

language support for newcomer students

Since 1999/00, there has been a 60% increase in the percentage of schools that have English as a Second Language (ESL) students but no ESL teacher.

According to Statistics Canada, over 600,000 foreign immigrants moved to Ontario between 2001 and 2006. Over the same period, there has been a 24% increase in the average percentage per school of students requiring ESL support. But there has been no corresponding increase in ESL teachers.

School boards receive funding for English as a Second Language based on two factors: the number of students born in a country where English is not the first or standard language and who have been in Canada for four years or less; and, based on StatsCan data, the number of children in the area whose language spoken most often at home is neither English nor French. Boards are not required to spend their ESL funding on ESL programs.

2007 survey results:

- ❑ 53% of elementary schools with ESL students have no ESL teacher, an increase from 33% in 1999/00.
- ❑ 27% of secondary schools with ESL students have no ESL teacher, an increase from 18% in 2003/04.
- ❑ There has been a 29% increase since 2000 in the percentage of elementary schools with ESL students. Over the same period, the percentage with ESL teachers declined 23%.

ESL funding not reaching students

Though the federal government is responsible for immigration, provincial governments are responsible for the education of newcomer students. In the last two years, funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) and French second language programs has increased slightly but, despite repeated recommendations from the Provincial Auditor, community organizations and parent groups, the province has not changed its ESL funding practices to ensure that the funding reaches the ESL students who need it.

Funding gap and ESL services

There is a significant gap between the amount the province provides to boards to maintain their school buildings and the actual cost of that maintenance. As a result, many boards “rob Peter to pay Paul” – removing funding from programs such as ESL to cover their core costs.

Schools in the GTA hit hardest

In schools with higher ESL populations (more than 10 ESL students) the percentage reporting ESL students but no ESL teacher has doubled since 2000.

Greater Toronto Area (GTA) schools account for 77% of the ESL students in the province. In the GTA, 90% of elementary schools report they have ESL students, while only 54% report they have ESL teachers.

On average, 13% of the students in GTA schools require ESL support, but in some schools the proportion is as high as 60%. One school in Toronto reported they had no staffing allocation for ESL despite the fact that 25% of their student population did not speak English as their first language.

New ESL policy needed

Currently, ESL students are “demitted” from ESL programs when the funding runs out. In 2005, the provincial Auditor called for an end to this practice, and recommended that every ESL student continue to receive support until he or she has achieved a standard level of English proficiency.

The auditor also recommended differentiated funding to recognize the difference between refugee students needing substantial literacy support and ESL students who have strong literacy skills and only require support to learn the language.

Q. How can the federal and provincial governments work together to ensure that all ESL students receive the support they need to master the English language?

what schools told us...

“Thirty of our students are getting ¼ to ½ day of service, but our board’s formula does not reflect the 85-90% of our kids who start school in kindergarten with no English at all, even though they were born here. About 70% of our students go home and speak a language other than English.”

An elementary school in Toronto DSB

“ESL staff now work with students only for initial assessment and observation – then they work with classroom teachers on a consulting basis.”

An elementary school in Waterloo DSB

“The number of ESL students increases every year, and every year there is less support available.”

An elementary school in Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB

“Our students continue to be adversely affected by the lack of ESL support. Up to half the students have ESL needs that don't necessarily qualify under official rules.”

An elementary school in Toronto DSB

