

Chapter 4

Section 4.07

Ministry of Education

English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development

Follow-up to VFM Section 3.07, *2005 Annual Report*

Background

Each year, Ontario receives an average of approximately 17,000 school-age immigrants who speak little or no English or French. The Ministry of Education (Ministry) provides grants to school boards for English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) programs.

The Ministry's overall goals for ESL/ELD programs are to assist students in developing the English literacy skills they require to achieve success at school, in postsecondary education, and in the workplace on an equal basis with their peers whose first language is English. While school boards are responsible for designing and implementing the programs and services needed to achieve these goals, the Ministry is ultimately accountable for the quality of the education system.

In 2006/07, the Ministry provided school boards with \$219 million in ESL and ELD grants (\$225 million in 2004/05). In our *2005 Annual Report*, we noted that there was a lack of oversight of ESL/ELD program delivery. In particular, the Ministry had no information about whether

students whose first language is not English were achieving appropriate proficiency in English. In addition, the Ministry had no information on how much school boards were actually spending on ESL/ELD programs. One board we visited indicated that more than half of its ESL/ELD funding was spent in other areas.

The considerable discretion that school boards and in some cases individual schools have with respect to ESL/ELD programs increases the risks of students with similar needs receiving different levels of assistance. In addition, the lack of a centrally co-ordinated process to develop ongoing training programs for teachers and various instructional aids results in under-investment and possible duplication of effort.

We also found that:

- The Ministry had not established a measurable English-proficiency standard that ESL/ELD students should attain before ESL/ELD services are discontinued. Some teachers we interviewed were concerned that services were discontinued prematurely due to budget considerations.
- There was a lack of tools to help teachers properly assess students' progress in achieving

English proficiency and determine whether additional assistance was needed.

- The Ministry had supplied little guidance on implementing its recommendation that teachers modify the standard curriculum expectations for, and provide accommodations (for example, extra time on tests) to, ESL/ELD students. The lack of guidance had resulted in inconsistent practices. In addition, the lack of documentation on accommodations provided meant that parents, principals, and school boards could not evaluate the appropriateness of the modifications and accommodations or their impact on marks.
- The Ministry was not ensuring that the ESL/ELD funding policy targeted students most in need of assistance, which may have resulted in inequitable funding allocations among school boards.

In 2004, the government established the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. The Secretariat specifically identified ESL students as a group that continues to struggle. In its May 2005 strategy document, the Secretariat stated that its key purposes include strengthening the focus on literacy and numeracy, and sharing successful practices among schools and districts. Each of these directly relates to the concerns noted during our audit.

We made a number of recommendations for improvement and received commitments from the Ministry that it would take action to address our concerns.

Current Status of Recommendations

According to information obtained from the Ministry of Education, progress has been made in addressing all of our recommendations, with significant progress being made on several. Recent

provincial testing results indicate that the achievement gap between English language learners and other students is narrowing. However, it will take a number of years of monitoring outcomes for English language learners before the full impact of actions taken and under way can be determined. The current status of action taken on each recommendation is as follows.

TEACHER TRAINING AND INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS

Recommendation

To help ensure that English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) students benefit from appropriate instructional practices and aids, the Ministry should:

- *work with school boards to determine and provide the minimum training that teachers require to work effectively in schools with significant numbers of ESL/ELD students; and*
- *co-ordinate the evaluation of, and where necessary the development of, courses for teachers, and instructional aids such as exemplars and ESL/ELD educational software.*

Current Status

The Ministry informed us that it had developed a policy for kindergarten to grade 12 (K–12) that specifies the knowledge and skill sets that teachers in schools with English language learners must have, as well as the Ministry's expectations and requirements of school boards with respect to the delivery of programs and services to support English language learners. In late 2006, the Ministry held meetings with over 350 educators to discuss the implementation of the draft policy. The policy was also reviewed with over 50 education stakeholders to ensure that it meets current needs and can be successfully implemented. Implementation of the policy was scheduled to begin in September 2007, and a provincial symposium to support implementation was scheduled for December 2007.

