

English as a Second Language Policy Guidelines

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Ministry of Education
Special Programs Branch

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English as a Second Language Policy Guidelines

Initial Identification

Definition of an ESL Student

English as a Second Languageⁱ students are those whose primary language(s), or language(s) of the home, is/are other than English and who may therefore require additional services in order to develop their individual potential within British Columbia's school system. Some students speak variations of English that differ significantly from the English used in the broader Canadian society and in school; they may require ESL supportⁱⁱ.

—from *English as a Second Language:
Policy Framework*
Ministry of Education, 1999

ⁱIn some literature, this is referred to as English as an Additional language (EAL)

ⁱⁱIn some literature, this is referred to as English as a Second Dialect (ESD)

The identification of ESL students depends on an assessment of the language performance and classroom functioning of the learner. (ESL students may be immigrants or Canadian born: schools should ensure that students are entitled to schooling in B.C. by verifying their age, residency, and immigration status). Initial assessment should seek to acquire information on:

- ◆ the student's English proficiency and experience in all four areas of language development: listening, speaking, reading, writing
- ◆ the student's previous schooling (e.g., report cards if available; information on interruptions to schooling)
- ◆ what language(s) or dialect(s) is/are spoken in the student's home
- ◆ the student's proficiency in his or her first language — listening, speaking, reading, writing; where documentary evidence and information from parents are inadequate, assessment of a student's first-language proficiency may be required
- ◆ a student's basic skills in academic subject areas (e.g., mathematics)
- ◆ possible needs other than ESL programming that the student might have (e.g., special needs, trauma counselling)

Assessment of English proficiency should take account of cultural and linguistic diversity (e.g., should avoid requiring cultural knowledge) and be non-discriminatory.

Initial assessments will typically be conducted upon a student's first arrival at school, but may be conducted at any point if a teacher believes a student requires ESL services.

Initial assessments should include a combination of:

- ◆ oral interviews (with students, parents)
- ◆ reviews of students' oral and unedited written language samples
- ◆ checks of students' reading and listening comprehension

Use of standardized tests may yield helpful information but these should not be the sole basis for making an initial assessment.

Focus on the Learner

The student's strength, proficiency and literacy in the first language correlate positively with the acquisition of a second language. As students develop an understanding of the general features of language through their first language, they can bring this knowledge to the task of second language learning.

Planning for the Learner

Adaptations to the provincially prescribed curriculum for ESL students should be made on the basis of assessed student needs. Language cannot be taught effectively in isolation. The ESL student's program should therefore focus on the acquisition of language, knowledge, and cultural understanding that will enable the student to access the provincially prescribed curriculum.

Planning for ESL learners should recognize the objective of integration into the mainstream school program as soon as feasible in order to achieve the expected learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum. ESL students must continue to develop socially and academically as they acquire English language skills. It is therefore best if they are integrated, with support, into mainstream classes with their English-speaking peers as soon as their English-language skills are sufficient to enable them to learn effectively in such a setting. For further information on adaptations to the provincially prescribed curriculum, see the section on "Required Areas of Study in an Educational Program Order" in the *Manual of School Law, 1995*.

Placement

In the B.C. school system, students are generally assigned to age-appropriate classes. Placement of students who have been identified as needing ESL services should be determined by an ESL specialist in consultation with other professionals (e.g., the school counsellor, the classroom teacher) as well as with the student and student's parents, as appropriate. Students should be placed in classroom settings where they can reasonably be expected to succeed.

Designating ESL Learners

ESL students are eligible for supplemental funding from the Ministry of Education and should be identified on Fall Data Collection form 1701.

For a student to be designated in the English as Second Language (ESL) program, three conditions must be met:

- (1) Through an annual assessment of English language proficiency, it is determined that the student's use of English is sufficiently different from standard English that she or he is identified as

requiring specialized services to adjust to the linguistic and cultural environment in order to achieve his or her individual potential and be successful in the British Columbia school system.

and

(2) There must be documentation consisting of:

- ◆ a record of current English language proficiency, with at least an annual assessment;
- ◆ an annual instructional plan designed to meet the needs of the student. An annual instructional plan can be written specifically for the individual student or for groups of students;
- ◆ a schedule or list of the specialized services being provided to each student
- ◆ evidence of reported progress in the acquisition of English.

and

(3) Additional services must be provided. These services may include: reception classes, pull-out services, and/or additional services provided within the regular classroom environment. Where the only additional services provided to the student are adaptations within the regular classroom, there must be documentation of support provided that is specifically designed to address needs of each student identified in the assessment referenced above.

