

Executive summary

Evaluation of Ontario's LBS program

November, 2016



About the LBS program

Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program provides free training to adults in reading, writing, and math skills in order to achieve their goals. Learners may participate in-person or learn online.

Coordinated and funded by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD),¹ the LBS program is delivered by community agencies, colleges, and school boards through the Employment Ontario (EO) service delivery system. 300+ locations across the province offer culturally- and linguistically-relevant services for Aboriginal, Anglophone, Deaf, and Francophone learners.

In accordance with the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF), programming is meant to be competency-based, learner-centred and transition-oriented: service providers work with learners to identify their goals and determine what competencies they need to take their next steps toward those goals. They then develop a learner plan to help the learner reach their goals. LBS programming may include assessment, in-person instruction, e-learning, referrals to other programs and services, and post-program follow-up.

Key messages of this executive summary

The LBS program is providing a vital, valued, and effective service to Ontarians. Its key components—the OALCF and the Performance Management Framework (PMF)—are well designed. However, serious problems have arisen in the implementation of these components. These problems stem from fragmented leadership, poor relations between the Ministry and the field, threats to sustainability (including inadequate funding) and a lack of a clear vision for whom the program is intended to serve. The Ministry and the field must work collaboratively to rebuild cooperative relations and clarify LBS's mission, so that the program can address Ontario's literacy needs with greater efficacy, efficiency, and accountability.

Key facts about the LBS program (2014-15)

40,000 learners served

By **274** service delivery sites

Using **\$84 million** in funding

To provide over **11 million** hours of programming

¹ Formerly known as the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).

About the evaluation

This evaluation is meant to inform policy and program decisions about literacy and essential skills training in the context of Employment and Training Services Integration (ETSI). It assesses the program's relevance, delivery, effectiveness and efficiency between April 2012 and March 2016. It will provide an opportunity to engage program stakeholders to come up with forward looking solutions.

The evaluation was informed by the following sources:

- Administrative data (about learners)
- Consultation visits with service providers (17)
- Discussion groups with learners (11)
- Inter-jurisdictional scan
- Learner survey (1,519)
- Service provider interviews (10)
- Community partner interviews (26)
- Support organization interviews (25)
- Ministry interviews (12)
- Service provider survey (244)

Strengths and limitations

We have confidence in the overall findings and conclusions of this evaluation. **Key strengths** include:

- There was extensive consultation with LBS program stakeholders (learners, service providers, support organizations, and the Ministry).
- Information about learner characteristics and outcomes was available from program's client information database. Data assessment undertaken to determine which information was reliable enough for use in the evaluation.
- Limitations of specific data methods were mitigated by the triangulated approach. Different lines of inquiry converged on similar conclusions, increasing the trustworthiness of results.
- In the few instances where the findings from different sources conflicted, this has been noted in the relevant sections of the report and the resulting limitations have been described.

Key limitations include:

- There was limited consultation with community partners, including employers and educational institutions.
- Only consulted with program participants, therefore, it is not possible to know whether LBS would meet the needs of those who might benefit, but did not participate.
- No comparison group available for learners, therefore, difficult to know if learners would have improved without intervention.
- Limited information was gathered regarding how services are delivered. While 17 consultation visits were done (which offered the opportunity to see service delivery first hand), most of this information was self-reported by service providers.

