

Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education's (ERPAE) Response to the Discussion Paper, *Strengthening Ontario's Adult Education System* (2017)



Preamble

The Eastern Region Partnership for Adult Education appreciates the opportunity to respond to the discussion paper, *Strengthening Ontario's Adult Education System*. Our response was generated through a process that included adult educators from the district school boards (DSBs) located in the eastern Ontario region and was informed by the environmental scan completed by the region. Specifically, input for this response was captured during two face-to-face input sessions - one held in Ottawa and one in Kingston - at which representative DSB staff collaborated to address each of the questions posed. All eight school boards that currently offer adult education programs in the eastern Ontario region had staff represented at the input sessions.

In total, 37 designated Adult Education DSB staff provided input on the 27 questions outlined in the discussion paper. Attendee comments and ideas were collated, synthesized and formulated into the responses written here. In our responses to different questions, there are issues and suggested solutions that arise repeatedly. This repetition is intentional and meant to reflect the sense of priority and intensity felt by the ERPAE regarding adult education.

This response has been reviewed and approved by the ERPAE Partnership Table.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this discussion paper. We appreciate the time and attention being dedicated to Adult Education (AE) and look forward to the government's continued efforts in this vital component of building the capacity of Ontario's citizens in the 21st century.

ERPAAE Response

Strengths and Opportunities for Improvement

1. Is anything missing from the strengths and opportunities for improvement described in this discussion paper?

Our response to missing strengths

The report from the environmental scan conducted in Eastern Ontario provides evidence of the importance of establishing a culture of care for adult learners. This critical element of programs and services needs more acknowledgement in the discussion paper. In the Eastern Ontario region, the provision of a culture of care in adult education promotes the holistic well-being of adult learners and provides a positive context for the educational experience. Providing a culture of care for adult learners involves:

- Modeling a caring attitude
- Engaging in meaningful dialogue with students
- Confirming, celebrating and applauding learning, and
- Providing opportunities to practice care

In addition, the critical role of passionate and well-equipped Adult Education staff needs to be articulated as a strength in this discussion paper.

Our response to missing opportunities

There are many missed opportunities in relation to partnerships across sectors:

- *Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada* is largely absent from the “big table” that connects provincially and federally funded and targeted support for some of the most vulnerable adult learners
- there is value in forging strong connections between *Indigenous Services Canada* and *Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada* to enhance support provided through adult education for indigenous learners

Other missed opportunities relate to strengthening adult education programming across the province:

- improving access in rural Ontario which faces specific challenges in its efforts to provide sustainable robust and effective AE programs; inconsistent rural access to internet (due to lack of infrastructure) is a significant barrier to providing online programming and elevated levels of poverty makes it a challenge for learners to travel to face-to-face programming, and provide for their families
- considering flexibility in collective agreements which may limit the scope of adult education programming that district school boards are able to offer and can be a source of staffing issues; contracts may require exceptions to best meet the needs of adult learners
- the language and length of the discussion paper may prohibit some adult learners from providing their invaluable perspectives; the Ministry should consider additional ways to obtain input from this important stakeholder group
- a centralized online platform and student information system that enables adult education staff to quickly and efficiently guide learners to appropriate programming options
- expanded meaningful opportunities for experiential learning and cooperative education (including paid coop opportunities)
- a standardized intake and registration process across the province
- increased opportunities for smooth transitioning between programs, including between non-credit and credit programs
- a centralized province-wide marketing function that supports consistent and effective promotion of adult education
- simplified funding registers that allow for greater efficiency of staff time and effective use and application of funding envelopes
- centralized opportunity to access province-wide information regarding adult education provision
- strategic adult education mandates and targets from the Ministries that prioritize AE to ensure that adult learners province-wide have access to similar programs and opportunities, which are not restricted by localized interpretation and implementation

2. *How can channels of communication among adult education partners be strengthened? What role should the government play?*

The ERPAE believes that channels of communication among adult education partners could be further strengthened through consideration of the following:

- loosening the program guidelines to support a more collaborative credit delivery system
- greater consideration of protocols which address privacy requirements of adult learners while allowing for sharing of relevant, yet sensitive information that would be important for adult educators to know
- facilitating the role of CESBA to further strengthen province-wide channels of communication
- creating a standardized Student Information System (government-funded) that is tailored to meet specific adult education provision and delivery needs

The role of government should be to:

- increase availability of partnership development funds and incentives
- create and maintain streamlined departments that each have unique but coordinated functions that avoid unnecessary duplication of tasks and initiatives
- create a provincial adult education coordinating committee/board that has representatives from service providers, regional committees, and other applicable stakeholders
- raise public awareness of the role played by and the strengths and outcomes of adult education
- commit to long-term, sustainable and adequate funding to ensure that adult education is recognized for its valuable role in providing appropriate and ongoing educational, lifelong learning and career development opportunities for Ontarian adults

Information Navigation

3. What can be done to meet the information needs of adult learners more effectively?

The Code for Canada sounds like an exciting initiative that has potential to positively meet adult education digital needs. To optimize this initiative, the ERPAE suggests incorporating these ideas:

- create and maintain a centralized Ministry supported adult education website that identifies program content, availability, credit worth and clearly explains relevant acronyms (e.g., OSSLC, ACE, GED, PLAR etc.)
- provision of Ministry funded and endorsed promotional campaigns that promote the availability of credit and non-credit adult education
- make PLAR information public – to increase awareness and recruit adult learners who have not yet tapped into adult education opportunities
- educate employers on available adult education programming and how they can be accessed
- create a one-stop shop in each region of the province that provides accurate, relevant, and unbiased information that meets the information needs of adult learners and provides a seamless referral process

4. What can be done to ensure that learners and potential learners have easy access to clear information about learning opportunities that are relevant to their needs and interests?

Ideas for ensuring that learners and potential learners have easy access to clear information about learning opportunities include:

- provision of appropriate and regular career, pathway planning, and guidance training and development opportunities for all adult education staff who are part of the intake and referral process
- provision of accurate and timely Labour Market Information (LMI) for all adult education staff who are part of the intake and referral process
- ensure all communication efforts are available in multiple languages (e.g., through online resources or a telephone hotline)

- provision of consistent and accurate information regarding adult education programming and availability in all schools (elementary, secondary, and ACE sites); adult learners are often parents of students in elementary and secondary schools and thus it is important that staff in these schools have information
- opportunities for increased development of sustainable and clear channels of communication between adult education providers and local community partners
- hold information sessions in a wide range of publicly accessible locations supported by appropriate and adequate promotion and marketing efforts

5. What types of digital information resources are you currently using to meet your own information needs and the information needs of learners to support their referral to and navigation of services? What types of information or tools would you like to use that are currently not available or accessible to you?

The digital information resources currently being used in the Eastern Region to meet our information needs and the information needs of our learners to support their referral to and navigation of services are as follows:

- Ministry of Education website
- Employment resource centre websites
- District school board and individual school websites
- Various localized job market information sources
- Youcanbookme.com for guidance appointments
- Career Cruising
- MyBlueprint
- Labour Ottawa Market website

The type of information or tools the ERPAE would like to use that are not currently available for use include:

- a purposefully built provincial website that provides easy access to program information, regions and sites of delivery, and outlines what an adult learner needs to do to find and enroll in a suitable program
- coordinated information and promotion using social media

- a targeted campaign that provides information regarding OSSD completion, including appropriate contact information and guides for next steps to enrolment
- a streamlined portal for dual credit programs
- streamlined ways of collecting, capturing, and accessing data for adult learners (multiple service providers- HARTS, COMS, 211, OELC, EOIS, TESL Ontario)

Innovations in Adult Secondary Education Programs

6. What else can be done to support the success of learners in adult credit programs?

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education believes that the following strategies would support the success of learners in adult credit programs:

- clear and standardized definitions/guidelines of transition points for adult education programs
- one point of entry for adult learners at school boards that includes both credit and non-credit intake, information and referral
- increased opportunities for adult education centres to provide adult learners with the option to choose face-to-face instruction
- the ability to provide every adult learner with targeted guidance, career, and life planning
- the ability to undertake outreach initiatives in order to deliver adult education where it is needed (and particularly in rural and remote sites)
- the ability to provide transportation and quality childcare for adult learners
- the opportunity to provide support for adult learners with special educational needs
- funding and expertise to adequately support adult learners that have mental health needs
- address the wage disparity for adult education staff working in non-credit programs, and between non-credit and credit departments
- support capacity building and innovation through longevity of adult education administrators (e.g., keep vice-principals and principals in adult education instead of moving them every few years)

- the opportunity to deliver adult education in purposeful buildings and locations that are recognized as being centres of excellence for adult education (rather than an offshoot of a secondary school)
- increased flexibility of delivery models (e.g., blended learning); the capacity and opportunity to identify what delivery models work optimally for which adult learners (evidence-based data)
- improved coordination through offering LBS services and ESL at district school boards to support the transition from non-credit to credit programs
- information centres to help adults navigate adult education options that are available
- sufficient, sustainable funding for all the above

Programming for Immigrants

7. What other education and training services would help adult immigrants settle, find jobs in their fields, and improve their English or French to prosper in Ontario?

