

# **ONLC Student Profile Study 2020 – 2021**



**Ontario Native Literacy Coalition**

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The views expressed in the publication are the views of the Recipient and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province. "The Government of Ontario and its agencies are in no way bound by the recommendations contained in this document."

# Executive Summary

Access to Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development data on the LBS Literacy and Basic Skills outcomes is privileged information not for publication. This, however, was provided to ONLC to evaluate student profiles for 21 Providers and over 2800 students to establish how their goals set at enrolment are being met and what changes could improve performance outcomes for Indigenous students.

It seems the request for confidentiality of LBS data is sensitive by revealing extremely poor results with less than 20% positive student outcomes. The data provided by the Ministry was extremely complicated and difficult to analyze. Trying to locate and identify ONLC Providers was impossible.

The scanned document provided required professional reprinting and enlarging of data 2.5 metres long x 1 metre wide blown up for reading. Even then a magnifying glass and long ruler was needed to ensure information collected was properly recorded maintaining confidentiality of Provider identities. From a research's point of view, the data provided was akin to a large jigsaw puzzle that took days to evaluate; a strange situation in this age of technology.

It is apparent that the Ministry funding guidelines for LBS is in need of urgent review. The 2018 LBS reporting data shows that almost 50% of the 44,827 enrolled students are already at Level 3 Essential Skills over 20,000 participants. In addition, some 11,000 enrollees (25%) are in the advanced age group 51 – 70 years. The Ministry needs to determine if this is where they want the focus for their expenditure to be spent.

The 7,412 into work outcomes, 16% would be less than expected had these students not taken any training. Mandated public education practices and success is not evident in LBS reflected by a large number of concerns Providers have revealed over several years.

The \$84ml funding 44,827 students equates to \$1,866 per student, which represents only 15% (\$12,100 per student) of what Ontario spends for K-12 education. This suggests the focus is only on adults who are close to achieving their desired goals in life, like low hanging fruit ready to be picked.

The 2018 – 19 enrolment data confirms this assumption. When an analysis of the ONLC focus on Indigenous students clearly target younger age groups with education levels below Grade 9 or Grade 12 who need to gain skills to avoid the poverty trap driven by low wages and unemployment.

It also suggests that ONLC has a different focus that includes a much higher referral rate to gain additional skills training currently 50% vs 4% Ontario total LBS data. This highlights the recognition that high need Indigenous students require much more training support and funding to achieve their Post-secondary and employment goals.

Given the impact of COVID 19 pandemic and the forced move to distance learning, ONLC Providers face an impossible task to adapt from classroom environment to distance delivery without the support of a properly funded home-based program focused on lifting Indigenous students to Level 3 literacy and Essential Skills to improve their employability.

In an economy that has lost many thousands of jobs that now require competitive skill sets for employment in Canada, 60% of Indigenous working age people currently lack these skills.

A total of 21 ONLC Providers were invited to respond to a questionnaire approved by ONLC Management seeking their voluntary support in identifying student profiles and training outcomes for enrolment intakes for 2019 – 2020. Only four (4) Providers responded with completed questionnaires and three out of the four, participated in interviews by phone and zoom.

The interviews focused primarily on ascertaining information about how they provided services in this year, which has impacted training and education throughout Ontario. We anticipated a reduced return in questionnaires due to COVID when in-class training was terminated in April 2020.

Both responses to the questionnaires and in interviews documented the difficulties of continuing on with distant technologies when many students lack computer skills, Internet connections and/or equipment, made progress difficult for both Providers and students. Those Providers that were interviewed reverted to one-to-one appointments and were determined to endeavor to help students achieve their goals set at enrolment. One-on-one learning is expensive and not a viable solution.

However, ONLC results are summarized in the Profiles and Outcomes section provided in this report. Each Provider has shown a high level of commitment to ensure student success for 2020 despite the challenges.

## **Background**

ONLC is the main Indigenous LBS Stream Provider in the Province of Ontario with the largest population of Indigenous people in Canada; some 228,000 people of whom half are under age 25.