Key findings: Relevance to learner needs

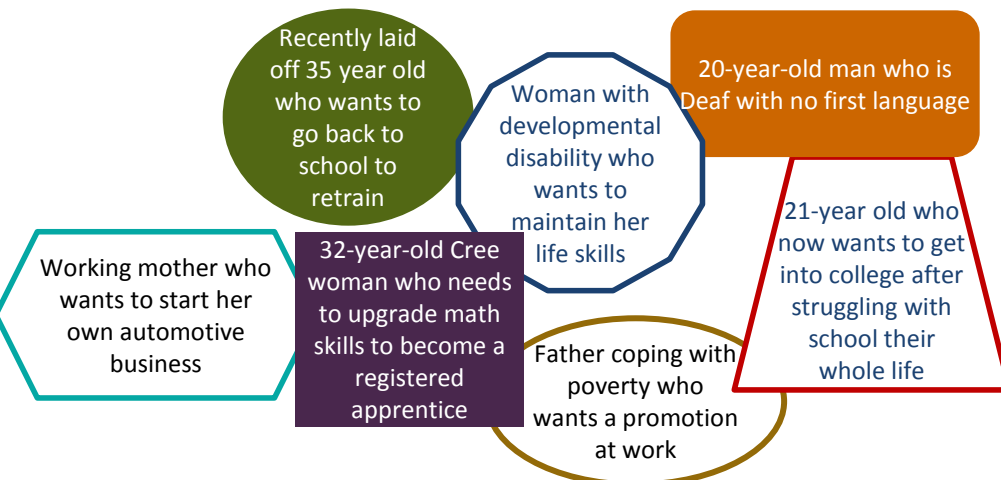
The LBS program serves learners with diverse needs

There is immense diversity amongst LBS learners' backgrounds, goals and needs. There is no typical LBS learner.

Learners may want to go back to school (39% post-secondary; 16% secondary; 6% apprenticeship), get a job or a better job (28%), or become more independent in life (12%).^{AD} Learners do not always have a single goal and often speak of multiple aspects of their life that they hope LBS will help improve.^{LDG}

In terms of their skills and needs, some learners enter the program with very low levels of literacy, while others will only need to improve their skills in one area.^{CV,SPI} Some learners have significant barriers that make it difficult to learn, while others don't. As a result, learners may progress quickly or take a longer period of time to improve their skills. In many cases, learners may come and go during their program journey.

LBS learners: a diverse group



¹ Statistics Canada. (2013). [Skills in Canada](#): First results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

The program is meeting learner needs

Service providers have responded to this diversity by tailoring their programming to the learner needs in their community. For example, college LBS programming tends to be fairly structured, while community-based programs that are serving learners with a range of goals and levels of literacy may feature each learner working independently with support from the instructor and/or a tutor.^{CV}

Most learners are highly satisfied with LBS services, and feel they are getting what they need to be ready for their next steps:

- 89% reported that they are satisfied with the quality of training.^{LS}
- 86% indicated that it met their needs.^{LS}
- More than 90% (91%^{LS}, 98%^{AD}) of learners would recommend the services to others.
- 90% indicated training activities were relevant to their goals.^{LS}
- 87% agreed the amount of learning opportunities received was satisfactory.^{LS}
- 87% felt more confident about their next steps.^{LS}

Learners value the program's nonjudgmental atmosphere, skilled staff, and close tailoring of learning activities to their individual aspirations.^{LDG}

While it is apparent that LBS is meeting the needs of current learners, analysis of the 2011-2012 PIAAC results estimates that the program is reaching less than 1% of the total Ontario working-age population with literacy skills below Level 3.¹

Evaluation lines of evidence denoted throughout report:

Administrative data (**AD**), Consultation visits (**CV**), Discussion groups with learners (**LDG**), Service provider interviews (**SPI**), Community partner interviews (**CPI**), Support organization interviews (**SOI**), MAESD interviews (**MI**), Learner survey (**LS**), Service provider survey (**SPS**)

Key findings: Relevance to government priorities and community needs

“Growing the economy and helping to create good jobs are fundamental to building more opportunity and security, now and in the future. That critical priority is supported by **strategic investments in the talent and skills of our people**, from childhood to retirement.”

-Premier Kathleen Wynne¹



The LBS program is contributing to Ministry priorities

Ontario is committed to developing a highly skilled, adaptable workforce. The 2014 MAESD mandate letter¹ emphasizes this role for skill development along with focusing resources on those who need them most.

LBS supports a number of MAESD priorities.^{MI} In particular, LBS aligns with the government’s commitment to support vulnerable populations, support transitions (especially transitions to employment and education), collaborate with other ministries, and ensure accountability.