We believe that additional education and training services that would best help adult immigrants settle, find relevant and meaningful employment, and develop their English or French language capacity should be marked by the following four characteristics:

1. *Collaborative*: Streamlined ESL services and programs in a range of communities; enhanced and targeted supports for transitions into and between programs; post-adult education employment searches; and cooperation between cooperative education, LBS, and ESL (e.g., cooperative education plus PLAR during a workplace practicum component)
2. *Informative*: Clear and consistent information on available pathways; information and training for all adult education staff on bridge training, OSLT, ELT etc. programs; opportunity to provide translation and interpretation services and resources in multiple languages; and adult education staff that are knowledgeable about and can provide support for credentialing services for new immigrants (e.g., World Education Services International Credential Evaluation)

3. *Quality Programming*: smaller class sizes; content of programs should be relevant to workplace issues; delivery scheduling should accommodate part-time and shift workers (e.g., evening, mixed mode, and flex classes); increased potential for recognition of prior work-related experience
4. *Sufficient Funding*: bridge training programs in smaller/more rural communities; accelerated literacy programs for adults; circle of friends activities and field trips should be funded; collaboration between services to provide mental health support; the opportunity for learners to keep money they have earned during cooperative education; WSIB coverage for work placements

8. *What can be done to help immigrants navigate among the various programs offered to support them?*

Immigrants navigating among the various programs offered to support them require collaboration among community partners, information about available programs, and sufficient funding opportunities. Each of these are described in more detail below.

1. *Collaboration*: Increased collaboration between community partners and within district school board departments is needed to facilitate provision of culturally appropriate events (e.g., cultural activity with PSW students, or helping ESL students in class) that integrate native English students with ESL students (breaks down concerns and builds understanding among diverse cultures), provide accurate information for settlement agencies, and MLOs to promote all adult education programming
2. *Information*: There is a need to define and simplify program offerings available, provide clear pathway information, offer multilingual accessibility on Ministry's websites, increase use of flowcharts and pictographs to help alleviate language barriers, undertake a public awareness campaign (province-wide) to promote adult education programming and emphasize the economic benefits to society for adult education, and provide a representative or contact person in each board or region to help facilitate planning between immigrant/newcomers to assist with language training, identification of learning goals, education, career, and life planning (e.g., a centralized hub service)

3. *Sufficient Funding*: funding should be aligned to community needs, create equitable funding opportunities (OSAP scholarships for school board training programs (PSW)), and remove barriers to allow for funding for non-English speaking adults who were born in Ontario but were raised in a different country or province and do not qualify for ESL funding
4. *Other*: offer ESL programs and adult credit information within any public school where adult learners' children attend, and develop and offer a credit course where appropriately skilled adult learners can earn credit for teaching English to immigrants; provide exemptions from College or University English entrance assessment for students with 70%+ in ENG4C or 4U (University of Ottawa currently offers this),

Regional Collaboration and Partnerships

9. How do you currently collaborate with other service providers and across sectors to plan and deliver adult education programs and services?

The school boards within the ERPAE currently collaborate with other service providers and across sectors to deliver AE programs. Examples of such collaboration include work with:

- post-secondary institutions to offer dual-credit programs
- co-op employers and employment centres
- social service organizations like Ontario Works and Newcomer Settlement Agencies
- CLARS Language Assessment Centres and Adult ESL programs
- local and regional committees and organizations such as CESBA and LBS Networks
- local community organizations to provide itinerant AE services as needed
- non-credit and credit AE programs to help adult learners prepare for credit programs

10. What can be done to help service providers and organizations build stronger collaborative relationships?

The ERPAE has identified many ways to help service providers and organizations build stronger collaborative relationships:

- creation of province-wide “Adult Education Reception Centres” located within regional hubs that offer multiple services to meet the needs of adult learners (e.g., social services, employment services, newcomer settlement services, counselling services, medical services, etc.)
- provision of funding so that Adult Education staff can have release time to build partnerships with community organizations
- implement regional adult education networks to support adult learners and their needs
- address the competitive nature between service providers (e.g., school boards and colleges, LBS and ESL) by placing focus on the learner pathway

11. What incentives or incentive structures would give service providers the support they need to refer learners to the programs and services that best meet their needs and goals?

