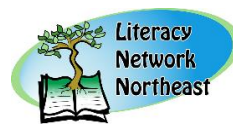


2023

# Literacy and Basic Skills

A Pathway to Supporting  
English as a Second Language  
Learners in Rural Ontario





## Acknowledgements:

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Thank you to the following individuals who completed the research and wrote the report:

- Summer Burton, Literacy Link South Central (LLSC)
- Robin Crank, Project READ Literacy Network (PRLN)
- Heather Robinet (Executive Director, QUILL Learning Network)

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## Executive Summary

The *Literacy and Basic Skills: A Pathway to Supporting ESL Learners in Rural Ontario* report is the result of a 2022-2023 business plan deliverable undertaken by a committee of regional learning networks in Ontario. It responds to concerns from rural Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) service providers/agencies about the number of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners they are serving in their classrooms. While the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development (MLITSD) recommends a Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) Level of 6 or higher (in Speaking/Listening) for entry to LBS programs, there is an increasing number of English language learners without that level of language proficiency seeking admission to LBS upgrading programs in rural areas\* where ESL programs are not available.

This report aims to address the current situation and make it easier for LBS agencies to fill the gap in training for English language learners within rural LBS programs. The committee has analyzed data collected from Statistics Canada (StatsCan), plus information solicited from 31 LBS agencies currently serving ESL learners (17 community-based, 11 school board, and 3 college programs) and 21 agencies who would serve these learners if they felt they could. The results have been mapped to highlight where in Ontario LBS agencies are serving English language learners. To help LBS service providers to better accommodate ESL learners in rural areas, the data has also been analyzed to share barriers, challenges, best practices, and some key recommendations for systemic changes.

\* For the purposes of this report, rural is defined as small population centres in Ontario consisting of populations of 30,000 people or less.

The top five (5) reported **Barriers and Challenges** that impact LBS agencies that serve ESL learners are:

1. Prospective learners do not have a Social Insurance Number (SIN) or have one and are reluctant to share it.
2. Prospective learners do not have the minimum CLB level recommended to participate in LBS programming.
3. There's a lack of available centres in rural areas to assess CLB levels.
4. In rural and remote areas, transportation is a significant issue.
5. LBS practitioners don't have a deep understanding of settlement services, nor do they have access to ESL/FSL-specific resources.

**Best Practices** for LBS agencies who serve ESL learners are compiled under five (5) focus areas as well. They are:

1. Program Considerations for LBS Service Providers to help them plan how to serve ESL learners within their LBS agencies;
2. Delivery Strategies for LBS Practitioners to help them engage and support ESL learners within their LBS agencies;
3. Intake and Assessment Tools and Tips for use with ESL learners;
4. Training Materials and Activities to Support ESL learners in LBS Programs; and,
5. Youtube Video Resources.

**Key Recommendations** to enable LBS agencies to better serve ESL learners include:

1. Increase funding to support ESL learners in LBS.
2. Make changes to LBS Eligibility/Suitability Criteria & Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
3. Provide additional training for the LBS field to support ESL.
4. Provide additional tools and resources for LBS to support ESL.
5. Encourage partnerships between ESL and LBS through funding and adjusted MLITSD criteria.

## Introduction

As stated in the Executive Summary, the *Literacy and Basic Skills: A Pathway to Supporting ESL Learners in Rural Ontario* report was written to identify the gap in language training service in rural Ontario communities\*, and the resulting impact on LBS programs. Rural LBS service providers are reporting an increase in the number of newcomers without appropriate language proficiency seeking admission to their upgrading programs. The Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training, and Skills Development (MLITSD)'s recommended Canadian Language Benchmark is Level 6 (in Speaking/Listening) for language learners seeking entry into LBS. Prior to attaining that level, language learners are encouraged to participate in English as a Second Language (ESL) or Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs. Both programs are based on the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB). ESL classes are funded by the provincial government through the school boards and are open to citizens and all legal residents over 18. LINC programs are funded by the federal government and are only available to Landed Immigrants and Convention Newcomers.

Unfortunately, while more and more newcomers are settling in, or relocating to rural areas of the province, there are limited or no government-funded language training programs available there, and/or not enough newcomers to meet the required minimum class size of 10 needed to establish one. In some cases, MLITSD may give ESL programs permission to run a class for only seven or eight (7-8) learners, but even that is a large number for rural Ontario. As a result, rural LBS agencies are fielding more requests from newcomers for access to LBS training and doing their best to fill the existing gap in training by accommodating them within the parameters of the LBS program using limited resources.

\* For the purposes of this report, rural is defined as small population centres in Ontario consisting of populations of 30,000 people or less. Statistics Canada information was used to inform this definition.

This report builds on the Enhancing Pathways Reports originally released in [2010](#) and [2012](#), by mapping out where immigrants are settling in rural regions of Ontario to fully understand the impact on Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) service providers. It also uses information solicited from LBS programs currently serving language learners to identify the top 5 challenges they face, and propose some solutions and/or best practices to address the current situation and make it easier for LBS service providers to fill the gap in training for newcomers. Recognizing that English language services and LBS are now overseen by the same ministry, the goal of doing this research report is to explore ways that language services and LBS can work together to meet the needs of under-served newcomers in Ontario, and/or increase the confidence and ability of LBS service providers and practitioners in rural Ontario to provide high quality service delivery to newcomers in areas where language training is not available.

### Data Collection Process

Workforce Planning Boards have access to important statistical and demographic data and play a critical role in ensuring labour market information is shared with their community partners. For this reason, we reached out to the Workforce Planning and Development Board of Elgin/Middlesex/Oxford for support with data collection for this report.

By gathering and analyzing Statistics Canada Census data from 2021, we were able to confirm Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) with a population of less than 30,000 and cross reference those communities with immigration and language statistics. It is worth noting that there are 169 CMAs in Ontario with a population of between 5,000 and 30,000. While there are an additional 334 CMAs with less than 5,000 people, StatsCan removed those communities from immigration analysis.

## Immigrant Population

Of those geographic areas, the ones with the highest proportion of immigrants were then identified. The top 10 communities are shown below.

