

What K–9 Administrators Need to Know about ESL Students and Programming

Who are ESL students?

English as a Second Language (ESL) students come from a range of cultural backgrounds and bring with them a variety of educational, social and personal experiences. ESL students first learned to speak, read and/or write a language other than English and have a level of English language proficiency that precludes them from full participation in the learning experiences provided in Alberta schools. ESL students may have recently immigrated to Canada or they may have been born in Canada and live in homes in which the primary spoken language is not English.

Canadian-born ESL students include First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Francophones, Hutterites, Mennonites and Canadian-born children of immigrants.

Foreign-born ESL students include recently arrived immigrants, refugees and fee-paying and funded international visa students.



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Literacy is ...

“... the ability to understand and employ printed information in daily activities, at home, at work and in the community—to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential.”

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and Statistics Canada, *Literacy in the Information Age: Final Report of the International Adult Literacy Survey* (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, 2000), p. x.

we educate

How is ESL programming funded?

ESL funding is provided to assist students who have insufficient fluency in English to achieve grade level expectations in English language arts and other subject areas.

Students eligible for ESL funding come from homes in which the primary spoken language is not English. These students speak minimal English or are non-English speaking.

Funding is provided for each eligible ESL funded child/student in Kindergarten to Grade 12. Funded children/students may be Canadian-born (Code 303) or Foreign-born (Code 301). Funding must be supported by an annual assessment of the student's language proficiency in English.

Funding is provided for a maximum of seven years for each eligible ESL funded child/student. Additional funding is available for all foreign-born students to provide enhanced support services.

“When providing English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, school boards should recognize that an ESL program is transitional in nature. Its function is to facilitate the integration of the student into the regular school program at the earliest possible opportunity.”

Alberta Education Policy 1.5.1

How is ESL programming and support delivered to students?

How ESL students are supported depends on the needs of the students, the nature of the school's programming and the number of ESL students in school. ESL students in elementary and junior high schools are generally placed in age-appropriate classrooms with their peers, and also receive additional language and content instruction.

The needs of ESL learners are best met when teachers work collaboratively to **differentiate** or **adapt instruction**, provide **explicit ESL instruction** and create an **environment of cultural competence**. Additional support may include ESL consultants, teacher assistants, community volunteers and peer tutors.

Factors to consider when setting up a program delivery model:

- English language level and learning needs of the students
- family support and English language level of parents
- number of ESL students in the school
- availability of trained ESL teachers, teacher assistants and specialists
- availability of resources and materials
- availability of appropriate instructional space.

What teaching strategies work well for ESL students?

Integrating language and content

The key objective of teaching language through content is to help students comprehend and demonstrate understanding across a variety of topics, tasks and situations in all subject areas. When teachers integrate explicit language instruction in their content lessons, ESL students gain academic knowledge and cognitive academic language proficiency simultaneously.

Organizing structured cooperative learning

Structured cooperative learning helps ESL students:

- develop positive interdependence, learning from the language models and group skills of their peer group
- demonstrate knowledge of their culture and their own areas of expertise
- benefit from the natural redundancy that is created by asking and answering questions and by working together to solve problems.

Creating a supportive language learning environment

A supportive language learning environment can be created by applying:

- formal mini-lessons with clear objectives and recognizable beginnings and endings, marked with formulaic cues
- regularly scheduled events, marked by changes in location and props
- clear lesson formats across subjects, from day to day.

Differentiating content, process and products

Differentiating **content** involves modifying the nature of informational resources used in the classroom and adjusting the scope of the content that is directly taught to each student.

Differentiating **process** involves delivering content in different ways and providing alternative ways for students to access, or work through, the content. Examples include using graphic organizers or working with a partner or in a small group.

Differentiating **products** involves establishing assignment options that vary in complexity, such as producing a poster or multimedia presentation rather than a piece of written work.



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Communicative Competence is ...

... the concept that speakers of a language must have more than grammatical competence to be able to communicate effectively in a language. Speakers must also know how language is used by members of a speech community.

How are ESL students assessed?

When ESL students arrive at school, information is gathered about English language proficiency, academic achievement and recent experiences that can affect schooling. This information, plus any necessary documentation, is used to place the students in the appropriate grade and to determine what type of ESL support is needed.

The classroom teacher, in consultation with the ESL teacher or consultant (if available), assesses the students' achievement and growth, provides feedback to students and their parents or sponsors, evaluates student achievement for report card purposes, and decides how much ESL programming support students require.

Tips for Appropriate ESL Student Assessment

- Focus on the students' meaning rather than on their language errors, such as grammatical mistakes.
- Grade a combination of processes and products for all students.
- Explain to students what and how you grade. Show examples of good work, using rubrics with clear criteria.
- Have grades reflect a variety of performances, such as participation, projects, portfolios and oral explanations.
- Adapt tests and the administration of tests.

“Culture is ... the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, action, customs, beliefs, values, and instructions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group.”
“Cultural competence [is] the ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served.”

Jerome H. Hanley, “Beyond the Tip of the Iceberg: Five Stages Toward Cultural Competence,” *Reaching Today's Youth* 3, 2 (Winter 1999), pp. 9–10.

How can schools support ESL students and families?

Welcome parents and children and answer any questions they have.

Tour the school with parents and their children.

Speak clearly in a normal tone and at a natural speed.

Invite parents to visit the school and watch a class in action.

Find out if there are cultural holidays or customs that will keep the child away from school or affect his/her participation in regular activities.

Rewrite information letters regarding school meetings or upcoming events in simple English, or have the information translated.

Contact Citizenship and Immigration Canada and/or local settlement organizations for background information on the family's culture and for volunteer possibilities.

For more information, see the *ESL Guide to Implementation (K–9)*, available at <http://education.alberta.ca/media/507659/eslkt09gi.pdf> or through the Learning Resources Centre at <http://www.lrc.learning.gov.ab.ca/pro/resources/item.htm?item-no=708266>.