



Coalition for Equal Access to Education

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RESPONSES TO THE REVIEW OF ESL K-12 PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION IN ALBERTA

BACKGROUND

In the Fall of 2006, the Ministry of Alberta Education released a report, entitled "The Review of ESL K-12 Program Implementation in Alberta". Drawing upon findings of a province-wide survey of principals and teachers, case studies, and interviews with stakeholders and experts, the report has identified the predictors of ESL student achievement at both the individual and school levels. The Ministry contracted Howard Research and Management Consulting Inc to do the study. The study synopsis and full report are available at <http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/ipr/eslreview/>.

THE STUDY HAS CONFIRMED...

The importance of early identification of ESL needs The longer the delay in identification of ESL status, the less likely the student will remain within the Alberta Education system at later grades (p.66), or complete Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT)/ Diploma Examinations (DE) in grade 6 and beyond (p.69). Longer delays in identification of ESL needs are also related to low PAT/ DE achievement levels, particularly in junior high (p.71)

The importance of assessment and collection of relevant information The quality and depth of diagnostics and assessment applied to ESL students is predictive of improved achievement outcomes in both English and math across the different grade cohorts. The collection of demographic and contextual information is also predictive of improved academic achievement level in English (p.77).

The importance of first language Students with limited first language proficiency are less likely to be moved forward with their age peers in junior and high school (p.68), to complete PATs at the junior high level (p.70), and to achieve well on PATs in early elementary grades (p.72).

The importance of adequate ESL funding and resource distribution The longer formerly funded Canadian and foreign born ESL students are in the system without funding support, the less likely they are to remain in the Alberta Education system at junior and senior high levels (p.66), and to be moved forward with their age peers (p.68). Schools that allocate more per student expenditure to support staff, ESL resource materials,

interpreters, translators, tutor support and resource support (such as counselling, mentorship, dual language resource materials, and community worker support) have an impact on improving ESL student achievement (pp.74-75).

The importance of jurisdictional support The number of jurisdictional supports in the form of additional teaching staff, additional support staff, interpreters, translators, ESL consultants, centralized assessment centres, resource materials, tutor support and other professionals (i.e. speech language pathologists) provided to schools is predictive of improvement in the achievement of ESL students (p.75).

The importance of ESL teacher qualification, training and specialization ESL teachers with more training, credentials and specialization are more effective in supporting ESL student achievement (p.74). Availability of an ESL team and designated ESL teachers and high team functioning have beneficial effects on improving English achievement (p.75).

The importance of timetabling A semi-structured approach to time-tabling may be most appropriate for most students, but an unstructured approach may be more appropriate for students with higher levels of English proficiency (p.76).

The importance of supporting ESL students with special needs In comparison to those ESL students without special needs, ESL students with special needs are less likely to be moved forward with their age peers at junior and senior high (p.68), to complete PAT/ DEs in both elementary and senior high (p.70), and to achieve well on PAT/ DEs at both later elementary and senior high levels (p.72).

The importance of school communication support of ESL parents The ability of schools to provide information to parents of ESL students is predictive of improved English academic achievement of ESL students (p.77).

AREAS OF CONCERN

Assessment

- Some 64 different instruments were used across the province to assess ESL student English proficiency (p.32).
- There was a lack of understanding among school personnel of the link between first language proficiency and second language acquisition (p.36).

Information tracking

- Only 43% of schools collected information related to first language proficiency (p.35).
- A modest percentage of schools (67%) collected data related to English language proficiency of ESL students upon their entry (p.35).
- The study did not report any available mechanisms that track performance of ESL students over time.

Curriculum

- Only 21% of schools used a comprehensive curriculum plan for instruction; 34% used partial curriculum and 32% reported none (p.38).

ESL Instruction & Qualification of Staff

- About 64% of schools reported that they have used an in-class ESL support model (p.46). In other words, those teachers who teach regular subject courses are supposed to develop and utilize specialized ESL teaching skills in order to provide ESL support to students through modification, adaptation and differentiation of their teaching. Yet 64% of ESL mainstream teachers also reported that they had no ESL training (p.49-50). In addition, 35% of ESL mainstream teachers had some ESL training (as little as one workshop). Only 2% of ESL mainstream teachers had an ESL diploma, certificate or degree in ESL.
- Schools with a higher proportion of teachers with less ESL training and those that rely on mainstream teachers to modify and adapt programs for ESL students have an adverse impact on English language achievement (p.74).

Without explicit requirements for mainstream teachers to acquire specialized ESL teaching skills in order to provide ESL support to students, the claim that everyone is an ESL teacher is at best not supported, and at worst is an excuse for schools not to allocate ESL monies for ESL instruction.

Cultural competence

- Only 19% of schools reported that they had a plan or strategy to address cultural diversity and competency through professional development; 46% reported having a partial plan and 35% reported none (p.39).
- Only 29% of schools had a plan or strategy to meaningfully involve parents of ESL students in supporting student learning; 43% reported having a partial plan and 27% reported none (p.39).
- Only 40% schools reported that they had a communication plan for families of ESL students; 34% reported having a partial plan and 26% reported none (p.39).
- Only 32% of schools reported that they had the necessary administrative support to promote and facilitate collaboration between culturally diverse families and communities; 42% reported having a partial plan and 29% reported none (p.40).
- Only 28.5% of schools reported that they had partnerships with ethnocultural groups and immigrant serving agencies that provide interpretation and translation to families with limited English; 28% with partial plan and 44% with none (p.40).
- About 65% of schools reported that they had never, almost never or seldom involved parents in promoting cultural competence (p.51).