The following incentives or incentive structures would give service providers the support they need to refer learners to the programs and services that best meet their needs and goals:

- additional funding for designated staff to coordinate student referrals and act as student advocates
- a student referral to another service provider should trigger some type of program accountability and recognition by that provider (i.e., LBS “T” boxes, accountability issues)
- funding per referral

12. What can be done to improve planning and coordination at the regional and local levels? What role should the government play?

Improving planning and coordination at the regional and local levels can be done through the:

- creation of a local and regional vision (committee) to support programming, cross-sector collaboration between learning centres, community agencies and support organizations
- establishment of guidelines for referrals between programs

- regular professional learning for everyone involved in adult education
- development of an adult learner database to support pathway planning and job placements for Ontario adult learners
- collection and distribution of shared best practices in adult education
- inclusion the Ministry of Community and Social Service in planning to ensure Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program alignment with regional goals

The government can support planning and coordination at the regional and local levels by investing in resources that will support AE, like a province-wide adult learner database, knowledge mobilization of best practices related to Adult Education, and funding for AE professional development.

Recognition of Prior Learning

13. a) What existing tools and practices for recognizing learning are working well?

In terms of what's working in PLAR, the ERPAE identified the following:

- PLAR programs are extremely popular and are administered within a variety of models used at different boards
- PPM 132 works reasonably well but processes are cumbersome
- existing tools ICAS/WES (for credential equivalencies of international education)
- success rates for PLAR are good, works with continuous intake and semester-based programs, and has a good paper trail for records
- the program allows for quick completion and achievement of goals, motivating students and empowering them
- the PLAR process prepares students for success in post-secondary education
- the process is a positive experience for students
- the portfolio development piece blends well with PLAR
- PLAR credits can be granted based on previous apprenticeship programs and other experiential learning, which is empowering for students
- the PLAR Mentorship program provides excellent training for staff regarding consistent practices (system)

- LBS/EDU Partnerships build on the mandates of each organization while successfully supporting the learner (system)
- online PLAR is working well in boards that have piloted this

b) What tools and practices are not working well?

The ERPAE felt the following aspects of PLAR were not working well:

- there is limited understanding of the PLAR process beyond Adult Educators, and a need for senior administrators, school administrators and teachers across the school system to be informed
- PLAR expertise is required to do it well and there is a need to train and retain capacity within school boards to do it well (i.e., designated qualified staffing directly funded by the Ministry of Ed to support guidance for adults)
- promotion and marketing of PLAR is not being maximized to the public
- LBS sometimes extends beyond their mandate (i.e., assessing transcripts, etc.)
- some students struggle with the transition to credit programs
- there isn't consistency on how tests are assessed: some boards use PASS/FAIL and other boards level the number of PLAR credits to be granted (i.e., Level 1 grants 1 credits, Level 2, grants 2 credits, etc.); PPM is not always followed
- student success, engagement strategies such as SAL (Students Accessing Literacy) and grade 9/10 coop doesn't allow for students to later be granted Grade 9/10 PLAR credit at adult education centres
- information systems are not consistent across the province
- PLAR is not adequately funded; most school boards are unable to have dedicated staff who focus on PLAR

14. Are there gaps that need to be addressed or other opportunities that can be explored?

The ERPAE identified these gaps in relation to PLAR:

- under-utilization of the challenge process in PLAR; for some, the challenge process could be used to achieve/support of final four credits
- equity issue: It is expensive for the student to pay for translation services regarding transcripts and other documentation; this cost should be absorbed by the service provider and funded by the province
- mainstream Guidance staff need to know more about PLAR
- Both credit and non-credit staff in Continuing Education need to know about PLAR
- not all Adult Centres have consistent access to LBS support for PLAR (fear of losing funding to other school boards)
- marketing is not being maximized
- regarding regional partnerships between MAESD and EDU. Where does PLAR fit in?

The ERPAE identified these opportunities in relation to PLAR:

- build bridge courses to close learning gaps between PLAR assessments and the final four courses
- develop better transitions to move students from ESL/LBS to credit at appropriate times and while meeting guidelines of all programs (and avoiding conflicts with double-dipping)
- reduce overlap between courses and include more bundling of classes to achieve credit attainment
- ongoing PLAR professional development for PLAR/guidance staff and recognizing need to retain staff with this expertise
- need to find more ways to identify PLAR opportunities during intake
- explore strategies for PLAR for Indigenous students and adults

15. What can be done to better address the issues of lost time, duplication of learning, and the need for more expeditious pathways?

