

Key Findings from Consultations on the Ministry of Education Adult Education Strategy



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Executive Summary

Regional consultations on the Ministry of Education (EDU) Adult Education Strategy were held in early 2015 across Ontario. Approximately 151 individuals participated from 64 English-language and French-language school boards across the province. Discussion centered on exploring a regional, collaborative approach to the delivery of Adult and Continuing Education (A&CE) programs and services by school boards, and focused on four key areas identified in the EDU Adult Education Strategy:

1. Regionally coordinated access to flexible delivery of EDU A&CE programs and/or services.
2. Coordinated information, intake, assessment, and referral, provided at school boards.
3. Regionally available and consistently applied Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Mature Students.
4. Regionally available guidance, career counselling and pathway planning for mature students.

The regional consultations with school boards validated key objectives outlined in the EDU Adult Education Strategy, and affirmed the need to build on promising practices in order to make improvements in key areas of EDU A&CE program and service delivery.

A number of common themes were identified during consultation discussions, including the existing funding model, which is not sufficiently adaptable for the flexible delivery modes required to address the complex needs and schedules of adult learners, incentives competition rather than collaboration among school boards, and impacts resource issues. Variation in the issues facing urban versus rural / remote school boards was identified, as was the need for increased professionalization of Adult Education, with professional development opportunities for administrators / instructors. Consultation participants also highlighted the need for support and engagement from all three funding ministries to improve transitions for learners between tri-ministry programs.

Participants were also asked to provide input on the ministry's proposed regional, collaborative approach to the delivery of A&CE programs and services by school boards. School boards indicated support for regional collaboration as a means of sharing promising practices and increasing the profile of Adult Education at school boards. Participants also expressed concern about the partnership formation process, particularly where strong competition between school boards exists, and concern about the loss of individual school board autonomy.

Introduction: Ministry of Education Adult Education Strategy

The Ministry of Education (EDU) Adult Education Strategy aims to improve access and opportunities for adult learners to expeditiously complete their high school diploma and or attain pre-requisites needed for further education. The strategy supports the commitment made in EDU's renewed vision for education, "Achieving Excellence," to "ensure that the adult education system better supports adult learners in their efforts to finish high school and successfully transition to postsecondary education, training or the workplace."

The strategy has three main objectives:

1. To improve adult learner outcomes by promoting system innovation and accessibility through collaboration / coordination and partnerships among school boards at the regional level.
2. To better support the provision of EDU A&CE programs and services that are flexible and responsive to learner needs.
3. To improve the transitions for learners between EDU adult credit programs and programs funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) and the Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and International Trade (MCIT).

Specifically, the strategy aims to improve adult learner access and opportunities by ensuring that all adult learners in all regions of the province have access to consistent, high quality EDU A&CE programs and services. To achieve this goal, EDU is seeking implementation of the strategy through a more collaborative approach, specifically, the establishment of regional school board partnerships that would initially focus on improvements in four key areas, which had been identified in research and reviews conducted over the past ten years:

1. Regionally coordinated access to flexible delivery of EDU A&CE programs and/or services (e.g., e-learning or hybrid delivery programs) that best meet adult learner needs.
2. Regionally coordinated information, intake, assessment, and referral, provided at school boards to ensure learners are directed to the program or service that best meets their needs.
3. Regionally available and consistently applied Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Mature Students working towards a high school diploma.
4. Regionally available guidance, career counselling and pathway planning for mature students working towards a high school diploma or seeking prerequisites for postsecondary education.

