

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program Data

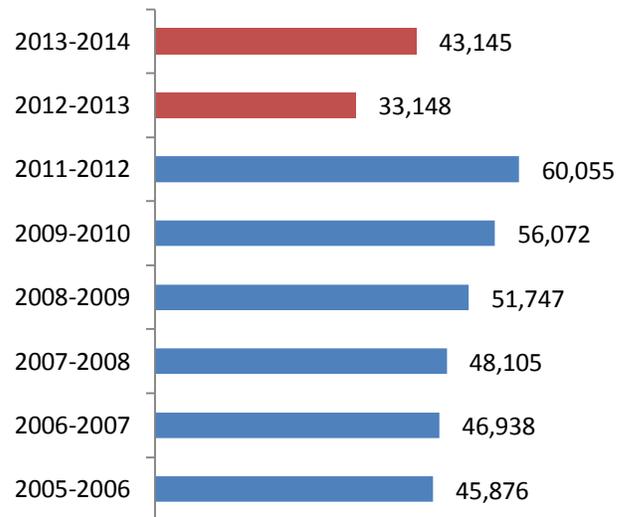
This overview of program data from LBS programs in Ontario was developed as part of a larger study¹ that investigated the way that the OALCF² Use Digital Technology, and Milestones in general, are used in LBS programs. The data was examined to provide a current program overview and a context for understanding the research findings. It also reveals that some learner profile and suitability targets³ set by the funder do not align with individual program realities. The overview includes data primarily from the current reporting system (EOIS/CaMS)⁴ with some supplemental data from the previous reporting system (the Information Management System or IMS)^{5,6}. The overview includes learner enrolment numbers, the age of learners, learner goal paths and the education levels of learners.

Learner Enrolment

In 2013-2014⁷ a total of 43,145 adults participated in LBS programs across Ontario.

This number includes those who participated in distance learning (5,553) and attended programs in-person (37,592). The number of enrolments has decreased substantially compared to a recent peak in 2011-2012, the year before the OALCF and EOIS/CaMS was introduced. The initial sharp decrease in 2012-2013 is primarily due to reporting adjustments and confusions related to the introduction of a new database system. The difference however between a peak of 60,055 the year before the OALCF and new reporting system was introduced and current enrolment is important to explore. Reporting differences between the two systems could be a reason for the decreased enrolments. In addition though, after 15 years of static funding, LBS received short-term supplemental funding in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012, which coincides with peak enrolment

Learner Enrolment from 2005 to 2014



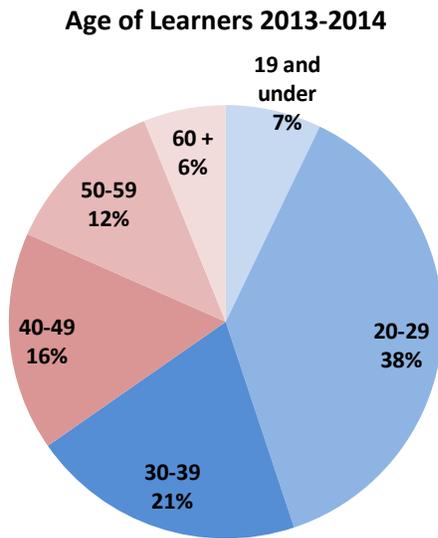
numbers. Subsequent decreases in enrolments also coincide with the return to previous funding levels. It is also possible that some of the decreased enrolments could represent a decrease in actual learners attending programs.

Age of Learners

In 2013-2014, the majority of learners (64%) were under the age of 39, including a small proportion (7%) under the age of 19. The age distribution does not align with the ministry's suitability indicator, which indicates that programs should target learners who are "older than 45 years of age and under 65". Only one-fifth (22%) of all learners in programs are between 45 and 65 years of age. Further, the suitability indicator directing programs to work with adults who have "been out of education or without being involved with training for 6 years or more" is not aligned with program realities, as close to one-third (29%) of all learners are under the age of 24. It is likely that many of these learners were involved in either

the K-12 system or some other form of training and education in the past six years.