Some ways to better address the issues of lost time, duplication of learning, and the need for more expeditious pathways include:

- the ability to award a lump sum of senior equivalencies instead of course by course without evidence of credentials (e.g., for refugees); standardize the process between K-12 and adult learners who come from other countries
- find a better way for IEPs (internationally educated professionals) to demonstrate competencies; not language-based
- more options for experiential learning/co-op type experiences that a learner has from other programs or previous secondary school education
- greater flexibility in the number of co-op courses that can be applied to the high school diploma
- 10 (or 12) month for learners to be out of the system is a barrier; remove it and make it flexible to obtain Mature Student Status
- more cross-curricular bundling of training/teaching and competencies or compressed courses that cover 3-4 classes (e.g., UCDSB offers e-learning where a course includes elements of English, Math, and other subject competencies- focus on competency-based approach and deeper learning teaching approaches to result in relevant adult learning)
- develop a PLAR APP
- consistent process for acquiring the OSR in a timely manner
- process for managing data- develop a consistent data entry after each PLAR test is completed, not after all tests are completed. This better supports the learner who transfers between schools midway through completion of the PLAR process.
- develop more defined pathway outcomes
- offer purposeful and structured linkages between non-credit and credit-based programs to provide learners with a supported route to transition from non-credit to credit-based learning opportunities

Pilot Projects for New Program Models

16. What other innovative program models should be considered for use in Ontario?

The ERPAE identified some innovative program models for use in Ontario. These include:

- more internally and externally recognized accreditation and standards of/for employment
- course bundling model is an excellent example to expedite adult learners through credit (e.g., cross-curricular courses being offered through the Upper Canada District School Board)
- Flexibility (in registers and funding) that supports earning credits through project-based and experiential learning
- more dual credit opportunities with local colleges
- streamlined Information systems with learner's educational experience, work experience and training, especially if they have completed courses/training programs at other organizations so that staff does not have to re-create training record
- consider a PPM change that would allow for assessment of students who have successfully completed programming at the College and University level. For example, do they have to complete the final 4 credits? Could it be fewer than 4?
- develop hubs using the Service Ontario model and/or satellite offices

Improved Intake, Guidance, and Pathway Planning

17. How are you currently conducting guidance and pathway or transition planning, including learner needs assessments? Specifically, what effective intake assessment processes and tools are you currently using?

Current and effective intake and assessment processes and tools being used by the ERPAAE include:

- one-stop intake assessment to determine pathway/plan utilizing credit and non-credit staff in the process
- Ontario Secondary Transcript as an indicator of student skill level
- in-house math, ESL, English and digital skills assessment to determine starting point
- CAAT testing to determine level
- project-based language assessments illustrated in a binder to demonstrate level of language
- face-to-face assessment

- time invested in the intake and assessment process- this requires sufficient funding to staff
- intake-documentation, ID, PLAR review to determine pathway
- create an education plan leading to diploma acquisition in 1 year
- note any specific accommodations needed
- intake done by a qualified Teacher with guidance qualifications
- information shared at intake is considered fluid and not stagnant (students plans change over time and staff consistently support goals and changes)
- LBS assessments-camera, pulse online

18. How can the system better support the delivery of guidance and pathway planning for adults, and by whom should this role be fulfilled?

According to the ERPAE, better support for guidance and pathway planning requires:

- sufficient funding to support guidance services by qualified guidance teachers for adult learner
- regular opportunities for professional development for guidance teachers in their role with adult learners
- availability of professional development to create an awareness of pathway planning for all adult education staff
- fulfilling the guidance function with qualified guidance teachers and not with other support staff
- training for Guidance teachers in Special Education to support learners and to help them access accommodations
- training for Guidance teachers on labour market and trends to better support the learner
- need for provincial and regional training to support a learner who transitions from one region to another in the province.

19. How would better integration of data and records across programs and service providers support learners and service providers?

Better Integration of data would allow service providers to access the information they need in an efficient manner to support intake. For example, it would be ideal

to have a student database in which a student's OSR can be accessed electronically. It would also be helpful to have a tracking system for client outcomes and referrals to track successes and provide data for continuous quality improvement. Lastly, a centralized booking system for referrals and appointments such as 'You Can Book Me.com' would be helpful for students and would allow service providers to track the needs and availability of clients.

Recognition of Essential Skills and Core Competencies

20. Would it be helpful for adult learners to have a provincial framework that identifies core competencies and essential skills? Would it be helpful for organizations delivering adult education programming to have such a framework?

