

# English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development

## Background

Since 2000, Ontario has received an average of approximately 128,000 immigrants each year. About 57,000 of them speak little or no English or French, and as illustrated in Figure 1, about 17,000 of them are of school age.

Most immigrants to Ontario settle in the Greater Toronto Area or other large urban centres. As a result, 10 of the province's 60 English school boards account for 86% of the grants provided by the Ministry of Education (Ministry) for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD), as illustrated in Figure 2.

Ministry curriculum documents describe ESL students as those who enter Ontario schools with little or no previous knowledge of English but who have received schooling in their home countries and have age-appropriate literacy skills in their first language. ESL students in junior grades may also be Canadian-born children with limited proficiency in English because they are from homes and/or neighbourhoods where English is not widely used.

The curriculum documents describe ELD students as those who not only have little knowledge of English but also enter Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education because they have

had only limited access to schooling in their home countries. Unlike their ESL counterparts, ELD students do not have age-appropriate literacy skills in their first language.

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.

ESL and ELD grants to school boards have risen from \$154 million to \$225 million over the last five years, as illustrated in Figure 3.

The Ministry provides school boards with specific funding for ESL/ELD services but does not require them to actually spend the grants on delivering ESL/ELD services. Boards have the right to reallocate the funds to other programs.

**Figure 1: Non-English/French-speaking Immigrants (Permanent Residents) to Ontario, 2000–04**

Source of data: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Age	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	5-year Average
0–4 years	7,965	9,741	8,993	7,471	7,447	8,323
5–13 years (school age)	12,581	13,507	12,609	10,039	9,583	11,664
14–19 years (school age)	5,728	6,060	5,705	4,803	4,569	5,373
over 19 years	31,185	36,509	34,200	30,788	24,671	31,471
<b>Total</b>	<b>57,459</b>	<b>65,817</b>	<b>61,507</b>	<b>53,101</b>	<b>46,270</b>	<b>56,831</b>

## Audit Objective and Scope

The objective of our audit of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) grants to school boards was to assess whether the Ministry had adequate procedures in place to:

- ensure that students whose first language is not English are provided with the programs and services they require in a cost-effective manner; and
- measure and report on the effectiveness of ESL/ELD programs and, where necessary, ensure that appropriate corrective action is implemented.

Our audit was conducted in accordance with professional standards for assurance engagements, encompassing value for money and compliance, established by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants, and accordingly included such tests and procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances. The criteria used to conclude on our audit objective were agreed to by senior Ministry management.

Most of our work was conducted at the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, the Toronto District School Board, and the York Region District School Board. We interviewed appropriate ministry staff, and the ESL co-ordinator or vice-principal at each of the three boards. At the school level, we interviewed principals, ESL teachers, classroom teachers, and secondary-school ESL students. We

also examined a sample of Ontario Student Records (Records) of students who immigrated to Canada from non-English-speaking countries in order to assess the adequacy of service and performance information maintained by schools for each student.

In addition, we researched practices in other jurisdictions, spoke with participants at a conference of Ontario ESL teachers and co-ordinators, and met with faculty members at two universities who have expertise in this area.

**Figure 2: ESL and ELD Grants by English-language School Board, 2004/05**

Source of data: Ministry of Education

District School Board	ESL/ELD Grant (\$ million)	ESL Grant for Cdn-born Students (\$ million)	Total (\$ million)
Toronto	79.0	9.0	88.0
Peel	30.3	2.0	32.3
Toronto Catholic	15.4	3.8	19.2
York Region	11.9	1.1	13.0
Dufferin-Peel Catholic	10.7	1.6	12.3
Ottawa-Carleton	7.2	1.0	8.2
Hamilton-Wentworth	5.2	0.7	5.9
Waterloo Region	4.7	0.8	5.5
Thames Valley	4.7	0.7	5.4
Greater Essex County	3.6	0.4	4.0
other boards	26.3	4.8	31.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>199.0</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>224.9</b>

**Figure 3: ESL and ELD Grants to English-language School Boards, 2000/01–2004/05**

Source of data: Ministry of Education

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05
ESL/ELD grants (\$ million)	132	152	159	163	199
ESL grants for Canadian-born students (\$ million)	22	22	22	23	26
<b>Total (\$ million)</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>181</b>	<b>186</b>	<b>225</b>
# of ESL/ELD students funded	72,684	80,949	87,124	84,875	103,667
# of Canadian-born ESL students funded <sup>1</sup>	137,985	137,985	137,985	137,985	137,985

1. This number is based on the 1996 Census.

The Ministry's Internal Audit Services Branch had not done any recent work that allowed us to reduce the scope of our work.