There remain questions about whether LBS is intended as an economic intervention designed to get people jobs, a social intervention designed to spread literacy as a human right, or both.^{MI}



Not all literacy needs are being met

Analysis of the 2011-2012 PIAAC results² estimates that LBS is reaching less than 1% of the total Ontario working-age population with literacy skills below Level 3. This may reflect a lack of awareness of the program across the province, as well as a lack of capacity within the current system to serve more learners. However, there may be other barriers (e.g. stigma about literacy, perceived lack of relevance, hours of operation, transportation, child care, etc.) that this evaluation did not systematically assess as it was not within scope.



Community partners feel needs are being identified and addressed

LBS programs are building on relationships with community partners and available data to make decisions about how to best serve their communities. Partners believe the supports offered are largely meeting the needs of their communities.^{CPI}

Strong partnerships are fueling the ability to meet community needs, while a lack of resources and awareness are the key barriers that get in the way of addressing needs.

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Administrative data (AD), Consultation visits (CV), Discussion groups with learners (LDG), Service provider interviews (SPI), Community partner interviews (CPI), Support organization interviews (SOI), MAESD interviews (MI), Learner survey (LS), Service provider survey (SPS)

¹ Wynne, K (2014). 2014 [Mandate letter: MAESD](#) – Premier’s instructions to the Minister on priorities for the year 2014.

² Statistics Canada. (2013). [Skills in Canada](#): First results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC).

Key findings: Participant outcomes

The LBS program aims to help learners improve their literacy and essential skills and gain the competencies they need to reach their goals, thereby supporting their transition to employment, postsecondary education, apprenticeship, secondary school, and/or increased independence.

Over the long term, it is hoped that the program will enhance employability, and improve participation in the labour market as well as community, social and political processes.

LBS learners are gaining skills and confidence

The LBS training has helped learners move toward the program’s immediate outcomes of improving skills, such as reading, digital literacy, writing, interpersonal skills, time management, organization, and budgeting, that they can apply in their day-to-day lives (86% of learners agreed).^{LS}

These skill improvements are having an impact on learners’ day-to-day lives, since learners are better able to manage their finances, their health, and their households.^{LDG} Learners also reported increases in confidence and self-esteem.^{LS}

“What I’ve learned about myself is that I don’t think I’m stupid anymore.”

- LBS learner^{CV}

LBS learners are successfully transitioning to their next steps

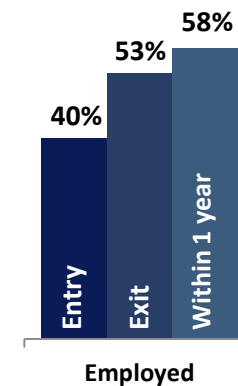
LBS programming is tailored to the needs of learners in five different goal paths: Employment, Apprenticeship, Postsecondary Education, Secondary School Credit, and Independence.

Programming is transition-oriented, meaning that learners and service providers develop a learner plan outlining the competencies a learner needs to gain in order to be ready for their next step toward their goals, and then do learning activities to develop the needed competencies.

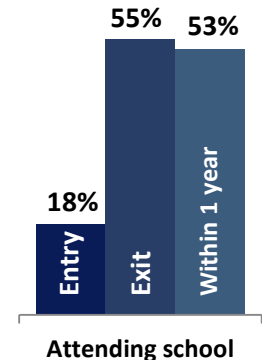
By the time they exit the program, most learners (83%) feel ready for their next steps.^{LS} Indeed, some learners successfully transition to their next steps within one year of exiting the program (i.e. move towards LBS’s intermediate outcomes). Learners in the Employment and Apprenticeship goal paths are getting jobs and/or getting a better job. Learners in the Postsecondary Education and Secondary School Credit goal paths are going back to school. Learners in the Independence goal path are gaining skills for independence^{AD} (particularly computer skills, confidence, communication skills, and financial management skills^{LDG,LS}).