The age-related profile has remained relatively stable since 2005-2006, with the exception of the youngest learners under the age of 19. Although a small proportion of learners, they have more than doubled in size from 3% to 7%⁸. The 45-64 year old category has



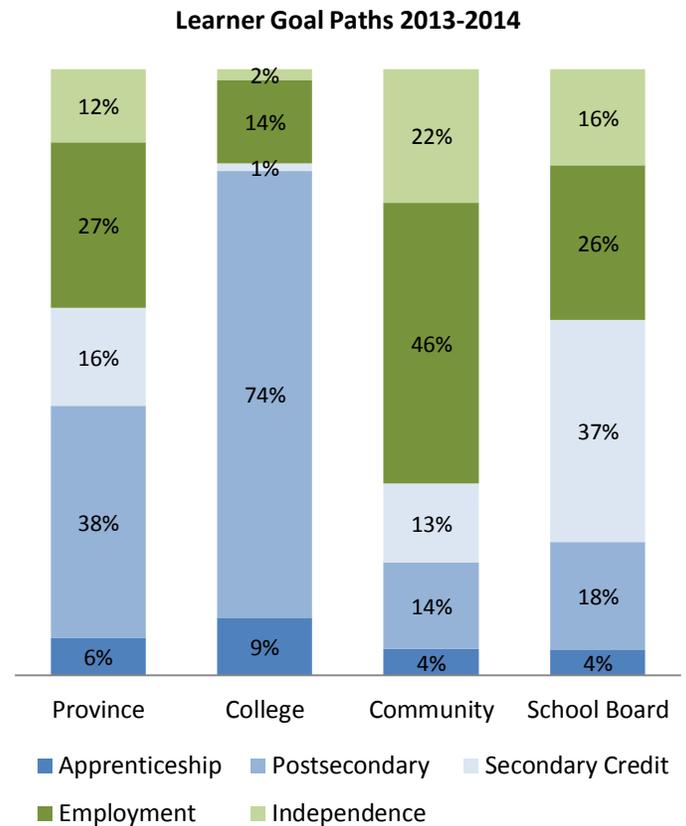
remained stable throughout the years, ranging between 20% and 22%. There was however a slight increase to 25% in 2009-2010. Other age categories have also remained unchanged over the past decade.

Learner Goal Paths

The LBS system is organized by five goal paths that are used to indicate the general purpose of program participation and guiding curricular aims. Each learner must identify a specific goal that is aligned with the goal paths upon enrolment.

With the introduction of the OALCF, the goal paths were expanded from three to five. A previous category, further education, was articulated more explicitly naming apprenticeship, postsecondary and secondary credit goal paths. These three goal paths are similar in that they all address academic literacy development and refer to the provincial education curriculum. The majority (60%) of learners are categorized into one of the three academic goal paths (i.e. apprenticeship, postsecondary or secondary). Just over one-quarter

(27%) identified an employment goal and only slightly more than one-tenth (12%) identified an independence goal. Individual programs identify their own targets related to the number of learners in each goal path. The predominantly academic goals of learners shape the way that literacy is developed in LBS programs.