## Summary

We found that while the Ministry provides school boards with approximately \$225 million a year of English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) and English-Literacy-Development (ELD) grants, it 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. Information we received from one board indicated that more than half of its ESL/ELD funding was spent on other areas.

This lack of oversight of ESL/ELD program delivery resulted in some concerns similar to those raised in our 1993 audit report on Curriculum Development. Specifically, 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 being provided with different levels of assistance depending on which school or board is delivering the program. In addition, the lack of a centrally coordinated process to develop ongoing training programs for teachers and various instructional aids

results in under-investment in these areas and may lead to some duplication of effort by school boards.

In particular, we 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 to ESL/ELD students were discontinued prematurely due to budget considerations.
- There was a lack of tools to help teachers to properly assess the starting point and progress of students in achieving English proficiency and to determine whether additional assistance was needed.
- Although the Ministry has recommended that teachers modify the standard curriculum expectations for, and provide accommodations (for example, extra time on tests) to, ESL/ELD students, it did not provide much guidance on how to adapt the standard curriculum expectations for students who are learning English. The lack of guidance has resulted in inconsistent practices.
- Neither report cards nor student records had sufficient information about modifications to standard expectations or accommodations provided to ESL/ELD students. As a result, parents, principals, and school boards were not in a position to 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 (Secretariat), stating that “every Ontario student needs to read, write, do math and comprehend at a high level by age 12.” The Secretariat specifically identified ESL students as a group that continues to struggle. In its May 2005 strategy document, the Secretariat states 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.

## Detailed Audit Observations

### TEACHER TRAINING AND INSTRUCTIONAL AIDS

To become an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) specialist, Ontario teachers must complete a three-part program accredited by the Ontario College of Teachers that enables them to “develop a deep understanding of second language acquisition theories and classroom teaching methodology.” Teachers are considered to be certified ESL teachers if,

at a minimum, they have completed Part I of the three-part program. ESL specialists we interviewed said that all ESL teachers should complete the specialist program.

ESL teachers at the elementary-school level typically work with students who are at the early stages of learning English by withdrawing them from their regular class for part of the day for instruction. At the schools we visited, students were usually withdrawn from classes where language-intensive subjects, such as history, were being taught. Students were left in their regular classes for subjects such as mathematics. At the boards we visited, students who started school with little knowledge of English were usually fully integrated after receiving three years of ESL/ELD services.

Aids available to teachers include a resource guide for ESL/ELD programs for students in grades 1 through 8, published by the Ministry in 2001. While the resource guide does not set out specific courses, it does provide school boards and teachers with suggestions regarding the delivery of ESL/ELD programs. The resource guide also describes four stages of second-language acquisition and literacy development, summarized in Figure 4.

For the secondary-school level, the Ministry published in 1999 a curriculum document setting out five ESL courses and four ELD courses for students at varying levels of proficiency in English. The

**Figure 4: Stages of Second-language Acquisition and Literacy Development**

Source of data: Ministry of Education

Stage	ESL	ELD
1	English is used for survival purposes.	Standard Canadian English has begun to be used appropriately.
2	English is used in supported and familiar activities and contexts.	Standard Canadian English is used in supported and familiar activities and contexts.
3	English is used independently in most contexts.	Standard Canadian English is used accurately and correctly in most contexts.
4	English is used with a proficiency approaching that of first-language speakers of English.	Grade-appropriate reading and writing skills are demonstrated.

fifth ESL and fourth ELD courses are intended to prepare students for grade 11 English. Students can substitute ESL/ELD courses for up to three of the four compulsory credits in English. The remaining credit must be grade 11 or 12 English.

These ministry documents note that students usually take five to seven years to become fluent in English. Thus, most students who have been fully integrated after receiving three years of ESL/ELD instruction would still benefit from specialized instructional strategies and techniques. However, there are no minimum ESL/ELD training requirements for regular classroom teachers with a significant number of ESL students. We were told that as a result, many ESL/ELD students have teachers who lack the training required to implement appropriate instructional techniques and strategies.

Classroom teachers we interviewed said that they needed practical training that focused, for example, on appropriate modifications to curriculum expectations for students at the various stages of proficiency in English and on the level of difficulty of homework that should be assigned, taking into account the parents' inability to help in many cases.