“I’m learning how to manage my budget. Working with what we have...It’s easier now. We can get through the month.”
-LBS learner^{LDG}

Employment outcomes improve for learners in the Employment goal path (n=8,763)^{AD}



Educational outcomes improve for learners in the Postsecondary Education goal path (n=8,763)^{AD}



*Outcome data was available for 64% of learners with closed service plans at three points in time; follow up data is based on a range of dates between 3 and 12 months.

Evaluation lines of evidence denoted throughout report:
Administrative data (AD), Consultation visits (CV), Discussion groups with learners (LDG), Service provider interviews (SPI), Community partner interviews (CPI), Support organization interviews (SOI), MAESD interviews (MI), Learner survey (LS), Service provider survey (SPS)

Key findings: Implementation and effectiveness of the OALCF

Introduced in 2012, the OALCF is an organizing framework that is competency-based, learner-centred, and transition-oriented. The OALCF requires service providers to work with learners to identify their goals and determine what competencies they need to take their next steps toward those goals. They then develop a Learner Plan to help the learner reach his/her goals. LBS programming includes assessment, in-person instruction and/or e-learning, referrals to other programs and services, and tracking of Learner Progress in EOIS-CaMS. The graphic to the right shows the five service delivery functions.

The field has embraced the spirit of the OALCF

Although implementation of some aspects of the OALCF is uneven, its learner-centred, transition-oriented spirit is embraced by the field and learners alike.^{CV} Information about OALCF alignment within each of the five service delivery functions is provided on the following page.

Providers feel that the OALCF has impacted their services positively or in a neutral way, except for adding to the time it takes to deliver services.^{SPS}

Partnerships, referrals and flexibility support success

The relationships and partnerships developed between service providers and their community partners have made it easier to identify and address community needs, as well as to refer learners to appropriate supports/programs.^{CPI,SOI,SPI}

Learners have found referrals and wraparound supports very helpful (and in some cases, critical) to their success.^{LS}

The flexibility inherent in the framework allows providers to tailor their offerings in order to address identified community needs.^{CPI,CV}



There are challenges with the OALCF's accountability elements

Many of the accountability mechanisms associated with the OALCF are perceived to pose barriers to learners.

The main areas of concern expressed by providers were the Milestones and especially the Culminating Tasks. They were seen as not always meaningful to learners, time consuming and potentially damaging to the learner's confidence.^{CV,SPI,SPS}

Other, less prevalent concerns included the exit and follow-up interviews (time consuming, not best way to collect data) and the participant registration form (lengthy, asks personal questions).^{CV}

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Alignment with the OALCF

The following shows how the five LBS service delivery functions are aligned with the OALCF.

1. Information and referral

- Providers use OALCF terminology.^{SPI, SPS}
- Providers give learners information about the program and assess fit with learner goals/needs.^{CV}
- Referrals made for many learners to support them in meeting their goals.^{LS}



2. Assessment

- Most providers have an assessment strategy.^{SPS}
- Most do initial assessments.^{LS, SPS}
- Most use ongoing assessments and feedback.^{LS}
- Most use Milestone Tasks.^{AD}
- Only some providers do exit assessments routinely.^{SPS}
- Few learners do Culminating Tasks.^{AD}

3. Learner Plans

- Almost all learners have a Learner Plan.^{SPS}
- Most providers keep Learner Plans up to date.^{LS, SPS}
- Learners sometimes involved in creating Learner Plan.^{LS, SPS}
- Learner Plan not always used to guide learning.^{CV}

5. Follow-up

- Many providers routinely do exit interviews.^{LS}
- Many learners followed up with after exit.^{AD}

4. Training

- Task-based and contextualized learning used to varying degrees.^{CV}
- Training is usually transition-oriented.^{CV, LDG, LS}
- Most learners make progress and gain competencies.^{AD}
- Some misconceptions about what contextualized, task-based learning entails.^{CV}

Evaluation lines of evidence denoted throughout report:

Administrative data (AD), Consultation visits (CV), Discussion groups with learners (LDG), Service provider interviews (SPI), Community partner interviews (CPI), Support organization interviews (SOI), MAESD interviews (MI), Learner survey (LS), Service provider survey (SPS)