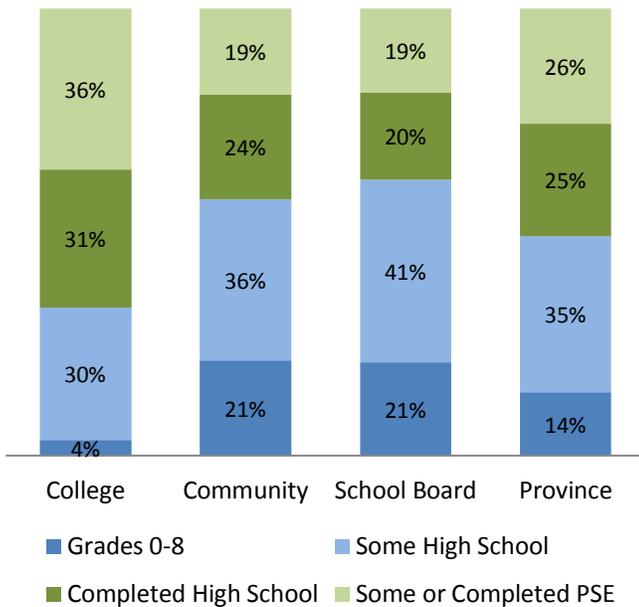
When we examine goal path distribution by sector, school boards closely mirror the provincial distribution. Colleges and community-based programs have their own distinct goal path profiles. The vast majority (74%) of adult learners in colleges want to access PSE, and nearly all (84%) are there for academic purposes. In contrast, nearly half (46%) of the adults in community-based programs have an employment goal, and just under one-quarter have an independence goal. Distinct goal path profiles indicate the need for curriculum development that supports a diversity of literacy learning aims.

Education Levels

Provincially, just over half of all learners (51%) in programs have more than a Grade 12 level of education, which does not reflect the education level suitability

indicator set by the province to work with learners with less than Grade 12. Learners with the most education can be found in college programs. Further, the colleges see only a small fraction of adults with the least amount of education. In comparison, school board and community-based programs share a similar profile. The majority of their learners have less than high school,

LBS Learner Education Levels



including one-fifth in each sector who have only 0-8 years of education. Both sectors would face similar challenges working with learners with fewer educational resources and experiences. Not revealed in the education attainment data, but a program reality, are the number of learners with developmental disabilities who received a secondary completion certificate and the number of learners who may have previously been

identified as having a learning disability in the K-12 system.

Conclusion

The data overview provided important contextual information related to the research project. In addition, it also provides important insights into the learner and program profile, and the way the ministry evaluates individual program effectiveness in its Performance Management Framework (PMF). The effectiveness category, one of three in the PMF, is weighted most heavily. The Milestones, along with two other assessments, Culminating Tasks and Learner Gains, are three of the four indicators in this category. The fourth indicator is related to the learner profile and learner suitability. The data overview raises important questions about the use of some current suitability indicators and the use of a single set of curricular standards and standardized assessments to evaluate program effectiveness:

- Current suitability indicators related to age, time out of school and education level do not reflect program realities
- Programs have distinct goal path profiles and learner education profiles, creating the need to support programs in different ways, using various curricular and assessment approaches
- The distinct educational backgrounds of adult learners, including those with disabilities and exceptionalities, means that accommodations must be integrated into an assessment system that is used to evaluate program effectiveness.

¹ For more details about the study refer to AlphaPlus (2015) *Research Overview - Assessment Challenges, Contradictions and Inequities: An Analysis of the use of digital technology and OALCF Milestones*.

² http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/programs/lbs_oalcf_overview.html

³ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2014). LBS Service Provider Guidelines, page 31. Available from http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/lbs_2014_2015_service_provider_guidelines_sdb_approved.pdf

⁴ *Literacy and Basic Skills Report Fiscal Year, 2012-2013, 2013-2014*.

⁵ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. *LBS Activity Reports: 2005–2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010*.

⁶ Essential Skills Ontario (2012) *Literacy and Essential Skills in Ontario*. Available from <http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca>

⁷ Since completing the study, data from 2014-2015 was made available. In 2014-2015 total enrolment was 43,617, only slightly more than the previous year.

⁸ This trend continued in 2014-2015.

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Research Overview — Assessment Challenges, Contradictions and Inequities: An analysis of the use of digital technology and OALCF Milestones

Download at <http://www.alphaplus.ca>

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program Data Lessons Learned From Analysing the OALCF Use Digital Technology Milestones

Practices Developed When Using the OALCF Milestones

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