Providers of ONLC enroll approximately 2,800 students annually. These enrolment numbers, however, fall far short in meeting the needs of Ontario's Indigenous population. It is important that student profiles are clearly focused on ensuring students at the highest need levels are not ignored or eliminated from participating in Essential Skills training. Currently, it appears that the training has focused on higher qualified mature students in trying to meet Ministry funding and delivery requirements.

## Purpose for Project

The purpose for this research project was to examine the profile of learners in the Indigenous stream LBS programs. The data collected spanned enrollments from 2018 to the present, November 2020.

## Project Goal

- To research and compile comprehensive Student Profile data about students enrolled in the LBS Ontario Indigenous Stream during 2019 – 2020.

## Project Objectives

- Provide a “user friendly” questionnaire to be completed by ONLC Service Providers ensuring that confidentiality of information provided either by a completed questionnaire and/or in an interview by phone/zoom is maintained.
- All ONLC Service Providers were invited to participate as key stakeholders. A letter of invitation signed by ONLC and the Project Team introduced the Consulting Team and the scope of the research project.
- Outcomes of this project would provide a case for funding and resources to better meet the needs and goals of Indigenous students throughout Ontario.

## Project Deliverables

- Draft a research work plan for the project
- Finalize the research plan
- Work collaboratively with Service Providers of the LBS Indigenous Stream of ONLC
- Develop a final “print ready” report

The initial time-frame for this project was April 2020 – November 2020 but due to COVID 19 more time was required to develop an online questionnaire and provide adequate time for Providers to respond. Questionnaires were sent out November 1, 2020 and deadline dates for responses were extended.

Timelines for the draft report and final were re-negotiated and set for completion by mid January 2021.

## Focus of Project Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) was divided into general student profile information, student outcomes and recommendations. The layout of the questionnaire is as follows:

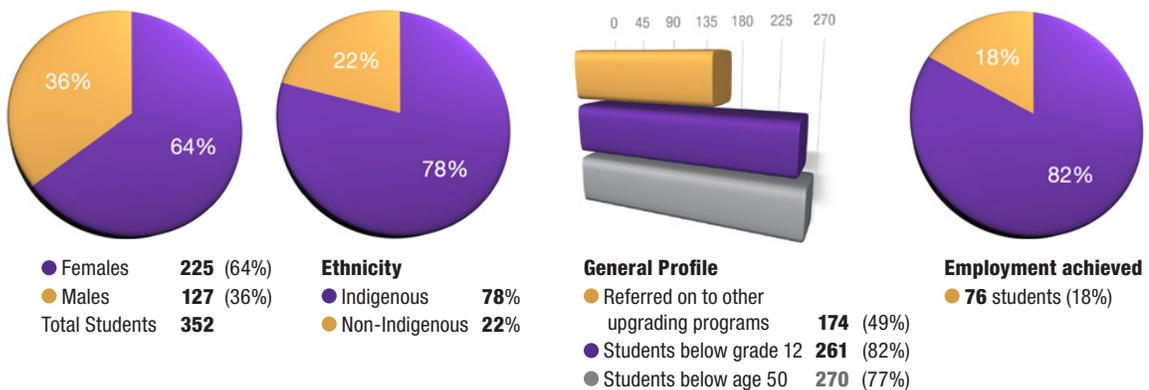
- First section captures demographic details that include gender, ethnicity, and levels of education, socio-economic conditions and age.

- The next section requests information pertaining to student outcomes, such as, their goals at intake and achievement of their goal(s) and referral to other programs, institutions or credits.
- The final section was designed to capture recommendations and experiences with referral process, intake and any challenges they face.

The data collected will provide practical suggestions for ONLC Providers in meeting challenges faced in a COVID 19 environment.

## Project Findings (ONLC Providers)

The following information was provided by four completed questionnaires for 2019 – 2020 enrolments.