1. **Leamington** - 26.9% of the population are immigrants.
2. **Niagara-on-the-Lake** - 26.8% of the population are immigrants.
3. **King** - 26.2% of the population are immigrants.
4. **Mono** - 20.5% of the population are immigrants.
5. **Shelburne** - 19.6% of the population are immigrants.
6. **Bayham** - 18.5% of the population are immigrants.
7. **Tecumseh** - 18.1% of the population are immigrants.
8. **Grimsby** - 17.9% of the population are immigrants.
9. **Wasaga Beach** - 17.5% of the population are immigrants.
10. **Puslinch** - 17.4 % of the population are immigrants.

**Data source:** *Statistics Canada. Table 98-10-0307-01, Immigrant status and period of immigration by place of birth: Canada, provinces and territories, census divisions and census subdivisions*

The research team recognizes that immigrants to Canada may speak English as their first language or be fluent English language speakers, meaning they would not benefit from English as a Second Language instruction. As a result, we worked with the Workforce Planning and Development Board of Elgin/Middlesex/Oxford to cross-reference responses to the Census question about whether English is the language most spoken at home or not.



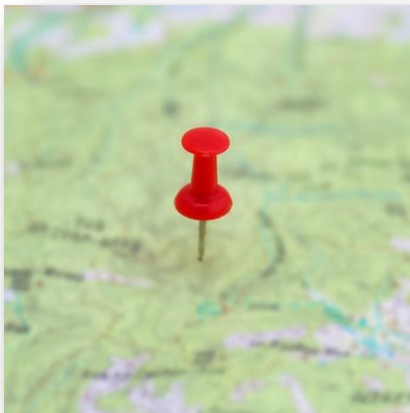


## Non-English-Speaking Population

The 10 communities identified as having the highest number of non-English speakers were:

1. **Hearst** - 88.3% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
2. **Hawkesbury** - 80.1% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
3. **Alfred and Plantagenet** - 71.9% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
4. **Kapuskasing** - 65.3% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
5. **The Nation** - 62.5% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
6. **Clarence-Rockland** - 60.3% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
7. **Champlain** - 57.1% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
8. **West Nipissing** - 55.4% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
9. **Russell** - 38.7% of the population does not speak English most often at home.
10. **North Glengarry** - 36.9% of the population does not speak English most often at home.

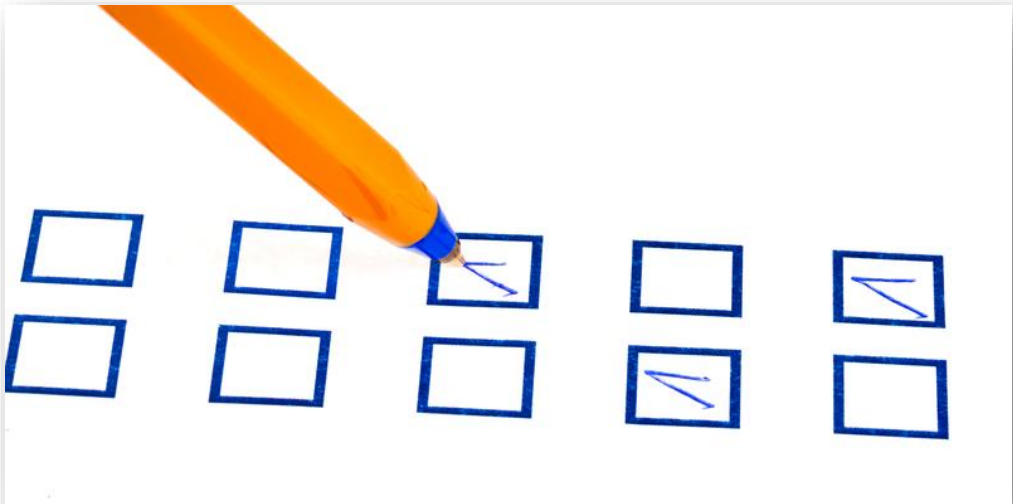
**Data source:** *Immigration and Ethnocultural Diversity Highlight Tables, 2016 Census.*



It's noteworthy that of the communities with the highest population of immigrants, Leamington, Bayham, King, and Tecumseh appear in the top 25 communities where English is not spoken most often at home.

