

English as a Second Language Policy Framework

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Ministry of Education
Special Programs Branch

Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Background	5
Rationale	5
Definition of an ESL Student	6
Goals	7
Principles	7
Focus on the Learner	9
Planning for the Learner	9
Initial Identification	10
Service Delivery	10
Ongoing Review	10
Reporting the Learner's Progress	11
Funding/Resource Support	11
Accountability	11
Educational	12
Fiscal	12
Roles and Responsibilities	12
Ministry of Education	12
School Districts	12
Schools	13
Teachers	13
Glossary	14
Acknowledgments	16

English as a Second Language Policy Framework

Introduction

“The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.”

(Preamble to the *School Act*, June 1993)

British Columbia is a diverse society; people from all parts of the globe contribute to the social, cultural and linguistic fabric of our Province. This diversity is mirrored in our schools’ population, both in the contributions made and in the unique needs which must be met in order to achieve the purpose of the education system.

Background

British Columbia schools have offered English as a Second Language (ESL) services for many years. These services have grown in magnitude and complexity to match increasing numbers of students and shifting immigration patterns. Where once the majority of immigrants came from European countries, they now arrive predominantly from Pacific Rim countries.

Since 1990, ESL enrollment has more than tripled, with about 90% of ESL students enrolled in Lower Mainland school districts.

As a result of shifts in immigration patterns, many students are unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet or with Western traditions, history, or lifestyle. ESL services must therefore include an orientation to British Columbia society as well as focus on the teaching of English. The arrival of greater numbers of refugees has increased the need for psychological and counselling support to assist their integration into school.

Some students, although born in Canada, require assistance because they use another language and/or a dialect of English in their homes and are not able to cope adequately with the school curriculum.

ESL students should be provided with educational opportunities in BC schools that will allow them to develop their individual potential.

Rationale

The purpose of this ESL Policy Framework is to support school districts in providing instruction for ESL students. The policy provides leadership, future direction and a basis for consistency, quality, equity and flexibility in the delivery of ESL services.

Definition of an ESL Student

The Ministry initially addressed English as a Second Language in *A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines* (1985). An interim ESL policy was in place during the 1996 to 1997 school year. The 1985 guidelines have never been rescinded, although both circumstances and educational practice have since changed.

This framework replaces the ESL section of *A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*, (1985), and is intended to reflect the many changes in legislation, policy, and educational practice that have occurred since that time. Among the significant changes are a new School Act (1989) and subsequent amendments, changes in Ministerial Orders and Regulations, a new Multicultural Policy for the Province (1990), and a new Language Education Policy (1996).

In the absence of a current ESL policy, various policy documents made significant statements related to ESL students, including:

“The Ministry of Education, Skills and Training will work with school boards to ensure that all students, whether born in British Columbia or immigrated to the province, who require assistance with learning English will have opportunities to establish their English language skills. English as a Second Language will be offered as a transitional... [service] to ensure the successful integration of these students into regular classes as quickly as possible.” (*Language Education in B.C. Schools: Policy and Guidelines*, 1996)

“It is...the policy of the Government of British Columbia to ensure that all British Columbians have equal access to programs and services.” (*Multicultural Policy of the Province of British Columbia*, 1990)

The development of this ESL Policy Framework continues the Government’s commitment to language education and equal access to services in BC schools.

For the purposes of this Policy, English as a Second Language¹ 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 support².

¹ In some literature, this is referred to as English as an Additional Language (EAL).

² In some literature, this is referred to as English as a Second Dialect (ESD).

Goals

The primary goal of the British Columbia school system is to support the intellectual development of students, with the support of families and the community. Enabling students to achieve the goals of human and social development, and career development is a responsibility shared by schools, families and the community. These goals apply equally to all students.

To help realize these goals for students learning English as a second language, the education system in British Columbia needs to provide appropriate services and programs to ensure that the school system is:

- ◆ equitable,
- ◆ of high quality,
- ◆ relevant,
- ◆ accessible, and
- ◆ accountable.

(adapted from *Statement of Education Policy Order, Mandate for the School System, OIC 1280/89*)

The goal of English as a Second Language education is to assist students to become proficient in English, to develop intellectually and as citizens, and to enable them to achieve the expected learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum.

Support for ESL students requires attention to language proficiency, intellectual development, and citizenship. Such support should be provided in a school environment which values diversity, bridges cultures and works to eliminate racism.

Principles

The same principles of learning apply to ESL students as they do to all learners, namely:

- ◆ learning requires the active participation of the student,
- ◆ people learn in a variety of ways and at different rates,
- ◆ learning is both an individual and a group process.

(adapted from *The Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education Plan, 1994*)

To promote equity and facilitate student placement, there should be consistent provincial language which articulates a student's place along the ESL service continuum. Consistency is especially important when students move within and between schools and districts to:

- ◆ set parameters within which services must be provided,
- ◆ establish provincially consistent language, and
- ◆ recognize the need for flexibility of delivery.