These Providers indicated that they were able to follow up with students who had been referred to other programs by keeping in contact with students to monitor their progress. Providers stated they felt this to be a key component in their operation towards student success. **As a result, 70% of students achieved the goal** they set out at intake for further training.

## Comparison ONLC Sample Enrolments 2018-2019<sup>1</sup>

<b>Total Students</b>	<b>291</b> (no ethnicity details)
<b>General Profile</b>	
students already qualified at Level 3 literacy	<b>143</b> (49%)
mature students ranging from 46 – 66 years	<b>145</b> (50%)
students referred to other providers	<b>114</b> (39%)
<b>Employment achieved</b>	<b>65</b> (22%)

A total of **62% of students achieved their training goals** set at intake.

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development LBS Data; 2018 - 2020

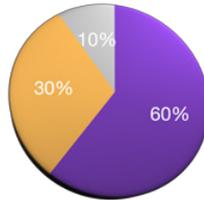
# Ontario LBS Profile Including Native Stream 2018 – 2019

Budget Expenditure \$84 ml

Enrolment Information Database

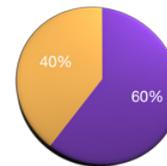
## Student Identified Goals (100%)

- Employment **60%**
- Post-Secondary & Personal Independence **10%**
- Secondary School Credits **30%**



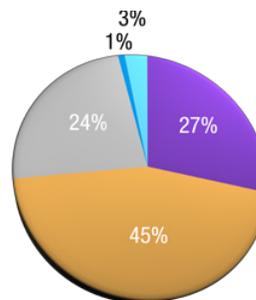
## Student Enrolment Literacy & Basic Skills (44,827 students)

- Female enrolled **26,838**
- Male enrolled **17,989**



## Student Age Range (44,827)

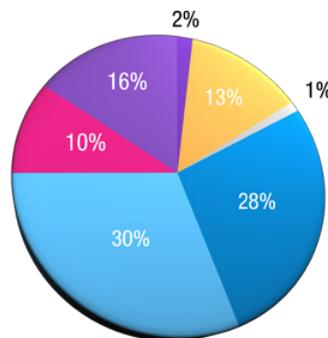
- 15 – 24 years **12,276** Representing 27% of student enrollments
- 25 – 44 years **20,148** Representing 45% of student enrollments
- 45 – 64 years **10,600** Representing 23% of student enrollments
- 65 & older **404** Representing 1% of student enrollments
- Unaccounted for **1,400** Representing 3% of student enrollments



## Education Qualifications

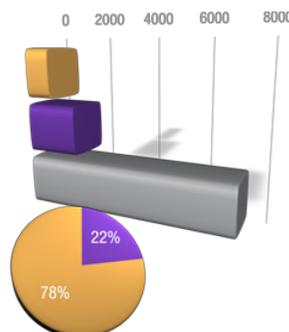
- Post Graduate Degrees awarded **794** 2%
- Certified Diploma & Certificates **5,987** 13%
- Apprenticeship Certificate **508** 1.5%
- High School Certificate **12,421** 28%
- Less than Grade 12 **13,337** 30%
- Less than Grade 9 **4,434** 10%
- Unknown/Unaccounted for **7,319** 15%

**Total Students 44,827**



## Student Goals Achieved

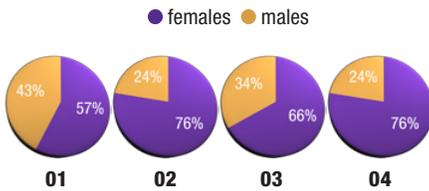
- Full time Employment **7,412** 16%
- Further Education **1,846** 4%
- Independence **902** 2%
- Student Goals Achieved **10,160** 22%
- Goal Not Achieved **34,667** 78%



## Further Project Findings (ONLC Providers 2019 – 2020)

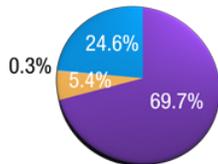
### Total Enrolments: 352

For purposes of confidentiality, we identified the participating Providers in the study by assigning a number (01 – 04) to their responded questionnaire.