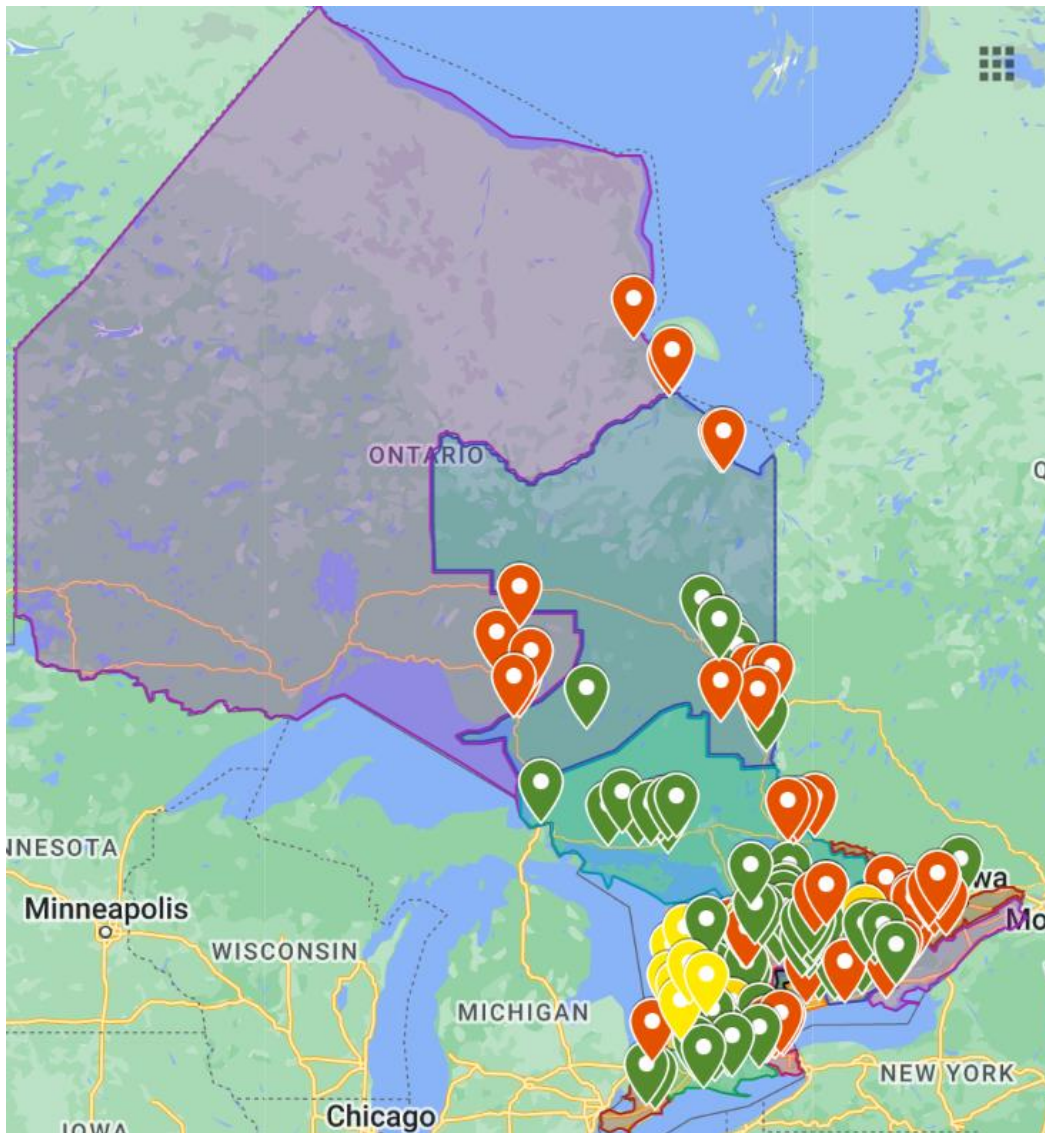
Despite sourcing some great data, none of it provided exactly the information needed for this report as it did not include data about Canadian citizens with English as a second language. In addition, this data also captures the regions that are French language speakers and therefore not ESL. We were also unable to get this data from multicultural agencies, local immigration partnerships, or settlement services providers. What the data collected did confirm however, was that the rural communities where LBS programs are currently providing literacy support for adults also have a high proportion of immigrants.

The research committee determined that better and more specific information might be attained by surveying LBS programs directly. A survey was created, then released to the LBS field in September 2022. A second release of the survey, directed at regions of the province from which no responses had been received, took place in November 2022. Thanks to the assistance of the regional learning networks, the committee was able to get a healthy response rate from rural LBS service providers that currently serve language learners or have served them in the past.



## Mapping Process

Once the survey data was collected and collated, a custom Google Map was created to pinpoint the rural areas where LBS service providers are currently serving language learners (shown below).



You can view the full interactive map at:

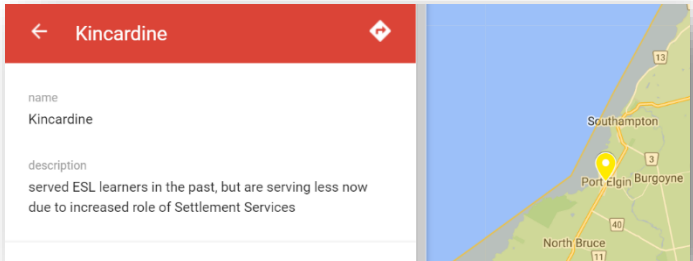
[https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1r6BpVWs\\_jHs3jEfeZmcYSV4pZK3XiXE&usp=sharing](https://www.google.com/maps/d/edit?mid=1r6BpVWs_jHs3jEfeZmcYSV4pZK3XiXE&usp=sharing)

Each coloured section on the map represents a different learning network in Ontario and selecting a section will show you how many responses came from LBS service providers within that network. It is important to note that some of the service providers that responded were part of more than one network. In these cases, the response was reported as part of the network in which the majority of that service provider’s locations are found. At least one LBS service provider from 15 of the 16 regional learning networks in the province responded to the survey. The Metro Toronto Movement for Literacy (MTML) is the only network region from which we received no survey response. This was not unexpected, and when contacted MTML advised that not only could its catchment area not be classified as rural, but that there were sufficient formal language training opportunities there as well.

Each point marked on the map represents the results reported from the survey regarding the answers to the question, “Do you currently serve, or have you ever served ESL learners in your rural LBS program?” All the cities and counties listed in the survey responses have been marked with either red, green or yellow.

If the marked point is **red**, the local LBS service provider does not currently and has not previously served ESL learners. If the marked point is **green**, the local LBS service provider does currently and has previously served ESL learners. And if the marked point is **yellow**, the answer is a little more complicated. For example, yellow can indicate that the responding program served ESL learners in the past but no longer does, or that more than one program responded with differing answers.

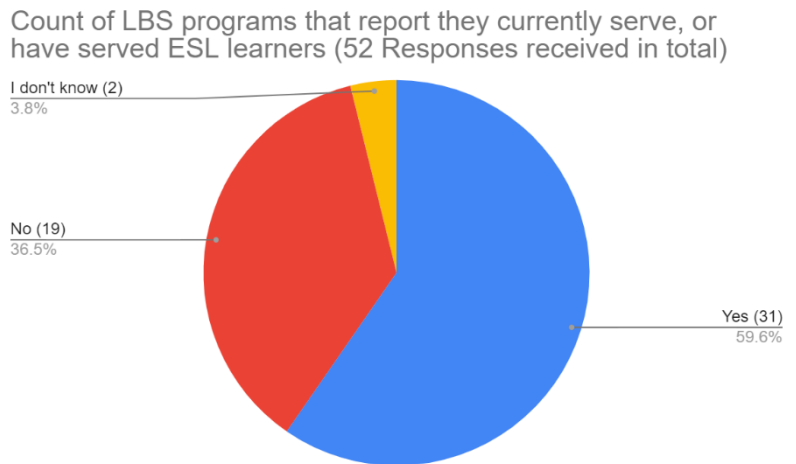
Selecting a yellow marked point will produce a pop-up window that includes information as to why that point was marked in yellow.