Definitions of quantifiers: All (100%); majority/most (75-99%); many (50-74%); some (25-49%); few: <25%

Key findings: Viability of e-Channel

e-Channel is the distance learning service within the LBS program, delivered through five service provider organizations. Learners may access e-Channel on its own, or in addition to in-person training (“blended learning”).

e-Channel is a viable delivery model to supplement in-person LBS services

e-Channel offers unique benefits, such as increased accessibility, flexibility and independence for learners with higher levels of digital literacy, who have reliable computer and internet access, and who can manage their own learning effectively.^{CV,LDG,LS,SPS} However, since online learning is not effective for all learners, e-Channel cannot serve as a replacement for in-person LBS services.^{CV,LS,SPS}

Blended LBS instruction may be a good option for learners who are not ready to learn independently, but who: a) would like greater variety or flexibility in their learning, b) want to develop digital literacy skills, and/or c) are just beginning to be ready for greater independence in their learning. Blended learning is, however, more expensive (incurring the costs of both in-person and e-Channel learning). Truly blended learning is also hampered by the EOIS-CaMS system, which does not allow for one comprehensive learner plan to be created that applies to both in-person and e-Channel.



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Key Findings: The PMF

The PMF was introduced to support business intelligence (BI) and ongoing quality improvement (QI). The PMF includes a set of core indicators, measures, and service quality standards that are applied equally to all sites delivering the LBS program. Ongoing stable funding is contingent on a site meeting the overall Service Quality Standard (SQS).

The intentions behind the PMF are sound

The PMF is intended to:

- Make it possible for the Ministry to ensure the accountability of service providers, and
- Encourage service providers to engage in continuous quality improvement.

These are important goals. Furthermore, the individual SQS measures (e.g. learner progress, service coordination, customer satisfaction) are relevant and aligned to the mandate of the program, and the SQS allows, in theory, for providers to fill specialized niches.

Implementation challenges have undermined the success of the PMF

Despite the good intentions, the impact of the PMF has, thus far, been predominantly negative.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS} Very few examples of positive changes made as a result of the PMF could be identified, while numerous examples of frustration, anxiety, goal displacement, and perverse incentives were found.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}

While these results may be disheartening, the Ministry is to be commended for attempting to monitor service quality and outcomes in a consistent way across the system. This has been a challenging undertaking in many other jurisdictions, so some hurdles are to be expected.

Numerous obstacles need to be overcome before the PMF can fulfill its intended function

Specific hurdles that must be overcome include:

- Current measures of learner progress are not suitable for all learners (too challenging, not relevant to their goals).^{CV,MI,SPI,SPS}
- A flawed and underweighted measure of learner barriers (Suitability) has incentivized creaming.^{CV,SPI,SPS}
- Rigid application of SQS requirements has restricted the flexibility of programs to respond to community/learner needs.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}
- Unclear expectations, combined with high stakes measures, cause anxiety that leads to gaming behaviours, reducing the integrity and interpretability of EOIS-CaMS data.^{CV,SPI,SPS}
- The integrity of EOIS-CaMS data is further undermined by unclear definitions and inconsistent guidance.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}
- Support organizations and some areas in the Ministry (e.g. program policy, design and development) do not have ready access to the EOIS-CaMS data for continuous improvement purposes.^{MI,SOI}
- Given these liabilities, service providers use the data almost entirely for compliance rather than to improve services.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}
- Implementation challenges have undermined goodwill between the field and the Ministry, further undermining stakeholders' confidence in, and willingness to use, the performance data.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}

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Key findings: Ministry support and funding structures

The Ministry is responsible for providing funding for the LBS program; ensuring transparency and accountability; establishing and communicating program guidelines, expectations and priorities; and (in collaboration with service providers) identifying innovative practices.

As the OALCF is a competency-based framework designed to allow flexibility in service provision, the Ministry does not prescribe or provide content or curriculum for individual service providers.