Teachers also said that there was a need for exemplars (examples of graded assignments for students at various English-proficiency levels) to assist them in assessing ESL/ELD students' work. Although the Ministry developed exemplars for the regular curriculum and for the ESL and ELD secondary-school courses, it had not done so for ESL/ELD students who are working towards modified expectations.

With respect to instructional aids, teachers at the boards we visited told us that ESL/ELD students would benefit from an increased number of age-appropriate, high-interest, low-vocabulary books (sometimes referred to as picture books) so that they could improve their English proficiency through pleasure reading. They also mentioned that it would be helpful to have bilingual dictionaries in more languages, as well as age-appropriate

visual dictionaries that use pictures and diagrams to explain the meaning of words.

The Ministry's resource guide states that "all areas of a student's English-language development can be enhanced through the use of interactive software programs (such as word-processing programs with capabilities for checking grammar and spelling, graphics programs, desktop publishing simulations, and interactive problem-solving games)." Similarly, the December 2004 Report of the Ministry's Expert Panel on Literacy in grades 4 to 6 recommended the use of "translation programs, electronic dictionaries, and other technological tools that can help students acquire access to the language of academic texts and build bridges from one language to another." Educators at the boards we visited advised us that they did not make extensive use of such software and did not have the resources to evaluate software products and other instructional aids.

Educators also indicated that schools have common needs with respect to both ESL/ELD training for classroom teachers and instructional aids. One of the boards we visited had independently developed some training courses and exemplars for use by its teachers. However, rather than having each board develop these items independently, it would be more economical for the Ministry to do so on behalf of all school boards. Formal ministry involvement could also help ensure that training courses and instructional aids were of high quality and developed on a timely basis. Similarly, ministry involvement in evaluating available software products and other instructional aids would be more cost effective than separate evaluations undertaken independently by individual boards.

### 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.

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry agrees that all students benefit from appropriate instructional practice and support.

The Ministry is currently developing a comprehensive K-12 policy for students who are learning English. The Ministry is also in the process of creating resource materials and professional development programs that will support teachers and schools in their work with these students.

## MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS

The Ministry's curriculum documents do not set out measurable objectives for ESL/ELD programs. They also lack English-proficiency standards for each age that, if achieved, would provide reliable evidence that ESL/ELD students have met specific objectives.

The approach used in a 2003 Alberta study of grade 10 ESL students could be considered for setting standards and measuring student progress in achieving them. Specifically, this approach included:

- a method for measuring reading comprehension through tests, which enabled researchers to examine ESL students at a clearly defined starting point relative to their English-speaking

age peers and measure their subsequent progress;

- a measurable objective, which was to help ESL students who started grade 10 at the 15th percentile in English reading comprehension reach the 65th percentile, the point at which they would be deemed capable of managing post-secondary education; and
- a defined period of time to achieve this objective—five semesters.

As discussed in the sections that follow, standards and related assessment tools would help educators make appropriate decisions about when to discontinue services to ESL/ELD students, monitor the progress of students in acquiring English, and more objectively report on student performance.

## Initial Assessments

The first assessment of most school-age immigrant students takes place at registration with a school board. The three boards we visited had established reception centres for assessing immigrant students. However, at one board, the centres assessed only secondary students. Students of elementary-school age in that board were registered at their local school.

The reception centres we visited assessed English proficiency using tools developed by an Ontario association of ESL educators. However, we noted that, except for mathematics, the centres did little work on assessing students' academic standing beyond determining the number of years of schooling received before immigrating to Canada. Also, there was no attempt to determine first-language literacy levels. As a result, schools do not have a clear starting point from which to monitor student progress and thereupon determine whether an individual student's poor performance is primarily the result of language difficulties or a weak academic foundation. Educators we spoke to about this issue stated that better information about students on their entry into the school system would be helpful.

## 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.

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry acknowledges the recommendation and has initiated a research program designed to determine additional ways to improve successful outcomes for students who are learning English, to fill some of the existing gaps in Canadian-based research on ESL/ELD programs, and to involve educators in ongoing research initiatives.

The Ministry initiated a formal consultation in May 2005 about the needs of students who are learning English. The Ministry will continue to work with educational partners to identify and review effective procedures for initial assessment of students' first-language skills, language proficiency in English, and academic background.