Ministry of Education Adult Education Strategy Consultations

In December 2014, EDU invited each school board Director of Education to nominate up to three senior school board administrators to participate in regional consultations held in London, Barrie, Toronto, Ottawa and Thunder Bay. A specific consultation for the French-language school boards was also held in Toronto. The consultations took place between February and March, 2015. Approximately 151 individuals participated from 64 English and French-language school boards across the province representing engagement by 89% of school boards. Participants included key A&CE school board administrators (Superintendents, Principals, Vice-principals, and Managers) who have responsibility for EDU adult credit programs. In addition, a separate meeting with representatives of the TVO Independent Learning Centre (ILC) was held on May 15, 2015 to discuss the role of distance education in the EDU Adult Education Strategy. This report summarizes the consultations held with school boards. A summary of the conversation with TVO Independent Learning Centre is provided in Appendix A.

The purpose of the consultations was to introduce the Adult Education Strategy to school boards, obtain feedback, and begin an ongoing dialogue on how best to implement a regional, collaborative approach to the delivery of A&CE programs and services among school boards. During the consultation discussions, school boards were asked to consider the four key areas and to share their reflections on existing practices that already achieve results in these areas. School boards also identified gaps or challenges to achieving improvements in the four key areas.

The questions used to guide the school board consultations are outlined below:

1. **Promising and innovative practices and models**
What are some promising practices or innovative approaches to program and service delivery that you're currently implementing?
2. **Gaps, challenges and limitations**
What are the challenges and barriers to reaching all learners and ensuring they have access to the programs and services they need?
3. **A collaborative regional approach**
 - How do you currently collaborate with other school boards in planning and delivering adult education programs and services?
 - How can you strengthen your current collaborative efforts to include other school boards? What obstacles do you face?
 - How can the Ministry support you in your efforts to build stronger collaborative relationships?

Organization of this Report

This report is organized to show feedback results of the consultation sessions in four sections:

- **Part 1:** School Board Feedback on Current Levels of Regional Collaboration
- **Part 2:** School Board Feedback on Opportunities and Challenges in Implementing the Four Key Areas of the Ministry of Education Adult Education Strategy
- **Part 3:** Common Themes
- **Part 4:** Regional Highlights

Part 1: School Board Feedback on Current Levels of Regional Collaboration

School board feedback on the current level of regional collaboration varied from confirmation of positive working relationships between some co-terminous boards to recognition that competitive relationships between boards inhibits collaboration in many circumstances.

Examples of existing successful regional collaboration were usually based on the following conditions:

- Positive working relationships between board contacts.
- A willingness to refer learners to A&CE programming at co-terminous boards.
- An understanding of and focus on avoiding duplication of program offerings.
- Geographic proximity of school boards.

The French-language boards characterized their current level of collaboration favourably. They observed that cooperation allows French-language boards to optimize available resources and broaden the range of services that boards can offer. Some examples of their collaboration are provided here.

- There are three Regional Adult Education and Training Partnerships (Partenariats en Education et Formation des adultes Francophones (PEFA)). The focus of each PEFA is determined by regional needs and priorities. This collaboration has enabled the creation of common French-language assessment tools for literacy and numeracy across a region.
- A Catholic / Public School Board Partnership (Centre d'éducation et de formation de l'Est de l'Ontario (CEFEO)) jointly operates an adult day school in Casselman, just east of Ottawa.
- In eastern Ontario, a coordinated / centralized referral system between French-language school boards has been established.

Some school boards have developed collaborative relationships with colleges and other service providers, usually on an individual basis, to improve pathways for their learners seeking further education.

- The Toronto District School Board has developed program focused partnerships with postsecondary institutions that support transitions to postsecondary education programs:
- George Brown College – practical nursing program
 - Ryerson University –orienting learners to university
 - Centennial College –police foundations

All boards noted the following challenges to implementing the Ministry's vision of improving access to adult education through collaborative regional partnerships among school boards:

- Physical distance between school boards.
- Relationships between board administrators.

- Different needs between urban, rural, English and French-language boards.
- Existing competition for learners between school boards that is driven by an enrolment based funding formula.
- Lack of clarity about the term “regional collaboration” and its application to school boards.