Resource allocation

- There is incongruence between the reported commitment of leadership to cultural competence and the actual allocation of resources to promote cultural competence. About 74% of schools reported they had leadership that demonstrated

commitment to cultural competence (p50). Yet 53% of schools reported that they rarely had adequate resources allocated to address and promote cultural competence (p.52).

- Even though ESL students bring in ESL Supplementary Grant to schools on top of the Basic Instruction Grant, 64% of schools use in-class ESL support (meaning regular subject teachers are supposed to provide ESL instruction) as their model of ESL instruction (p.46). Yet 64% of ESL mainstream teachers also reported having no ESL training in order to support ESL students in their classrooms (p.49). Also refer to **ESL Instruction & Qualification of Staff**
- Overall, only 11.1 % of schools reported having full day self-contained ESL classes and 2.3% reported having half-day self-contained ESL classes. Even among those schools with 26 or more ESL students, only 9.4% reported having full day self-contained ESL classes and 7.2% reported half-day self-contained ESL classes (p.46).

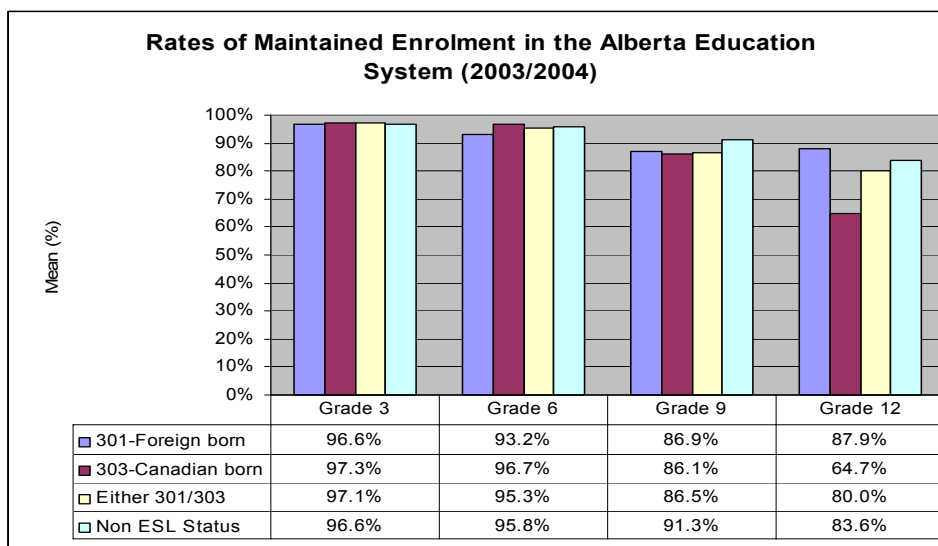
Schools, therefore, do not appear to use ESL monies for the purposes of providing explicit, structured ESL instruction by qualified staff to ESL students.

Performance of Canadian-born ESL students

- In comparison to foreign-born funded ESL students, **Canadian-born funded ESL students** are less likely to remain within the Alberta Education system to grade 12 (p.66), to be moved forward with their age peers in almost all grades, to complete provincial achievement tests, or to do well on provincial achievement tests (p.69).

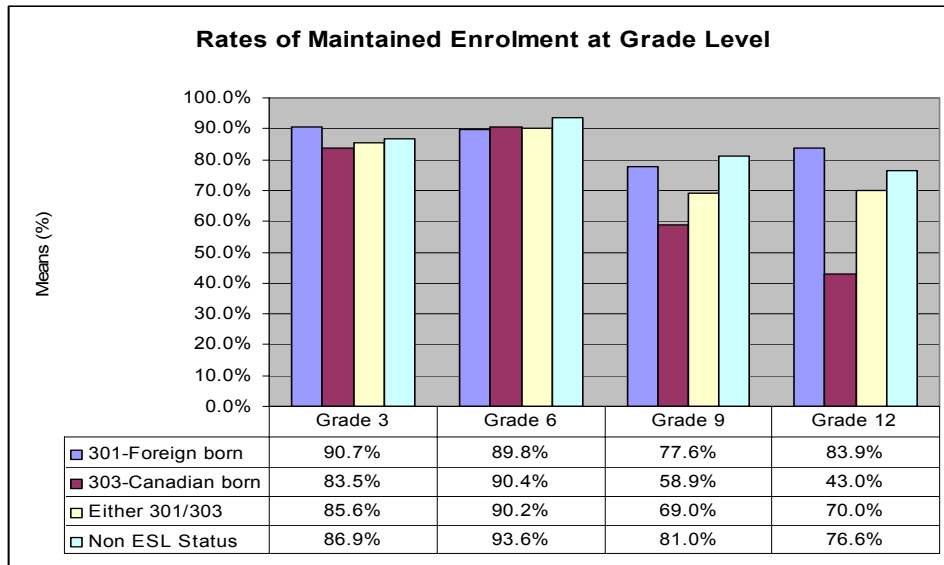
Rate of maintained enrolment in Alberta education system

- By Grade 9, the rates of maintained enrolment of ESL students in the Alberta Education system declined between 4.4% and 5.2%. Though foreign-born ESL students had a higher rate of maintained enrolment (87.9%) in the Alberta education system than students with non-ESL status (83.6%), Canadian-born ESL students had the lowest rate of maintained enrolment at only 64.7%.



