

**Evaluation of ESL Education in Alberta: Perceptions of ESL Students
in Four Major School Boards**

Coalition for Equal Access to Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of identified ESL students in Alberta has tripled from 14,673 in the 1988-1989 school year to 48,346 in the 2007-2008 school year. As ESL learners continue to be a fast growing student population, our K-12 public education system would benefit from a better understanding of the current state of ESL education in Alberta schools.

This study surveyed 242 self-identified ESL students from four of Alberta's major school boards, namely the Calgary Board of Education, Calgary Catholic School District, Edmonton Public School Board and Edmonton Catholic School District in the 2007-2008 school year. Respondents were diverse in terms of gender, country of birth, school division and language proficiency. The survey questionnaire focused on the perceptions of ESL students about various aspects of ESL education, including the matching of ESL needs and ESL enrollment, identification of ESL needs, assessment of language proficiency, ESL instruction, tracking of English language learning progress, resource allocation for ESL services and school-family communication.

This study has some limitations. It focuses solely on the perceptions of self-identified ESL students. While their viewpoints are very important and offer insights into their first hand experiences in Alberta schools, some students may not always be aware of all aspects of ESL services in their schools, nor be able to estimate their abilities accurately. Further, the sample size for this study was relatively small, and the numbers of respondents to some questions were less than ideal.

Summary of Findings

Congruence of ESL Needs and ESL Enrollment

- About 67.2 percent of all respondents reported that they have been enrolled in an ESL program at some point in their K-12 educational experience.
- Among those respondents who were enrolled in an ESL program, 73.3 percent indicated a match between their ESL enrollments and ESL needs.
- For those who were not currently enrolled in an ESL program, 21.1 percent indicated that they, in fact, needed ESL support. Another 21.8 percent were unsure if they needed ESL assistance.

Identification

- Only 17.4 percent of respondents believed that their schools have formal screening procedures to identify their ESL needs.
- Respondents indicated that schools mostly relied on requests from their families (32.2 percent) and classroom teachers (34.9 percent) to identify their ESL needs.
- About 34.9 percent of respondents reported that their schools thought they needed ESL support without any testing or consultation with their families.

Assessment

- Assessments of language skills were not routinely done in school with potential ESL students. A slight majority of respondents reported that they received a formal assessment for their writing and reading abilities in English (54.5 percent and 58.0 percent, respectively). Respondents reported that they were less likely to receive a formal assessment for their speaking (41.9 percent) and listening (39.7 percent) abilities in English.
- Even though other studies have established the importance of heritage languages in the development of proficiency in a second language, respondents consistently reported low rates of assessment for their writing (24.2 percent), reading (18.8 percent), speaking (19.1 percent) and listening (17.1 percent) abilities in their first language.

ESL Instruction

- The most commonly reported types of ESL instruction were ESL instruction in a separate ESL classroom (74.0 percent), pullout (58.1 percent), ESL instruction by subject teachers (24.0 percent), collaborative instruction between ESL teachers and subject teachers (26.0 percent), and before or after school program (14.3 percent). (Respondents were encouraged to indicate more than one type of instruction if they had experienced more than one).
- About 1 out of 3 respondents (66.7 percent) reported they received 5 hours or less of ESL instruction per week.
- Overall, many respondents indicated that their schools stopped providing them with ESL assistance when their proficiency in reading (42.6 percent), writing (53.2 percent) and speaking (37.9 percent) were still considered as "average" or "poor/very poor."

Tracking and Monitoring

- Only 45.3 percent of respondents indicated that their schools have a way to keep track of their improvement in learning English.
- A significant number of respondents (47.2 percent) did not know if their schools keep track of their progress in learning English.

Resource Allocation

- Roughly 2 in 5 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their schools have adequately allocated ESL teachers (42.0 percent), ESL assistants (35.8 percent), ESL textbooks (43.8 percent), and classroom materials (42.0 percent) for ESL instruction.

School-Family Communication

- Respondents indicated that schools are more likely to use teacher-parent interview (66.0 percent) and report cards (59.7 percent) to inform their families of their progress in learning English.
- About 1 in 10 respondents (10.8 percent) reported that their schools have not informed their families of their progress in learning English at all.
- The majority of respondents indicated infrequent school-family communication. About 71.3 percent of respondents reported that their schools have informed their families of their progress learning in English once every three months or once every semester.

Relational Patterns

- There is an overall lack of strong, coherent relationships among the various aspects of ESL services: identification, assessment, instruction, resource allocation, tracking of learning progress and home-school communication. This indicates that students perceive a lack of pedagogically sound ESL service delivery in Alberta schools.

Key Recommendations to Alberta Education and School Boards

The Coalition for Equal Access to Education urges Alberta Education and school boards to work collaboratively with stakeholders to address the following areas:

- Develop standards for identification, assessment, placement, explicit ESL instruction, and tracking of progress for both language proficiency and academic performance;
- Develop and implement ESL programs of study at all levels of school;
- Provide adequate resources for ESL education and develop accountability measures and reporting requirements;

- Set professional standards in terms of professional requirements for ESL personnel and school personnel who provide language support to ESL students;
- Ensure availability of resources and opportunities for comprehensive, sustained professional development and continuing education for personnel; and
- Involve diverse stakeholders (government, education, community, service providers, etc.) in collaborative efforts to support ESL learners.

1. INTRODUCTION

Learners with an English as a Second Language (ESL) background have established a strong presence in K-12 education. In Alberta schools, the number of identified ESL learners has tripled from 14,673 in the 1988-1989 school year to 48,346 in the 2007-2008 school year (Alberta Learning, 2004; Alberta Education, 2008). What is more, the reported figures are conservative due to a lack of standardized procedures for identifying and assessing ESL learners in schools.

As ESL learners continue to be a fast growing student population, their academic success and well being will shape the future of Alberta. This study focuses on the voices of ESL learners in Alberta schools. Drawing upon the 2007-2008 survey of 242 self-identified ESL learners in the four major school boards in Calgary and Edmonton, namely Calgary Board of Education (CBE), Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD), Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) and Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD), this study will examine from the perspective of self-identified ESL learners how the public education system has supported their ESL needs.

2. SETTING THE CONTEXT

According to Cummins (1994), acquisition of a second language develops on a continuum from Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS involves the development of social, conversational language competence for oral communication. ESL learners can comprehend social language through their observations of non-verbal behaviours (e.g. facial expression, gestures), reactions from others (e.g., shock, surprise, pleased), voice cues (e.g., intonation, phrasing, stress) and other contextual cues. ESL learners often need a minimum of 2 years of ESL instruction to develop BICS. CALP, on the other hand, involves mastery of cognitively challenging, grade appropriate learning tasks aligned with the

program of studies. ESL learners, at this level of competency, no longer require non-verbal cues and intensive face-to-face interaction. Instead, they are able to understand abstract academic language and to meet the literacy demands of subject content. Development of CALP is essential for success in high school and post-secondary education. Acquisition of CALP is, however, a long, uneven and gradual process that may require varying types of ESL program support over the entire K-12 experience of a learner (Collier, 1995; Roessingh & Kover, 2003). Effective ESL education, therefore, ought to promote a continuum of ESL services dealing with all aspects of language acquisition from BICS through to CALP, involving identification, assessment, instruction, tracking and monitoring of progress, resource allocation, and school-family communication (see Coalition for Equal Access to Education, 2005; Ngo, 2007).