Services such as Learning Assistance, Speech Language Pathology services, or other services that are based on total student enrolment are not considered to be additional ESL services for purposes of this report. Students in Programme francophone or registered with the FEA should not be reported as ESL students. Reduction of class size by itself is not a sufficient service to meet the definition of ESL services.

NOTE: Include adult students who are in an ESL program only if the ESL program is part of a planned program of studies leading to a British Columbia Certificate of Graduation. Students meeting the requirements of both ESL and a Special Education program may be reported in both categories.

NOTE: Funded enrolment will be determined by taking the number of these students in kindergarten half day programs, divided by two, and adding them to the remaining number of school aged students in the program.

Information on ESL students, on the range of ESL student needs, on current research into ESL, on effective instructional practices for ESL, and on the role of the ESL Specialist is provided in the Ministry resource documents, *ESL Learners: A Guide for Classroom Teachers* and *ESL Learners: A Guide for ESL Specialists*.

Ongoing Review

There should be ongoing monitoring of students' English-language proficiency, based on:

- ◆ periodic samples of a students' unedited writing, completed assignments, tests related to comprehension of content that has been taught, notes of parent interviews or of conferences, teacher observation of oral performance (i.e., as maintained in a portfolio)
- ◆ student's understanding of subject-specific content as demonstrated periodically through an array of classroom activities (e.g., worksheets, essays, reports, projects, content-based tests)

ESL policy specifies that a documented assessment of English-language proficiency should be conducted at least annually. This annual review of English-language proficiency should be based on a review of ongoing assessment records (as described above) together with the student's report cards and information such as minutes of school-based team or department meetings pertaining to particular students. The assessment should take account of the fact that students may have differing levels of proficiency in relation to different aspects of language (e.g., they may have more advanced oral language proficiency than written language proficiency).

In assessing language proficiency, districts may choose to describe the student's performance in relation to a matrix of descriptors. This is also beneficial for reporting (see the guidelines specified here in relation to Reporting).

Exit from ESL Programming

Service should be adjusted on the basis of an ongoing review of student performance. If the review determines that the student is functioning at the age and grade level given commensurate abilities, the student may no longer require ESL services. This does not preclude the student receiving ESL services in the future should the need arise.

Over time it is expected that support levels will diminish as students progress successfully in a fully integrated program. Where students are not progressing toward independence in the curriculum, a more extensive assessment of student needs should occur.

Service Delivery

Service delivery should occur under the guidance of an ESL specialist who may provide:

- ◆ direct instruction to an individual learner or class
- ◆ support to a classroom teacher
- ◆ direction to a classroom assistant or teaching assistant

Reporting the Learners' Progress

All additional services provided for ESL students should be documented. Where the only additional services provided to students are adaptations within the mainstream classroom, there must be documentation of adaptations specifically designed to address the needs of the ESL student which are distinct from those that would normally be provided to address student differences.

Where necessary and appropriate, service delivery may also include the provision of support from:

- ◆ another specialist (e.g., counsellor, psychologist, speech and language pathologist, qualified interpreter) working in consultation with an ESL specialist
- ◆ a classroom assistant or teaching assistant working under the direction of an ESL specialist

Service should be regularly adjusted in relation to the assessment of student progress.

Schools are required to ensure that five reports to parents on the progress of all ESL students are provided each year (three formal reports and two informal reports, as per Policy circular 96-08 — Student Reporting).

Letter grades are not appropriate for ESL students, except in the following circumstances:

- ◆ where ESL students are judged to be capable of meeting the provincially prescribed learning outcomes for a particular subject
- ◆ where ESL students are judged to be capable of meeting the learning outcomes for courses in a locally developed program (including ESL courses in a locally developed program)

Districts may approve ESL courses in a locally developed program (Note: at the grade 11/12 level, these courses may provide students with up to eight credits of Selected Studies, as per provincial policy).

In these circumstances letter grades must be used.

Where letter grades are not used, formal reports should include a checklist of language acquisition descriptors and/or structured written comments.

Currently, districts use a variety of descriptors to describe the student's level of English language competency. One familiar scheme that would facilitate communication at this time is the set of descriptors developed by the Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Inc. A common set of descriptors is intended to facilitate consistency in the delivery of ESL services. The following is a summary of the TESOL descriptors.

