisation linguistique en français et Perfectionnement du français (ALF/PDF) programs.

Over the last ten years, there has been a steady increase in the number of English Language Learners in Ontario schools. There are more students per school and more schools with ELLs.

In English-language schools,

- 63% of elementary schools have English Language Learners this year, compared to 53% in 2003/04. The percentage of secondary schools with ELLs has remained fairly steady at 47%.
- 56% of elementary schools and 33% of secondary schools report having 10 or more students learning English, up from 46% and 25% respectively in 2003/04,
- in elementary schools with *ten or more* ELLs, 19% have no English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, an improvement from a high of 33% in 2006/07, and
- in secondary schools with ten or more ELLs, 95% have a specialist ESL teacher.

## QUICK FACTS FOR 2010/11

- 63% of English-language elementary schools have students who require English-language support (ELLs), compared to 53% in 2003/04.
- 40% of French-language elementary schools with more than ten students requiring French-language support have no specialist French as a Second Language teacher.

Children of parents educated in French and children who come to Canada from French-speaking countries have a right to go to French-language schools. However, in most of Ontario, these schools are in English-speaking communities, and many of these children need support as they learn French:

- 66% of elementary schools in French-language boards report students who require ALF/PDF support.
- Of the French-language elementary schools with ten or more ALF/PDF students, 40% report having no ALF/PDF teacher.

## NOT JUST THE GTA: UNMET NEEDS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORTS

Schools in the GTA have the highest number of ELLs in the province: 90% of elementary schools have English Language Learners in them; an average of 13% of students per elementary school are ELLs, and 5% of GTA schools report that 60% or more of their students are English Language Learners.

However, across the province many schools report significant ELL populations: 18% of schools outside the GTA have 10 or more English Language Learners in them, and 29% of those schools do not have teachers who specialize in teaching English to newcomers.

## ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS BEING STREAMED IN HIGH SCHOOL?

In secondary school, students who require language supports may face limits beyond simple language acquisition. Data from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) show that English Language Learners are 36% more likely to be enrolled in applied mathematics than their English-speaking counterparts.<sup>2</sup> This raises concerns because enrolling in applied courses may limit post-secondary choices for these students. It is more difficult to go on to university if a student has taken applied courses in Grades 9 and 10. Thus, short-term language skill problems may be making a long-term difference for a large number of English Language Learners.

## BEYOND LANGUAGE: CONNECTING TO SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Schools are logical places to provide connections to settlement supports for immigrant children and families, who may face considerable barriers to accessing educational, health and social services.<sup>3</sup>

Newcomer students and their families need information about things such as how the education system works, where parents can further their own education and training, where they can access health care and how to find employment. Worryingly, 59% of elementary schools and 40% of secondary schools with English Language Learners report they “never” cooperate or coordinate with settlement agencies. Given substantial federal cuts to settlement agencies this year,<sup>4</sup> it is unlikely that this relationship will improve in the next few years.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Newcomers enrich our province, but these students and their families require effective support and programs to ensure they have an equitable chance for success.

People for Education recommends

- the province fund ELL/ALF supports for students until they reach a provincially established standard of academic proficiency in English and French, and
- the province protect funding for ELL/ALF, so that it may only be spent on the purpose for which it is given, and
- the province ensure that all English Language Learners and students enrolled in ALF/PDF are receiving appropriate supports and are not being streamed into applied courses due to short-term language issues.

## WHAT PRINCIPALS TOLD US . . .

Over 22 languages are spoken in students' homes, and most students are fully able to communicate in English. But we have a great deal of difficulty communicating with our parent community that does not speak English.

*Elementary School, Waterloo Region DSB*

Has not changed, just no service.

*Elementary School, Toronto DSB*

Resource staff no longer able to support students and staff at the school level - email support from a designated board person is still available.

*Elementary School, Simcoe County DSB*

While we have 325 ELL students in our school, only 80 children are serviced by our ESL staff.

*Elementary School, Peel DSB*

# NOTES

- 1 Office of Economic Policy, Labour and Demographic Branch, Government of Ontario. (2007). *2006 Census highlights on language, immigration, citizenship, mobility/migration*. Toronto, ON: Ontario Ministry of Finance.
- 2 Based on numbers of students writing Grade 9 mathematics assessment, as reported in Educational Quality and Accountability Office. (2010). *EQAO's provincial report on the results of the Grade 9 assessment of mathematics and the Ontario secondary school literacy test, 2009-2010*. Toronto, ON: author. Retrieved from [http://www.eqao.com/pdf\\_e/10/EQAO\\_ProvincialReport\\_Secondary2010.pdf](http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/10/EQAO_ProvincialReport_Secondary2010.pdf)
- 3 Two major U.S. National Academy of Science Reports have remarked on the scarcity of research that addresses how school-based services meet the needs of newcomer children and families. In 2009, it was noted that “in general, though the needs of Aboriginal, immigrant, refugee, and racial and ethnic communities are accepted to be high, specific, school-based prevention and intervention research has not been reported.” National Research Council (U.S.). (2009). *Preventing mental, emotional and behavioural disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities*. Washington: National Academies Press, page 36. Back in 1995, when setting a research agenda, the NRC also wrote: “The pressing practical issue, then, is not whether policies and programs for immigrant students exist, but to what extent appropriate policies for immigrant children and existing policies (such as those for LEP students) overlap, and whether special policies and programs are needed for immigrant children. Among the crucial questions: Are there social services that schools might provide or coordinate which would benefit recent arrivals? Do immigrant students need educational services different from those provided to LEP students? What might those services be and how should they be integrated into the educational system?” National Research Council (U.S.). (1995). *Immigrant children and their families*. *Future of Children*, 5(2), 72-89. There are a few exceptions e.g. Suarez-Orozco, C., Pimentel, A., & Martin, M. (2009). *The significance of relationships: Academic engagement and achievement among newcomer immigrant youth*. *Teachers College Record*, 111(3), 712-749.; Price, O.A., & Kugler, E.G. (2009). Go beyond the classroom to help immigrant and refugee students succeed. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(3), 48-52.
- 4 People for Education. (2011, April 7). Federal funding cuts devastate programs for young Ontario newcomers [press release]. Toronto, ON: author. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Federal-Funding-Cuts-Devastate-Programs.pdf>



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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