

Literacy Link

EASTERN ONTARIO

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LITERACY SERVICE PLAN 2024-25

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The Literacy Service Plan is created annually by Literacy Link Eastern Ontario (LLEO) and the Adult Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs in the Eastern Ontario network. The LLEO network support region includes the counties of Stormont Dundas Glengarry (SDG), Leeds and Grenville (LG), Frontenac, Lennox and Addington (LA), and Prince Edward County (PEC).

This flexible and responsive Literacy Service Plan is a result of consultation with Literacy and Basic Skills providers, and community service coordination conversations about labour market information, employment needs, community trends, and service gaps to guide regional LBS services in the upcoming year.

The Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) system in Ontario is funded in Ontario by the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development (MLITSD). LBS is part of Employment Ontario along with Employment agencies and agencies supporting Apprenticeship.

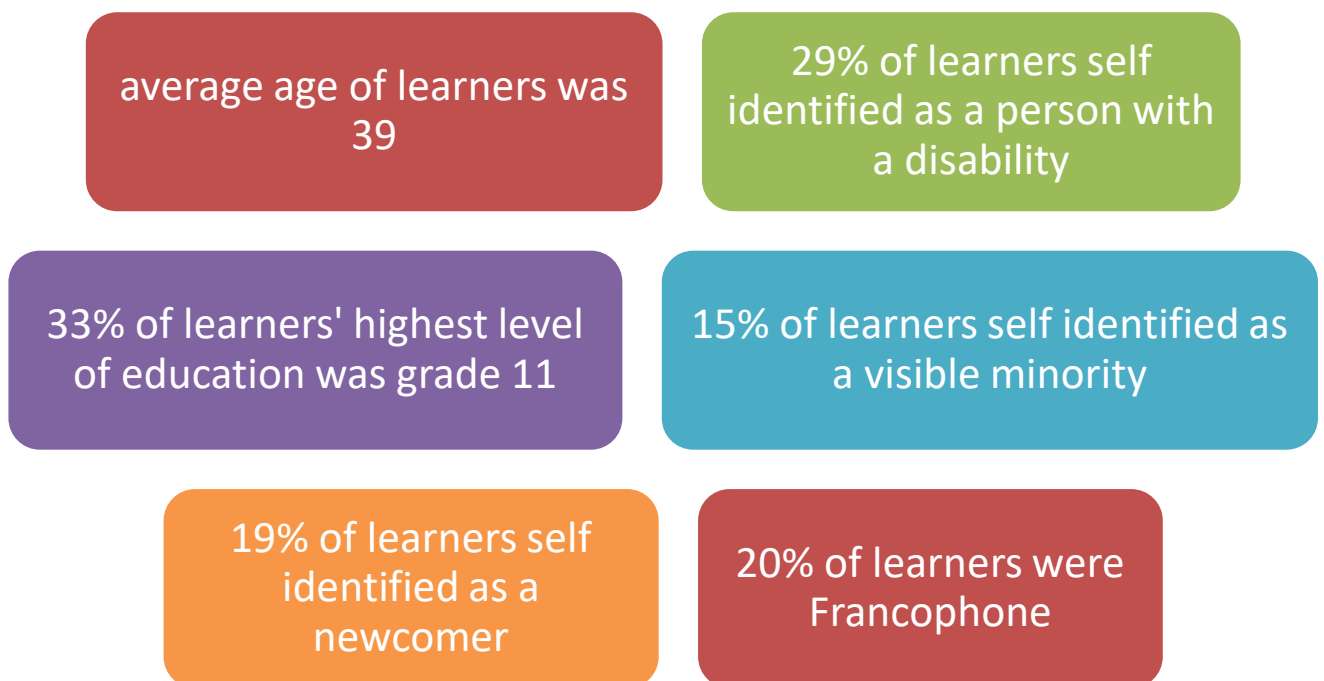
In 2023-2024, Ontario's LBS system received an influx of funding through Skills for Success (SFS). The Skills for Success Funding provided the opportunity to provide additional LBS services and develop relevant resources through pilot projects.

Pilot projects in the Eastern Ontario region included Workplace Literacy Organizational Needs Assessments and training supports for employees to improve job performance, provincial support for apprenticeship programs with marketing campaigns, and professional development to enhance LBS service provider capacity to work with underrepresented groups. This funding was also extremely effective in enhancing regional networks' ability to plan and coordinate services to support the needs of increasing numbers of immigrants coming to Ontario and needing support to build their language and literacy skills.