Boards recognized the potential for the Ontario Association of Continuing Education School Board Administrators (CESBA) to be supportive of formal collaboration among school boards. Boards indicated they would appreciate greater opportunities to network with each other, share best practices, and learn from one another, as they are starting to do at the CESBA regional meetings.

Participants identified that information about board profiles, program offerings and methods of intake, referral and assessment would be helpful, as well as a mechanism that allows for sharing of best practices. School boards suggested that the creation of a central adult learner database and the sharing of this data throughout the province would be useful.

Boards stressed that a clear, strategic picture with direction and guidelines from the Ministry is necessary if effective regional collaboration is to occur. Some boards suggested that only a direct obligation to deliver adult education would achieve the level of attention, support and interest at the senior leadership level that is required to effectively deliver adult education programs and services.

Part 2: School Board Feedback on Opportunities and Challenges in Implementing the Four Key Areas of the Ministry of Education Adult Education Strategy

The strategy identifies the following four-key areas as the starting point of a phased approach in implementing the EDU Adult Education Strategy. Participants were directed to discuss promising practices and obstacles/challenges in the context of these four areas.

1. Regionally coordinated access to flexible delivery of EDU A&CE programs and/or services (e.g., e-learning or hybrid delivery programs) that best meet adult learner needs.
2. Regionally coordinated information, intake, assessment, and referral, provided at school boards to ensure learners are directed to the program or service that best meets their needs.
3. Regionally available and consistently applied PLAR for Mature Students working towards a high school diploma.
4. Regionally available guidance, career counselling and pathway planning for mature students working towards a high school diploma or seeking prerequisites for postsecondary education.

2.1 Flexible Delivery

Boards revealed that flexible delivery is very important to providing effective adult education programs and services that meet the growing range of complex needs faced by adult learners. Consequently, school boards are often pressed to provide or coordinate additional “wrap around supports.” These supports help learners effectively address the needs/barriers they face, and enable school boards to re-engage and maintain

In the Western region consultation, a “Fast Track” program for adult learners over 18 was described as a promising practice; offering flexible programming for the student who is not necessarily comfortable with joining a regular school environment after transitioning from the Supervised Alternative Learning program. The “Fast Track” program focuses on re-engagement, literacy and numeracy.

engagement of adult learners, and establish the supporting conditions for learner achievement. Such supports, boards noted, are often related to mental health, social services, education, and employment. Boards reported that the lack of supports for mental health / addictions affects both the students who are in need of services, and the teachers who are challenged to provide adequate support.

School boards acknowledged that ease of access is essential for the learner and a goal that many service providers seek to achieve. However, it was noted that such service coordination can take place in one location only when there are sufficient numbers of learners to cover costs.

School boards agreed that there are many obstacles to achieving greater flexibility in the delivery of A&CE programs and services. Both the physical space and location of adult education programs can be challenging. School boards noted that facilities are aging and that they cannot afford to keep or update building spaces for adult education programs. French-language boards described the difficulties in offering flexible delivery because of the small populations they serve, a population that is spread across a large territory. Similar challenges were noted by northern and rural school boards. School boards reiterated that they view there to be an inadequate amount of funding for capital improvements and technology. Boards discussed the challenge of finding an adequate physical location for classroom delivery, as well as difficulties in accessing the supporting infrastructure needed to provide online delivery.

The “One-Stop-Shop” model is a promising practice, especially in more rural communities. The provision of daycare in locations with several programs and services under one roof is especially attractive to adult learners. In Niagara Falls, after a high school was closed, the space was repurposed to house specialized programs in addition to a daycare program and is now running at total cost recovery.

Some school boards have experimented with e-learning and reported that when appropriately supported, e-learning helps to overcome access barriers and provides an alternative to classroom-based delivery.

Similarly, a majority of French-language school boards offer e-learning as a part of a wider suite of programs or delivery options. The French-language boards had varied experiences with e-learning: some boards create their own content, other boards have established mechanisms for tracking student performance as a means to keep the learner engaged. Most of the French-language boards involved in e-learning offer continuous intake in order to accommodate the scheduling and other needs of adult learners.