In Alberta, ESL learners have annually generated millions of dollars in instructional monies for school boards. According to the 2007-2008 Funding Manual for School Authorities (Alberta Education, 2007), the respective base instruction rates per pupil for students in Early Childhood Education (ECS) and those in Grade 1 to 9 were \$2,725 and \$5,450 for the 2007-2008 school year. The base instruction rate for students in Grade 10 to 12 was \$155.7 per Credit Enrolment Unit (CEU), or up to \$ 9,342.6 per student per school year for a maximum of 60 CEUs per student. For ESL learners, on top of the base instruction grant, the school boards received \$1,093 for each designated student. In addition, school boards received an additional \$477 per student for ESL students with a low socio-economic status (including those with refugee status). The estimated total of base instruction and ESL funding generated by ESL students in Alberta in the 2007-08 school year was over \$300 million.

In spite of increasingly sizable base instruction and ESL funding for ESL learners, there is widening incongruence between the complex needs of ESL learners and the availability of ESL services in Alberta schools. In a recent review of ESL K-12 program implementation in Alberta for

Alberta Education, Howard Research & Management Consulting Inc. (2006) provided some telling results. According to the review, 64 percent of the surveyed schools declared that they use in-class ESL support (meaning regular subject teachers are supposed to provide ESL instruction) as their model of ESL instruction. Yet, the majority of the subject teachers (64 percent) reported having no ESL training to enable them to support ESL students in their classrooms. Overall, only 11.1 percent of schools reported having full day self-contained ESL classes and 2.3 percent reported having half-day self-contained ESL classes. Even among those schools with 26 or more ESL students, only 9.4 percent reported having full day self-contained ESL classes and 7.2 percent reported half-day self-contained ESL classes. Many of the surveyed schools, therefore, did not appear to use ESL monies for the purpose of providing explicit, structured ESL instruction by qualified staff to ESL students.

Other research studies have also raised red flags about the educational success of ESL learners. Cummins (1981) suggested that ESL learners are two or more years behind their native English-speaking counterparts academically by the time they reach sixth grade. Watt and Roessingh (1994, 2001) tracked educational outcomes among ESL youth in a single, large urban school in Alberta for 10 years. They found that the drop-out rate for ESL learners remained unchanged at 74 percent, more than double the high school non-completion rate in Alberta. In their study of the academic achievement of ESL high school students in one urban school board in Alberta, Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa and Jamieson (1999) reported that nearly 46 percent of high school ESL learners did not complete their studies within the K-12 system, compared to a 70 percent completion rate for all learners in Alberta. Latimer (2000) examined the 1996-1999 provincial achievement test scores of students in the Calgary Board of Education, and found that ESL learners in grades 3, 6 and 9 were between 16 to 28 percentage points behind other students in language arts. Grayson (2004) provides glimpses into the future awaiting many ESL learners at the

university level. The researcher suggested that the communication skills of university students who are sons and daughters of immigrants, independent of length of time in Canada, are not as high as those of Canadian-born English speaking students. Grayson further asserted that all else being equal, independent of time in the country, the university GPAs of immigrant students of non-European origin were generally lower than those of Canadian-born students.

In summary, the language acquisition process is complex and it requires explicit, structured language instruction by qualified ESL professionals. Yet, there have been ongoing concerns about both the availability and quality of ESL instruction in the public education system. Given that ESL learners play an important role in the future of Alberta and Canada, the Ministry of Education and school boards could benefit from ESL learners' evaluation of school responsiveness to their ESL needs.

3. METHODS

Survey Research Design

This study used a survey to gain an understanding of the perspectives of ESL learners on how Alberta schools have responded to their ESL needs. The development of the questionnaire was informed by the conceptual framework for effective ESL education, which promotes a continuum of ESL services dealing with identification, assessment, instruction, tracking and monitoring of progress, resource allocation, and family involvement (see Coalition for Equal Access to Education, 2005; Ngo, 2007). In addition, a team of six academic researchers and community leaders served as research advisors and provided their feedback and recommendations throughout the development of the questionnaire. The survey was also piloted with a group of ESL learners for further feedback and recommendations. The survey was available in Arabic, Chinese, English,

Filipino, German, Hindi, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Urdu and Vietnamese. The translated versions of the survey were cross-checked by independent reviewers to ensure accuracy of the translation.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. It focuses solely on the perceptions of self-identified ESL students. While their viewpoints are very important and offer insights into their first hand experiences in Alberta schools, some students may not always be aware of all aspects of ESL services in their schools, nor be able to estimate their abilities accurately. Further, the sample size for this study was relatively small, particularly for analyses specific to each school board. The numbers of respondents to some questions were also less than ideal due to reliance on the experience of those self-identified ESL learners who have enrolled in an ESL program (made up of 67.2 percent of the total sample).

Data Collection

The researchers recruited participants from various ethnocultural communities in Calgary and Edmonton. The non-random sample was stratified according to the demographic trends of the immigrant populations in Calgary and Edmonton. Two teams of community research assistants (17 members in Calgary and 19 members in Edmonton) supported the data collection process. All research assistants received an orientation to the study and signed an oath of confidentiality. The members of the research teams used their networks of community serving agencies, ethnocultural groups and other service organizations to recruit the research participants. They further made public presentations to ethno-cultural families to promote the research project. Recruitment notices were also placed in various ethnic media outlets, such as newspapers, newsletters and radio. The research teams collected the data in the 2007-2008 school year.

Participants

All research participants met the following criteria for inclusion: (1) They had to be ethnocultural children or youth who had identified themselves as ESL learners; (2) They had been resident in Alberta for at least 6 months; and (3) They were attending the K-12 education system in the 2007-2008 school year. Our sampling strategies took into consideration differential levels of student enrollment in various school boards, immigration patterns, gender representation, and school divisions. A total of 242 ESL learners from four major school boards in Alberta, namely the Calgary Board of Education (CBE), Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD), Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) and Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD), participated in the study. Table 1 provides an overview of the sample.