Eastern Ontario Region Summary

Service areas: Stormont Dundas Glengarry, Leeds & Grenville, Kingston Frontenac, Lennox & Addington, Prince Edward County

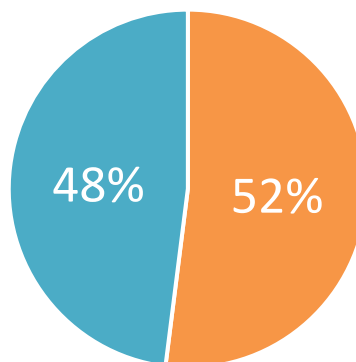
Learner Profiles



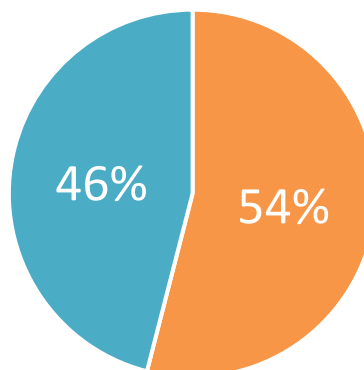
Source: Employment Ontario Eastern Region Learner Profile Data 2022-2023

EQAO Results: Provincial Grade 9 math test results summary

52% of students met the provincial standard
for math in 2021-2022



54% of students met the provincial standard
for math in 2022-2023

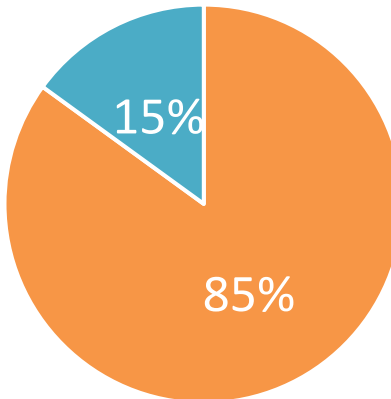


Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs will
need to prepare math programming to meet
the goals of adult learners

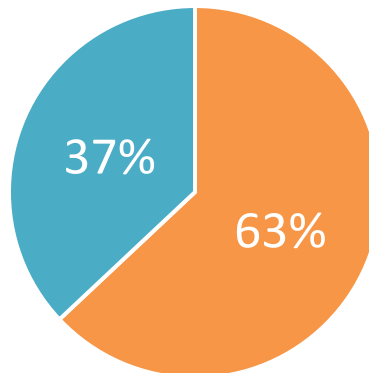
Source: Publications - EQAO

OSSLT Results Summary 2022/23

15% of the first-time eligible students to take the test were NOT successful at reaching the provincial standard



37% of previously eligible students tested were NOT successful at reaching the provincial standard



There will be a significant influx of young people needing LBS services in Ontario in the upcoming years.

Source: Publications - EQAO

LLEO Network Apprenticeship Outlook

Key trends and projections in apprenticeship include:

- There has been an increase in skilled trades learning in high schools.
- Apprenticeship Certificate of Qualification completion rates are consistently below 50%.
- There is a chronic (and growing) shortage of skilled tradespersons in Ontario.
- The role for LBS in Apprenticeship training is to help (pre)apprentices to navigate educational pathways, provide training to improve readiness, support apprentices with study and testing skills, and work with apprenticeship stakeholders to improve access to LBS/apprenticeship connections and supports.

LLEO Network Labour Market Information

Current trends and projections in Eastern Ontario labour markets show labour shortages, low unemployment, and difficulties with staff retention identified across many industries and sectors.

There has been an identified lack of education, training, technical and soft skills to meet job requirements.

LBS can offer support with ongoing workplace literacy training, leadership training for employers, occupational specific micro-credential programs that support employment preparation and readiness.

Top Jobs in Demand	Top apprenticeship registrations	Top common skills in demand
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transport truck drivers • Material Handlers • Food Services and Food Manufacturing • Retail • Administrative and Clerical • Home/Personal Support Workers • Early Childhood Educators • Education Assistants • Construction and Trades Helpers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automotive Service Technician • Electrician-construction and maintenance • Industrial mechanic Millwright • Truck and Coach Technician • Plumber • Early Childhood Educator • Hairstylist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication • Customer service • Interpersonal skills • Teamwork • Detail oriented • Microsoft Office • Digital literacy and technology • Math and numeracy

LLEO Network Trends and Successes

Outreach, adaptation and flexibility

LBS Service providers in the Eastern Ontario region have been increasingly offering flexible service schedules and off-site delivery to provide training at locations in a variety of community spaces and agencies including libraries, women's shelters, youth organizations, community living organizations, and correctional institutions with much success.

Within the LLEO network, LBS learner goal paths are expected to be primarily employment, followed by independence, high school, post-secondary, and apprenticeship with the lowest percentage of learners on this path. However, it is important to note that learner education and goal paths are fluid and often change direction with completion of milestones and achievement of outcomes.