## Survey Results

Fifty-two rural LBS service providers responded to the survey. Twelve (12) indicated that while they were not currently serving ESL learners, they would be if challenges and issues identified later in this report could be mitigated.

Thirty-one service providers (59.6%) said they were currently serving, or had recently served ESL learners. Seventeen of these programs were operated by school boards, while 12 were community-based, and 3 were colleges.



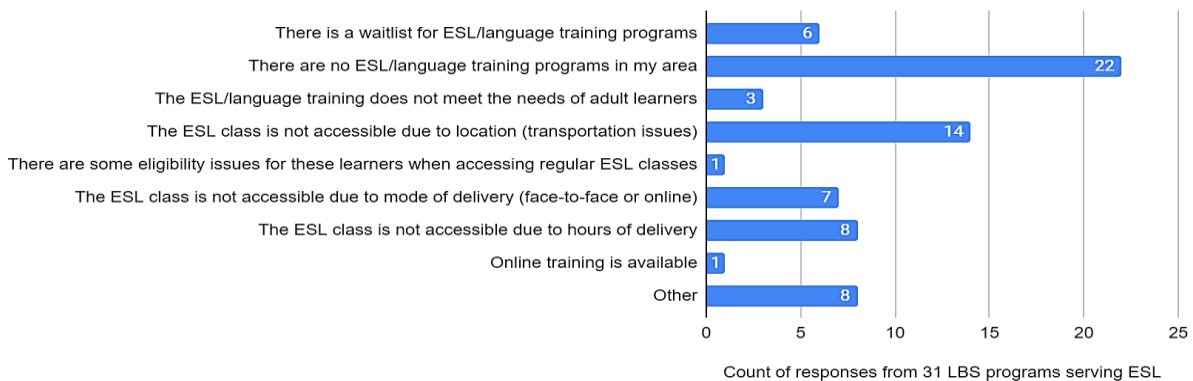
The median percentage of language learners attending these rural LBS programs was 5%. That number, however, is somewhat misleading as 11 of the 29 programs that answered this question on the survey reported percentages higher than 5% - some of them substantially higher. For example; one program reported 6%, two programs reported 7%, three service providers reported 10%, one program reported 12%, one program reported 15%, and one program reported 20%. On the higher end, one service provider reported 40%, and another 70%.

One program indicated they are also currently running ESL classes for 21 language learners using fundraised dollars. These classes are not considered LBS, and the duration of the classes, and number served is limited by the amount of money raised.

The top reasons why rural LBS service providers have chosen to serve language learners, in order from highest to lowest response count, were:

- There are no ESL language training programs in my area - 31.4%
- The ESL class is not accessible due to location (transportation issue) - 20%
- The ESL class is not accessible due to hours of delivery - 11.5%
- The ESL class is not accessible due to mode of delivery (eg. online vs. in-person) - 11.5%\*
- Other - 11.4%\*\*
- There is a waitlist for ESL/language training programs - 8.6%
- The ESL/language training provided does not meet the needs of the learner - 4.3%
- There are some ESL eligibility issues for learners - 1.4%

Why programs are serving ESL learners in their rural LBS programs



\* The responses to “Online training is available” were also included in this question.

\*\* The 11.4% of LBS service providers who chose “Other” also expressed concerns about the lack of in-person classes for learners, particularly those with low CLB levels; lack of computer/internet access in the rural areas; and ESL eligibility issues and the need to address the needs of Foreign Workers who are providing a solution to the labour market shortage in many rural communities. Also noted was the desire by some language learners from more closed newcomer societies to learn in a homogenous group rather than a mixed group.

Follow this link to access full aggregate data from the survey: <https://bit.ly/LBSpauth2ESLdata>

## Barriers and Challenges

There are several challenges for prospective learners in rural environments that create barriers to their attendance in LBS programs, but particularly for those who do not speak English as their first language. The results of the survey highlighted the complexity of supporting ESL learners, with respondents suggesting a wide variety of barriers and challenges. The research team reviewed each response and cross-referenced duplicate or similar suggestions to create a list of the top five barriers and challenges faced by LBS service providers attempting to support English language learners in their programs.

**Prospective learners do not have a Social Insurance Number (SIN) or have one and are reluctant to share it.**

To qualify for a Social Insurance Number (SIN), prospective learners must be legally allowed to work and/or receive benefits in Canada. Immigrants who have not yet completed this process do not have a SIN to provide to LBS service providers during registration. The length of time it takes to obtain a SIN in Canada can vary depending on several factors, including where someone lives and their immigration status (permanent resident, temporary resident with a work permit, international student with a valid study permit and authorization to work on or off campus, refugee claimant with a work permit, or someone authorized to work as part of a temporary foreign worker program).

Once someone has a SIN number, being asked to share it raises significant privacy concerns, particularly when it's requested by a person or organization with whom the potential learner has not yet gained trust. Because a SIN can be used to access someone's personal information and financial records, many people are understandably concerned about the risks associated with sharing it. In fact, digital literacy programs that include a focus on protecting personal information usually instruct learners not to share their SIN with others.

**The Impact:** The SIN requirement at LBS program registration means programs are either:

- a) turning people away who cannot or will not share their SIN, *or*
- b) serving these learners without entering them into the LBS Case Management System (CaMS). This means these learners don't count towards the program's Learners Served Target. Since LBS programs aren't funded to serve these learners, many of those who do are either stretched thin in terms of staffing or need to rely on outside fundraising to support them fully.