Table 1: An overview of the sample

| | Total | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|--|-------|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Total Surveys | 242 | 100.0 | 79 | 32.6 | 44 | 18.2 | 73 | 30.2 | 46 | 19.0 |
| Gender | | | | | | | | | | |
| Female | 121 | 50.0 | 41 | 51.9 | 19 | 43.2 | 34 | 46.6 | 27 | 58.7 |
| Male | 121 | 50.0 | 38 | 48.1 | 25 | 56.8 | 39 | 53.4 | 19 | 41.3 |
| Region of birth | | | | | | | | | | |
| Canada/ USA | 34 | 14.0 | 17 | 21.5 | 4 | 9.1 | 7 | 9.6 | 6 | 13.0 |
| Latin America | 21 | 8.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 8 | 18.2 | 4 | 5.5 | 9 | 19.6 |
| Europe | 12 | 5.0 | 5 | 6.3 | 1 | 2.3 | 3 | 4.1 | 3 | 6.5 |
| Africa | 39 | 16.1 | 9 | 11.4 | 8 | 18.2 | 8 | 11.0 | 14 | 30.4 |
| West, Central, and South Asia, and Middle East | 47 | 19.4 | 19 | 24.1 | 1 | 2.3 | 27 | 37.0 | 0 | 0.0 |
| East and Southeast Asia | 89 | 36.8 | 29 | 36.7 | 22 | 50.0 | 24 | 32.9 | 14 | 30.4 |
| School Division | | | | | | | | | | |
| Kindergarten | 4 | 1.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 6.8 | 1 | 1.4 | 0 | 0 |
| Elementary | 101 | 41.7 | 38 | 48.1 | 25 | 56.8 | 24 | 32.9 | 14 | 30.4 |
| Junior High | 69 | 28.5 | 16 | 20.3 | 10 | 22.7 | 27 | 37.0 | 16 | 34.8 |
| Senior High | 68 | 28.1 | 25 | 31.6 | 6 | 13.6 | 21 | 28.8 | 16 | 34.8 |
| Years in Canada | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 years or less | 152 | 63.1 | 42 | 53.8 | 30 | 68.2 | 54 | 74.0 | 26 | 56.5 |
| 6 years or more (Maximum 18 years) | 89 | 36.9 | 36 | 46.2 | 14 | 31.8 | 19 | 26.0 | 20 | 43.5 |

Note: Some columns do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Language Proficiency of Respondents

Respondents demonstrated varying levels of proficiency in heritage languages and in English. With respect to first language proficiency, respondents assessed their speaking ability most favorably, with 75.6 percent selecting “good” or “very good” as their responses (Table 2). The ESL learners, however, were less confident in their reading and writing abilities in their first language. Only 54.2 percent and 43.9 percent of all respondents respectively ranked their reading and writing abilities higher than average. Across school boards, respondents from the EPSB and ECSD were most convinced about their speaking ability in their first language. About 4 out of 5 respondents in the EPSB and ECSD (81.2 percent and 82.2 percent respectively) chose “good” or “very good” to describe their speaking ability. Those from the CBE reported the lowest levels of reading and writing abilities in their first language. About 40.6 percent and 33.0 percent of the CBE respondents thought their reading and writing abilities were above average. It is important to note that language proficiency of respondents could be partially tied to country of origin and the conditions under which the students arrived in Canada.

Table 2: Proficiency in first language

| | Poor/Very Poor | | Average | Good/Very Good |
|-----------------|----------------|------|---------|----------------|
| | N | | % | |
| Reading | | | | |
| Total | 236 | 33.9 | 11.9 | 54.2 |
| CBE | 79 | 48.1 | 11.4 | 40.5 |
| CCSD | 43 | 30.3 | 11.6 | 58.1 |
| EPSB | 69 | 21.7 | 11.6 | 66.7 |
| ECSD | 45 | 31.1 | 13.3 | 55.6 |
| Writing | | | | |
| Total | 237 | 38.8 | 17.3 | 43.9 |
| CBE | 79 | 51.9 | 15.2 | 32.9 |
| CCSD | 44 | 34.1 | 15.9 | 50.0 |
| EPSB | 69 | 26.1 | 23.2 | 50.7 |
| ECSD | 45 | 40.0 | 13.3 | 46.7 |
| Speaking | | | | |
| Total | 237 | 10.5 | 13.9 | 75.6 |
| CBE | 79 | 10.1 | 17.7 | 72.2 |
| CCSD | 44 | 13.6 | 20.5 | 65.9 |
| EPSB | 69 | 10.1 | 8.7 | 81.2 |
| ECSD | 45 | 8.9 | 8.9 | 82.2 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

In terms of English language proficiency, respondents assessed their speaking ability most favorably, with 64.3 percent selecting “good” or “very good” for their responses (Table 3a). They, however, reported lower rates of proficiency in reading and writing. About 56.2 percent and 49.6 percent of all respondents respectively ranked their reading and writing abilities above average. Among the school boards, those respondents in the CBE reported the strongest reading and writing abilities in English, with 66.7 percent and 62.8 percent of the respondents rating their reading and writing abilities higher than average. At the other end, only 48.5 percent and 38.2 percent of respondents in the EPSB selected 4 and 5 on the 5-point scale to describe their reading and writing abilities.

Table 3a: Proficiency in English Language (Overall)

| | Poor/Very Poor | | Average | Good/Very Good |
|-----------------|----------------|------|---------|----------------|
| | N | | % | |
| Reading | | | | |
| Total | 235 | 12.8 | 31.1 | 56.2 |
| CBE | 78 | 7.7 | 25.6 | 66.7 |
| CCSD | 44 | 15.9 | 31.8 | 52.3 |
| EPSB | 68 | 11.8 | 39.7 | 48.5 |
| ECSD | 45 | 20.0 | 26.7 | 53.3 |
| Writing | | | | |
| Total | 234 | 18.4 | 32.1 | 49.6 |
| CBE | 78 | 14.1 | 23.1 | 62.8 |
| CCSD | 43 | 23.3 | 30.2 | 46.5 |
| EPSB | 68 | 14.7 | 47.1 | 38.2 |
| ECSD | 45 | 26.7 | 26.7 | 46.7 |
| Speaking | | | | |
| Total | 235 | 12.3 | 23.4 | 64.3 |
| CBE | 78 | 9.0 | 24.4 | 66.7 |
| CCSD | 44 | 15.9 | 20.5 | 63.6 |
| EPSB | 68 | 7.4 | 27.9 | 64.7 |
| ECSD | 45 | 22.2 | 17.8 | 60.0 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Tables 3b and 3c further elaborate on reported levels of English language proficiency among the respondents according to their numbers of years in Canada. Generally, those respondents who had been in Canada 5 years or less reported lower rates of proficiency in reading, writing and speaking than those who have been in Canada 6 years or more. The two cohorts demonstrated the differences of 12.2 and 8.3 percentages with respect to favourable assessment of their reading and speaking abilities (“good” or “very good”). They, however, showed a difference of only 2 percent with respect to favorable assessment of their writing abilities.

Table 3b: Proficiency in English Language by Years in Canada- 5 years or less

| | N | Poor/Very Poor | Average | Good/Very Good |
|-----------------|-----|----------------|---------|----------------|
| | | | % | |
| Reading | | | | |
| Total | 146 | 13.7 | 34.9 | 51.4 |
| CBE | 41 | 9.8 | 29.3 | 61.0 |
| CCSD | 30 | 20.0 | 26.7 | 53.3 |
| EPSB | 50 | 12.0 | 40.0 | 48.0 |
| ECSD | 25 | 16.0 | 44.0 | 40.0 |
| Writing | | | | |
| Total | 146 | 19.9 | 31.5 | 48.6 |
| CBE | 41 | 19.5 | 17.1 | 63.4 |
| CCSD | 30 | 26.7 | 26.7 | 46.7 |
| EPSB | 50 | 14.0 | 46.0 | 40.0 |
| ECSD | 25 | 24.0 | 32.0 | 44.0 |
| Speaking | | | | |
| Total | 146 | 13.7 | 25.3 | 61.0 |
| CBE | 41 | 9.8 | 29.3 | 61.0 |
| CCSD | 30 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 66.7 |
| EPSB | 50 | 10.0 | 28.0 | 62.0 |
| ECSD | 25 | 24.0 | 24.0 | 52.0 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 3c: Proficiency in English Language by Years in Canada- 6 years or more