Current support from the Ministry is widely regarded as insufficient in both its quality and its quantity. Addressing this will require fostering a much more tightly integrated LBS leadership within the Ministry, defining and communicating a clear vision for the LBS program, and rebuilding an open, respectful, and cooperative relationship with the field.

“It all starts with **two way dialogue**”
-Support organization director^{SOI}

Funding is considered inadequate

Current funding levels are considered inadequate to support quality services.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS} Funding levels have not been indexed to inflation, so are declining in real terms and pose a threat to the continued ability of the LBS network to provide quality services.

Funding for service development has effectively been cut in half without the SDNDF funding.^{SOI}

Funding decisions are perceived to lack fairness, consistency, and transparency. A rationalized and transparent funding model would be welcomed.^{CV,MI,SOI,SPI}

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The Ministry’s vision and expectations are unclear

Ministry expectations are communicated through over 100 guidance documents, making it very challenging for anyone to know and understand all of the expectations. Some expectations are unclear or confusing because of vague language or mixed messaging.

When service providers ask their ETCs about the expectations, they receive inconsistent guidance, both across and within regions.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS} This leads to confusion, anxiety, and gaming.^{CV}

The efficacy of ETC guidance is hampered by the regional model,^{CV,SOI} multi-program portfolios,^{MI} high turnover rates,^{MI,SOI,SPI,SPS} and ineffective communication channels within the Ministry.^{MI}

Unanswered questions about the vision of the LBS program also contribute to the confusion and uncertainty. The deepest question is the following: whether LBS is intended as an economic intervention designed to get people jobs, a social intervention designed to spread literacy as a human right, or both.^{MI}

Open, collaborative relationships are lacking

There is a general sense in the field that the Ministry engages poorly with providers and support organizations.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}

Providers and support organizations often feel that the Ministry breaks promises (not introducing a funding model), keeps secrets (not releasing the 2011 evaluation), makes decisions without consulting the field (re-purposing SDNDF funding), does not understand how LBS works on the ground (undertrained ETCs), and undervalues the program as a whole (funding that is declining in real terms).^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}

Providers feel that the intensity of reporting and monitoring requirements communicates a lack of trust of providers on the part of the Ministry.^{CV,SPI,SPS}

Efforts to rebuild collaborative relationships among all stakeholders will pay rich dividends.

Key findings: Effectiveness of support organizations¹



Support organizations provide critical supports

Support organizations are important to the LBS program and to the service providers. With no day-to-day responsibilities for learners, support organization staff have time to develop and pilot innovative materials, keep an eye on the wider community, and monitor advances in the adult literacy field.^{SOI}

Service providers rely on their stream, sector, service, and regional network support organizations to develop innovative materials (e.g. OALCF-aligned teaching resources), spread best practices, identify community needs, conduct marketing and outreach and enhance their organizational capacity.^{SPS}



Service providers are looking to support organizations to fill a leadership void

Service providers have also come to rely on support organizations for leadership that they are not intended or authorized to provide (e.g. assistance with how to enter data into EOIS-CaMS, how to achieve SQS standards, clarification regarding reporting requirements), because service providers do not feel they are receiving adequate supports from the Ministry.^{CV,SOI,SPI,SPS}

Support organizations are unable to fill this leadership role effectively because they do not have access to needed information (e.g. EOIS-CaMS data), they do not have authority to make decisions or judgment calls, and they do not have a formal mechanism for coordinating their efforts across 27 separate organizations.^{SOI}

If support organizations are to fill this role, they must be given the access, authority, and coordination required to do so. Conversely, if they are not to fill that leadership role, it must be filled more effectively by the Ministry.

Evaluation lines of evidence denoted throughout report:

Administrative data (**AD**), Consultation visits (**CV**), Discussion groups with learners (**LDG**), Service provider interviews (**SPI**), Community partner interviews (**CPI**), Support organization interviews (**SOI**), MAESD interviews (**MI**), Learner survey (**LS**), Service provider survey (**SPS**)

¹Support organizations is inclusive of stream-based, sector-based, and service-based support organizations, as well as regional networks.