Yes, it would be helpful to build on what already exists to create a consistently recognized framework for all stakeholders - students, educators, service providers, employers and the public. Ideally the framework would be woven into the expectations to achieve the OSSD and other credentials.

21. What can be done to better recognize the core competencies and essential skills that are meaningful to Ontarians over the course of their learning and working lives, and to Ontario employers across all sectors? What role should the government play?

To recognize core competencies, the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education believes we would need to:

- have provincial support to bring stakeholders together to help determine future direction as per the Ontario document 'Building the Workforce of Tomorrow'
- continue to provide official language training to broaden job opportunities
- be able to access adequate funding to provide literacy and numeracy funding for new Canadians
- ensure that core competencies and essential skills are embedded into the curriculum and teaching practice

- have guidance and other adult education staff regularly access training and professional development at the local, regional and provincial level to ensure core competencies and essential skills are understood, recognized and included in the Adult Learner's Portfolio

General Discussion Questions

22. Are there any other system enhancements needed that were not mentioned in this discussion paper?

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education believes that a system enhancement is required to change the mindset of all Ontario, indeed the entire country, from thinking about education as something that happens from K-12, to embracing the reality of Lifelong Learning in this 21st century. This would require Provincial commitment to an ongoing focus and campaign to position adult education as being a normal part of everyone's learning journey.

Other system enhancements would provide sufficient funding to:

- 1) *Eliminate Barriers*: costs associated with transportation, day care, technology and other barriers need to be eliminated so that adult students, regardless of where they live in Ontario, can have access to an adult education program of their choice and one that is offered in the delivery model best suited for their individual learning style: face-to-face, online or blended. The latter point may require adjustments and enhancements to current funding models so that the offering of adult education programs in rural, remote and isolated areas of the province are viable and sustainable for the provider.
- 2) *Ensure Supports Are Available*: supports are needed to ensure that all learners in Ontario have readily available and easy access to guidance, career pathway planning, special education, student success, mental health support, cooperative education, experiential learning and programs such as dual credit or Specialist High Skills Major.

23. What else would help make the system more seamless and learner-centered?

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education believes that a seamless, learner-centered system would see all levels of government working together to break down the existing “silos of service”. This would involve:

- having adult education service providers share relevant information to support the learner pathways; this will mean developing protocols which address privacy concerns
- the creation of a common adult education information system
- the establishment of a regional coordinating adult education planning team, like the provincial regional planning teams that exist to support Crown Wards (Education Championship Teams) and School, College Work Initiative (SCWI) that would encourage and support cross sector communication and work; this could be an extension of the regional partnerships established by the Ministry of Education to include all other adult service providers or a new coordinating entity
- solutions for rural, remote and isolated adult learners that go beyond web sites

24. What are the most urgent priorities that need to be addressed in the short term?

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education believes that fostering a learner-centered approach means addressing the immediate barriers preventing or hindering many adult learners from accessing and/ or succeeding in adult education programs. These include:

- reducing transportation issues and barriers for adult learners (especially in rural, remote and isolated areas)
- the provision of daycare services for children of adult learners while their parents are attending an adult education program
- the provision of adequate special education and mental health and addiction support
- readily available access to high speed internet and technological devices

- funding model adjustments to ensure that adult learners in rural, remote and isolated areas have access to viable and sustainable adult education programs and services that best meet their individual needs
- funding adult learners enrolled in credit bearing programs at the same level as under 21-year-old students
- funding (beyond initial 3-year commitment) to continue the work started by the regional partnerships for adult education (RPAEs) and extend the work to include all education service providers.
- a provincial marketing strategy to promote adult education

25. What can be done to better support all adult learners, including immigrant learners, Indigenous learners, francophone learners, Deaf and Deafblind learners, learners with disabilities and others?

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education believes that to better support the above noted learners it would be helpful to:

- bring Federal Ministries and Agencies that support adult learners into the conversation (e.g. Immigration, Refugee, Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Communities)
- bring the Ontario Ministry of Health and healthcare providers into our conversations to better support our learners with distinct medical needs
- continue to partner with our francophone colleagues to understand service delivery gaps and find local solutions to issues when they arise

The points identified above will promote sharing, spawn innovation, and create additional solutions that better support all adult learners.

We also know from our experience in working with the above noted student populations, that there are often additional expenses related to the temporary creation of discrete spaces/programs for defined populations (e.g., specific refugee groups, Indigenous programs) for short term interventions and support, yet this type of service is not always recognized in current funding models. Thus, an easily accessible funding mechanism to support short term needs for specific adult learner populations is required.