**Prospective learners do not have the minimum Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) level recommended to participate in Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programming.**

The recommended CLB level language learners wanting to register for LBS programs should be working at is Level 6 or greater in both speaking and listening. The CLB levels in reading and writing can be below Level 6. Learners who might be better served by an English or French as a Second Language (ESL/FSL) program, but who live in rural areas without such programs, find themselves without the language skills required to be eligible for LBS service.

**The Impact:** The guideline indicating that learners need a CLB Level 6 or higher to be successful in the LBS program is handled differently from program to program.

- a) Some LBS service providers follow this guideline implicitly, meaning if a prospective language learner cannot produce a CLB assessment showing they have these levels, they will not serve them.
- b) Others perceive these language levels as "recommendations" and will either not ask for proof if they believe the learner can be successful or will accept learners below the recommended levels when they have nowhere else to go. Because learners at lower benchmark levels often require more intensive support and take longer to progress, this can have a negative impact on program statistics.



### **There's a lack of available centres in rural areas to assess CLB levels.**

While the formal CLB assessment is used to evaluate language proficiency, not everyone who speaks English or French as their second language has completed one. For rural learners, a referral for a CLB assessment is not a simple solution. These assessments are generally done through Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment and Referral Service (CLARS) Centres. The majority of these CLARS assessment centres in Ontario are located in more heavily populated urban areas of the province, making them difficult for prospective learners in rural or remote areas to access. In some areas of the province there are also long wait times with assessment appointments being booked months into the future.

**The impact:** The lack of rural CLARS assessment centres creates a significant barrier for prospective learners who would proceed with an assessment to confirm their eligibility for either ESL/FSL or LBS programs if they could only reach the location. This puts people in need of upgrading in either language and/or literacy skills in a position of potentially being unable to attend any upgrading programs to improve their skills. Those who can get to an assessment centre but have to wait some time for their appointment may also have to delay the start of their training/upgrading.

### **In rural and remote areas, transportation is a significant issue.**

When deciding where to establish social, community, education and employment services priority is often given to community hubs – areas with large populations of people that require these services. As a result, rural areas with smaller populations often feature fewer services. Adding to that challenge, rural areas may cover a large geographic area (particularly in Northern Ontario) so residents may live far from any services at all.

As a result, rural residents with vehicles need to have both the time, and sufficient financial resources to pay for gas to drive to locations with service. Those without a vehicle face a bigger challenge. In many rural areas, there is a limited or non-existent public transportation system, making it difficult for residents to access essential services, including those related to language and literacy upgrading. If taxis or ride-sharing services are available (which is not always the case) they're often expensive and unreliable.

That said, during the pandemic many face-to-face ESL programs across Ontario did establish remote learning options for their learners, which they continue to offer post-pandemic. Provided these remote learning options are available and accessible in the more rural and remote regions of the province, they can provide a solution for newcomers who are unable to travel outside their own community to attend language training. However, remote learning comes with its own challenges. For example, newcomers who lack adequate digital skills to learn online and/or have limited or no access to technology and the internet may not be able to participate. Additionally, language learners with low CLB levels learn best in a face-to-face environment.

**The Impact:** Even if rural residents are aware of upgrading programs, there is a good chance they cannot get to them. This has a negative impact on enrollment in the LBS programs that would serve these prospective learners if given the opportunity.



Further, the lack of transportation options in rural areas contributes to social isolation, as it is so difficult for residents to connect with others and participate in community activities. Remote learning is not a viable option for language learners who have limited English comprehension and/or digital skills.

**LBS practitioners don't have a deep understanding of settlement services, nor do they have access to ESL/FSL-specific resources.**

Mirroring our understanding that LBS learners often come to literacy programs with a variety of challenges and issues, English and French language learners have diverse needs and concerns as well. The concerns of newcomers to Canada are often different however, and include immigration status, foreign credential recognition, housing, school registration for children, and understanding Canadian social and workplace culture. Without a solid understanding of how to navigate these issues, adult literacy practitioners find themselves in a position where they may not have the information needed to effectively support newcomer learners.

Teaching English or French as a Second Language (ESL/FSL) can also present unique challenges to adult literacy practitioners, most of whom are not certified ESL/FSL teachers. While LBS practitioners are experts in andragogy and well-versed in techniques to teach reading, writing, math, digital and communication/interpersonal skills, different approaches are used to teach language skills. Compounding the issue is the lack of resources such as ESL/FSL textbooks, language learning software and instructional materials, which makes it more difficult for someone who is not an ESL/FSL teacher to effectively teach a language.

**The Impact:** LBS practitioners frequently go above and beyond in their commitment to the learners they serve, even if they don't have all of the tools and resources they need. While English and French language learners can absolutely benefit from the LBS program that bridges the gap when language programs aren't available in rural areas, the specialized training and resources these practitioners are missing makes this process more difficult for all involved. With the earlier challenges we outlined indicating programs are not always compensated for their efforts in supporting English or French language learners, it's easy to understand why some may not be in a position to offer this "above and beyond" level of service.

## Best Practices

To support rural LBS service providers that have language learners accessing their service, we have compiled some strategies, best practices, and tips, as well as tools and resources suggested for assessment and training. These lists are based on feedback from the LBS service providers in rural Ontario that have been supporting ESL learners to meet the need in their communities.

We hope these suggestions will help rural LBS service providers to deliver training that not only meets the needs of the language learners, but those of their program staff as well.

### Program Considerations for LBS Service Providers

1. ESL/language learners have highly individualized needs. They are not always able to be in class 4 or 5 days or half days a week.
2. Developing topical curriculum or modifying existing LBS curriculum/resources to meet the needs of language learners can be extremely labour intensive for the LBS program/practitioner and may become an ongoing commitment.
3. Language learners who are more fluent in English can be very helpful to classmates who are less fluent. They can also be very helpful to LBS program staff leading the class.
4. If learners are still translating from their own home language to English (or vice versa), they would be considered below a CLB Level 6 according to LBS standards. If possible, they should attend an ESL or LINC program.