### Ongoing Assessments

Both of the Ministry's ESL/ELD curriculum documents state that each student's progress in acquiring English should be carefully monitored by teachers until the student has demonstrated a level of proficiency in English similar to that of his or her English-speaking peers. This would enable teachers to offer program changes to students, and provide additional supports as needed. Educators we interviewed agreed that a student's progress is the change from one assessment to the next, and monitoring progress is an evaluation of the adequacy

of this change. Therefore, adequate monitoring of an ESL/ELD student's progress in acquiring English would involve:

1. measuring the student's English proficiency relative to his or her age peers whose first language is English at least annually;
2. quantifying the amount of progress the student made between assessments; and
3. assessing whether the amount of progress made is adequate in the circumstances, documenting this assessment, and making changes to the student's program where necessary.

To perform parts 1 and 2, teachers need tools for measuring the English proficiency of their ESL/ELD students on a periodic basis. Part 3 requires benchmarks for the various ages and proficiency levels at which students start a term or semester, against which teachers can compare each student's progress. Progress at or above the benchmark would indicate that a student is making adequate progress, while progress below the benchmark would indicate that additional assistance may be required. An expert in ESL/ELD education whom we interviewed suggested that a useful benchmark might be the amount of progress achieved at the end of an assessment period by 60% of ESL/ELD students who all entered Ontario's school system at the same age and proficiency level.

However, the Ministry has not developed the necessary assessment tools and benchmarks to enable teachers to measure the progress of ESL/ELD students in acquiring English. Instead, it has been left to individual school boards to determine how, or even whether, to measure English proficiency and to determine what constitutes adequate progress over an assessment period. None of the boards we visited provided teachers with tools designed to measure the amount of progress students made between assessments. Therefore, the information required to monitor the progress of ESL/ELD students in acquiring English was, in essence, not available. Teachers we interviewed

stated that monitoring was informal, but that action would be taken where students were at risk of failing courses due to language problems.

## 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.

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry is committed to maintaining a high-quality education system that ensures success for all students, including students who are still in the process of acquiring English proficiency.

The Ministry will work with educational partners to identify and review effective procedures for ongoing assessment of students' acquisition of English and their academic progress.

### Documenting Monitoring Activities

Schools keep student information in Ontario Student Records (Records), which are permanent official records maintained at the student's current school. A student's Record is sent along with the student when a student transfers to another school. The Ministry requires that Records contain basic registration information, report cards, Ontario Student Transcripts (where applicable), and additional information "conducive to the improvement of the instruction of the student." Such additional information could include the results of teachers' monitoring of the progress of ESL/ELD students in, for example, acquiring English and integrating socially.

In our sample of Records for ESL/ELD students attending the schools we visited, we found little information on student progress in acquiring English and no information on secondary students' social integration. Consequently, these Records would be of little use to next year's teachers in determining whether the student would benefit from program changes or additional supports.

Some Records we examined contained tracking sheets designed to provide a general assessment of students' English proficiency. However, as these forms were not required to be used, they were not routinely completed. Moreover, they were not designed to enable teachers to quantify students' progress from one assessment to the next.

With respect to ESL/ELD students' social integration, we noted that, while the Ministry's secondary-school curriculum document states that schools should monitor social integration, it does not provide examples of what the Ministry expects in this regard or of the benefits to students of social activities. Social interaction with Canadian-born peers not only assists ESL/ELD students in learning English, but also may help prepare them for success in the workplace. Immigrant managers and professionals participating in a 2004 Conference Board of Canada study reported that a "lack of knowledge of Canadian norms and values had been a barrier to realizing their full potential."

## 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.

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

Accountability for monitoring and recording student progress for all students is a ministry priority. The new policy framework for students who are learning English will clearly articulate the Ministry's expectations for monitoring the progress of these students.

The Ministry will consult with educational partners to determine the most effective ways of monitoring/tracking the progress of students who are learning English.

## When to Discontinue Services

A key issue for this type of program is identifying the point at which students no longer require services. The schools we visited generally reduced supports for elementary students after they reached Stage Three, defined (see Figure 4) as the use of English "independently in most contexts." For students who started school at Stage One (the use of English "for survival purposes"), service was typically provided for two or three years. However, a 2002 study of the long-term academic achievement of ESL students in the United States stated that "students with no proficiency in English must NOT be placed in short-term programs of only one to three years ... [T]he minimum length of time it takes to reach grade-level performance in [the] second language is four years."