Many LBS Service Providers in the Eastern region have experienced an increase in newcomers seeking LBS services that also require significant ESL upgrading and support. This trend is projected to continue and will require a strategic shift, and an increase in coordinating, developing and integrating LBS and ESL support to bridge the gap. Current examples of responding to this trend include embedding PLAR prep in LBS programming to bridge high level ESL learners to credit pathways.

LBS Service Providers are experiencing an increase in learners with mental health concerns. This will impact the need for space to offer quiet zones, as well as staff capacity to offer one-on-one instruction. To accommodate their needs, Algonquin Lakeshore Catholic District School Board has acquired 3 separate small room offices at their Open Book location in Kingston, where learners can work while being supported by staff 1-1.

There has been an increase in seniors seeking LBS digital literacy and occupational specific training for return to employment. LBS and Employment Service Providers are reporting that seniors are increasingly returning to the workforce to supplement their income due to inflation and cost of living increases, however, their skills, particularly in the field of technology need to be upgraded first.

Business and employers are actively seeking to upgrade the skills of their existing workforce, which translates into an increased demand for the training services offered by LBS service providers. In response LBS providers have provided training for staff at the City of Cornwall. Skills for Success funding provided the opportunity to deliver Organizational Needs Assessments and subsequent customized training for employees at Prescott Fire Department, daycares, and industrial manufacturing workplaces.



In response to labour market trends, Kingston school boards developed and promoted pre-PSW and PSW training programs with a large cohort of credit graduates who are now enrolled in post-secondary programs and successful graduates who are now working full time and engaged in their community.

LLEO Network Service Gaps and Challenges

Barriers to service, staff capacity, inflation

Inflation, cost of living, lack of stable housing, food insecurity, and mental illness and substance use disorders are causing barriers for learners to pursue LBS and employment training.

LBS Service providers will be challenged with a lack of LBS/ESL integrated service infrastructure in terms of resources, tools, and staff capacity to provide LBS and employment training, certification and admission requirements for newcomers.

Suitability and eligibility requirements are significant barriers to access and increasingly do not represent the population seeking LBS training, especially youth, seniors, newcomers, and persons with developmental disabilities seeking training and employment.

Transportation is a barrier to access for learners in remote and rural communities is. Public transportation is often not available in rural areas, and LBS Service providers don't have finances to meet the increase costs of transportation for learners to access services at LBS locations – they can't get to the classroom to improve their digital literacy skills, so their access to online learning is impeded.

With the introduction and Employment Service transformation, organizations have been undergoing significant changes resulting in decreased referrals to LBS services and programs. As Employment Transformation continues and Service System Managers are selected to manage Employment Services, LBS agencies and regional literacy networks have their hands full to ensure that referral relationships are strong and are used in the best interests of clients.

Community LBS programs are currently faced with a series of financial challenges that threaten their ability to deliver quality services. Underfunding has become a preoccupying issue for many institutions. In addition, community LBS programs have to contend with inflation, which is driving up the cost of living and, consequently, operating costs. For example, once S4S funding is ended, Kingston Literacy & Skills will limit workplace skills training delivery that is currently being offered at an outreach location in Brockville, leaving the city without community-based LBS services.

As community and learner trends evolve with increasing demands, staff capacity and development will be a challenge in the upcoming years. Investing in ongoing training for LBS staff is absolutely necessary to ensure a qualified workforce.

Online learning in Eastern Ontario

While some communities are experiencing an increasing demand for online learning, many learners in rural communities face barriers to access due to unreliable internet and lack of public transportation.

Current regional trends indicate that most learners show a preference for face-to-face learning. Seniors are increasingly seeking LBS digital literacy and occupational-specific training to re-enter the workforce. This trend is a response to rising inflation and living costs. However, many of these seniors require technology skill upgrades. Notably, older learners also require extra support and prefer face-to-face learning, making online courses less suitable for this demographic.

St. Lawrence College has reported an interesting observation that summarizes online learning trends in a post covid landscape *“Anecdotal evidence suggests that since COVID and the remote offerings that became a necessity, there seems to be a greater interest in online (independent study). However, student success does not support a program of solely online offerings. It is our observation that “want” of independent study vs “success” via online learning (independent study) are two separate things. It has been noted that some potential learners have been lost due to the lack of a fully online program. To be successful in a fully online program learners must have a minimum level of computer skills, access to high speed internet, access to computers that meet the minimum standards to run the learning platform, as well as discipline to complete the work on their own and be able to recognize when they must seek assistance and support from the instructors or college wrap around supports. A blended program of in-person and online learning opportunities is a good compromise that has the potential to meet the learner needs and support the learner’s success. We will continue to offer a blend of in-person and online sections to support our learners at all three LBS sites at St. Lawrence College.”*

Eastern Ontario LBS providers are responding to learners’ needs to upgrade digital literacy skills before pursuing specialized or occupational training online with blended one-on-one support for online learning, and integrating digital literacy into each learners’ plan.