In addition, the following principles reflect a set of beliefs about the needs of ESL students:

- ◆ English language proficiency and knowledge of Canadian culture are fundamental to the success of students in our school system and in our society.
- ◆ There are educational, social, and economic benefits to maintaining a student's first language(s). The educational system therefore should respect and value an individual's first language(s) and culture, and recognize the importance of the continued use of the first language(s)³.
- ◆ Student learning is enhanced by judicious use of two or more languages.
- ◆ To facilitate learning, students should see their history, literature, and cultural experiences in general reflected in the classroom and curriculum.
- ◆ Students require both social and academic communicative competence in order to participate fully in educational opportunities. Academic communicative competence is more difficult to acquire and takes more time.
- ◆ Equity of access to services, facilities and resources should be provided for students for whom English is a second language.
- ◆ ESL students who also have special needs require services to address both their language proficiency and their special need.
- ◆ Parents play a vital role in the education of their children by working in partnership with educators. Parental support is an important component of an ESL student's education. Parents are encouraged to actively participate in the learning process.
- ◆ Fundamental principles in reporting to parents apply to parents of ESL students as well; effective reporting should recognize language and cultural differences.
- ◆ ESL services should reflect current knowledge with regard to effective practices.
- ◆ There should be accountability to the public for the funding allocated

³ Consistent with the Language Education Policy, many students may be eligible to receive credit towards graduation for competency in a wide variety of languages through Challenge, Equivalency and Ministry-approved Credentials

Focus on the Learner

Planning for the Learner

Students for whom English is a second language vary substantially in their needs for service. Some of the variables which account for this include the student's strength, proficiency and literacy in the first language, the level of prior exposure to English, the age of the student, previous school experience, the student's cultural and emotional context, and the demands of the curriculum. These individual differences should be reflected in the services which the student receives.

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. Adaptations may be required to address their level of English language proficiency and their prior educational and cultural experience.

Based on the assessed needs of the student, a determination should be made of the instructional goals which can reasonably be met in the current school year. These should be recorded in an Annual Instructional Plan for the student which includes a schedule or list of the specialized services being provided to that student.

ESL students must follow provincial curriculum except where that student is receiving ESL services, and unable to demonstrate his or her learning in relation to the expected learning outcomes set out in the applicable educational program guide for a course or subject or grade (*Required Areas of Study in an Educational Program Order, 1995*). To graduate, ESL students must meet the requirements of the Graduation Requirements Order. Schools should adapt instructional and assessment methods, provide more time and/or adapt educational materials to give ESL students the greatest opportunity possible to achieve the learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum. Where ESL students cannot demonstrate their learning in relation to the expected learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum, school districts should ensure that appropriate ESL services, including English language instruction, are provided.

Current knowledge with regard to effective practices should be the basis for program and instructional planning for ESL learners. The initial assessment to identify students who require ESL services, the ongoing review of their progress, and the suspension of service is a shared, professional responsibility.

Initial Identification

The purpose of initial assessment is to identify a student's need for ESL service. Essential elements in assessment include language proficiency (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) relative to the student's age, in the context of academic, cultural, social and emotional needs. Teachers should adapt the student's program as necessary for the student to develop their individual potential.

Service Delivery

English as a Second Language services should be provided to assist students to become proficient in English, to develop intellectually and as citizens, and to enable them to achieve the expected learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum. Factors such as individual student need, the number of students requiring service, and their location throughout the school and district will determine the way in which ESL services are delivered. Services must be designed to be flexible in response to changing needs and be reflective of both the needs of the students and the characteristics of the school district. Services may be delivered in a number of ways, including (but not limited to):

- ◆ separate ESL instruction to students,
- ◆ supportive services within a mainstream classroom,
- ◆ ESL specialist support to the classroom teacher.

The ESL specialist, the classroom teacher, and others with appropriate expertise have a role to play, depending on the nature of the services to be provided.

The ultimate goal of ESL service is social and academic communicative competence — the ability to use the language appropriate for the situation. The assessment of such competence is an area of specialized knowledge. Determinations in this area should be made by educational professionals with ESL training, in conjunction with classroom teachers and others as appropriate.

Ongoing Review

At least annually, the student's progress should be reviewed through an assessment of English language proficiency. If the student is not making progress, it may be necessary to conduct further assessment of the student's needs and to adjust services accordingly.

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.

Reporting the Learner's Progress

The Reporting requirements for ESL students who are following the provincial curriculum for a course, subject or grade are the same as for other students. These requirements are described in Policy Circular 96-08 (Student Reporting) and in the Student Progress Report Order. Letter grades, and percentages where appropriate, must be used to indicate students' levels of performance in relation to the prescribed learning outcomes.

Where students are following courses in a locally developed program, letter grades and percentages may be appropriate to report student progress.

Letter grades are not appropriate where ESL students are not yet able, due to their level of language proficiency, to follow the provincial curriculum or a course in a locally developed program. In that case, the student progress report must contain information describing what the students can do, areas in which they require further attention or development, and ways of supporting them in their learning.

It is important that parents be informed of their child's progress in social and academic language competence as part of the regular reporting process. Wherever possible and appropriate, interpreters should be provided for parent/teacher conferences.