| | Poor/Very Poor | | Average | Good/Very Good |
|-----------------|----------------|------|---------|----------------|
| | N | | % | |
| Reading | | | | |
| Total | 88 | 11.4 | 25.0 | 63.6 |
| CBE | 36 | 5.6 | 22.2 | 72.2 |
| CCSD | 14 | 7.1 | 42.9 | 50.0 |
| EPSB | 18 | 11.1 | 38.9 | 50.0 |
| ECSD | 20 | 25.0 | 5.0 | 70.0 |
| Writing | | | | |
| Total | 87 | 16.1 | 33.3 | 50.6 |
| CBE | 36 | 8.3 | 30.6 | 61.1 |
| CCSD | 13 | 15.4 | 38.5 | 46.2 |
| EPSB | 18 | 16.7 | 50.0 | 33.3 |
| ECSD | 20 | 30.0 | 20.0 | 50.0 |
| Speaking | | | | |
| Total | 88 | 10.2 | 20.5 | 69.3 |
| CBE | 36 | 8.3 | 19.4 | 72.2 |
| CCSD | 14 | 14.3 | 28.6 | 57.1 |
| EPSB | 18 | 0.0 | 27.8 | 72.2 |
| ECSD | 20 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 70.0 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

4. FINDINGS

Effective ESL education ought to ensure that a continuum of services is available to ESL learners.

The following section examines the congruence of ESL needs and enrollment of learners in an ESL

program, identification of learners with ESL needs, assessment of language proficiency, ESL

instruction, tracking of English language learning progress, resource allocation for ESL services and

school-family communication.

Congruence of ESL Needs and ESL Enrollment

Table 4 demonstrates incongruence between ESL needs of students and their enrollment in an ESL program in Alberta schools. Overall, 67.2 percent of respondents reported that they had been enrolled in an ESL program at some point in their K-12 educational experience. Furthermore, 39.8 percent of respondents indicated that they currently need ESL support. Another 20.7 percent of respondents were unsure whether they needed ESL instruction. Yet, only 35.7 percent of respondents indicated that they were currently enrolled in an ESL program.

Among the four school boards, respondents from the EPSB were the least likely to report that they had been enrolled in an ESL program at some point in their K-12 educational experience (43.1 percent). Further, respondents from the EPSB and ECSD were more likely to report that they were not currently enrolled in an ESL program. Though 41.1 percent of respondents from the EPSB indicated that they needed ESL instruction, only 26.0 percent reported that they were currently enrolled in an ESL program (a difference of 15.1 percent). In the ECSD, 60.0 percent of respondents indicated their need for ESL support. Yet, only 37.6 percent of respondents reported that they were currently enrolled in an ESL program (a difference of 22.2 percent).

Table 4: ESL needs and enrollment

| | N | Yes | No | Not Sure |
|--|-----|------|------|----------|
| | | % | | |
| Have you ever enrolled in an ESL program? | | | | |
| Total | 241 | 67.2 | 29.9 | 2.9 |
| CBE | 79 | 77.2 | 20.3 | 2.5 |
| CCSD | 44 | 77.3 | 22.7 | 0.0 |
| EPSB | 72 | 43.1 | 51.4 | 5.6 |
| ECSD | 46 | 78.3 | 19.6 | 2.2 |
| Do you think you need ESL instruction currently? | | | | |
| Total | 241 | 39.8 | 39.4 | 20.7 |
| CBE | 79 | 29.1 | 39.2 | 31.6 |
| CCSD | 44 | 36.4 | 50.0 | 13.6 |
| EPSB | 73 | 41.1 | 39.7 | 19.2 |
| ECSD | 45 | 60.0 | 28.9 | 11.1 |
| Are you currently enrolled in an ESL program? | | | | |
| Total | 241 | 35.7 | 61.8 | 2.5 |
| CBE | 79 | 36.7 | 57.0 | 6.3 |
| CCSD | 44 | 47.7 | 52.3 | 0.0 |
| EPSB | 73 | 26.0 | 74.0 | 0.0 |
| ECSD | 45 | 37.8 | 60.0 | 2.2 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 5 further elaborates on the mismatch between enrollment of ESL students in an ESL program and their reported needs for ESL instruction. Overall, 73.3 percent of all respondents who were enrolled in an ESL program indicated a match between their ESL enrollment and ESL needs. However, 12.8 percent of those who were placed in an ESL program believed that they did not need ESL support, and another 14.0 percent were not sure whether they needed ESL support.

Among the four major school boards, a perfect match between ESL enrollment and ESL needs (100 percent) was reported among those respondents enrolled in an ESL program in the ECSD. This perfect match, however, should not overshadow the fact that 38.5 percent of ECSD students who were not enrolled in an ESL program indicated they needed ESL support. By

comparison, respondents who were enrolled in an ESL program in the CBE were least likely to report a match between ESL enrollment and ESL needs (58.6 percent), and more likely to doubt whether they needed ESL support (31.0%). In the CCSD, 28.6 percent of respondents who were placed in an ESL program believed that they did not need ESL support.

For those respondents who were not enrolled in an ESL program, 21.1 percent of reported that they, in fact, needed ESL support. Another 21.8 percent were not sure whether they needed ESL support. Among the four school boards, those respondents who were not placed in an ESL program in the ECSD reported a highest rate of mismatch between their need for ESL support and their non-ESL enrollment status (38.5 percent). In the CBE, 28.9 percent of respondents who were not placed in an ESL program indicated their doubts as to whether they needed ESL support.

Table 5: Congruence in ESL enrollment and ESL needs

| | Total | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|-----|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Enrolled- Need | 63 | 73.3 | 17 | 58.6 | 14 | 66.7 | 15 | 78.9 | 17 | 100.0 |
| Enrolled- Don't need | 11 | 12.8 | 3 | 10.3 | 6 | 28.6 | 2 | 10.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Enrolled- Not sure if needed | 12 | 14.0 | 9 | 31.0 | 1 | 4.8 | 2 | 10.5 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Total enrolled | 86 | 100.0 | 29 | 100.0 | 21 | 100.0 | 19 | 100.0 | 17 | 100.0 |
| Not enrolled- Need | 31 | 21.1 | 4 | 8.9 | 2 | 8.7 | 15 | 28.3 | 10 | 38.5 |
| Not enrolled- Don't need | 84 | 57.1 | 28 | 62.2 | 16 | 69.6 | 27 | 50.9 | 13 | 50.0 |
| Not enrolled- Not sure if needed | 32 | 21.8 | 13 | 28.9 | 5 | 21.7 | 11 | 20.8 | 3 | 11.5 |
| Total not enrolled | 147 | 100.0 | 45 | 100.0 | 23 | 100.0 | 53 | 100.0 | 26 | 100.0 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Identification of ESL Needs

Data from the survey demonstrate a perception of a lack of coherent, standardized screening procedures for ESL needs among K-12 learners in Alberta schools (Table 6). Only 17.4 percent of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program believed that their schools had screening procedures for their ESL needs. About 32.2 percent of respondents reported that their schools became aware of their ESL needs when their families requested ESL support. Another 34.9 percent of respondents indicated that their classroom teachers requested assessments of their ESL needs. Alarming, 34.9 percent of respondents reported that their schools concluded that they needed ESL support without any family consultation or testing. About 7.4 percent indicated that their schools failed to identify their ESL needs.