## Delivery Strategies for LBS Practitioners

1. Be flexible. Listen to the learner's needs and try different things.
2. Reference the LBS guidelines for oral skills and CLB for placement into LBS programs.
3. Connect language learners with local YMCA / YWCA or other Settlement Services providers where possible.
4. Suggest a formal CLB Assessment if one hasn't already been done. It is much easier to find suitable curriculum/resources if you know the level(s) of your learner(s).
5. When possible, refer language learners to ESL or LINC service providers if they have less than CLB Level 6 (speaking and listening). Many will offer online options to newcomers who require language support and have the digital skills and confidence to learn online.
6. Provide small group face-to-face delivery options when possible.
7. Focus on learning English that is most needed when coming to a new country like Canada (e.g. Survival English - knowing how to call 911 and give your address clearly, knowing how to ask for help or directions, knowing vocabulary to help with groceries, dealing with money, transportation etc.)
8. Train on a highly topical curriculum rather than focusing on general curriculum. Attempt to individualize for each group. Focus on topics such as health and safety, food safety, parenting, cooking, fire safety, government, work, etc. and incorporate ESL learning that way.
9. Let intermediate level language learners benefit from using media (YouTube, TV shows, etc.) to shape conversation and apply context to vocabulary and usage. (See list of helpful YouTube Video Resources on Page 25.)
10. For younger language learners who have "aged out" of the local high schools, pick up where those schools left off in terms of preparing them to complete their OSSD, or to transition to the world of work, through provision of LBS modular programs such as Point of Sale (POS) training, etc.

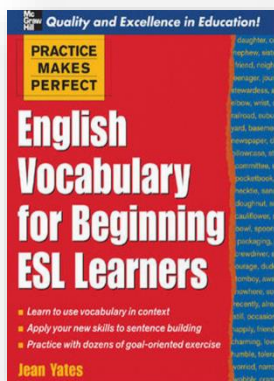
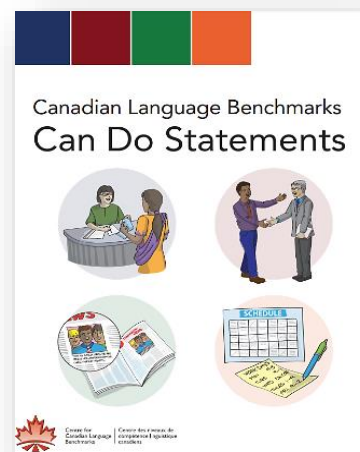
11. Provide a 'gentle' introduction of learning materials. Adult language learners can be tentative, and although instructors can be keen to teach, they must be careful not to overwhelm the new learners with too much, too quickly.
12. Use learning materials that are appropriate for the learner's level and needs and find common ground with ESL learners. For example:
  - Discuss likes and dislikes, childhood experiences, hobbies, family, and even mild anxieties or inconveniences.
  - Create opportunities for communication exchanges like "Did you ever hear the story of Little Red Riding Hood? What did you call it, growing up?" Usually, these exchanges point to excellent lessons about the parts of speech (e.g. Little, red, and riding are all adjectives that describe the type of hood, etc.). These mini lessons tend to organically unveil areas where the learner is struggling while simultaneously encouraging them to ask questions about the English language.
  - Play with words (puns, homophones, comical incidents). This usually allows learners to relax and "plumb the depths of our mongrel lexicon". After all, according to George W. Bush, "The French don't have a word for 'entrepreneur'." Linguistic origins and similarities are great places to connect as well because of this.
13. Partner with local libraries to have volunteer tutors provide additional support and speaking practice to learners.
14. Partner with a trusted ESL provider as a resource. Access volunteers and/or instructors who are trained ESL Instructors to get ideas and suggestions to teach/support language learners in your LBS program.
15. Encourage ESL learners to volunteer in the community to practice language skills.
16. Encourage peer-to-peer conversations/groups and projects to provide opportunities to learn about culture and community.
17. Have staff take TEFL.org certification to better equip them to support English as a Second Language learners (keeping in mind that there are differences for native English speakers teaching non-native English speakers).

## Intake and Assessment Tools and Tips

1. Use a standard Intake Assessment for all ESL learners if possible.
2. Use current LBS intake and assessment tools. For example:
  - OALCF Learning Styles Inventory
  - OALCF Common Assessment Package: <https://learningnetworks.ca/resources-publications/common-assessment-for-the-oalcf-goal-paths-resource-package-literacy-northwest/>
  - ESKARGO from CESBA: <https://cesba.com/resources/>
  - CABS paper-based assessments for Reading and Comprehension and Numeracy
  - CAMERA assessment for workplace tasks
3. Use regular communication assessments for intake (e.g., a modified Rowen writing rubric, CARA reading assessment, etc.)
4. Use the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) assessment - Literacy Placement Tool.
5. Use Canadian Language Benchmarks Online Self-Assessment (CLB-OSA) if a CLARS Assessment can't be arranged. This assessment works best with mid to higher level learners: <https://www.clb-osa.ca/>
6. Use diagnostic assessments that focus on phonics and phonetic awareness.
7. Use Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) for assessment if no other assessment tool works for the language learners you are serving.
8. Develop your own assessment tool in partnership with ESL providers that will work well for ESL learners and still meet the needs of LBS.
9. Send ESL learners to YMCA/YWCA or other local Settlement Services provider for formal CLB assessment (CLARS).
10. Use information provided in any referrals from previous ESL instructors to determine a learner's level and/or needs. For example, a learner may have moved from an area where ESL was available to them, and they were enrolled. Information about the learner's level(s) should be available upon request.

## Training Materials and Activities to Support ESL Learners in LBS Programs

1. Use individualized resources based on the learner's goal path and life experiences.
2. Use existing LBS training materials where possible. For example:
  - *ReadForward* : <http://www.readforward.ca/>
  - OALCF Reading and Writing resources
  - *Common Assessment of Basic Skills (CABS) Level 1* - have 1:1 conversation over registration forms
  - CESBA resources
  - Laubach books and training for community-based programs
3. Use the *Canadian Language Benchmarks Can Do Statements* to gain an understanding of what tasks language learners “can do” at each benchmark level. It will help you identify/choose curriculum and activities to use with learners: [https://www.ecala.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CLB\\_Can\\_Do\\_Statements\\_web.pdf](https://www.ecala.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/CLB_Can_Do_Statements_web.pdf)
4. Introduce “new vocabulary” at the start of lessons.
5. Use picture dictionaries, flashcards, and games.
6. Use grammar and reading books in the classroom.
7. Use *Laubach Way to Reading* and/or *Laubach Way to English* curriculum series (available in 4 levels).