Provider	Total Enrolment	Gender
01	117	67 females 50 males
02	85	65 females 20 males
03	80	52 females 27 males
04	85	65 females 20 males

**Total 352**



### General Profile (based on 352 total enrollments)

#### Ethnicity

● First Nations: 246 ● Métis: 19 ● Inuit: 1 ● Non-Indigenous: 87

#### Age range

● 15 – 24 82 23%  
● 25 – 50 188 53%  
● 51 – 70 82 25%

#### Education Levels

● Less than Grade 9 78 22%  
● Less than Grade 12 187 53%  
● Level 3 Basic Literacy 87 25%

#### Goals

● Full-time Employment 142 Achieved 76 or 22%  
● Trades 40 nil – 0-  
● Education credits 135 Achieved 48%

70% of students achieved the goal they set at intake

To summarize, this demonstrates a large gender imbalance with 2 – 3 females for every male. This can be a critical element for future success especially in Indigenous males with low self-esteem and lack of confidence, it is desirable to achieve gender balance in enrolments.

Out of 352 students 87 (25%) are Non-Indigenous, 82 are mature students ages 51 – 70 years. Eighty-seven students (25%) are at Level 3 Literacy and Basic Skills.

This student profile seems to be directly tied to Ministry policies driving expected outcomes or milestones and less about the need to lift people from poverty. This may also be a direct breach of the UN Rights of Indigenous People as it eliminates people most in need of training in order to become gainfully employed or qualify for further education. Current inadequate funding criteria and measures fall short of offering a program(s) that promotes equality of opportunity.

# LBS Ontario Student Profile and Outcomes 2018 – 2019

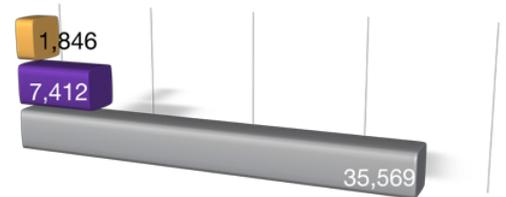
In order to evaluate and interpret the data collected on student profiles and training outcomes the Project Team sought to compare LBS Ontario statistics that include the Indigenous stream to that of the four Providers participating in this study.

**Total Students Enrolled: 44,827**

## General Profile

- 20,218 students already qualified at Literacy & Basic Skills Level 3. This represents approximately 50% of total enrolments.
- 11,200 were mature students ages 46 – 70 years (25% of total enrollments)

● Further Training	1,846	(4%)
● Employment achieved	7,412	(17%)
● Yet to achieve	35,569	



Out of 44,827 students **only 21%** of students achieved their goals in LBS Ontario wide 2018 through 2019. ONLC examples for achieving student goals were **62% in 2018 – 2019** and **70% in 2019 – 2020**.

These outcomes show four ONLC Providers achieved very credible outcomes compared to Ontario wide LBS Providers.

# ONLC Student Profile Report 2019 – 2020

Those Providers that participated in this study provided this information.

## Comparison:

	<b>East Region</b> (ON RESERVE)	<b>North</b> (URBAN CENTRE)
<b>Enrollments</b>	70	117
<b>Ethnicity</b>	100% Indigenous	54% Indigenous
<b>Education Levels Less than Grade 12</b>	56 (80%)	67 (57%)
<b>Age Range (15 – 50)</b>	66 (94%)	63 (54%)
<b>Full-time Employment Achieved</b>	30 (43%)	32 (27%)
<b>Targeted Enrolments</b>		
<b>Indigenous</b>	100%	54%
<b>Below Grade 12</b>	80%	57%
<b>Ages 15 – 50</b>	90%	54%