Among the major school boards, respondents from the ECSD were more likely to report that their schools had used standard screening procedures to identify their ESL needs (41.2 percent), and that their classroom teachers had requested assessments of their ESL needs (58.8 percent). Respondents from the ECSD were also more likely to report their schools just thought they needed ESL support without any family consultation or testing (47.1 percent). Respondents from the EPSB, on the other hand, were most likely to report that their families had requested assessments of their ESL needs (46.4%).

Table 6: Identification of ESL students

| | Total | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|---|-------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Family's request for ESL support | 48 | 32.2 | 17 | 31.5 | 10 | 30.3 | 13 | 46.4 | 8 | 23.5 |
| Classroom teacher's request for testing | 52 | 34.9 | 17 | 31.5 | 5 | 15.2 | 10 | 35.7 | 20 | 58.8 |
| Standard screening procedures | 26 | 17.4 | 3 | 5.6 | 4 | 12.1 | 5 | 17.9 | 14 | 41.2 |
| My school just thought I needed ESL | 52 | 34.9 | 19 | 35.2 | 10 | 30.3 | 7 | 25.0 | 16 | 47.1 |
| School does not know about my ESL needs | 11 | 7.4 | 4 | 7.4 | 1 | 3.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 6 | 17.6 |
| Other (social workers, tutors, librarians, etc) | 11 | 7.4 | 4 | 7.4 | 6 | 18.2 | 1 | 3.6 | 0 | 0.0 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

ESL Assessment

Effective ESL education requires standardized assessment procedures that take into consideration ESL learners' ability in both English and their heritage language (see Ngo, 2006). This study finds a lack of formal assessment of ESL learners for their proficiency in first language and in English.

With respect to assessment of proficiency in English language, only 54.5 percent and 58.0 percent of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program reported formal assessments for their writing and reading abilities in English respectively (Table 7). The data also revealed a lower proportion of respondents who reported formal assessments for their speaking and listening abilities (41.1 percent and 39.7 percent, respectively). Among the school boards, respondents from the CCSD reported the lowest rates for assessment of writing and reading abilities in English. With respect to assessment of proficiency in heritage languages, the data demonstrate a lack of understanding and appreciation of the important role of first language proficiency in second language acquisition, or a lack of capacity to assess first language proficiency among schools in Alberta. Respondents consistently reported low rates of assessment for writing (24.2 percent), reading (18.8 percent), speaking (19.1 percent) and listening (17.1 percent) abilities in their first language.

Table 7: Assessment of language ability

| | Alberta | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|--|---------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Assessment of English language ability | | | | | | | | | | |
| Writing | 85 | 54.5 | 31 | 51.7 | 16 | 47.1 | 17 | 58.6 | 21 | 63.6 |
| Reading | 91 | 58.0 | 35 | 58.3 | 16 | 47.1 | 18 | 62.1 | 22 | 64.7 |
| Speaking | 65 | 41.9 | 22 | 36.7 | 13 | 38.2 | 12 | 41.4 | 18 | 56.3 |
| Listening | 62 | 39.7 | 18 | 30.0 | 13 | 38.2 | 11 | 37.9 | 20 | 60.6 |
| Assessment of First language ability | | | | | | | | | | |
| Writing | 37 | 24.2 | 12 | 20.3 | 8 | 24.2 | 6 | 21.4 | 11 | 33.3 |
| Reading | 29 | 18.8 | 9 | 15.0 | 5 | 15.2 | 6 | 21.4 | 9 | 27.3 |
| Speaking | 29 | 19.1 | 6 | 10.2 | 8 | 24.2 | 6 | 21.4 | 9 | 28.1 |
| Listening | 26 | 17.1 | 5 | 8.5 | 6 | 18.2 | 6 | 21.4 | 9 | 28.1 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

ESL Instruction

Respondents who had been enrolled in an ESL program reported various types of ESL instruction in Alberta's schools (Tables 8a). Overall, about 74.0 percent of the respondents reported they had received ESL instruction in a separate ESL classroom. Another 58.1 percent of the respondents declared that they received pull out ESL instruction, which requires ESL students to leave their content classrooms for limited amounts of time for individual or small group ESL instruction. Respondents also reported other forms of ESL instruction, including: collaborative instruction between ESL teachers and classroom teachers (26.0 percent), ESL instruction by classroom teachers (24.0 percent), and before or after school programs (14.3 percent). Among the school boards, respondents from the CCSD were most likely to report pull out as a form of ESL instruction (73.5 percent). On the other hand, respondents from the ECSD were most likely to report ESL instruction in a separate classroom as the most prominent form of ESL instruction in their schools (88.9 percent). Students in ECSD were also more likely to report that they received ESL instruction from classroom teachers (that is, teachers of content, as opposed to ESL specialists) (41.7 percent), and before and after school programs (30.6 percent). Of particular interest, classroom teachers carrying out ESL instruction were more prominent within the ECSD (41.7 percent) and the EPSD (40.7 percent).

Table 8a: Types of ESL instruction

| | Total | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|--|-------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Pull out | 90 | 58.1 | 31 | 54.4 | 25 | 73.5 | 15 | 53.6 | 19 | 52.8 |
| ESL taught by ESL teachers in a separate ESL class | 114 | 74.0 | 37 | 64.9 | 24 | 70.6 | 21 | 77.8 | 32 | 88.9 |
| Adjunct | 40 | 26.0 | 9 | 15.8 | 5 | 14.7 | 13 | 48.1 | 13 | 36.1 |
| ESL taught by classroom teacher | 37 | 24.0 | 8 | 14.0 | 3 | 8.8 | 11 | 40.7 | 15 | 41.7 |
| Before/ After school program | 22 | 14.3 | 4 | 7.0 | 2 | 5.9 | 5 | 18.5 | 11 | 30.6 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

Table 8b further examined various types of ESL instruction, as reported by those respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program, at the elementary and junior/ high school levels. In all school divisions, respondents were more likely to report pull out and ESL instruction in a separate ESL classroom as the prominent methods of ESL instruction. Respondents in the elementary school division, however, were more likely to report pull out instruction (65.1 percent), collaborative instruction between ESL teachers and classroom teachers (31.7 percent), and ESL instruction by classroom teachers (27.0 percent). Respondents in the junior and high school divisions, on the other hand, were more likely to report ESL instruction in a separate ESL classroom (79.8 percent).

Table 8b: Types of ESL instruction by school division

| | All | | Elementary | | Junior/ High School | |
|--|-----|------|------------|------|---------------------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Pull out | 90 | 58.8 | 41 | 65.1 | 49 | 54.4 |
| ESL taught by ESL teachers in a separate ESL class | 113 | 74.3 | 42 | 66.7 | 71 | 79.8 |
| Adjunct | 40 | 26.3 | 20 | 31.7 | 20 | 22.5 |
| ESL taught by classroom teacher | 37 | 24.3 | 17 | 27.0 | 20 | 22.5 |
| Before/ After school program | 22 | 14.5 | 11 | 17.5 | 11 | 12.4 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

As illustrated in Table 9a, schools have been stringent with their allocation of time for ESL instruction. About 37.9 percent of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program reported that they received less than 2.5 hours of ESL instruction per week. Another 28.8 percent indicated that they received between 2.5 and 5 hours of ESL instruction. Together, 66.7 percent of respondents received 5 hours or less of ESL instruction per week. Among the school boards, the ECSD outscored all other school boards as providing the most hours of ESL instruction. Indeed, 62.8 percent of respondents from the ECSD reported that they received more than 5 hours of ESL instruction per week.