Key findings: Efficiency of service delivery

Costs of LBS service provision are reasonable

In 2014-15, expenditures for the LBS program were \$83,903,392.¹

With these funds, the LBS program provided almost 11 million hours of service to approximately 40,000 learners, who completed over 61,000 Milestone Tasks.^{AD} This represents a cost of about \$2,000 per learner, or about \$7 per hour.

Hour for hour, MAESD funding for the LBS program is slightly higher than funding levels for college education.²

Unlike the colleges, LBS programs do not charge tuition fees to supplement the Ministry funding,³ so they effectively have less revenue per hour than College programs. Given their limited funding, it is impressive that the LBS programs manage to provide such tailored, personalized services.

¹ MAESD financial spreadsheets. Note: limited comparative information was available for similar programs and some key costing information was missing (e.g. Ministry administrative cost ,salary, etc.)

² Based on \$1.134M total MAESD funding to colleges, and 195M hours of instruction each year, across 200,000 FT and 200,000 PT learners

³ MAESD (2016). Literacy and Basic Skills: Service provider program guidelines.

Unit costs are affected by program size, in-kind contributions, and the needs of the population served

For in-person service provision, the annual unit costs, overall and by stream, are estimated at^{AD,1}:

Cost per...	Overall	Anglo-phone	Deaf	Franco-phone	Aboriginal
learner	\$2,000	\$1,900	\$6,100	\$2,400	\$2,200
hour	\$7.00	\$6.50	\$20.50	\$10.50	\$6.50

Several factors were identified that affect the unit cost of service:

- **Number of learners:** Large sites benefit from economies of scale, and have lower unit costs than small sites.^{AD}
- **In-kind contributions:** Volunteer time and in-kind resources such as classroom space, administrative support, and computer equipment reduce the costs of service provision.^{AD}
- **Barriers faced by learners:** Challenges such as poverty, disability, deafness, addiction and/or trauma make it more difficult for learners to progress.^{CV,SPI} Multi-barriered learners may need additional time and supports, which raises the cost of service.^{AD}

Deaf stream sites are the most expensive as all of these sites are small and they face the unique challenge of instructing learners in up to two second languages (ASL and English).^{CV,SPI}

Excessive administrative requirements decrease efficiency

Service providers are required to use EOIS-CaMS to support service delivery and to report back to the Ministry.

Accountability requirements impose a large burden on service providers due to the volume of reporting and data entry, the poor usability of the EOIS-CaMS platform, and the numerous reports providers are required to submit.^{SPS}

Administrative burden was the second most commonly cited barrier (after funding) to high quality services, spontaneously mentioned by over half of service providers.^{SPS} This is taking time away from service provision.^{CV,SPI,SPS,SOI}



Evaluation lines of evidence denoted throughout report: Administrative data (**AD**), Consultation visits (**CV**), Discussion groups with learners (**LDG**), Service provider interviews (**SPI**), Community partner interviews (**CPI**), Support organization interviews (**SOI**), MAESD interviews (**MI**), Learner survey (**LS**), Service provider survey (**SPS**)

Conclusions and recommendations: LBS service delivery

The following key recommendations should be considered and implemented collaboratively by MAESD, service providers, support organizations, and other relevant stakeholders. More detailed recommendations can be found in the final evaluation report.

The LBS program provides a relevant, effective service

There remains a great need for adult literacy and essential skills training in Ontario. LBS providers are using partnerships and data to identify and address community needs. Through tailored services, service providers are collectively able to meet the needs of a very diverse group of learners.

Learners remain highly satisfied with LBS. They value the program's nonjudgmental atmosphere, skilled staff, and close tailoring of learning activities to their individual aspirations.

Learners are gaining skills and confidence. Some learners are successfully transitioning according to their goal paths, while others will need more sustained support before they are ready to transition.

Recommendation F-1: Continue to fund and support the LBS program as a key part of the Ministry's efforts to promote skill development.

Recommendation F-2: Explore strategies to reach more potential learners by increasing demand, increasing awareness, and increasing capacity.