In addition, we would be remiss if we did not mention that EQAO assessments are not “adult centric” nor relevant to adult learners of any background. Versions of these assessments should be created specifically for the adult learner.

26. What forms of discrimination or systemic barriers do adult learners experience? What would help make access to adult learning opportunities more equitable?

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education conducted an environmental scan and the data collected speaks to the experience of adult learners in our region and the economic and family pressures that make self-improvement a challenge. In rural areas, both access to and finding funds to provide for transportation, child care, and technology (hi-speed internet service) are barriers for adult learners attempting to access adult educational services.

Adult learners in the Eastern Ontario Region do not have universal access to adult education programs and services. Services and pathways are often determined by where the learner resides and proximity to educational service rather than what the learner truly wants or requires. Additionally, competition among various service providers working within tight funding requirements sometimes means that the system is “geared” to service providers’ needs to meet targets and or maximize revenue/grants, rather than meeting the individual adult learners needs.

Funding for students under the age of 21 and over the age of 21 in Ontario who are enrolled in a secondary school credit program is not equitable - if we value lifelong learning, we need to equally support all stages of the learner’s educational journey.

Access to adult learning opportunities could be more equitable if funding was available to close the above noted gaps, particularly acknowledging rural realities. It may be helpful to adult learners to establish regional intake centres where knowledgeable staff would be available to understand learner needs and to refer learners to the program or pathway that best meets their short and/or long-term goals. Some adult learners would need support to access such centres.

27. Do you know of any promising practices that are being adopted in Ontario or in other jurisdictions that we could build on to improve our adult education system?

The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education supports current Tri-Ministry cooperation as a positive step toward improving our adult education system. We suggest that the approach could be expanded in subsequent years to include the Ministry of Health, Community and Social Services.

In the Eastern Region, we are appreciative of and benefiting from the Adult Education Credit Strategy and associated funding. The RPAE approach to regional collaboration and learning is a promising practice, and implementation of our strategic plan for capacity building is well received and supported. We are enthusiastic about our work and very optimistic that our 2017-2019 strategic plan for ERPAE will be impactful.

We are aware of promising practices in the delivery of adult education in other nations (e.g., England) where funding is based on learners completing various components of the adult education journey. Adult education funding is provided for the successful completion of:

- intake, assessment
- registration
- attendance
- credit accumulation
- graduation

In addition, there are examples internationally of discrete funding grants being available to support the fixed costs of providing adult education: capital, accommodation, and administration, as well as additional funding supports to support students with academic and social needs. We urge the Tri-Ministry collaboration to consider such examples as it moves forward with sustainable initiatives for adult education in Ontario.

In Conclusion

Eastern Ontario represents about 14% of the province's population and its geographic, economic, and demographic characteristics create distinct needs, opportunities and challenges for adult education. The District School Boards in our region strive to serve children, youth and adults who live in rural areas, in villages and small towns and in small and medium sized cities.

The Eastern Region Partnership for Adult Education, including those who serve on the partnership table and the adult education staff in DSBs, is committed to the vision articulated in the discussion paper - *a seamless, learner-centered adult education system that provides opportunities for all adults living in Ontario to develop the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in Ontario's highly skilled workforce and constantly evolving society* - and is enthusiastically collaborating in the Adult Education Strategy.

We have taken seriously this opportunity to provide input based upon our experience in serving adults and we look forward to continuing to contribute to provincial efforts to strengthen adult education in Ontario so that adult learners are well-supported and able to achieve their personal, educational, and employment goals.

Executive Summary

This paper represents a collective response from the Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education (ERP AE) to the discussion paper, *Strengthening Ontario's Adult Education System (2017)*. Ideas in this paper were generated during two in-person sessions that included AE administrators, educators, and staff from eight DSBs located in the eastern Ontario region. The ERP AE identified issues and suggested solutions in regard to ten pre-determined AE areas, which are summarized below.

1. Missing Strengths of Adult Education and Opportunities for Improvement: We believe there are many missing strengths of adult education and a variety of opportunities for improvement. For example, the ERP AE believes that a culture of care within adult education that addresses the wholistic needs of adult learners is essential to promote student success. We also believe there are many

opportunities to develop and improve sustainable cross-sector AE partnerships with: *Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Indigenous Services Canada* and *Crown-Indigenous Relations*, and *Northern Affairs Canada*. In addition, it is important to strengthen existing channels of communication between adult education partners.