Beginning

At this level, students initially have limited or no understanding of English. They rarely use English for communication. They respond nonverbally to simple commands, statements, and questions. As their oral comprehension increases, they begin to imitate the verbalizations of others by using single words or simple phrases, and begin to use English spontaneously. At the earliest stage, these learners construct meaning from text primarily through nonprint features (e.g., illustrations, graphs, maps, tables). They gradually construct more meaning from the words themselves, but the construction is often incomplete. They are able to generate simple texts that reflect their knowledge level of syntax. These texts may include a significant amount of nonconventional features, such as invented spelling, some grammatical inaccuracies, pictorial representations, surface features and rhetorical patterns of the native language (i.e., ways of structuring text from native culture and language).

Intermediate

At this level, students understand more complex speech, but still may require some repetition. They acquire a vocabulary of stock words and phrases covering many daily situations. They use English spontaneously, but may have difficulty expressing all their thoughts due to a restricted vocabulary and a limited command of language structure. Students at this level speak in simple sentences, which are comprehensible and appropriate, but which are frequently marked by grammatical errors. They may have some trouble comprehending and producing complex structures and academic language. Proficiency in reading may vary considerably depending upon the learner's familiarity and prior experience with themes, concepts, genre, characters, and so on. They are most successful constructing meaning from texts for which they have background knowledge upon which to build. They are able to generate more complex texts, a wider variety of texts, and more coherent texts than beginners. Texts still have considerable numbers of nonconventional features.

Advanced

At this level, students' language skills are adequate for most day-to-day communication needs. Occasional structural and lexical errors occur. Students may have difficulty understanding and using some idioms, figures of speech, and words with multiple meanings. They communicate in English in new or unfamiliar settings, but have occasional difficulty with complex structures and abstract academic concepts. Students at this level may read with considerable fluency and are able to locate and identify the specific facts within the text. However, they may not understand texts in which the concepts are presented in a decontextualized manner, the sentence structure is complex, or the vocabulary is abstract. They can read independently, but may have occasional comprehension problems. They produce texts independently for personal and academic purposes. Structures, vocabulary, and overall organization approximate the writing of native speakers of English. However, errors may persist in one or more of these domains.

Students with Limited Formal Schooling

Students with limited formal schooling (LFS) are generally recent arrivals...whose backgrounds differ significantly from the school environment they are entering. This category includes students whose schooling has been interrupted for a variety of reasons, including war, poverty, or patterns of migration, as well as students coming from remote rural settings with little prior opportunity for sequential schooling. These students may exhibit some of the following characteristics:

- pre- or semiliteracy in their native language
- minimal understanding of the function of literacy
- performance significantly below grade level
- a lack of awareness of organization and culture of school

Although many LFS students are at the beginning level of oral proficiency, some may have reached the intermediate level. Although not fully skilled in the academic domain, these students possess valuable life skills that can serve as a basis for academic learning.

Suggested Minimum Qualifications for ESL Specialists

Suggested minimum qualifications for ESL specialists can be identified in relation to three distinct categories:

- ◆ **A Professional Teaching Certificate and basic classroom experience:** Experience in the regular classroom as well as with students in ESL is necessary in order to enable ESL specialist teachers to provide their students with appropriate learning experiences. These learning experiences should assist the students to learn the English language, Canadian culture, and the academic background necessary to integrate as smoothly as possible.
- ◆ **Specialized Skills:** In addition to fluency in English, training in ESL methodology is essential. Unless a teacher understands the differences between learning one's first language and learning an additional language, he or she will have difficulty assisting students through the various stages in their growth toward bilingualism. Specialized education for English as a Second Language teachers should consist of academic training in the following areas:
 - methodology and methods for teaching ESL
 - cross-cultural sensitization and strategy training
 - multicultural studies
 - first and second language learning
 - applied linguistics

ESL training for teachers who wish to teach in the British Columbia school system is available at Simon Fraser University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Victoria.

- ◆ **Relevant Practical Experience:** The experience of living in another culture for a period of time, participating in cross-cultural communication, learning another language (long-term study), and bridging cultural gaps can be beneficial to understanding and helping students from other language and cultural backgrounds.

The ESL Policy Guidelines Technical Committee

The Ministry of Education gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the members of the ESL Policy Guidelines Technical Committee, who offered advice and input to help develop the *English as a Second Language Policy Guidelines* document:

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