The study's conclusion was consistent with the views expressed by some educators we interviewed that decisions to reduce or eliminate support after students reach Stage Three were often based on resource limitations rather than sound pedagogy. Although teachers told us that services would be resumed in cases of very poor academic perform-

ance, this practice does not address the needs of students performing below their potential due to marginal English skills, who would benefit from continued service.

Other jurisdictions have recognized the need for a more rigorous basis for determining when to end service. For example, New York State requires its school boards to provide ESL services until students achieve a level of English proficiency defined by the state and measured annually by its English as a Second Language Achievement Tests. In October 2003, the Alberta Commission on Learning recommended that the province "create provincial proficiency standards for assessing [ESL] students ... and provide funding until students reach the standard." The Alberta government responded that it supported this recommendation, and reported in October 2004 that "Alberta Learning [Alberta's Ministry of Education] ... is developing provincial proficiency standards and assessment tools for ESL ... students."

ESL co-ordinators we interviewed agreed with the need for a proficiency standard to support service decisions made for ESL/ELD students. However, concerns were raised that in the absence of additional resources, a requirement to continue providing services to students until they met the standard would simply spread existing resources over more students.

## 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.

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry is in the process of developing a policy that will clarify expectations regarding the kinds of support required to meet the varying needs of students who are learning English.

### Reporting on Student Performance

The Ministry's curriculum documents state that programs should be adapted to allow students in the early stages of learning English, or those at early stages of development in English literacy, to succeed. Adaptations include modifying (reducing) the curriculum's learning expectations for subjects and courses, and providing students with accommodations, such as extra time on tests or permission to use bilingual dictionaries.

*The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1–8: English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development—A Resource Guide, 2001* states that report cards should disclose whether ESL/ELD students are working towards modified expectations. The resource guide also notes that “it is important to ensure that parents of ESL and ELD students understand on what basis a particular mark has been given, and how it relates both to the student's ability to use English and to his or her proficiency in the subject area.” However, the accommodations that students received, and the nature and extent of modifications to the standard curriculum expectations, were not disclosed in report cards at any of the elementary schools we visited.

The Ministry's grades 9–12 ESL and ELD curriculum document states that report cards should clearly indicate whether ESL/ELD students' learning expectations have been modified and what accommodations they received. However, the report cards we reviewed did not disclose whether accommodations were provided or whether learning expectations had been modified. With respect to

modifications, most of the secondary-school teachers and principals we interviewed said that they did not modify curriculum expectations, except in the case of special-needs students. However, some teachers told us that curriculum expectations are modified for ESL/ELD students in congregated classes—classes composed entirely of early-stage ESL/ELD students. Others told us that they were more generous in marking the work of ESL/ELD students. This was not disclosed in report cards or in the Records we reviewed.

As a result, information essential to an accurate picture of how ESL/ELD students are performing relative to their peers whose first language is English is missing from both report cards and Records. Consequently, the appropriateness of the modifications and accommodations provided to each student cannot be evaluated by the board, principals, or parents. Also, since the level of modifications and accommodations provided to students depends solely on the judgment of individual teachers, they may vary significantly for students with similar proficiencies in English in different schools or even within the same school.

The accuracy of assessments of ESL students was questioned in a 1993 study conducted by an Ontario school board. It found “strong evidence to suggest that teacher ratings of ESL students are inflated.” The study also noted that “it is speculated that teachers tend to overrate ESL students for two reasons: (1) they are generous in their perceptions of ESL students and want to give them the benefit of any doubt; and (2) they have not developed sufficient empirical or ‘intuitive’ norms for ESL student achievement, based on the age and length of residence of those students.” Similarly, a study conducted at an Alberta secondary school in 2003 found that many teachers were inclined to give ESL students in English classes “good will marks.”

Our interviews of educators yielded differing views about the benefits of accurately reporting ESL/ELD students' proficiency in English and their

overall performance. Those who opposed the idea were concerned that doing so would undermine the confidence of their students. However, the 2003 Alberta study mentioned earlier described inaccurate reporting as a “benevolent conspiracy ... [that] ultimately produced devastating consequences as reflected in the examination results and subsequent failure in students’ pursuit of postsecondary studies.” A 2004 study of the academic achievement of ESL students at a large Ontario university found that the performance of ESL students was below what their secondary-school marks would have predicted, suggesting that those secondary-school grades did not accurately reflect their achievement. The study noted that “at a very global level, the findings also suggest that in general, ESL students, independent of birth place and length of time in Canada, do not achieve grades comparable to those of Canadian born speakers of English, even though they may have entered the university with similar high school marks.”