Information Navigation: There are many improvement strategies that could be implemented to ensure that adult education in Ontario is able to meet the information needs of its adult learners more effectively. We urge the optimization of Code for Canada to include a centralized and purposefully constructed Ministry supported adult education website that provides adult education learners and staff with convenient access to program information, regions and sites of delivery, and enrollment information. This centralized function should be underpinned by an extensive AE knowledge mobilization and promotion strategy.

Innovations in Adult Education Programs: The ERPAE believes that there are many strategies that could further support the success of learners in adult credit programs. Critical issues include clarifying and publicizing systems and processes related to provision of and participation in adult education. There is a need for adult learners to have access to targeted guidance, career, and pathway planning from trained guidance counsellors. Funding is required to develop and sustain high quality, flexible, and purposeful program options (e.g., blended learning, rural outreach initiatives) and individualized support services (e.g., special education support, mental health support) to meet the needs of diverse adult learners. Finally, increased coordination and provision of LBS and ESL at the school board level would support the transition of adult learners from non-credit to credit programs.

Programming for Immigrants: We believe that additional education and training services that would best help adult immigrants settle, find relevant and meaningful employment, and develop their English or French language capacity should be marked by the following four characteristics: they should be collaborative, informative, consist of high-quality programming, and be sufficiently funded.

Regional Collaboration and Partnerships: The DSBs within the ERPAE currently collaborate with varied service providers and across sectors to deliver adult

education programs. To enhance and build upon this work, we recommend the creation and sustainable funding of province-wide “Adult Education Reception Centres” located within regional hubs that offer multiple support services (e.g., social services, employment services, newcomer settlement services, counselling services, medical services, etc.) to meet the diverse needs of adult learners. The government should support planning and coordination at the regional and local levels by investing in resources that will support AE, like a province-wide adult learner database, knowledge mobilization of best practices related to Adult Education, and funding for AE professional development.

Recognition of Prior learning (PLAR): Across the ERPAE region, all eight DSBs that provide adult education use PLAR, but there is inconsistency in how and when it is administered and provided. Additional funding should be allocated to DSBs so they can improve the implementation of PLAR and develop best practices for its use. Given the immense benefits of PLAR, opportunities to ensure all adult education staff are knowledgeable and competent in administering PLAR should be provided. In addition, the benefits of PLAR should be communicated to stakeholders and the wider public through a targeted knowledge mobilization strategy.

Pilot Projects for New Program Models: The ERPAE identified some innovative program models for use in Ontario (e.g., course bundling, increased accreditation of/for employment, AE hubs). To continue to satisfy the varied needs of adult learners, we believe that sustained efforts should be made to further increase the flexibility of programming, the streamlining of information systems, and the development of effectively coordinated services.

Improved Intake, Guidance, and Pathway Planning: The ERPAE already utilizes many excellent practices in this area. However, the ERPAE acknowledges the need for consistent intake practices for adult learners, including access to guidance counsellors who offer pathway planning and individualized support. Such AE guidance counsellors require professional development opportunities to help them stay current about Labour Market Trends and equip them to meet the needs of diverse adult learners (e.g., special education needs, mental health needs). In terms of management of student information, better integration of data would allow service providers to access the information they need in an efficient manner to support intake (e.g., it would be ideal to have a student

database in which a student's OSR can be accessed electronically). Moreover, a data management system that tracks client outcomes/ successes/challenges and referrals would provide data needed for continuous quality improvement. Lastly, a centralized booking system for referrals and appointments such as 'You Can Book Me.com' would be helpful for students and would allow service providers to track the needs and availability of clients.

Recognition of Essential Skills and Competencies: To recognize core competencies, the ERPAE believes that all stakeholders should be come together to help determine future direction as per the Ontario document 'Building the Workforce of Tomorrow.' The development and implementation of strategies and initiatives to ensure that core competencies and essential skills are embedded into the curriculum and teaching practices should be considered, as should official language training, literacy, and numeracy initiatives. Essential skills should be understood by all adult education staff and should be understood, recognized, and included in the Adult Learner's Portfolio.

General Discussion Questions: The Eastern Regional Partnership for Adult Education believes that a system enhancement is required to change the mindset of all Ontario, indeed the entire country, from thinking about education as something that happens from K-12, to embracing the reality of Lifelong Learning in this 21st century. This would require Provincial commitment to an ongoing focus and campaign to position adult education as being a normal part of the adult learning journey.