## Example: Differing Profiles in Enrolment by ONLC Providers

	<b>West</b> (SMALL URBAN CENTRE)	<b>West</b> (RURAL)
<b>Enrollments</b>	80	85
<b>Ethnicity</b>	78% Indigenous	84% Indigenous
<b>Education Levels Less than Grade 12</b>	73 (91%)	65 (76%)
<b>Age Range (15 – 50)</b>	75 (94%)	66 (78%)
<b>Full-time Employment Achieved</b>	5 (6%)	7 (8%)
<b>High School Certificate Achieved</b>	8 (10%)	3 (4%)
<b>Post secondary Enrolled</b>	6 (8%)	3 (4%)
<b>have Internet and computer access at home</b>	22%	26%

# Review of Skills Ontario (SAO) Pilot Report

## Relevant Information

The Ministry hired CCI Research Inc. to conduct an evaluation on phase one of the Skills Ontario (SAO) pilot. Their objectives were the following:

- Assess the employment outcomes of SAO jobseekers, including skills development;
- Examine SAO jobseekers' outcomes for various socio-demographic groups;
- Assess the effectiveness of SAO in meeting employer needs; and the need of jobseekers.

The evaluation report spans activities between October 2017 to July 2019 and provides survey results and key trends on service delivery and jobseeker outcomes.

The survey addressed employment status, wage earnings, skills development and training, characteristics about jobseekers' current job(s), and feedback on satisfaction and improvement.

CCI summarized the findings from employer interviews as positive and found that many jobseekers surveyed improved their employment status, improved their skills to find and keep a job, and would recommend SAO to others looking for similar services.

The Report consisting of 171 pages covered the interviews and data from employers and jobseekers that validates the positive findings of the CCI Evaluation.

The missing elements revolved around the employers who did not respond to the interviews. This does raise the question of reliability in determining "how effective" the program was. Those that did respond were positive and felt the programs were effective and would recommend to others.

The potential employers with vacancies in low and medium skilled occupations that do not require Post-secondary level education were able to relate to jobseekers with poor job skills, being out of work or on low income. This represents the most **vulnerable jobseekers** that can benefit from **work skills training**. Matching employers and these jobseekers was obviously the key to a successful employment outcome.

Improvements in training were recommended by some participants that can always be an option for continued and improved training. This is particularly evident in the ES with LBS and ES without LBS groups at 6-month, 12-month and 18-month surveys.

An interesting finding was that SAO jobseekers showed that the majority of participants had **poor job skills and 51%** were unemployed and had a history of **low-income employment**.

The largest cohort of jobseekers was between 18 – 29 years of age (39%) but overall 88% of participants were between 18 – 49 years old. In terms of education, 25% had not completed High School, 39% had completed and **31% had some Post-secondary education**.<sup>2</sup>

This evidence shows that the SAO Pilot is reaching its target group population with good employment outcomes and average salary levels of \$688 weekly (\$35,776 annually).<sup>3</sup>

Whilst several employers could have had improved numbers under the SAO pilot, the Final Report by CCI provides evidence that better application and support suggests good outcomes will continue and enhance this employment initiative in Ontario.

However, it may also be of interest to note that Essential Skills (ES) participants without Literacy Basic Skills (LBS) out-performed participants with **ES and LBS in the SAO pilot**.

The data provided by the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development in the Province of Ontario on LBS in 2018 with 44,800 participants revealed the following outcomes:

- Only 16% employed (7,412), No salary details available
- 28% were ages 45 – 70 (11,000), Limited employment prospects
- 50% of total 44,800 participants had educational experience that would suggest they were already at **Level 3 literacy/Basic Skills or should have been**.

These findings suggest a review of LBS is needed with a clear function to evaluate what it is capable of achieving. LBS, though referred to as a ‘program,’ is only a guideline for meeting and measuring milestones. **It lacks the necessary design elements and components required for an adult education/training program** with matching assessments offered to participants rather than expecting Providers to design something on their own. This will speed up the learning process for students and make better use of Providers’ personnel to monitor and support the learning process.

