

Early Childhood Services English as a Second Language

Eligibility for English as a Second Language (ESL) funding

English as a Second Language (ESL) funding is available for children needing extra English language supports and instruction. This extra support is to help children achieve grade level expectations. See the [Funding Manual for School Authorities](#) for more information.

ESL funding is available for children 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).

ESL funding and programming is available for children as young as 3½ years of age, who are at a rapid stage of language growth; funding is provided for a maximum of five years for eligible children. ESL programming supports and enhances the development of a child's language skill in the context of their family and community.

Students in home education, blended, outreach or on-line programs are **not** eligible for ESL funding.

School authorities and approved private early childhood services (ECS) operators may wish to contact community organizations that serve children and families to help identify children who are eligible for funding. They may also connect with community agencies and other groups that support new members, refugees and immigrants in the community.

How is language proficiency determined?

Assessment of a child's language proficiency determines ESL funding and programming needs.

A child's English language skill or ability is determined by a certificated teacher. Determining the child's English language ability usually includes:

- an interview with the parents/guardians and an evaluation of the child's oral language; and
- culturally relevant picture prompts or objects, age-appropriate questions, or other common assessments.

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Teachers may use the [Alberta Kindergarten to Grade 12 \(K–12\) ESL proficiency benchmarks](#) to determine language proficiency. Documentation must be on file to indicate the child's language proficiency at the onset and following a year of programming.

Who is responsible for providing ESL programming?

ESL programming must be provided under the direction of a certificated teacher.

The goal of ESL programming is to create language-rich environments for children. This programming must be delivered:

- 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.

The certificated teacher, in collaboration with the program staff at daycares or pre-schools, is responsible for developing program plans, and using instructional and assessment strategies that meet the language learning needs each child.

Why should children learning English continue to speak their home language?

Many children entering ECS programs who may have limited proficiency in English speak another language at home.

These children may already have a well-developed language and literacy base from speaking their home language that they can use to help them learn English.

Children learn English as an additional language better when they maintain and build on their home language and culture.

The two developing languages strengthen, rather than take away from each other.

Parents and guardians can help their child learn English by continuing to speak and read to their child in their home language. A successful ESL program recognizes the importance of family, community, and culture in developing and maintaining the home language. It also supports development of the new language.

Schools and ECS operators should encourage families to continue with their home languages and cultures. The [Learning English as a New Language](#) parent tip sheet provides more information for helping children learn English.

Further information on ESL programming, is available on [Alberta Education's website](#).

The [Working with Young Children who are Learning English as a New Language](#) guide contains information to enhance English language learning, including information on effective programming and the importance of culture and speaking the home language.

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What ESL programming is appropriate for children before Grade 1?

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

ESL programming should provide opportunities for children to gain confidence in language skills, through using a variety of:

- language-rich activities;
- play experiences; and
- interaction with English-speaking peers.

The focus is **not** on academic readiness skills. ESL programming should be developmentally appropriate, child-focused, and engage families and communities. The learning community should be welcoming of family and community members and appreciate the value of their diverse identities.