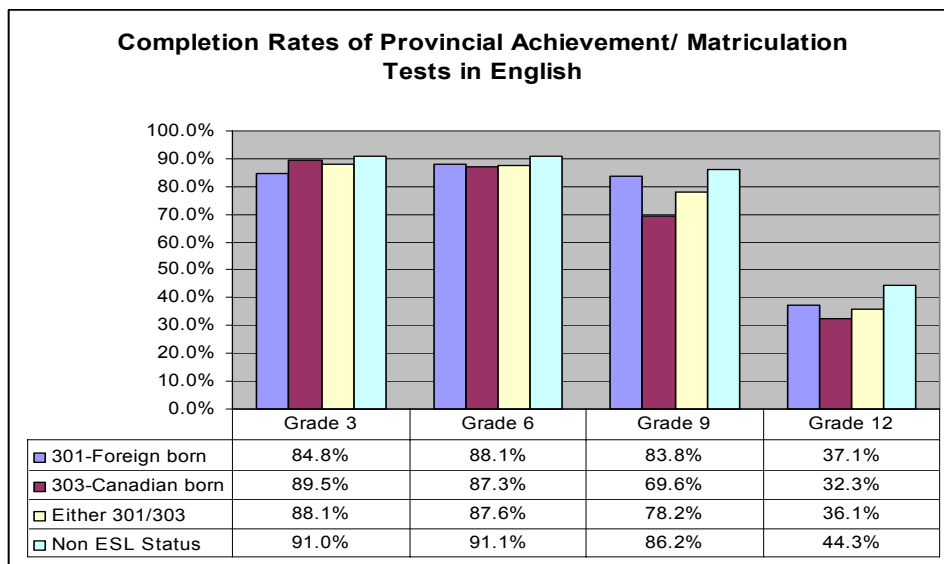
Rate of maintained enrolment at grade level

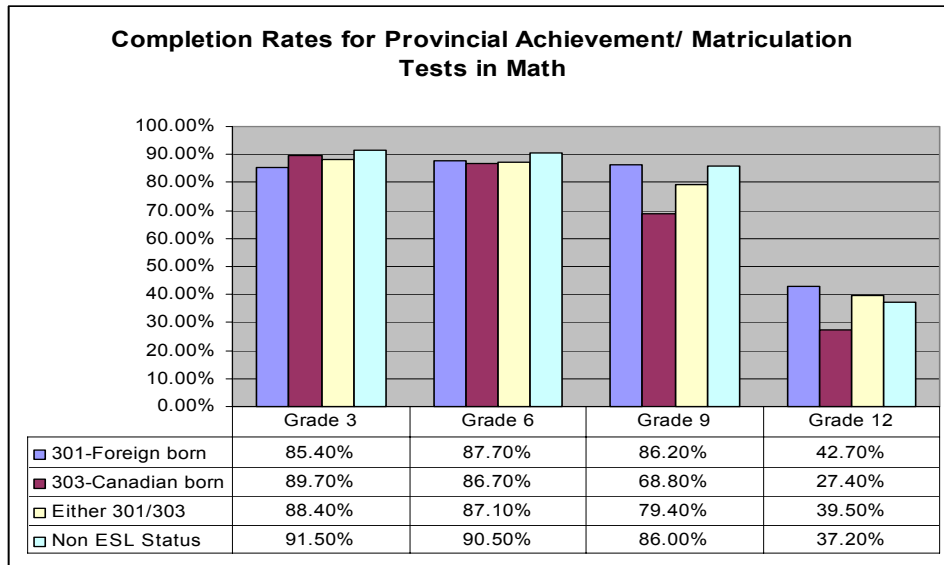
- Canadian-born ESL students were less likely to maintain enrolment at grade level, and were 33.6% behind students with non-ESL status in Grade 12.



Completion rates of provincial achievement/matriculation tests

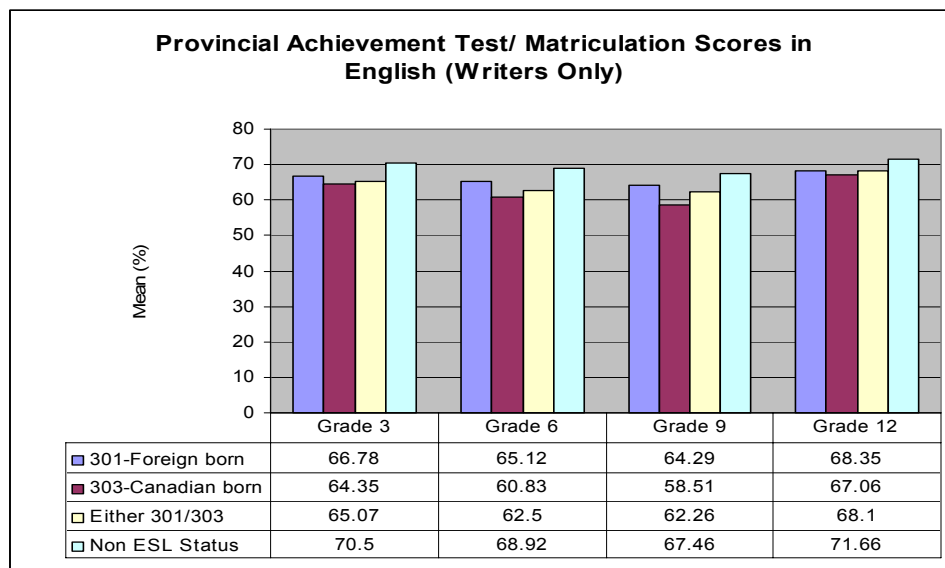
- Overall, ESL students had lower completion rates of provincial achievement or matriculation tests in English and Math.
- From Grade 6 on, Canadian born ESL students had the lowest completion rates of provincial achievement or matriculation tests in English and Math. Compared to students with non-ESL status, Canadian born ESL students in grade 9 and 12 were 16.6% and 12.0% respectively behind the completion rates of provincial achievement/matriculation tests.