Many literacy and basic skills programs fall short because **they lack the resources and funding required for a training skills program**. Given the problem and the need for raising levels of literacy across all sectors, the Ontario Government could well re-define what they refer to as a ‘program’ and evaluate how funding can be better utilized.

<sup>2</sup> CCI Research Report; Skills Advance Ontario (SAO): Pilot Evaluation 2016 – 2018; Final Report; page 14

<sup>3</sup> CCI Research Report; Skills Advance Ontario (SAO): Pilot Evaluation 2016 – 2018; Final Report; Tables 6 – 10 & 611; pages 64 – 65.

The Primaxium in Economics suggests ***a dollar invested must equal a dollar returned***. This provides a good baseline for evaluating the investment and return of the LBS initiative.

## General Comments on Findings

Responses from the four Providers confirmed the focus and student profile findings for this study. All four expressed that ONLC has provided relevant and useful student resources, assessments and guidance to their organizations.

There were another four (4) providers that contacted the Project Team but did not participate in completing the survey. One of these providers stated in an email that they have 225 “human beings” enrolled but did not want to participate in just another “political survey.” Another provider stated that they had just been appointed to the management position and did not feel they could complete the questionnaire with confidence. The Project Team did ensure that all ONLC Providers were contacted by email or phone.

- In general, we found that the targeting of students did not always match ONLC’s mandate for delivery of service as the Indigenous Stream with 25% being Non-Indigenous students.
- The age range with 25% of students over age 50 years, suggest that Providers are deliberately targeting mature older students. Same as total LBS Ontario enrolments.
- Twenty-five percent (25%) of students already at Level 3 Literacy and Basic Skills as opposed to 50% Ontario wide LBS.
- Referrals to other providers and programs to achieve goals were reported to be around 51%. This indicates that these providers use referrals to help their students achieve their goals, including students wishing to receive High School credit(s) as opposed to 4% Ontario wide LBS.
- The four Providers followed their student referrals by monitoring their progress through regular contact. Three of these providers indicated they had this ability because the buildings or areas they were located at housed most of the programs or training they had referred students to; thereby, being able to maintain contact with students on a more regular basis. This comes as an additional cost. It was interesting to find 20% of students approximately were carryovers from the previous years enrolments. This demonstrates the need for more intensive curriculum support for high needs Indigenous students.

The challenges faced by all Providers is that in order to achieve Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development required outcomes, enrolments are often targeted to enroll students who already meet the required standards of education and can more easily achieve desired outcomes with minimum supervision. These students generally are at Level 3 Literacy and Essential Skills and are mature students age 50 plus.

Given the documented outcomes of the four ONLC Providers who completed the survey, it cannot be assumed the other 16 ONLC providers would have the same outcomes. However, the responses by the participating ONLC Providers would indicate that referral to additional training needs would be far higher than the Ontario wide referral rate of 4%.

Further reported by Providers was that required Provincial intake forms do not provide evidence of ethnicity. If it did, the data would likely suggest that without ONLC Providers the number of Indigenous students in LBS would be low.

## Recommendations

Based on information provided by those who participated in this project, we offer the following recommendations.

- a) To discuss with Ontario funders of LBS 2021 – 2022 regarding a re-focus of enrolment criteria, program delivery and definition what are “successful” outcomes for 21 ONLC Providers with an enrolment of 2,800 students.
- b) To re-define LBS as a funding source rather than a program since it has no curriculum with matching assessments or resources to use for delivery.
- c) Design or provide funding for existing programs/courses that incorporates all nine Essential Skills as home-based family program with lessons presented for TV/DVD as opposed to online learning. Providers have indicated that many students are either not digitally literate, do not have access to Internet or equipment required to be online. The COVID environment has revealed that Providers need to have available programs that provide a more flexible delivery, particularly allowing for a home based option for learning that helps address gender imbalance that is so important in families.
- d) Changing student enrolment focus:
  - 90% enrolment to be Indigenous
  - 90% below age 45
  - 90% below Grade 12
  - 100% enrolled in home or community based Essential Skills Program designed as a program for all learning styles and levels of literacy
- e) Re-focus on bringing in more ‘high needs’ students who do not enroll in current LBS programming. Current LBS milestones and criteria for program/course parameters, such as length of a program, decreases Provider’s options in working with these students effectively. Reducing student enrolments by 50% but retaining the same level of current funding will allow Providers to work towards graduating at least 85% of their students at Level 3 Literacy and Essential Skills. Therefore, with 1,400 students some 1,190 students can graduate with better opportunities to

