

English as a Second Language (ESL) Common Questions



Why is English as a Second Language (ESL) funding provided to school authorities for children who are as young as 3 ½ years of age on September 1?

Early ESL programming supports the Minister's mandate to continue to improve broad-based supports and early intervention initiatives for at-risk children to improve their learning outcomes.

When young children start learning a new language, they are also maintaining and building on their home language and culture. The two developing languages strengthen each other rather than take away from each other. Providing ESL funding and programming for children as young as 3 ½ years of age, who are at a rapid stage of language growth, supports and enhances their developing language proficiency in the context of their family and community.

In addition to Early Childhood Services (ECS) Base Instruction funding (see [Funding Manual for School Authorities](#)), ESL funding is provided for children from 3 ½ years of age who are:

- foreign born and have minimal English language skills, or
- Canadian born and have limited English language skills. (This may include First Nations, Métis and Inuit children who would benefit from language enhancement.)

How are children identified as being eligible for ESL funding?

School authorities and approved private ECS operators may seek assistance in identifying children who are eligible for funding through community organizations that serve children and families, as well as community agencies and other groups that support new members and immigrants of the community. Assessment of a child's language proficiency determines ESL funding and programming needs. Documentation must be on file to indicate the child's language proficiency at onset and following a year of programming.

How is a child's language proficiency determined?

The child's English language proficiency is initially assessed by a certificated teacher. Assessment can include an interview with the parents and assessment of the child's oral language through culturally relevant picture prompts or objects, age-appropriate questions, or other common assessments.

Alberta Education has developed [K-12 ESL Proficiency Benchmarks](#) to assist educators in tracking and reporting a child/student's language proficiency.



Who is responsible for conducting the program?

Programming must be under the direction of a certificated teacher. Programming may be delivered directly by a certificated teacher in a classroom setting, or supervised by a certificated teacher who works closely with program staff at daycares or pre-schools to create language-rich environments, develop program plans, and use instructional and assessment strategies that meet the language learning needs of the children. If programming is provided off-site under teacher supervision, a contractual agreement is recommended.

The Alberta Education guide [*Working with Young Children who are Learning English as a New Language*](#) provides information about developing effective programming to enhance English language learning for young children.

What ESL programming is appropriate for children prior to the kindergarten year?

Participation in all ECS programming, including ESL programming for children prior to Grade 1 or 6 years of age, is not mandatory in Alberta. Prior to Grade 1, parents may choose to have their child participate in a program and must provide consent before programming for ESL begins.

Programming in a supportive and welcoming learning environment should provide opportunities for children to gain confidence in language skills through a variety of language-rich activities, play experiences, and interaction with English speaking peers. Programming should be developmentally appropriate, child-focused, and engage families and communities. The focus is **not** on academic readiness skills.

A successful program recognizes the importance of family, community, and culture in developing and maintaining the home language as well as supporting development of the new language. Children, parents and community members should feel as though they are welcomed members of the learning community and that their diverse identities are valued. The Alberta Education guide [*Working with Young Children who are Learning English as a New Language*](#) helps early childhood professionals understand the relationship between learning a new language, and maintaining and developing the home language and culture. You can also visit the [Funding for Early Learners: ESL/Francisation](#) webpage to find out more.

Further information about ECS programming is available at [Early Childhood Services](#) or by contacting the Early Learning Branch at 780-422-9423. For more information about ESL benchmarks, contact [Mike Ettrich](#) at 780-644-8195. To be connected toll-free inside Alberta, dial 310-0000.