The Ministry also advised us that the policy and a new resource—*Many Roots, Many Voices: Supporting English language learners in every classroom—A practical guide for Ontario educators*—were used to develop training materials that provide direction on how to best meet the needs of English language learners. In spring 2007, training was provided during the discussions on the implementation of the policy and through two publicly available webcasts titled Teaching and Learning in Multilingual Ontario and Differentiated Instruction. The Ministry also indicated that it had been making presentations at educational conferences and meetings.

According to the Ministry, over 1,000 educators had received training by the above means, and teachers had indicated that they found the *Many Roots, Many Voices* guide readable and helpful. At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry was planning to train an additional 10,000 educators—including 8,000 teachers-in-training—by mid-2008.

With respect to instructional aids such as exemplars (that is, models or standards) and software, the Ministry indicated the following:

- It was identifying existing resources and would define resource needs to ensure that the most effective resources would be developed.
- A revised ESL/ELD curriculum for grades 9 to 12 had been released for implementation beginning in September 2007.
- Two additional resources were being developed, to be titled *Supporting English Language Learners in Kindergarten* and *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling*. Implementation and training for their use was scheduled to begin in fall 2007.
- An assessment tool and guideline titled *Steps to English Proficiency (STEP)* had been developed. *STEP* is to provide the required information for setting benchmarks for assessing English proficiency. *STEP* was piloted in a select number of boards across the province

in winter 2007, and final revisions were made on the basis of the feedback from the pilot. A two-year validation process for *STEP* was to begin in fall 2007; following the validation and an analysis of the research component of the validation, revisions are to be made to *STEP* before it is distributed to the system beginning in the 2009/10 school year.

MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS

Initial Assessments

Recommendation

The Ministry should determine whether the benefits of teachers having a clear starting point from which to monitor progress are sufficient to justify the cost of more thoroughly assessing the first-language literacy and academic standing of new English-as-a-Second-Language and English-Literacy-Development students.

Current Status

The Ministry advised us that it had determined that the overall benefits of teachers having a clear starting point from which to monitor progress does justify thoroughly assessing first-language literacy and academic standing. At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry had conducted research on best practices and procedures for such assessment, including benchmarks, indicators, and standards. The results of this research were used to inform the development of the K–12 policy implemented in schools beginning September 2007. The documents consulted and prepared by the Ministry as part of its research included:

- a 2005 report by the University of Ottawa Faculty of Education research team titled *Emergent Themes in ESL Learning, Literacy and Curriculum Reform*, which confirmed the value of initially assessing English language learners;

- a December 2005 report prepared within the Ministry titled *Praxis Revisited: Second language learning in Ontario's elementary school system*, which includes research on the assessment of first-language proficiency, English language proficiency, and academic standing;
- a May 2005 ministry report on the initial ESL/ELD consultation, which includes information on the value of initially assessing English language learners; and
- a February 2006 report prepared within the Ministry titled *English language learners benchmark project*, which focuses on ways in which to improve successful outcomes for English language learners, a primary one being initially assessing their English language proficiency.

The Ministry also highlighted major themes that arose in implementation discussions with 384 educators across the province from October 11 through November 2, 2006.

Ongoing Assessments

Recommendation

To help ensure that decisions about the types and amount of services and supports provided to English-as-a-Second-Language and English-Literacy-Development students are based on proper monitoring of their progress, the Ministry should develop tools that teachers can use to periodically measure students' English proficiency and benchmarks against which they can compare each student's progress.

Current Status

The Ministry indicated that it had developed *Steps to English Proficiency (STEP)*, which includes scales for assessing and tracking the development of English language proficiency among English language learners. *STEP* includes monitoring tools, assessment materials to support those tools, and guidelines for initial and ongoing assessment. The validation of *STEP* will enable the Ministry to establish benchmarks for developing English language

proficiency, which will include recommended timelines for moving from one step to the next in the *STEP* program and which will identify appropriate points for participation in Education Quality and Accountability Office tests.