Table 9a: Number of hours of ESL instruction per week

| | Alberta | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|---------------------|---------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Less than 2.5 hours | 58 | 37.9 | 28 | 50.0 | 17 | 50.0 | 7 | 25.0 | 6 | 17.1 |
| 2.5 to 5.0 hours | 44 | 28.8 | 15 | 26.8 | 11 | 32.4 | 11 | 39.3 | 7 | 20.0 |
| 5.0 to 7.5 hours | 19 | 12.4 | 8 | 14.3 | 3 | 8.8 | 2 | 7.1 | 6 | 17.1 |
| 7.5 to 10.0 hours | 13 | 8.5 | 2 | 3.6 | 1 | 2.9 | 4 | 14.3 | 6 | 17.1 |
| More than 10 hours | 19 | 12.4 | 3 | 5.4 | 2 | 5.9 | 4 | 14.3 | 10 | 28.6 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 9b further examined allocation of time for ESL instruction, as reported by those respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program, in the elementary and junior/ high school divisions. About 50.0 percent of respondents in the elementary division and 30.3 percent of those in the junior/high school divisions reported that they had received less than 2.5 hours of ESL instruction per week. Another 32.3 percent of respondents in the elementary division and 27.0 percent in those in the junior high/ high school divisions further indicated that they had received between 2.5 and 5 hours of ESL instruction per week. Those respondents in the junior high/ high school divisions were more than twice as likely as those in the elementary division to report that they had received more than 5 hours of ESL instruction per week (42.7 vs. 17.8 percent).

Table 9b: Number of hours of ESL instruction per week by school division

| | All | | Elementary | | Junior/ High School | |
|---------------------|-----|------|------------|------|---------------------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Less than 2.5 hours | 58 | 38.4 | 31 | 50.0 | 27 | 30.3 |
| 2.5 to 5.0 hours | 44 | 29.1 | 20 | 32.3 | 24 | 27.0 |
| 5.0 to 7.5 hours | 19 | 12.6 | 6 | 9.7 | 13 | 14.6 |
| 7.5 to 10.0 hours | 13 | 8.6 | 1 | 1.6 | 12 | 13.5 |
| More than 10 hours | 17 | 11.3 | 4 | 6.5 | 13 | 14.6 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

The survey also asked respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program to identify their primary ESL instructor. Among respondents who received ESL instruction, 75.7 percent reported that ESL teachers were their primary English language instructor (Table 10a). Others reported that their primary ESL instructors were teacher assistants (8.3 percent), subject teachers (8.3 percent), and others people such as librarians or youth workers (7.6 percent). Among the major school boards, respondents from the EPSB and CBE were more likely to report that they had received ESL instruction from an ESL teacher (80.0 and 77.4 percent respectively).

Table 10a: Primary ESL instructor

| | Alberta | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|-------------------|---------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| ESL teacher | 109 | 75.7 | 41 | 77.4 | 25 | 73.5 | 20 | 80.0 | 23 | 71.9 |
| Teacher assistant | 12 | 8.3 | 5 | 9.4 | 3 | 8.8 | 1 | 4.0 | 3 | 9.4 |
| Subject teacher | 12 | 8.3 | 3 | 5.7 | 2 | 5.9 | 2 | 8.0 | 5 | 15.6 |
| Other | 11 | 7.6 | 4 | 7.5 | 4 | 11.8 | 2 | 8.0 | 1 | 3.1 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

With respect to the school division (Table 10b), 64.9 percent of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program at the elementary level and 83.5 percent of those in the junior/high school divisions identified ESL teachers as their primary ESL instructors. Also, respondents in the elementary division were more likely to identify teacher assistants and classroom teachers as their primary ESL instructors.

Table 10b: Primary ESL instructor by school division

| | All | | Elementary | | Junior/ High School | |
|-------------------|-----|------|------------|------|---------------------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| ESL teacher | 108 | 76.1 | 37 | 64.9 | 71 | 83.5 |
| Teacher assistant | 12 | 8.5 | 9 | 15.8 | 3 | 3.5 |
| Subject teacher | 12 | 8.5 | 7 | 12.3 | 5 | 5.9 |
| Other | 9 | 7.0 | 4 | 7.0 | 5 | 7.1 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

In recent years, some school officials have asserted the notion that every teacher is an ESL teacher. This survey attempted to determine if this assertion is consistent with ESL students' experiences in their subject classes (Table 11). The data reveals that only 27.3 percent of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "In general, my subject teachers, such as math, science and social studies teachers, have given me ESL support in the subject classrooms." Respondents from the ECSD were more likely to agree with the statement (47.1 percent). Those respondents from the CCSD were least likely to agree with the statement (17.6 percent).

Table 11: ESL support by subject teachers

| | Disagree/Strongly Disagree | | Neutral | Agree/Strongly Agree |
|---------|----------------------------|------|---------|----------------------|
| | N | % | | |
| Alberta | 161 | 35.4 | 37.3 | 27.3 |
| CBE | 60 | 35.0 | 36.7 | 28.3 |
| CCSD | 34 | 44.1 | 38.2 | 17.6 |
| EPSB | 31 | 41.9 | 38.7 | 19.4 |
| ECSD | 36 | 22.2 | 36.1 | 41.7 |

Note: Some rows do not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.

With respect to the quality of ESL instruction, 3 in 5 respondents who have enrolled in an ESL program agreed or strongly agreed that they have received adequate ESL support to prepare for future vocational training (60.0 percent) and university or college education (63.0 percent) (Table 12). Further, a slight majority agreed or strongly agreed that their schools have provided adequate ESL support for daily communication (69.0 percent) or for achieving good grades in subject classes (i.e., social studies, mathematics, physics and biology) (66.2 percent). Among the school boards, respondents from the CCSD and EPSB were least likely to agree that their schools had provided them with adequate ESL support for daily communication (64.3 percent). Those in the EPSB were least likely to agree that their schools had provided them with adequate ESL support

for good grades in subjects (57.1 percent), preparation for vocational training (50.0 percent), and preparation for university or college education (51.9 percent). Respondents from the ECSD, on the other hand, were more likely to report that they have received adequate ESL support for daily communication (79.4 percent), good grades in subjects (74.3 percent), preparation for vocational training (84.4 percent) and preparation for university or college education (80.0 percent).