Recommendation F-3: Continue Literacy Service Planning at the local level, with the involvement of relevant community partners.

The OALCF provides a useful framework for LBS programming

Most service providers appear to be delivering learner-centred, competency-based, transition-oriented programming. Some are finding it challenging to deliver task-based learning, or to tailor learning plans to individual learners' needs.

The OALCF provides a flexible framework that enables them to tailor their programming to meet the needs of their communities and learners.

Milestones and Culminating Tasks are not always meaningful to learners, are time consuming and are potentially damaging to the instructional relationship.

Recommendation D-1: Keep the OALCF as a flexible competency-based, transition-oriented framework.

Recommendation D-2: Review the merit of Milestones and Culminating Tasks in consultation with the field and with recognition of the field's concerns about these measures.

Recommendation D-4: Invest in continued OALCF training for service provider staff, with emphasis on areas of difficulty (e.g. task-based programming, effective use of learner plans).

e-Channel is a viable delivery model

e-Channel is a less intensive, lower-cost delivery model that is valued by learners. It is well suited to complement in-person LBS training, through blended learning for some learners and as a stand-alone option for others. Integration between e-Channel and in-person LBS could be stronger.

Recommendation E-1: Continue to fund e-Channel as a complement to, rather than replacement of, in-person instruction.

Recommendation E-2: Better integrate e-Channel services with in-person services for blended learners in order to reduce competition and duplication of efforts.

Conclusions and recommendations: LBS management and leadership

Sustained quality of the LBS program is at risk

Funding levels that are declining in real terms pose a risk to the continued ability of the LBS network to provide quality services. The administrative burden of data entry and reporting divert scarce resources from service provision. The current, historically based funding model is considered dysfunctional and in need of replacement.

Recommendation C-1: Index service provider and support organization funding to cost of living.

Recommendation C-2: Ensure that providers can spend the large majority of their time in serving learners. This can be achieved by reducing providers' administrative burden.

Recommendation C-3: Adopt a rationalized and transparent funding model in consultation with the field and an expert in developing funding methodologies.

Recommendation C-4: Exercise caution when using the EOIS-CaMS data to support design of a funding model.



The PMF's implementation has defeated its intentions

Monitoring service quality is important for both accountability and continuous improvement. However, the PMF as it has been implemented discourages providers from flexibly responding to community and learner needs, fosters anxiety and gaming, and produces data that is rarely used for continuous improvement.

Effective implementation of the PMF must be founded in relationships of mutual trust and must respect the diversity of service provision and community/learner needs. Both the Ministry and the field have an important role to play in achieving this.

Recommendation B-1: Continue to collect data and measure performance.

Recommendation B-2: Ensure that the PMF allows for flexibility in meeting community and learner needs:

- Communicate clearly that it is acceptable for sites to fall below the standard on certain measures as long as they meet the overall SQS standard.
- Redesign the Suitability measure as an explicit measure of barriers to learning.
- Ensure that Suitability is weighted heavily enough to allow providers to specialize in serving learners with barriers.

Recommendation B-6: Do not tie funding to performance on the SQS until these issues have been resolved.

LBS leadership is fragmented

Service providers and support organizations do not have a clear understanding of the Ministry's expectations, due to excessive documentation and fragmentation of leadership across four regions, 27 support organizations, and approximately 130 ETCs. The lack of clarity is causing confusion and anxiety.

Strong, unified leadership is needed to answer fundamental questions about what the LBS program is trying to achieve. Clear and transparent communication is needed to rebuild good relations and ensure a common understanding of expectations.

Recommendation A-1: Develop, in consultation with the field, a clear vision of what LBS is intended to achieve and whom it is intended to serve.

Recommendation A-2: Explore possibilities for centralized, consolidated, and consistent LBS leadership.

Recommendation A-3: Communicate expectations and requirements clearly through a small number of curated, searchable documents.

Recommendation A-4: Rebuild and foster open and collaborative relations between the field and the Ministry.