Documenting Monitoring Activities

Recommendation

To help ensure that Ontario Student Records (Records) contain the information required to enable the next year's teachers to assess the needs of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) students so that the appropriate level of assistance can be provided, the Ministry should:

- *require that schools file summaries of monitoring activities regarding the progress of ESL/ELD students in acquiring English in the Records;*
- *and*
- *clarify what it expects in the monitoring of students' social integration.*

Current Status

The Ministry indicated that it had developed a K–12 policy for English language learners with respect to ESL and ELD programs and services, which includes direction for monitoring and tracking student progress and filing the results in the students' Ontario Student Records.

The policy sets out requirements for monitoring, tracking, and recording student progress for kindergarten to grade 12. In support of this policy, the Ministry had begun work to determine what data should be collected for more effective monitoring and tracking. In addition, the Ministry was planning to provide selected schools with the *STEP* tool for validation beginning in fall 2007.

The Ministry indicated that, as a result of discussions within the Ministry and with stakeholders, the policy removed the expectation that schools will monitor social integration. The Ministry also indicated, however, that it will be able to identify issues relating to social integration through the

analysis of the data collected and information provided through Board Improvement Plans and/or Student Success/Learning to 18 Action Plans.

When to Discontinue Services

Recommendation

To help ensure that services to English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) students are not discontinued prematurely, the Ministry should establish measurable English-proficiency standards that ESL/ELD students must attain before boards can discontinue ESL/ELD services to them.

Current Status

The new K–12 policy states that “English language learners should receive ESL/ELD program support until they have acquired the level of proficiency required to learn effectively in English with no ESL/ELD support.” The Ministry indicated that the decision to discontinue ESL/ELD support is made by the principal in consultation with the student, the parents, and ESL/ELD and classroom teachers. The Ministry also indicated that the resources *Supporting English Language Learners in Kindergarten* and *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling*, both of which were to be available in fall 2007, as well as the revised *Grades 1–8 Resource Guide* (expected to be available in September 2008) and the revised grades 9–12 ESL and ELD curriculum (which was available to schools in September 2007), would also provide guidance on the appropriate time to discontinue programs and services.

Reporting on Student Performance

Recommendation

To help ensure that the progress of English-as-a-Second-Language and English-Literacy-Development students is properly reported, the Ministry should work with school boards to ensure that report cards include information on the extent, if any, to which

curriculum expectations have been modified and the types of accommodations students received.

Current Status

The Ministry indicated that its K–12 policy contains revised reporting expectations, clarifying that when learning expectations are modified for English language learners, evaluation will be based on the documented modified expectations, and this will be noted on the report card and explained to parents. The Ministry also indicated that it was working with school boards to identify potential changes to the report-card format that will ensure more effective reporting to parents.

ASSESSING PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Recommendation

To help ensure that the Ministry and school boards can identify which English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) services and supports are the most effective and economical in meeting student needs, the Ministry should:

- *require that school boards collect and report the information necessary to relate student progress and outcomes to the type, amount, and cost of the ESL/ELD services and supports they received;*
- *co-ordinate and facilitate efforts to identify and promote best practices, and evaluate the need for, and benefits of, additional services and supports; and*
- *monitor the outcomes for ESL/ELD students, such as graduation rates and progress after graduation.*

Current Status

The Ministry indicated that its English language learner policy requires that school boards collect and report the information necessary to relate student progress and outcomes to ESL/ELD services and supports. The Ministry also indicated that, in addition, the policy is to:

- provide criteria for identifying English language learners;
- describe procedures for data collection to enable the Ministry to track these students as a group and analyze their progress relative to various program delivery models; and
- provide feedback to school boards on the most effective programs and approaches at various stages of development of English language proficiency.

Research done as of the time of our follow-up had identified a number of best practices that were already reflected in policy, resources, and training. Research is to continue to be a component of all resource development and professional training.