succeed in securing employment and qualifying for Post-secondary or Apprenticeship and trades training, as well as, improving the life opportunities of Indigenous students. Focusing on these students will positively increase the return on investment.

- f) Current LBS funding is not sufficient to provide the prepared curriculum, assessments and resources that high needs students require. Therefore, applying the same funding to fewer students will grow student success and employment outcomes aimed at reducing unemployment rates and inadequate skills that leave too many Indigenous people on poverty level salaries.
- g) Create a user-friendlier database for Providers to use for collecting data on student progress for funders and other stakeholders. It was further recommended that training be made readily available to Providers in how to use the Provincial database.
- h) Expand Provider's mandate to include Family Literacy as an option for the services they provide. Too often poor literacy is endemic within Indigenous households from grandparents, husbands and wives, partners and siblings. This can be more effectively addressed in the family home environment and particularly, now with remote learning being the tool used for educating children.

# Appendix 1

**ONLC STUDENT PROFILE DATA**

**LBS Enrollments for 2019 & 2020**

(Individual responses will remain confidential)

**Provider:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Location:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Person:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total Number of Enrollments for** 2019  2020

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**Please indicate for the following questions the number of students for categories that apply to your organization. Numbers for 2019 & 2020 can be combined for these answers.**

**How many students enrolled are** Female  Male

**How many are:**



First Nations



Métis



Inuit

Non-Indigenous

New Immigrant

**How many are between** 15 – 24 yrs  25 – 50 yrs  51 – 70 yrs

**Highest level of education:**

STATE NUMBER AS APPLICABLE

- 1. Less than Grade 9
- 2. Less than Grade 12
- 3. Secondary School Certificate
- 4. Certificate Apprenticeship/Journeyman
- 5. Certificate/Diploma
- 6. Bachelors Degree
- 7. Masters or above
- 8. Unknown

**Income source:**

STATE NUMBER AS APPLICABLE

- 1. Crown Ward
- 2. Dependent EI
- 3. OW/OOSP
- 4. Employed  P/T  Fulltime
- 5. Employment Insurance
- 6. No source of regular income
- 7. Unknown source

# DATA ON STUDENT OUTCOMES

## How many students identified their goal as being:

1. Full-time Employment
2. Self-Employment
3. Part-time Employment
4. Trades/Apprenticeship
5. Referral to other Training

## How many students were referred to other Programs for:

1. High School Certificate
2. Post-secondary Ed
3. Indigenous culture/language
4. Other Training /Programs  (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Number of students who met their enrolment goal for:

1. Employment Fulltime
2. Self-Employment
3. Part-time Employment
4. High School Certificate
5. Post-secondary Ed
6. Other Programs  (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
7. Unknown

## Number of students with:

1. Internet and computer at home
2. TV & DVD at home
3. Unknown

1. Would you prefer to retain students to continue their training with you if you received funding to do this?  Yes  No

Given the needs of young Indigenous people should they be given priority enrolment?  Yes  No

2. What challenges have you had in delivering your program in this current COVID environment?  
Please explain:

3. If a home-based TV/DVD Essential Skills Program could be made available in this COVID environment would you be interested in offering such a program?  Yes  No

4. What changes you would like to recommend for LBS Guidelines?  
Please explain:

5. As an ONLC Provider what recommendations do you have for ONLC?  
Please comment:

6. Any Additional Comments?

**Thank you for your participation and recommendations!**

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