Table 12: Quality of ESL instruction

| Agree/ Strongly Agree | Alberta | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|--|---------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Enough ESL support for daily communication | 100 | 69.0 | 37 | 67.3 | 18 | 64.3 | 18 | 64.3 | 27 | 79.4 |
| Enough ESL support for good grades in subjects | 98 | 66.2 | 37 | 67.3 | 19 | 63.3 | 16 | 57.1 | 26 | 74.3 |
| Enough ESL support for vocational school | 84 | 60.0 | 27 | 51.9 | 16 | 57.1 | 14 | 50.0 | 27 | 84.4 |
| Enough ESL support for university or college | 85 | 63.0 | 32 | 60.4 | 15 | 60.0 | 14 | 51.9 | 24 | 80.0 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

Table 13 demonstrates the perceived levels of English reading, writing and speaking abilities of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program at the point of termination of ESL support. Overall, respondents indicated that their schools stopped providing them with ESL support when their levels of reading, writing and speaking in English were slightly above average (means of 3.6, 3.4 and 3.8 on the 5 point scale for reading, writing and speaking ability, respectively). In percentage terms, only a slight majority of respondents indicated that their levels of reading (57.4 percent) and speaking (62.1 percent) were good or very good at the point of termination of ESL instruction. A significantly smaller percentage of respondents (46.8 percent) selected “good” or “very good” to describe their writing ability at the point when they no longer received ESL support. Among the four major school boards, respondents from the CCSD reported the highest percentages for good or very good levels of reading, writing and speaking in English at the point of termination of ESL instruction (65.0, 65.0, and 76.2 percent respectively). Respondents from the EPSB were more likely to report their schools stopped providing them with ESL instruction when their levels of reading, writing, and speaking in English were poor or average (55.0, 65.0 and 45.0 percent respectively).

Table 13: Levels of reading, writing and speaking in English at termination of ESL instruction.

| | N | Poor/Very Poor | Average | Good/Very Good |
|-----------------|----|----------------|---------|----------------|
| | | | % | |
| Reading | | | | |
| Alberta | 94 | 11.7 | 30.9 | 57.4 |
| CBE | 36 | 2.8 | 33.3 | 63.9 |
| CCSD | 20 | 15.0 | 20.0 | 65.0 |
| EPSB | 20 | 20.0 | 35.0 | 45.0 |
| ECSD | 18 | 16.7 | 33.3 | 50.0 |
| Writing | | | | |
| Alberta | 94 | 17.0 | 36.2 | 46.8 |
| CBE | 36 | 8.3 | 47.2 | 44.4 |
| CCSD | 20 | 20.0 | 15.0 | 65.0 |
| EPSB | 20 | 25.0 | 40.0 | 35.0 |
| ECSD | 18 | 22.2 | 33.3 | 44.4 |
| Speaking | | | | |
| Alberta | 95 | 9.5 | 28.4 | 62.1 |
| CBE | 36 | 0.0 | 38.9 | 61.1 |
| CCSD | 21 | 19.0 | 4.8 | 76.2 |
| EPSB | 20 | 15.0 | 30.0 | 55.0 |
| ECSD | 18 | 11.1 | 33.3 | 55.6 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Tracking and Monitoring of English Language Learning Progress

Table 14 demonstrates respondents' awareness of available tracking mechanisms for their English language learning progress. Only 45.3 percent of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program indicated that their schools have a system or a way to keep track of their improvement in English. A significant number of respondents did not know whether their schools kept track of their English language learning progress (47.2 percent). Respondents from the CBE were most likely to report that they were not aware of ESL tracking (65.0 percent). Those respondents from the ECSD were

more likely to report that their schools keep track of their English language learning progress (69.4 percent).

Table 14: Tracking of progress in learning English

| | | Yes | No | Don't Know |
|-------|-----|------|------|------------|
| | N | % | | |
| Total | 159 | 45.3 | 7.5 | 47.2 |
| CBE | 60 | 28.3 | 6.7 | 65.0 |
| CCSD | 33 | 42.4 | 12.1 | 45.5 |
| EPSB | 30 | 53.3 | 13.3 | 33.3 |
| ECSD | 36 | 69.4 | 0.0 | 30.6 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Resource Allocation

Respondents of the survey did not rate highly the resource allocation for ESL services in their schools. As illustrated in Table 15, roughly 2 in 5 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their schools had allocated ESL teachers (42.0 percent), ESL assistants (35.8 percent), ESL textbooks (43.8 percent), and classroom materials for ESL classes (42.0 percent). Among the school boards, respondents from the ECSD were most likely to agree that schools had provided enough ESL teachers (69.4 percent), ESL assistants (41.7 percent), ESL textbooks (63.9 percent), and classroom materials for ESL classes (63.9 percent).

Table 15: Resource allocation for ESL education

| Agree/ Strongly Agree | Alberta | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|----------------------------|---------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Enough ESL teachers | 68 | 42.0 | 24 | 39.3 | 10 | 29.4 | 9 | 29.0 | 25 | 69.4 |
| Enough ESL assistants | 58 | 35.8 | 17 | 27.9 | 14 | 41.2 | 12 | 38.7 | 15 | 41.7 |
| Enough ESL textbooks | 71 | 43.8 | 20 | 32.8 | 16 | 47.1 | 12 | 38.7 | 23 | 63.9 |
| Enough classroom materials | 68 | 42.0 | 20 | 32.8 | 18 | 52.9 | 7 | 22.6 | 23 | 63.9 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

School-Family Communication

Table 16 examines various means of communication that schools used to inform families of their children's English language learning progress. Overall, a slight majority of respondents who had enrolled in an ESL program indicated that their schools used teacher-parent interviews (66.0 percent) and report cards (59.7 percent) to inform their families of their progress in learning English. Notably, 1 in 10 respondents (10.8 percent) indicated that their schools did not inform their families of their learning progress in English at all. Among the school boards, respondents from the CCSD reported the highest rate for school-family communication through the use of parent-teacher interviews (81.8 percent), while those from ECSD identified report cards as the most frequent form of school-family communication (80.6 percent) to inform their families of their progress in learning English.

Table 16: School-Family Communication

| How school informs family ESL progress | Alberta | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|--|---------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Parent-teacher interview | 105 | 66.0 | 37 | 62.7 | 27 | 81.8 | 20 | 64.5 | 21 | 58.3 |
| Report cards | 95 | 59.7 | 38 | 64.4 | 16 | 48.5 | 12 | 38.7 | 29 | 80.6 |
| ESL benchmarks | 21 | 13.2 | 3 | 5.1 | 2 | 6.1 | 4 | 12.9 | 12 | 33.3 |
| None | 17 | 10.8 | 7 | 11.9 | 3 | 9.4 | 4 | 12.9 | 3 | 8.3 |
| Other (telephone calls, emails, etc.) | 5 | 3.2 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 3.1 | 2 | 6.5 | 2 | 5.6 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

From the overall perspective of the respondents, school-family communication is infrequent (Table 17). About 52.0 percent of respondents indicated that schools informed their families of their progress in learning English only once every semester. Another 19.3 percent of respondents reported the frequency of school-family communication as once every three months. Only a small number of respondents indicated weekly (4.0 percent), biweekly (4.7 percent) or monthly (12.7 percent) dialogues between home and school. Among the school boards, a significant number of respondents in the CCSD (90.7 percent) and CBE (80.3 percent) described the frequency of school-family communication as once every three months or once every semester. Those respondents in the ECSD reported the highest frequency of school-family communication. About 45.8 percent of respondents indicated that schools communicated with their families on the weekly, bi-weekly or monthly basis.