With respect to evaluating the need for, and benefits of, additional services and supports, the Ministry advised us that discussions with school boards on the implementation of the K–12 policy (which began in September 2006) had identified potential additional needs and that the analysis of School Improvement Plans and Student Success/Learning to 18 Action Plans would provide the Ministry with information as to whether or not additional services and supports are required.

At the time of our follow-up, the following steps had been taken to help ensure that student outcomes were being monitored:

- The Ministry's K–12 policy now includes requirements for monitoring the outcomes of English language learners.
- The Ministry had begun work with the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) to determine data-collection needs and facilitate collection of data that will support effective monitoring of outcomes.
- The English language learner team was continuously reviewing other ministry initiatives to identify opportunities to improve the monitoring of outcomes.

The Ministry advised us that members of its English language learner team were helping the Ministry develop strategies for monitoring student

outcomes and were participating in ministry outcome-monitoring initiatives such as OnSIS, the analysis of Education Quality and Accountability Office data undertaken by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, and the analysis of Board Improvement Plans and/or Student Success/Learning to 18 Action Plans.

ENSURING QUALITY PROGRAM DELIVERY BY SCHOOLS

Recommendation

To help ensure that schools appropriately deliver services for English-as-a-Second-Language and English-Literacy-Development students, the Ministry should require that boards establish quality-assurance processes that review and assess each school's compliance with ministry and board policies.

Current Status

The Ministry indicated it would require that school boards establish quality-assurance processes as recommended. The Ministry's K–12 policy for English language learners addresses quality assurance through requirements for board reporting on the delivery of ESL/ELD programs and services. An analysis of information provided through Board Improvement Plans and Student Success/Learning to 18 Action Plans, along with data collected through the *STEP* validation and ongoing discussions with school boards, will enable the Ministry to measure student improvement, identify successes, and evaluate school and board compliance with policy requirements.

MEETING MID-YEAR AND REFUGEE STUDENT NEEDS

Recommendation

To help ensure that English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) programs address the needs of all ESL/ELD students, the Ministry should:

- assess the benefits to students who arrive late in the school year or semester of programs that provide intensive training in English until the beginning of the next term or semester; and
- consider working with Citizenship and Immigration Canada to develop more effective programs for high-needs refugee students.

Current Status

At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry indicated that it had undertaken a number of initiatives to address the needs of mid-year and refugee students, including:

- developing policy in this regard that is supported by research on the needs of refugee students, discussions with educational partners and relevant immigration authorities, and the *STEP* tool, which includes the appropriate training of teachers;
- developing and distributing the document *Many Roots, Many Voices*, with training of an initial 650 teachers to begin the dissemination of information on strategies to support English language learners, including mid-year and refugee students (an additional 5,000 teacher candidates were scheduled to be trained by fall 2008);
- consulting Ontario's Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration with plans for joint initiatives to provide social and educational support for English language learners who are refugees;
- working with Citizenship and Immigration Canada staff to identify potential areas for collaboration and to share information that will support the social integration and school success of English language learners, including those who are refugees; and
- developing and training to support the 2007 release of *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling*, which

directly addresses the needs of refugee students.

FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Recommendation

To better ensure that both the amount and the allocation of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) funding is appropriate and commensurate with students' needs, the Ministry should:

- determine whether funding, instead of treating all students in each board similarly, should take into account the percentage of high-needs students in a board;
- review the grant for Canadian-born English-language learners to determine whether the age group of students that it targets is appropriate; and
- require that school boards report their expenditures on ESL/ELD programs and, where significant portions of the ESL/ELD grants are reallocated to other programs, determine what impact this has had on the ESL and ELD students in that board.

Current Status

At the time of our follow-up, the Ministry indicated that it had started a review of ESL funding policies—both the general grant and the grant for Canadian-born English language learners. With respect to the third point of the recommendation, the Ministry had introduced program reporting, which, when fully implemented, will require that school boards report how funding for ESL is being used. The Ministry indicated that this would allow it to determine how much ESL/ELD funding is being used for its intended purpose and in turn be in a position to relate this to student achievement.