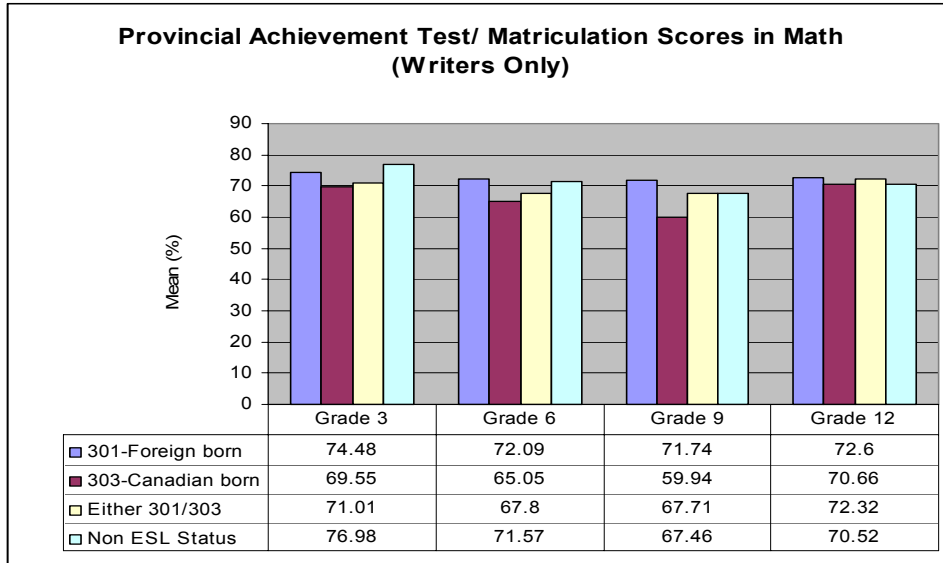


Achievement- Comparison across cohorts

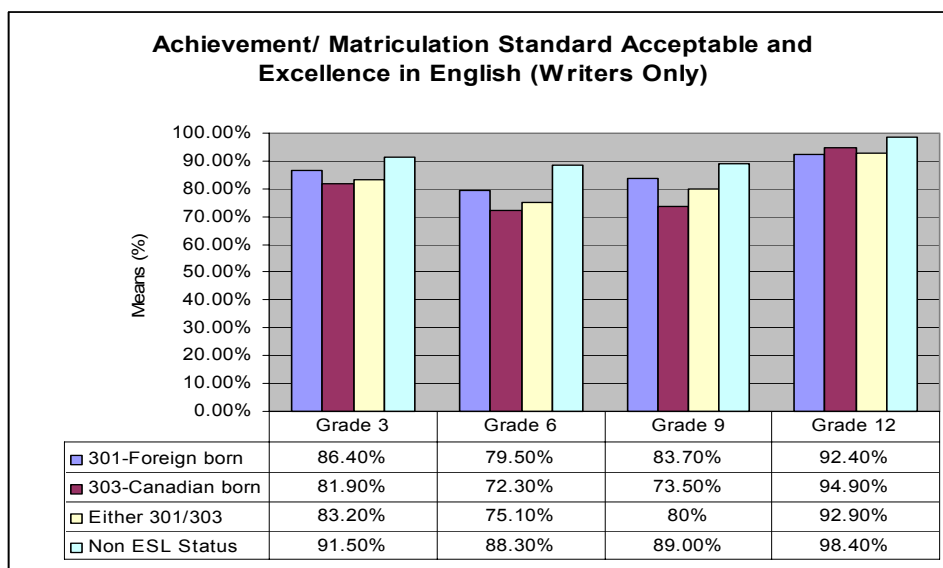
- Overall, ESL students who wrote the tests in English performed lower than students with non-ESL status in all grades. Canadian born students consistently achieved the lowest scores at all levels.