Many low income and rural learners struggle with technology and internet service affordability.

Despite funding challenges and barriers some LBS service providers can offer learners support including laptop loans and some internet/wifi services via Ministry Training Supports.

e-Channel learning

e-channel learning could be enhanced and incorporated more efficiently into learning services in our community through partnerships and improved internet access/infrastructure. Moving forward the region will consider:

- Working with local authorities or Internet service providers.
- Setting up a mentoring system between experienced learners and those just starting out.
- Ongoing emphasis and support for face-to-face training for blended/hybrid learning

In the LLEO network region, fluid partnerships with online learning platforms have been successful with some LBS service providers.

For Algonquin Lakeshore District Catholic School Board, an ongoing partnership and collaboration with Correctional Services Canada has opened possibilities for them to access Good Learning Anywhere for correctional facilities. This is a positive change as many of the learners reintegrating into the community struggle with digital literacy.

Literacy Link Eastern Ontario Network Actions for 2024-2025

In response to the community trends and service gaps reported with insight provided by LBS service providers, community conversations and labour market information, Literacy Link Eastern Ontario proposes to pursue the following actions in 2024-2025 to enhance Literacy and Basics Skills service capacity, and learner experience and success.

Literacy and Basic Skills service providers in the LLEO network region are focusing on delivering flexible and responsive training that supports employment readiness, soft skills development and practice, occupation specific language and tasks, micro credentials, mental wellness programs, digital literacy, ESL/LBS integration, staff capacity and professional development.

In looking to the future, LBS service providers and support organizations are mindful of Artificial Intelligence and are looking forward to engaging practices to integrate AI into the LBS system including AI employment developments, virtual reality training options, curriculum resources and tools, as well as staff capacity. LLEO regional network meetings are supported with AI recordings and summaries, and as an experiment, AI was ‘tasked’ to review and critique a draft this report before publication.

- 1. Ongoing service coordination** – continue to develop partnerships, outreach, and flexible service options to leverage space, share resources, optimize available funding, and offset increased operating expenses due to inflation, including partnerships with internet service providers to improve service. LLEO will participate in 4 outreach opportunities representing regional LBS service providers to external groups in each region and participate in provincial Communities of Practice in 2024-2025 to engage and build relationships with community stakeholders that foster service coordination and collaboration.
- 2. Enhance staff capacity through professional development** with the ongoing regional network Communities of Practice meetings, training in equity, diversity and inclusion, ESL, digital technologies, math instruction, motivational interviews, digital and functional assessments, as well as and work to attract qualified and diverse Literacy and Basics Skills Practitioners. LLEO will coordinate 6 regional network gatherings for LBS managers, 6 regional gatherings for LBS instructors and assessors, as well as plan and

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coordinate professional development and training workshops including one full day in person professional development opportunity for all network LBS Service Providers.

- 3. Develop inclusive resources and tools to support ESL/LBS learners** including financial literacy and digital literacy and assessments, and integrated curricula. LLEO will explore and develop a resource to support increased access to inclusive ESL/LBS resources available for network service providers and one professional development opportunity to support LBS and ESL integration.
- 4. Develop inclusive resources and tools to support workplace literacy**, employment readiness, occupational specific curriculum and assessments based on labour market reports. LLEO will update one existing occupational curriculum to current standards, technology, language and tasks.
- 5. Explore funding streams to improve access to online learning and digital literacy.** LLEO will collaborate with rural network SPs and community stakeholders to research and develop a rural connectivity resource that includes partnerships and grants available to help increase rural access to internet and transportation.
- 6. Develop ongoing relationships with SSMs** to improve awareness, engagement, and referral pathways for LBS services. LLEO will develop regular communications and strategies to collaborate with SSMs to increase awareness of LBS services including 2 regional LBS/SSM Communication and Outreach meetings.
- 7. Explore ways to remove suitability and eligibility barriers** to LBS services and training. LLEO will research and explore collaboration with provincial networks and ministry representatives to raise awareness and recommend solutions to these barriers. Regional Network SPs will receive updates about suitability and eligibility changes and developments.

For more information contact:

Brandy Smith
Executive Director, Literacy Link Eastern Ontario
literacyleo@gmail.com



613-340-3083

www.lleo.ca

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