8. Use *English Vocabulary for Beginning ESL Learners*. Free e-book found at: <https://languageadvisor.net/practice-makes-perfect-english-vocabulary-for-beginning-esl-learners/>
9. Use *True Stories Reading Series* by Sandra Heyer: <https://sandraheyersongs.com/other-titles-by-sandra-heyer/>
10. Use LINC leveled resources: <https://belcresources.home.blog/2019/01/31/the-journey-begins/>



11. Use learning materials from *Ellii* website, formerly called the *ESL Library* (fees apply):

<https://ellii.com/>

12. Use online listening and reading activities in the classroom.

13. Encourage regular group discussions.

14. Use interactive websites such as *Learning Chocolate* to learn ESL Basic Vocabulary:

[https://www.learningchocolate.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA3eGfBhCeARIsACpJNU\\_Dg9kfsTsf3GDDfJVVjj-p2EP0g-AmSA-7I01UXV\\_ZSLLyLU8SyfsaAs1IEALw\\_wcB](https://www.learningchocolate.com/?gclid=Cj0KCQiA3eGfBhCeARIsACpJNU_Dg9kfsTsf3GDDfJVVjj-p2EP0g-AmSA-7I01UXV_ZSLLyLU8SyfsaAs1IEALw_wcB)

### Youtube Video Resources

- To explain Grammar Points: <https://www.youtube.com/user/engvidenglish>
- Workplace English: <https://www.youtube.com/@awesalberta/videos>
- Vocabulary:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEd\\_Vg\\_dhC4&list=PLzBvni9Rw7cCdChX6ziiEnah-8xOYtUI-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEd_Vg_dhC4&list=PLzBvni9Rw7cCdChX6ziiEnah-8xOYtUI-)
- Listening/Dialogue Practice: <https://www.youtube.com/@easyenglish551/videos>
- Task-based videos:  
<https://www.youtube.com/@tcdsbadulteducationyoutube7283/videos>
- News Videos / Vocabulary & Listening: <https://www.youtube.com/@bbclearningenglish>

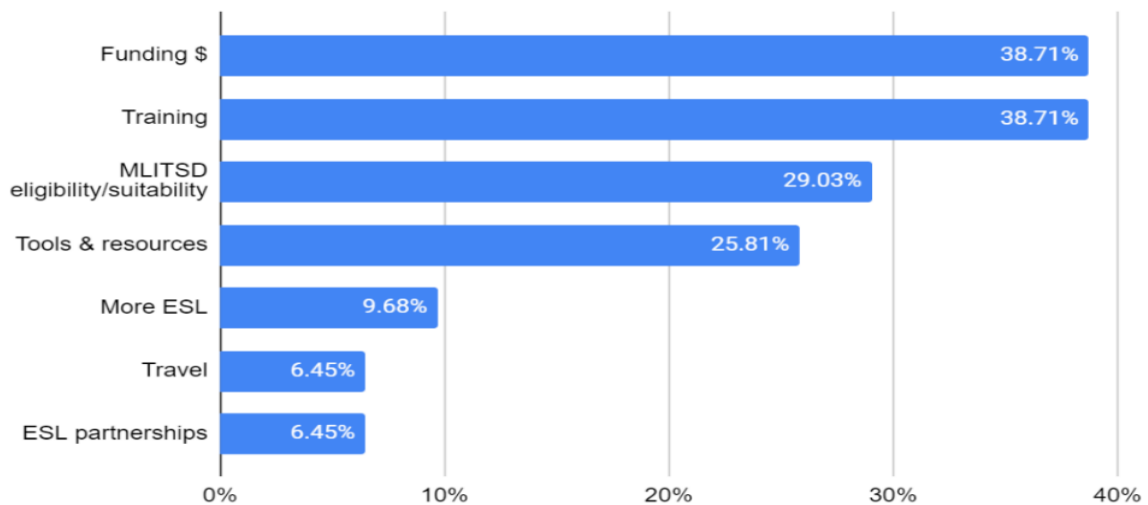


## Recommendations

Through our research, investigation, and survey of the LBS field, we have identified five (5) key recommendations for system level changes that will benefit LBS service providers and ESL learners in rural Ontario and:

1. Improve access to training for ESL learners;
2. Establish and implement training for ESL learners in rural LBS programs;
3. Respond to language training needs for labour market success; and,
4. Support flexibility in funding and program design within the LBS guidelines.

What is needed for LBS to support ESL in rural areas (%)



## Increase funding to support ESL learners in LBS.

As there is a minimum number of 10 learners required to establish an ESL program in a community, this makes it difficult to establish ESL training in rural areas as the number of potential clients is not guaranteed. LBS is already serving adults in rural communities and has a foundation to support this need/gap in service through existing service providers. However, LBS service providers already consider themselves underfunded with many already struggling to meet the upgrading needs of their community under the current funding model. Almost half of the LBS service providers in rural areas reported that funding is a barrier for them in serving ESL learners.

In order for rural LBS agencies to implement programming that also supports ESL learners, they require: more opportunity to plan and coordinate with newcomer groups and support organizations about specific needs of language learners; time to develop and/or acquire appropriate resources, learning materials and/or lesson plans; travel supports for learners to access language assessment and settlement services for accurate placement within local programs; additional hours of instruction to support learners at different levels; and more staff/volunteers to provide ESL for the rural communities that are in need.



All these challenges create increased costs for service providers. Additional funding would enable LBS service providers in rural areas to establish and implement programming that meets the needs of ESL learners and responds to language training needs identified by employers as necessary for labour market success.