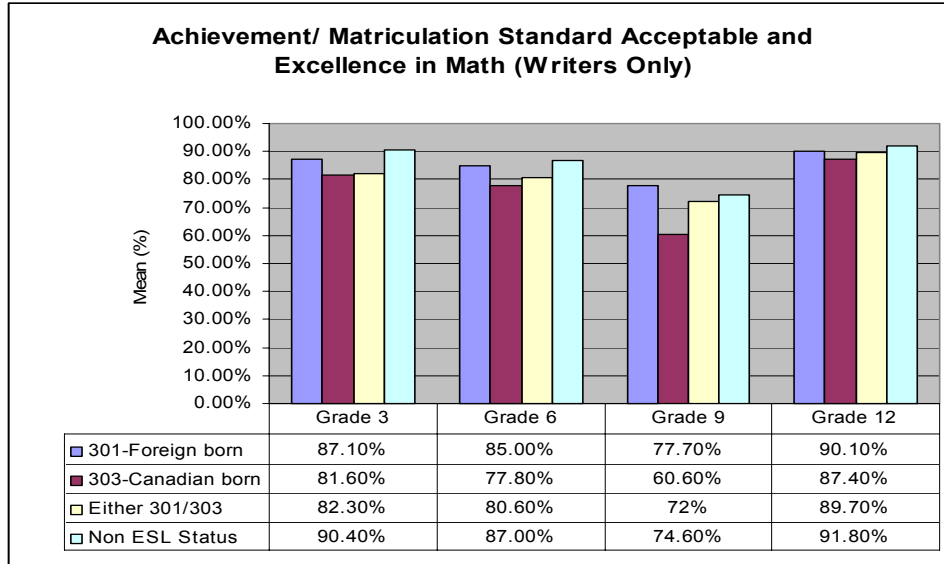


- ESL students achieved lower scores in math than students with non-ESL status in grade 3 and 6. With an exception at grade 12 level, Canadian born students consistently achieved the lowest scores in math.

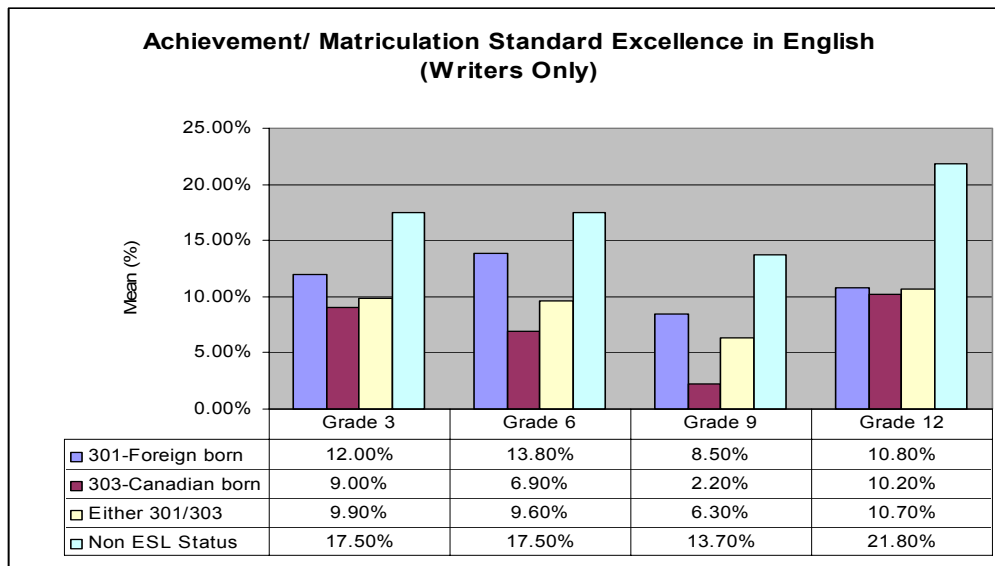


- Overall, the percentages of ESL students achieving standard acceptable and excellence levels in English and Math were lower than those of students with non-ESL status. With an exception for English at grade 12 level, Canadian born ESL students had the lowest rates in achieving standard acceptable and excellence levels in English and Math.

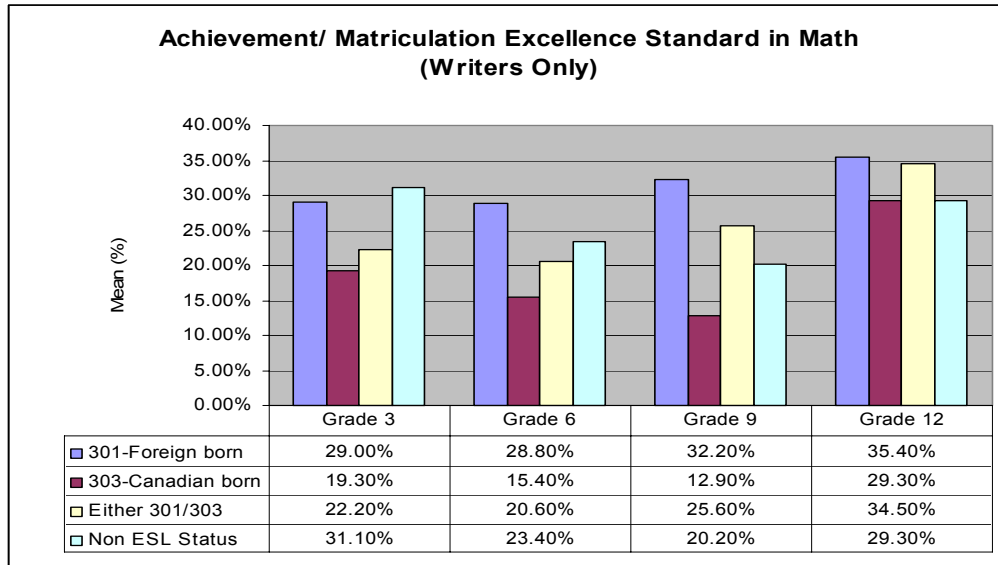




- Overall, ESL students lagged behind in achieving a standard of excellence in English in all grades. Canadian born ESL students had the lowest percentages of achieving a standard of excellence in English in all levels, particularly in later grades.