We also understand that many Ontario universities are unwilling to rely solely on ESL students’ marks in their English credits for admission purposes. Instead, they require students who have been in Canada for less than three years to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language, even where they have already passed grade 12 English.

Inaccurate assessments and inflated grading of a student’s actual performance can have other drawbacks. For instance, students who would benefit from after-school and summer programs might choose not to participate, mistakenly believing that their marks represent an accurate picture of their 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.

### MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry acknowledges this recommendation, and the policy under development for students who are learning English will provide direction to school boards about documenting and reporting adaptations made to a student’s program.

### ASSESSING PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Assessing the performance of any program involves measuring the extent to which intended outcomes were achieved and determining whether the costs incurred were reasonable. As discussed in the sections that follow, neither the Ministry nor the school boards we visited had established processes for collecting the information on costs, services provided, and student outcomes required to assess the results achieved by their ESL/ELD programs.

The boards we visited also had no information about the effectiveness of the various services offered with respect to outcomes, such as graduation rates, or about the relative cost effectiveness of each type of service. As a result, these boards had no basis for determining which service alternatives produce the best student outcomes at the most reasonable cost and therefore no ability to determine best practices that could be shared with other school boards, including practices that help students learn English more quickly.

### Learning English More Quickly

Both the Ministry’s secondary-school curriculum document and a 2002 U.S. study note that time is a factor for students who arrive at later elementary grades or secondary school. The curriculum

document states that “students who arrive as beginning learners of English during their secondary-school years may not have enough time to catch up with their peers by the end of Grade 12.” The U.S. study found that for students whose academic performance is at grade level in their first language when they arrive, learning enough English to do grade-level work again “is equivalent to interrupting their schooling for one or two years.” As a result, they “have to make more gains than the average native-English speaker makes every year for several years in a row to eventually catch up to grade level, a very difficult task to accomplish.”

Some schools we visited that received large numbers of students with no knowledge of English took steps to help these students progress more quickly by increasing the amount of instruction provided by teachers with ESL training. For example:

- Two elementary schools provided more instruction by ESL teachers in withdrawal classes during students’ initial months before placing them in regular classes for most subjects. One school had full-day withdrawal classes for students in grades 7 and 8, while the other had half-day withdrawal classes for all grades.
- Several secondary schools had congregated classes in various subjects for early-stage ESL students with instruction by ESL teachers. One board had a small (275 students) secondary school composed entirely of early-stage ESL students, and all teachers at this school were certified ESL teachers. Students could enrol in the school for up to three semesters.

However, the impact of these and other service alternatives on English-acquisition times had not been evaluated by either the boards we visited or the Ministry. As a result, it is not clear which practices achieve the best results for similar types of students.

## Ministry Monitoring

The Ministry did not collect from school boards the information required to determine whether the ESL/ELD programs for which it provides \$225 million a year in grants were meeting its goals.

For example, the Ministry had not compared the outcomes for students who received ESL/ELD services in elementary or secondary school to that of English-as-a-first-language students. Relevant comparisons include the percentage of students who graduated, and who subsequently earned a college diploma or university degree, or successfully completed an apprenticeship program.

Researchers who examined the dropout rate of ESL students who started grade 9 between 1989 and 1997 at an Alberta secondary school found that the rate was much higher than that of students whose first language is English. The researchers tracked the students according to their placement in the ESL program as beginner, intermediate, or advanced, upon entry into secondary school. They reported that the dropout rate ranged from over 90% for students at the beginner stage of English proficiency to about 50% for those at the advanced stage, with an overall average of 74%. The educators we interviewed felt that Ontario’s rates would be significantly lower than these, but a majority agreed that the dropout rate for ESL students would be higher than that of English-as-a-first-language students.

We did not find any research comparing the graduation rates of ESL/ELD students who are accepted by colleges and universities to those of English-as-a-first-language students. However, a follow-up on the previously mentioned 2004 study at a large Ontario university found that “even if they were born in Canada or immigrated at an early age, the university grades of ESL students are lower than those of native-born speakers of English after adjustments have been made for factors such as levels of prior achievement, social class, and faculty of enrolment.”

Information on the performance of ESL/ELD programs at each school board would enable the Ministry to identify the practices underlying cases of sustained high/poor performance and work with school boards to promote best—and, where necessary, correct poor—practices. It would also enable the Ministry to determine whether additional services should be provided to ESL/ELD students and, if so, evaluate them through pilot testing. For example, the value of summer programs and ESL services in kindergarten could be examined.