Teachers have the professional obligation to report progress only for students whom they have personally instructed and evaluated. Where an ESL specialist is responsible for providing some portion of the student's educational program, s/he should provide written information on the student's progress for inclusion with the report of the classroom teacher.

Funding/Resource Support

Provision of ESL services by a School Board requires additional funding to that provided by the core funding. The Ministry provides supplemental funding to eligible school districts to enable them to deliver English as a Second Language services to ESL students.

Accountability

There are two domains of accountability: educational (consisting of service delivery and reporting), and fiscal. Educators, administrators, school boards and the Ministry are responsible for various aspects of these domains.

Roles and Responsibilities

Educational

The Ministry has a responsibility to set educational standards, and to promote educationally appropriate ESL services and the identification and assessment of students who require these services. Districts have the responsibility to provide educationally appropriate ESL services, to ensure that ESL students are identified, have valid and appropriate assessments, are placed in learning environments suitable to their needs, receive appropriate instruction designed to achieve educational goals, and that regular reporting is provided to parents.

Fiscal

The Ministry sets the criteria for funding eligibility and monitors that funding provided supports the services for ESL students.

Systems of financial accountability should be appropriate and manageable for all districts, and should not redirect significant time or funds from educational service delivery.

Ministry of Education

The Ministry:

- ◆ promotes the equitable participation of ESL students in the educational system in British Columbia,
- ◆ sets standards, develops necessary policy, and establishes guidelines for ESL services,
- ◆ provides and allocates funding to School Districts,
- ◆ monitors that funding for ESL services is equitably distributed and effectively used,
- ◆ reviews and monitors ESL services to determine educational outcomes,
- ◆ works with teams of educators to identify effective practices in ESL and supports educators' efforts to improve ESL services, and
- ◆ analyzes student enrollment trends and distribution to facilitate long-term educational planning.

School Districts

School districts:

- ◆ provide educationally appropriate English as a Second Language services to all students who require them,
- ◆ develop local ESL policies and procedures,
- ◆ ensure that educators assigned to deliver ESL services are appropriately trained and have the necessary skills,

- ◆ ensure that all educators and support staff who work with ESL students have access to relevant staff development opportunities, and
- ◆ clearly identify who is responsible for administering ESL services in the district.

Schools

Schools:

- ◆ implement ESL services,
- ◆ place and plan programming for students and inform their parents,
- ◆ facilitate access to resources and support for effective implementation of ESL services,
- ◆ facilitate the collaboration among all educators providing ESL services, and
- ◆ promote an environment which values diversity, bridges cultures and works to eliminate racism.

Teachers

Teachers of ESL students:

- ◆ work collaboratively to identify, plan and provide services to ESL students,
- ◆ provide effective instruction,
- ◆ provide ongoing assessment, and
- ◆ report progress.

Glossary

In order to have a useful discussion on complex and challenging issues, all those involved in the discussion must agree on a common interpretation of words essential to discourse.

Academic refers to subject matter in a formal schooling context.

Academic communicative competence is the ability to use language to communicate academic knowledge and reach one's potential academically within the context of formal schooling. A variety of factors are involved, including the ESL student's previous academic experiences, literacy background, previous life experiences (e.g., trauma), motivation to learn the language, personality, and developmental history.

Adaptation of the curriculum retains the prescribed learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum, and is provided so the student can participate in the program. These adaptations can include alternate formats and instructional strategies, contraction or extension of time, and assessment procedures. Students receiving service which is an adaptation of the curriculum are assessed using the standards for the course/program and can receive credit toward a Dogwood certificate for their work.

Appropriate ESL services are those provided for ESL students who cannot meet the prescribed learning outcomes. They may include in-class or pull-out ESL support, reception class support, or the support provided in locally developed courses. Curriculum and instruction provided for ESL students should reflect current research and effective ESL practices.

Assessment is a systematic process of gathering information in order to make appropriate educational decisions for a student. It is a collaborative and progressive process designed to identify the student's strengths and needs, and results in the identification and implementation of selected educational strategies. Assessment of the ESL student occurs initially to identify placement and service, and on an ongoing basis to determine progress.

Dialect is a regional or social variety of language distinguished by features of vocabulary, pronunciation, and discourse that differ from other varieties.

Educationally appropriate services are services that reflect current knowledge with regard to effective ESL practices. They are provided by districts for all ESL students along a continuum — from reception services for beginners, through transitional services, to services that offer support during full integration.

An **ESL Specialist** has specialized training in the field of English as a second language: a concentration, diploma or degree in ESL from the Faculty of Education of a recognized university.

Integration allows students for whom English is a second language to be included in educational settings with their peers, and to be provided with the necessary adaptations to enable them to be successful in those settings.

A **locally developed course** is a local program that is part of an educational program offered by the board. It is not determined by the minister. The board must approve of the local program and send a copy of the program and the board's approval to the minister for information and record keeping purposes.

Social communicative competence is the ability to use natural speech to communicate in social situations for a variety of purposes, and to function effectively in a variety of social contexts, including in the classroom.

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