TESL Ontario Calls for Sustained Federal Investment in Newcomer Language Education and Settlement Services

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As the federal government releases its Fall 2026 Budget and maintains a relatively stable approach to immigration levels, TESL Ontario is calling for continued and increased investment in the language education and settlement services that help newcomers build successful lives in Canada.

Welcoming immigrants and refugees is only the beginning of Canada's immigration journey. Ensuring they have the tools, resources and opportunities to participate fully in Canadian society requires sustained investment in settlement and language education. English language proficiency is fundamental to accessing employment, pursuing further education, navigating public services, participating in communities and building a sense of belonging.

However, recent reductions in federal settlement funding and changes to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's (IRCC) language training programs raise significant concerns about the capacity of Canada's newcomer support system to meet these needs.

IRCC's own projections indicate that Settlement Program funding outside Quebec is expected to decline from $1.125 billion in 2025–2026 to approximately $783.7 million by 2028–2029.[i] Furthermore, the phase-out of Stage 2 (advanced) language instruction removes important opportunities for newcomers to progress beyond foundational language skills. These changes have implications not only for newcomers, but also for the settlement organizations and professional language educators responsible for delivering these essential services.

TESL Ontario recognizes that foundational language instruction is critical. However, language acquisition is a progressive, long-term process, and achieving basic communication skills should not represent the end of publicly supported learning opportunities. While foundational instruction provides newcomers with essential skills for navigating everyday life, CLB 4 proficiency is often insufficient for the next steps toward meaningful economic and educational participation. Newcomers seeking to enter post-secondary education, pursue adult credit programs, obtain further training, access employment opportunities or transition into professional occupations require additional language development to meet the demands of these environments. **At a minimum, publicly funded Stage 2 language instruction must be maintained to provide this essential bridge between foundational language learning and the education, training and employment pathways that support long-term integration.** Without these opportunities, newcomers risk reaching a point where they have developed basic communication skills but lack the language proficiency necessary to advance their education, pursue meaningful employment and fully contribute their skills and experience to Canadian society.

The consequences of reduced investment extend well beyond the classroom. Language education supports Canada's economic productivity by helping newcomers access employment, apply their existing skills and qualifications, and contribute meaningfully to the workforce. It also strengthens social cohesion by enabling individuals and families to engage with their communities, access essential services and participate more fully in Canadian life.

Equally important is the impact on the professional language education sector. Federal settlement funding sustains the organizations, programs and qualified educators that make newcomer language instruction possible. Funding uncertainty and program reductions threaten employment, institutional knowledge, program continuity and the long-term capacity of Canada's language education workforce. These are resources and professional expertise that cannot easily be replaced once lost.

TESL Ontario therefore calls on the federal government to:

- **Maintain and increase IRCC settlement funding** to ensure that resources reflect the ongoing needs of newcomers, settlement organizations and the communities they serve, rather than relying solely on annual immigration admission targets.
- **Reconsider the elimination of Stage 2 language instruction** and maintain access to publicly funded language learning opportunities beyond foundational proficiency levels. At a minimum, newcomers need an essential bridge between Stage 1 instruction and the language proficiency required to pursue post-secondary education, adult credit programs, further training and meaningful employment. Successful integration requires continued language development and opportunities for learners to progress toward their educational, professional and economic goals.
- **Provide stable, predictable, multi-year funding** that enables settlement organizations to retain qualified language educators, maintain program capacity and deliver consistent, high-quality instruction.

Canada's immigration, economic and social objectives are interconnected. A successful immigration system must be supported by a settlement framework that gives newcomers a genuine opportunity to thrive. Reducing access to language education risks creating barriers to employment, economic independence and meaningful participation in Canadian society.

TESL Ontario and its members understand the transformative role that language education plays in the lives of newcomers. Every day, professional language educators help individuals develop the confidence, skills and connections necessary to contribute to their communities and build their futures in Canada.

Investing in language education is investing in people. It is investing in Canada's workforce, its communities and its future.

TESL Ontario urges the federal government to recognize language education as an essential component of Canada's immigration and settlement infrastructure and to ensure that the resources required to support successful integration remain a national priority.

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[i] IRCC Deputy Minister Transition Binder 2026 – Canada's Approach to Settlement and Integration of Immigrants and Refugees. Full document available here.