We noted that the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat stated in its May 2005 strategy document that “the opportunity to develop a high level of literacy is contained within a narrow window of a child’s life. Children who, by the age of eight, have not learned fundamental literacy may struggle throughout the rest of their schooling. They are therefore placed at an increased risk of not completing their education successfully.”

## 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.

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry agrees that it is important to track the progress of students who are learning English in order to ensure that school programs are providing the required support.

The policy being developed will consider (1) providing criteria for identifying English-language learners, (2) describing procedures for data collection to enable tracking these students as a group, and (3) using this information to identify the most effective programs and approaches.

## ENSURING QUALITY PROGRAM DELIVERY BY SCHOOLS

Merely establishing policies for the delivery of services and supports to ESL/ELD students does not ensure that the policies are implemented. Consequently, there is a need to verify that schools are delivering these services and supports in an appropriate manner. However, none of the boards we visited had established quality-assurance processes to examine and report on each school’s delivery of ESL/ELD programs. Such examinations would also include the accuracy of any program performance data collected in future.

For example, board personnel did not visit schools to verify that students’ progress in acquiring English was properly monitored and that their report cards were properly completed. Nor were efforts made to ensure that ESL/ELD students received appropriate feedback on their tests and assignments. A ministry document states that information “on areas in need of improvement is more helpful when the specific category of knowledge or skills is identified and specific suggestions are provided than when they receive only an overall mark or general comments.”

When asked about ways in which ESL programs might be improved, some secondary students we interviewed mentioned the lack of feedback about mistakes in their assignments, and stressed the importance of understanding their mistakes in order to avoid such errors in future.

None of the principals we interviewed had been evaluated by their superintendents on their school's ESL/ELD programs. At one board, there was no mention of ESL/ELD programs in the improvement plans of any of the schools we visited, and even where mentioned at the other boards, we saw few examples of initiatives where the impact on student progress or outcomes could be measured. We noted that the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat said in its May 2005 strategy document that it would ensure that school boards' plans specifically address the strategies they will use to bring about equity of outcomes for designated groups.

### 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.

### MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry agrees and, building on the May 2005 consultation, will work with school-board leaders to enhance quality-assurance processes related to policy for programming and services for students who are learning English.

## MEETING MID-YEAR AND REFUGEE STUDENT NEEDS

We noted two groups of students whose needs did not appear to be fully addressed: students who arrive in Canada late in the school year or semester and speak very little English; and refugee students, particularly those who have been in refugee camps for extended periods and have received little or no formal education in their first language.

Where students arrive in Canada late in the elementary-school year or secondary-school semester, the school boards we visited generally place them in ongoing classes, for which they receive no mark or credit due to their late entry. In general, the boards we visited did not have programs to provide these students with intensive training in English during these periods to better prepare them for the next school year or semester.

As illustrated in Figure 5, Ontario receives an average of more than 6,000 refugees per year, about 2,500 of whom are of school age.

School-age refugees fall into two categories:

- those who have missed two or three years of schooling but have some literacy in their first language and who, along with their parents, are familiar with the concept of school, expected behaviours, and urban life; and
- those who have little or no formal education. These students come from very high-needs families whom the federal government recently started accepting on humanitarian grounds. As noted in a newsletter published by the federally funded Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program, this group of refugee students may have no school experience, may be unfamiliar with urban life and amenities, and may exhibit behaviours based on life in refugee camps.

One of the boards we visited had developed a program specifically designed for non-English-speaking students with gaps in their education and offered it at selected elementary and secondary schools. The program was open to students aged

**Figure 5: Refugees (Permanent Residents) Arriving in Ontario, 2000–04**

Source of data: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Age	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	5-year Average
0–4 years	591	540	466	400	483	496
5–13 years (school age)	1,551	1,451	1,459	1,398	1,637	1,499
14–19 years (school age)	844	960	955	985	1,148	978
over 19 years	3,271	3,057	3,009	2,905	3,024	3,053
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,257</b>	<b>6,008</b>	<b>5,889</b>	<b>5,688</b>	<b>6,292</b>	<b>6,026</b>

11 to 16, and they could remain in it for a maximum of three years. The other two boards we visited did not have ELD programs, saying they had few students in this situation.