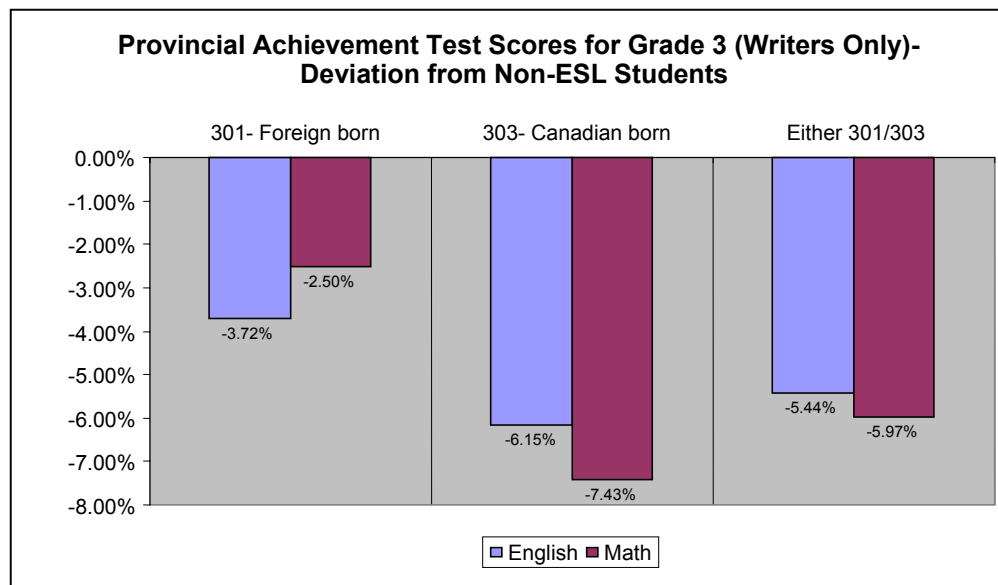
- While percentages of foreign-born ESL students achieving a standard of excellence in Math were higher than those for students with non-ESL status, Canadian born ESL students consistently had the lowest percentages in achieving a standard of excellence in Math.



Achievement- Comparison within Cohorts

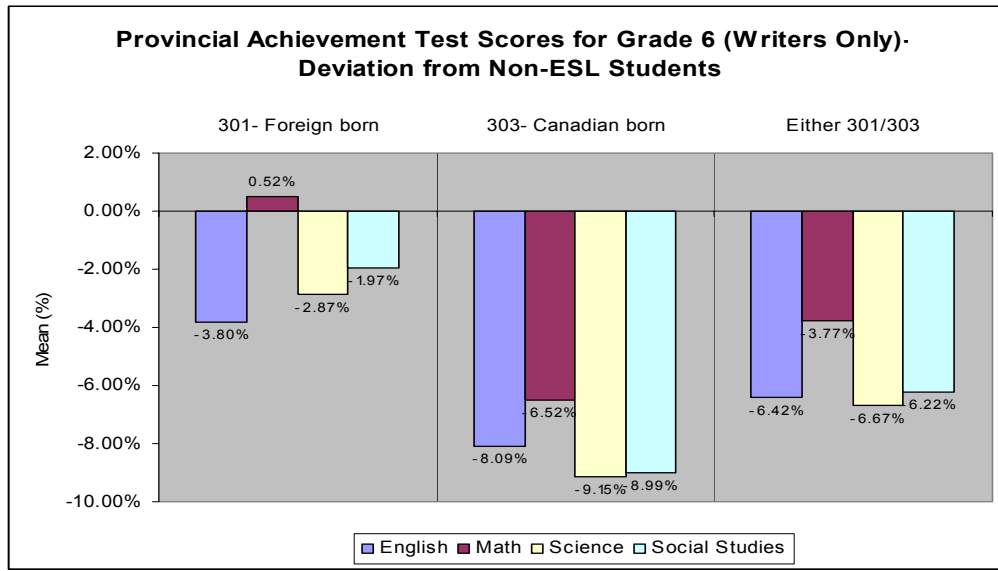
Grade 3

- Overall, ESL students who wrote provincial achievement tests consistently scored lower than students with non-ESL status in both English and Math. Canadian-born ESL students achieved the lowest scores in English and Math.



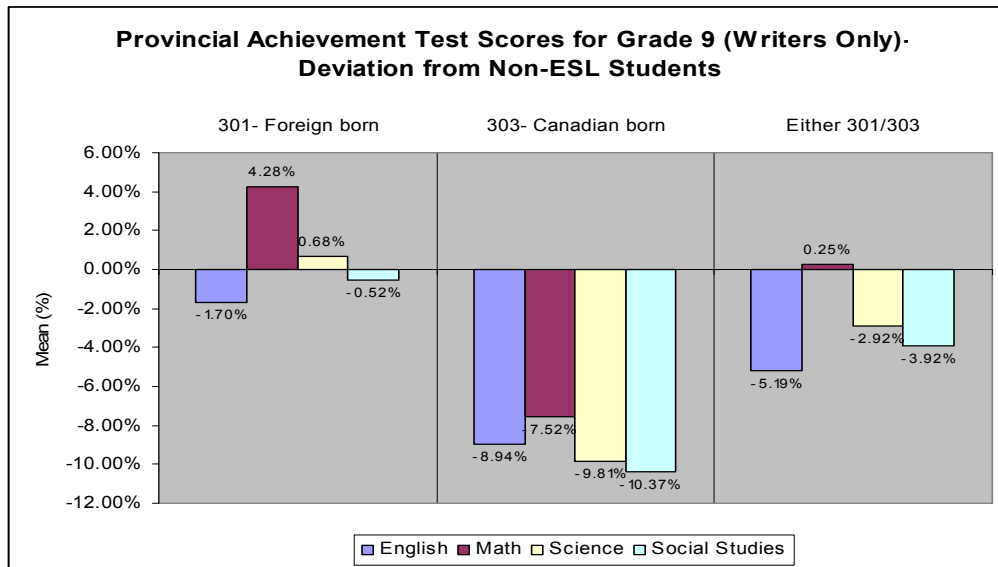
Grade 6

- With the exception of the performance in Math among foreign-born ESL students, ESL students who wrote provincial achievement tests in grade 6 consistently scored lower than students with non-ESL status in English, Math, Science and Social Studies. Canadian-born ESL students achieved the lowest scores in all subjects.



