

LANGUAGE SUPPORT

Every year, People for Education conducts a survey of Ontario's 4900 publicly funded schools.

The survey asks principals for information on resources and programs in the school and about the school's connection with its community.

In 2013, 1122 schools responded to the survey. This report is an excerpt from the 2013 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools.

BEYOND BASIC ENGLISH AND FRENCH

One in five Ontario students do not speak English or French as their first language.¹

There are also many students who speak English as their first language, but a dialect that is significantly different from the Standard English used for instruction in Ontario schools, such as Caribbean Creole or Jamaican Patois.² Some Aboriginal students also speak a dialect that is different from standard academic English.

DEFINING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

According to Ontario policy, English Language Learners (ELLs) may be Canadian-born or they may be newcomers from other countries. The policy (which is not connected to the funding model) defines ELLs as students who have:

- a first language other than English,
OR
- a dialect of English significantly different from the standard used for instruction in schools,
AND
- require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English.³

QUICK FACTS FOR 2013

- An average of 8% of elementary and 4% of secondary school students are English Language Learners (ELL).
- In secondary school, there is an average of 47 ELL students for each ESL teacher, and in elementary school there is an average of 73 ELL students for each ESL teacher.
- 24% of elementary students per school in French-language boards are in language support programs.
- 23% of elementary and 13% of secondary schools with 10 or more ELLs, have no specialist ESL teacher.

PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT = PROFICIENCY IN ACADEMIC ENGLISH

ELL educational support is intended to assist students in developing not only basic conversational skills, but the 'academic' English needed to write essays, standardized tests and other forms of school work—in other words, the language and literacy skills needed for academic success in school.⁴

Not all students become proficient in English at the same rate. It takes, on average, five to seven years, and sometimes longer, to develop proficiency in academic English.⁵

Students who are learning English for the first time, but who have had some formal schooling in their first language, tend to acquire English faster than students without reading or writing proficiency in a first language.⁶

MOST ONTARIO SCHOOLS HAVE ELL STUDENTS

Across Ontario, 72% of English elementary schools and 55% of secondary schools have English Language Learners (or English as a Second Language, English Language Development students).

In 2013:

- on average, 8% of students in elementary schools and 4% of students in secondary schools are identified as ELLs, a number that has remained relatively stable over the last decade.
- in some schools, the percentage of ELL students is as high as 92%.
- 36% of elementary and secondary schools have ESL/ELD teachers.
- the average ratio of ESL/ELD teachers to ELL students is 1:73 in elementary schools and 1:47 in secondary schools.
- in elementary schools with 10 or more identified ELL students, 77% have an ESL/ELD teacher, but in most schools they are part-time.
- in secondary schools with 10 or more identified ELL students, 86% have an ESL/ELD teacher, and in most schools they are full-time.

FRENCH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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. Because many of these children grow up in English communities, a much higher proportion require language support, which they get through Actualisation linguistique en français or Perfectionnement du français (ALF/PDF) programs.

- On average, 24% of elementary students per school in French-language boards are in ALF/PDF programs.
- 80% of elementary schools in French-language boards have students who require ALF/PDF support.

FUNDING DOES NOT MATCH NEED

In Ontario, funding to support language acquisition is provided to school boards in three ways:

- for “recent immigrants” from non-English or French-speaking countries, on a sliding scale for up to four years;
- for “pupils in Canada” who speak neither English nor French at home; and
- for ALF/PDF students, the percentage of children requiring “assimilation” support.⁷

There is a disconnect between Ontario’s ELL policy and how ELL is funded. The policy says that students should receive support until they have acquired the English or French skills needed to succeed academically. Yet the funding is based solely on students’ years in Canada and Census data on recent immigration. Funding is *not* based on students’ language proficiency.

A number of principals say that due to insufficient funding, not all eligible students receive ESL/ELD support—in some schools, support is only provided for recent immigrants, and only for basic ‘survival’ communication skills.

In order to deal with lack of funding, ESL intervention begins in Grade 1, and only if the child is born outside of Canada.

Principal, Elementary School, York Catholic DSB

One principal whose school has 200 ELL students says, “We are understaffed in ELL. We can only properly service 35 Stage 1 students [English for survival purposes].”⁸

Our ELL population is underserved. Students who qualify for ESL assistance are not receiving it. Despite their best efforts, classroom teachers are not able to address the language needs of these students.

Principal, Elementary School, Toronto DSB

Principals in some schools also say that Aboriginal students are not receiving sufficient ELL support to develop academic English skills, either because they did not qualify for funding (i.e. they spoke English—or a dialect of English—as a first language) or their schools did not have access to ESL/ELD teachers.

It is up to school boards how they spend the funding, and whether they spend all of it on language support. Language funding can be used for other programs and services.

NOTES

- 1 Ontario Ministry of Education (2007). *English language learners, ESL and ELD program and services: Policies and procedures for Ontario elementary and secondary schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. Available from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esl/eldprograms/esl/eldprograms.pdf>
- 2 Ontario Ministry of Education (2007a). *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9-12: English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development, 2007*. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/esl.html>
- 3 Ontario Ministry of Education (2007). *English language learners, ESL and ELD program and services: Policies and procedures for Ontario elementary and secondary schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12*. Available from: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/esl/eldprograms/esl/eldprograms.pdf>.
- 4 Ontario Ministry of Education (2007). *English language learners, ESL and ELD program and services*, see note 75.
- 5 Cummins, J. (2007). *Promoting literacy in multilingual contexts*. Ontario: The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat.
- 6 Ontario Ministry of Education (2007). *English language learners, ESL and ELD program and services*, see note 75.
- 7 Government of Ontario. (2013) Education funding: Technical paper, pp. 39-45. Retrieved May 15, 2013 from http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1314/Technical13_14.pdf.
- 8 Elementary school, York Region DSB



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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RECOMMENDATIONS

Proficiency in English or French is a prerequisite for success in Ontario schools, and effective programs that support students’ acquisition of full academic language skills contribute to long-term well-being and prosperity.

People for Education recommends that the province:

- establish a clear standard for proficiency in English or French that allows students to meet academic requirements;

- develop a new funding model for language support that reflects the goals of the ELL/ALF policy and which is tied to students’ meeting standards for language proficiency; and
- protect funding intended for ELL/ALF so that it may only be spent on the purpose for which it is given.