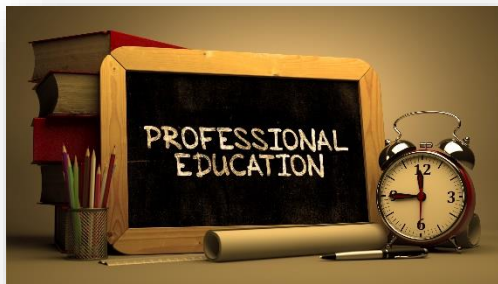
## Make changes to LBS Eligibility/Suitability Criteria & Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Almost 100% of LBS service providers in rural areas reported that they would like to see the Eligibility Criteria for participation in the LBS program updated. They would also like to see ESL included as one of the Suitability Criteria so efforts to help ESL learners who need training, is reflected in LBS targets. Within the current Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD)'s LBS Guidelines, eligibility criteria states that a learner must be sufficiently proficient in speaking and listening to benefit fully from the language of LBS instruction (English or French). It then recommends that CLB Level 6 for speaking and listening be the minimum level of proficiency required to benefit from LBS instruction. This hinders the ability of LBS service providers to offer service to language learners in their community who cannot access it elsewhere. Many LBS service providers find that learners at lower CLB levels are still capable of learning and making progress in LBS classrooms and want permission from MLITSD to serve these learners. Since many language learners, particularly those in rural areas, have not been formally assessed to determine CLB levels, it is sometimes difficult to decide eligibility at intake.

Many ESL learners in rural communities are working as well as learning. Many are in jobs that are seasonal or have slow and busy times, which makes it difficult for them to commit to a full year of uninterrupted learning. This type of scenario is not reflected in the way MLITSD and Employment Ontario (EO) have engineered the KPIs of LBS service providers – specifically Learner Progress and Completion of Milestones within a year. We recommend addressing the Eligibility and Suitability Criteria and KPI's to make them more reflective of the current immigration patterns in Ontario, the training needs of all communities, and the realities of learners who are also working full time to support their families.

In addition, it is very difficult to serve ESL Learners who do not have Permanent Residency or Canadian Citizenship since they would have a 900 series SIN Card which is not permissible in the EO Case Management System (CaMS). This is a disadvantage since LBS can't provide access to training to learners who would benefit from the LBS program, for example, Convention Refugees and /or Protected Persons. For other ESL learners who have their Permanent Residency or Canadian Citizenship, many are uncomfortable sharing their SIN number due to concerns about privacy and protection of their personal information. As such, we recommend removing or adjusting these criteria for data collection to improve access to training for ESL learners in rural areas.

### Provide additional training for LBS to support ESL.



LBS service providers are experts in andragogy and supporting literacy learning for adults, however teaching ESL has its own challenges. Almost half the rural programs surveyed reported that additional training and professional development for staff would help them be more effective at delivering training to ESL learners.

Training of staff on CLB and how they work with Skills for Success/Essential Skills, TESL certification, the CLB assessment, as well as general professional development on lesson planning, differences between LBS and ESL learners, and most recommended ESL resources were some of the training pieces suggested by service providers.

Additional training for LBS providers and staff on workplace needs of newcomers, and access to curriculum on Canadian Workplace Culture would also improve programs' abilities to implement programming that is responsive to language training needs for labour market success.

### **Provide additional tools and resources for LBS to support ESL.**

LBS service providers in rural areas have been working to support some ESL learners in their existing programs using the resources and tools available to the LBS field. This results in an inconsistent approach to supporting ESL learners with many service providers struggling to find/adapt/create additional tools and resources that will suit the needs and limitations of language learners in their programs. Also, LBS service providers indicate that the LBS milestones are often too advanced for ESL learners to demonstrate progress. As such, lower-level assessments, milestones and learning materials that are also culturally inclusive, plus marketing materials to connect with ESL learners, are needed.

### **Encourage partnerships between ESL and LBS through funding and adjusted MLITSD criteria.**

LBS service providers recognize that different tools, techniques, and strategies are needed to support learners whose first language is not English. They are excellent at providing service for those whose first language is English and they are very good at helping ESL students using the tools and resources available to them, but there is always room for improvement. LBS agencies recognize the benefits of working together and the challenges ESL programs face in establishing language training programs in rural communities. LBS and ESL staff would benefit from working together and learning from each other. LBS would also benefit from being invited to training organized by ESL programs and being given access to online training bootcamps established for new ESL instructors. If serving ESL learners, LBS would also benefit from having access to online ESL curriculum modules available on the ONYX website. Delivery of language training in rural areas in partnership between LBS and ESL would increase Ontario's ability to meet the needs of ESL learners in rural communities through flexibility in funding and program design that encourages this kind of partnership.

## Conclusion

Approximately 80,000 clients are served by newcomer settlement services annually, with 70,000 language assessments and referrals made to programs that meet client needs. Many newcomers who require language training, particularly those located in rural communities in Ontario, have difficulty getting that training for a variety of reasons, including limited or no government-funded language training programs available in their community, and/or not enough newcomers to meet the required minimum class size of 10 needed to establish one.

The purpose of this report was three-fold: 1. To identify, acknowledge and explain the increasing demand for LBS service by newcomers in rural communities; 2. Share best practices, resources, tools, and tips to increase the confidence and ability of LBS service providers/practitioners to provide high quality service delivery to newcomers; and, 3. Make recommendations for systemic changes that need to happen if LBS service providers are to continue serving ESL learners in rural Ontario.

As previously noted, LBS providers in rural communities are already stepping in to fill the gap in service to language learners where possible. However, this is currently still a temporary solution. Without systemic changes that include increases in funding, and modifications to LBS Eligibility and Suitability Criteria, and Key Performance Indicators that reflect the growth of immigration in Ontario, this service is not sustainable long-term. There may never be enough demand for language training in rural communities to warrant the establishment of ESL programs, but LBS providers are already there and willing to help. With some support and potential partnerships between LBS and ESL under MLITSD, LBS service providers can continue to meet the needs of ESL learners in rural areas and be better equipped to do so.