We interviewed a SWIS worker, previously a teacher, about the adequacy of ELD programs where they exist. The SWIS worker was of the view that existing programs were directed at traditional cases—students who have missed two or three years of schooling—and did not meet the needs of students who have never attended school or missed many years of schooling. While the federal government provides high-needs families with settlement assistance and a short orientation program, it does not have programs to help these students with their education.

### 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.

### MINISTRY RESPONSE

The Ministry acknowledges the importance of addressing the needs of students who arrive during the school year, the needs of refugee students, and the needs of students who arrive with limited prior schooling. The policy for English-language learners will consider how the needs of these students could be addressed.

The Ministry will continue to consult with Citizenship and Immigration Canada as appropriate to develop more effective programs for students who are learning English.

### FUNDING AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Ministry funding to school boards for ESL and ELD students consists of two components. Although ESL/ELD students arrive with a range of proficiencies in English and previous education, neither grant is based on an assessment of the needs of individual students, with the result that funding for high-needs students is the same as for those with low needs.

The first component, which covers recent immigrants, currently provides a total of \$7,847 per eligible student over four years and is based on the number of recent-immigrant students born in countries where English is not a first or standard language. The grant is calculated on a declining scale based on year of arrival, as illustrated in Figure 6 for the 2004/05 school year. Principals are required to report the number of eligible students enrolled

**Figure 6: ESL/ELD Grants for Recent-immigrant Students, 2004/05**

Source of data: Ministry of Education

Year of Arrival	Weighting Factor	Base Amount (\$)	Grant Amount per Pupil (\$)	Number of Pupils	Total Grants to School Boards 2004/05 (\$)
2004	1.00	3,203	3,203.00	25,722	82,387,566
2003	0.70	3,203	2,242.10	22,388	50,196,135
2002	0.50	3,203	1,601.50	27,324	43,759,386
2001	0.25	3,203	800.75	28,233	22,607,575
<b>Total</b>			<b>7,847.35</b>		<b>198,950,662</b>

at their schools in October, and to keep appropriate immigration information in Ontario Student Records (Records) to support the numbers reported to the Ministry. The Records we examined had the required information.

The second component, for Canadian-born students, is calculated by the Ministry based on Statistics Canada data on the number of children aged 5 to 19 years within each board's boundaries whose language spoken most often at home is neither English nor French. The grant for the 2004/05 school year was \$26 million and was allocated using 1996 Statistics Canada Census data.

We noted that a Statistics Canada study, based on 1994–98 data, found that the Canadian-born children of immigrants to Canada “faced significant disadvantages in the first years of elementary school ... [T]heir mathematics and reading skills were about 20% lower and their writing skills almost 30% lower [than the skills of their classmates whose parents were born in Canada]. However, by age 10 or 11, these children were considered to be performing as well as their classmates in all three subject areas.”

The study indicates that the group of Canadian-born students who need ESL services are those aged 5 to 11 years, rather than the age 5–19 group used in the Ministry's formula. If the Ministry, recognizing that Canadian-born students who are learning English require more assistance when they are younger, were to calculate boards' grants using the age 5–11 group instead of the broader group

used in the current formula, the results would likely indicate that some boards are under-funded while others are over-funded for Canadian-born students who are learning English.

As discussed earlier in this report, almost 2,500 of the refugees who come to Ontario each year are of school age. Because they have significant gaps in their education, and in some cases no formal education at all, refugee students require more services than students who only need to learn English. However, the Ministry's funding formula does not directly address the heavier needs of refugee students.

Although the Ministry's Education Funding Technical Paper 2004–05 stipulates that ESL/ELD grants are provided to school boards so that they have “resources to meet the needs of ... students [who] require extra help to develop proficiency in the language of instruction,” the Ministry does not require that these grants be spent on ESL/ELD programs. In fact, the Ministry advised us that it is aware that a portion of these grants is often reallocated to other programs. Because the Ministry does not require that boards report spending by program, information on the extent of the reallocations was not available to us, although one board provided us with financial information that indicated that less than half of its grant was spent on ESL/ELD programs. The Ministry had not assessed the impact of such reallocations on the adequacy of services provided to ESL/ELD students.

## 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.

## MINISTRY RESPONSE

Accountability is a high priority for the Ministry. The Ministry has already begun a review of the current funding model for immigrant ESL/ELD students and Canadian-born ESL students in order to ensure appropriate allocation of funding for ESL/ELD programs.

A Working Group on Financial Reporting reviewed the option of program-expenditure reporting. The Ministry is currently considering the report of the working group.