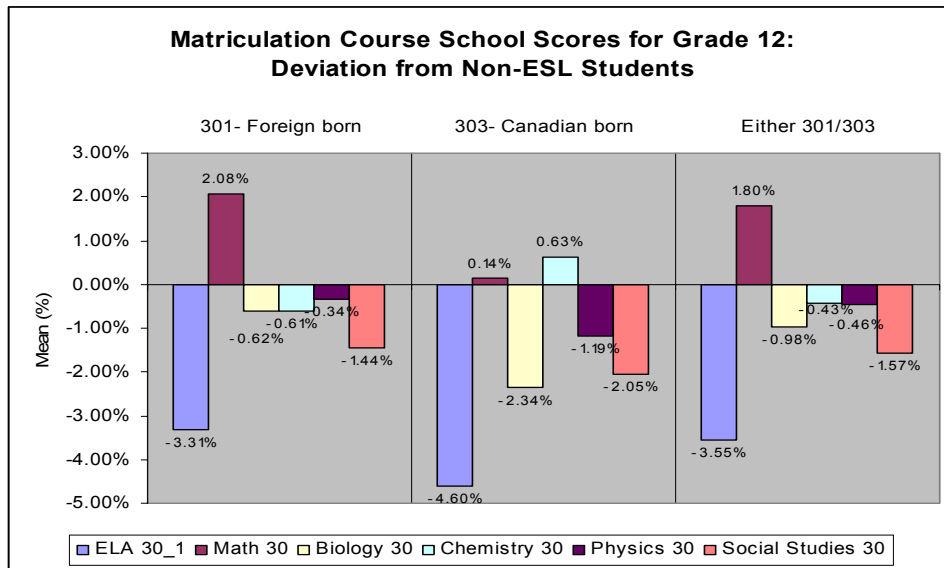
Grade 9

- With the exception of the performance in Math and Science among foreign-born ESL students, ESL students who wrote provincial achievement tests in grade 9 consistently scored lower than students with non-ESL status in English, Science and Social Studies. Canadian-born ESL students scored the lowest in all subjects.