Table 17: Frequency of school-family communication

| Frequency of communication | Alberta | | CBE | | CCSD | | EPSB | | ECSD | |
|----------------------------|---------|------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Weekly | 6 | 4.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 11.1 | 3 | 8.6 |
| Every two weeks | 7 | 4.7 | 1 | 1.8 | 1 | 3.1 | 2 | 7.4 | 3 | 8.6 |
| Monthly | 19 | 12.7 | 6 | 10.7 | 0 | 0.0 | 3 | 11.1 | 10 | 28.6 |
| Every two months | 11 | 7.3 | 4 | 7.1 | 2 | 6.3 | 2 | 7.4 | 3 | 8.6 |
| Every three months | 29 | 19.3 | 7 | 12.5 | 17 | 53.1 | 3 | 11.1 | 2 | 5.7 |
| Every semester | 78 | 52.0 | 38 | 67.8 | 12 | 37.6 | 14 | 51.9 | 14 | 40.0 |

Note: Totals do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Relational Analysis

To achieve effective ESL education, schools ought to provide a continuum of ESL services dealing with identification, assessment, instruction, tracking and monitoring of learning progress, resource allocation, and home-school communication. Ideally, schools should demonstrate congruent relationships among various aspects of ESL services, and their impact upon students' learning outcomes.

Our Pearson correlation analysis of the selected variables, however, reveals an overall lack of strong, coherent relationships among the various aspects of ESL education as reported by the students (Table 18). The consistently low correlation coefficients among the variables associated with identification, assessment, instruction, resource allocation, tracking of learning progress and home-school communication are indicative of a general perception of a lack of pedagogically sound ESL service delivery in Alberta schools.

The analysis also reveals some modest, but statistically significant relationships among the selected variables. First, there is an indirect relationship between school initiated and family initiated modes of identification ($r = .385, p < .01$). ESL students are less likely to rely on their families to tell schools about their ESL needs when schools have ESL screening procedures in place. Second, ESL students who have been assessed for their writing abilities in English are also likely to have written assessments of their heritage language proficiencies ($r = .309, p < .01$). Third, ESL students who have received structured ESL instruction are more likely to report ESL teachers as their primary ESL instructors ($r = .286, p < .01$), to assess adequate allocation of ESL teachers ($r = .212, p < .05$), and to report monthly frequency of school-family communication ($r = .192, p < .01$). Further, those who have received 10 hours of ESL instruction or more are more likely to report a monthly frequency of home-school communication ($r = .261, p < .01$).

Table 18: Correlations among Various Aspects of ESL Education

| | | School Initiated | Family Initiated | English | First Language | Structured ESL Instruction | > 10 Hours of ESL Instruction per Week | ESL Teacher as Primary Instructor | Adequate ESL Teachers | Monthly Communication | Availability of Tracking Mechanism |
|----------------|------------------------------------|------------------|------------------|---------|----------------|----------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Identification | School Initiated | 1 | | | | | | | | | |
| | Family Initiated | -.385** | 1 | | | | | | | | |
| Assessment | English | -.025 | -.004 | 1 | | | | | | | |
| | First Language | .049 | .125 | .309** | 1 | | | | | | |
| Instruction | Structured ESL Instruction | .133 | -.034 | .076 | -.030 | 1 | | | | | |
| | > 10 hours of ESL per Week | .081 | -.053 | .099 | .095 | .145 | 1 | | | | |
| | ESL Teacher as Primary Instructor | .141 | .070 | -.014 | .071 | .286** | .025 | 1 | | | |
| Funding | Adequate ESL Teachers | .135 | -.030 | -.006 | -.154 | .212* | .072 | .070 | 1 | | |
| Communication | Monthly Communication | .165 | .123 | -.030 | .135 | .192* | .261** | .065 | -.039 | 1 | |
| Tracking | Availability of Tracking Mechanism | .103 | .035 | .138 | .101 | .111 | .055 | -.004 | .079 | .124 | 1 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the late 1980s, the ESL student population has grown steadily in Alberta schools. ESL education is not an emerging challenge, but rather, is an integrated reality of contemporary public education. Yet, the results of the survey of 242 self-identified ESL learners raises the concern that Alberta schools have yet to achieve effective, pedagogically sound ESL education. ESL learners do not readily have access to standardized screening procedures for ESL needs, appropriate enrolment in ESL programs, and formal assessment of English and heritage language proficiency, responsive ESL instruction, explicit tracking of learning progress, adequate ESL personnel, and learning resources. There is also a perception of an overall lack of strong, coherent relationships among the various aspects of ESL service delivery.

The findings of this study have echoed the various areas of concern identified in the 2004 review of ESL K-12 program implementation in Alberta, including: inconsistent use of assessment instruments (64 different instruments), the lack of information tracking related to students' language learning over time, the lack of curriculum-based ESL instruction, over-reliance on classroom teachers with limited ESL training, and limited allocation of resources for ESL services (see Howard Research Management and Consulting Inc, 2006). They also point out that the current state of ESL services in the K-12 education system does not position schools to meet the complex challenges facing ESL learners, including high dropout rates (Derwing, DeCorby, Ichikawa & Jamieson, 1999; Roessingh & Watt, 1994, 2000), poor academic performance (Latimer, 2000), and complex sociocultural needs (see Ngo, 2004, 2009).

The persistent reality of ad-hoc, fragmented and inadequate ESL services can be attributed to a lack of coherent ESL policies in the Alberta education system. Currently, Alberta Education does not set province-wide standards for identification, assessment, placement, ESL instruction,

qualification of ESL instructors, tracking of the learning progress, accountability measures and reporting. Instead, ESL services are often left to the subjective judgment of individual schools and school boards. (Although there is a province-wide committee to advise Alberta Education, the limited staffing allotment from the government precludes significant progress in this area. The government staff assigned to ESL cannot possibly undertake the amount of work that is necessary to improve the current state of affairs without additional resources.) Subsequently, ESL learners rely on the political will of school board trustees and administrators for the development and implementation of ESL policy. Among the four major school boards identified in this study, the ECSD was the first school board that introduced its ESL administrative policy in 2000. In the last two years, the CBE, CCSD and EPSB have developed their ESL policies. The existing ESL policies, however, do not adequately address the issues of standards in all aspects of ESL services, resource allocation and accountability.

In its business plans, Alberta Education has consistently articulated its principles of responsiveness, accessibility, equity and accountability (see Alberta Education, 2008, 2009). These principles position the Alberta education system to mandate schools to shift away from their subjective frame of reference, and instead, to adopt a rights-based paradigm in ESL service delivery. In other words, the Alberta Ministry of Education and local school boards will need to demonstrate stronger leadership in establishing standards for ESL education, as well as accountability measures for ESL services, resource allocation and learning outcomes of ESL students.

The Coalition for Equal Access to Education urges Alberta Education and school boards to work collaboratively with stakeholders to address the following areas:

- Develop standards for identification, assessment, placement, explicit ESL instruction, and tracking of progress for both language proficiency and academic performance;

- Develop and implement ESL programs of study at all levels;
- Provide adequate resources for ESL education and develop accountability measures and reporting requirements;
- Set professional standards in terms of professional requirements for ESL personnel and school personnel who provide language support to ESL students;
- Ensure availability of resources and opportunities for comprehensive, sustained professional development and continuing education for personnel; and
- Involve diverse stakeholders (government, education, community, service providers, etc.) in collaborative efforts to support ESL learners.

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