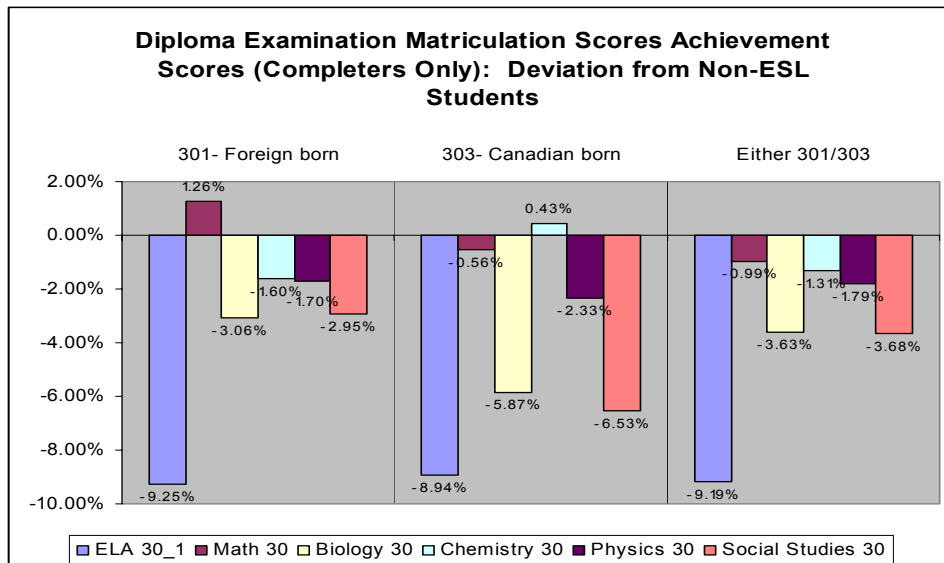


Grade 12

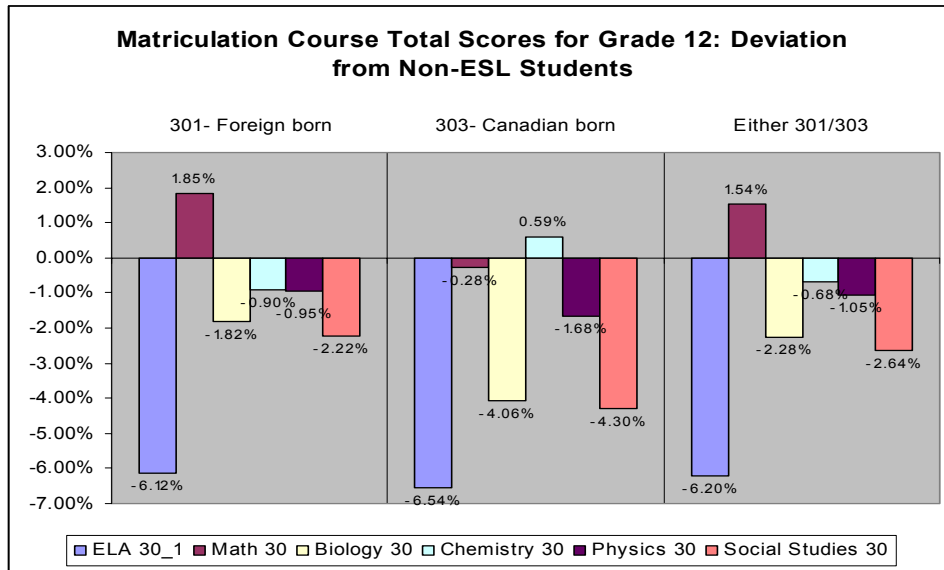
- With the exception of the performance in Math 30 among ESL students and in Chemistry 30 for Canadian born ESL students, the school scores for matriculation courses of ESL students in grade 12 were consistently lower than those of students with non-ESL status in English 30, Biology 30, Physics 30 and Social Studies 30. Canadian-born ESL students scored the lowest in English 30, Biology 30, Physics 30 and Social Studies 30.



- With the exception of the performance in Math 30 among foreign born ESL students and Chemistry 30 among Canadian born ESL students, the diploma examination scores for matriculation courses of ESL students in grade 12 were consistently lower than those of students with non-ESL status in English 30, Math 30, Biology 30, Physics 30 and Social Studies 30. Canadian-born ESL students achieved the lowest scores in Biology 30 and Social Studies 30. Foreign-born ESL students scored the lowest in English 30.



- With the exception of the performance in Math 30 among foreign-born ESL students and in Chemistry 30 among Canadian born ESL students, the total scores (average of school and diploma exam scores) for matriculation courses of ESL students in grade 12 were consistently lower than those of students with non-ESL status in English 30, Biology 30, Physics 30 and Social Studies 30. Canadian-born ESL students scored the lowest in English 30, Math 30, Biology 30, Physics 30 and Social Studies 30.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Alberta Education

The Coalition for Equal Access to Education endorses the report's recommendations to Alberta Education, which include:

1. Re-examine the current funding structure for K-12 ESL.
2. Develop a recommended list of diagnostic and assessment instruments appropriate for use with K-12 ESL students to improve consistency and standardization in assessing, interpreting and reporting test results.
3. Develop K-12 ESL proficiency standards and guidelines for instructional strategies consistent with the Alberta Program of Studies.

In addition, the Coalition for Equal Access to Education urges Alberta Education to demonstrate stronger **leadership** in the following areas:

- Development of standards for identification, assessment, placement, explicit ESL instruction, and tracking of progress for both language proficiency and academic performance;
- Development and implementation of ESL programs of study at all levels;
- Associated psychological, sociocultural and academic support for ESL students;

- Adequate funding and development of accountability measures and reporting requirements;
- Professional standards in terms of professional requirements for ESL personnel and school personnel who provide language support to ESL students;
- Research and knowledge development;
- Cultural competency; and
- Involvement of multi-stakeholders in ESL reform in Alberta.

For an in-depth discussion of our recommendations, please refer to the Coalition's document, *Toward Quality, Equitable English as a Second Language Education- A Practical Framework*, which was presented to the Standing Policy Committee on Education and Employment of the Government of Alberta in September 2005. The document is available at www.eslaction.com.

School Jurisdictions

The Coalition for Equal Access to Education endorses the report's recommendations to school jurisdictions, which include:

1. Ensure that K-12 ESL students have sufficient support and time to learn English and subject matter content;
2. Provide more professional development opportunities for practicing teachers and teacher assistants.

In addition, the Coalition for Equal Access to Education urges school boards to assume stronger jurisdictional leadership to address the following:

- Standards for identification, assessment, placement, explicit ESL instruction, and tracking of progress for both language proficiency and academic performance;
- Implementation of the existing guides to ESL programs.
- Associated psychological, sociocultural and academic support for ESL students;
- Allocation of adequate, equitable funding for ESL instruction;
- Development of accountability measures and reporting requirements for ESL funding and results;
- Professional standards in terms of professional requirements for ESL personnel and school personnel who provide language support to ESL students;
- Availability of resources and opportunities for comprehensive, sustained professional development and continuing education for personnel;
- Greater collaboration with universities for research and knowledge development.

Universities

The Coalition for Equal Access to Education endorses the report's recommendations to school jurisdictions, which include:

1. Create more opportunities for inclusion of K-12 ESL related courses in teacher education programs and increase placement opportunities for student teachers in schools with large numbers of ESL students; and
2. Develop a research agenda that addresses as a priority questions and issues related to K-12 ESL in Alberta.

In addition, the Coalition for Equal Access to Education urges universities to place greater emphases upon diversity in their teacher education programs, to include:

- Availability of and requirement for ESL education in core pre-service training;
- Availability of sustained, comprehensive opportunities for professional development and continuing education for practicing teachers;
- Integration of cultural diversity and competence in all aspects of university programs; and
- Research and knowledge development related to ESL education and diversity.

Advanced Education

The Coalition for Equal Access to Education endorses the report's recommendation to explore transition options which would allow ESL students to complete high school requirements. We also urge greater collaboration and coordination between Alberta Education and Advanced Education to ensure smooth transition of ESL students into higher education.