Most school boards noted that even with the greater flexibility afforded through e-learning, reaching all adult learners and providing adequate learning supports remains challenging. For example, reliable access to technology is not always available, and, there is a lack of computer familiarity and skills on the part of both the adult educator and the adult learner. The French-language boards observed that, especially in the northern region, adult learners are not always sufficiently independent and self-motivated to be successful in completing e-learning modules.

Boards recognized that, as in a classroom setting, adult learners participating in e-learning also benefit from developing a supportive relationship with a caring individual who can assist learners with

Western region boards discussed the merits of the EDU-funded A&CE Hybrid Pilot Project, the flexibility and support it offers for students and the professional development it offers for teachers. These pilots are also exploring a more effective way to allocate existing funding to better support learner success.

coursework. Some boards are exploring blended/ hybrid instruction and noted the promising signs of success of this delivery format. Boards have been piloting how e-learning can be complimented by face-to-face tutoring services to provide the supporting conditions for adult learner achievement.

Participants spoke about the value that the teachers bring to A&CE and described the teacher's role as essential to adult learner achievement. School boards noted the efforts of some teachers to reach the learner, for example, some teachers are willing to travel throughout the community to provide face to face instruction.

Boards highlighted the impact of high turnover rates of A&CE teachers and administrators and the resulting loss of valuable knowledge, such as insight about the adult learning environment.

School boards elaborated on their experiences with the Dual Credit and School within a College (SWAC) programs and how successful these EDU programs have been. Boards noted that the adult learner would also benefit from access to these programs, which support transition to postsecondary education programs. They suggested the Ministry consider expanding eligibility requirements and relaxing program rules to allow more adult learners the opportunity to participate. Boards also noted the benefits of experiential learning opportunities for adult learners, such as co-operative learning.

2.2 Information, Intake, Assessment and Referral

Some boards expressed that there is a general lack of information sharing between boards, and also recognized the importance of communication in creating seamless learner pathways for learners. Boards described the first point of contact for an adult learner as critical and boards reiterated the significance of ensuring that learners are referred to the correct program in a timely manner.

Boards told us that assessing learners upon entry poses challenges. First, guidance staff was identified to be the best qualified staff to conduct assessments, but few adult education departments have funding for dedicated guidance staff. In many cases, intake assessments are undertaken by staff that are not sufficiently trained to do assessments and may not be familiar with the entire range of service offerings. Secondly, boards reported that there is a lack of coordination among adult education service providers, which may result in the adult learner having to repeat assessments, paperwork, classwork from previous programs. Finally, participants identified a lack of a coherent and consistently applied referral process for providers of EDU-funded A&CE, MCIT-funded English and French as a Second Language (ESL/FSL), and MTCU-funded Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), which clearly and consistently directs learners to the correct program that best suits their needs.

Toronto area boards suggested that a central database outlining learner history and electronic referrals could potentially help with creating smoother pathways for learners.

Boards observed that there are inconsistencies across adult education programs offered by EDU, MTCU and MCIIT. For example, the terminology used in the adult education programs offered by the three ministries funding adult education is inconsistent. This inconsistency may lead to further confusion, both for the learner and the educator, in ensuring that the learner is placed in the correct program and the correct class. The French-language boards added that program rules and eligibility requirements seem to be interpreted differently from one region to another.

Some boards suggested that better coordination in the delivery of A&CE could be achieved by using shared terminology and common language and definitions between boards and across programs from the three ministries. Boards stated that greater coherence in the adult education system could also be achieved through improved school board leadership interaction and communication with community agencies; through a better understanding of the programs and services that each provider offers; and establishing a mechanism to facilitate sharing of information and knowledge, such as a website. Boards viewed closer interaction with community agencies not only as a possible way to raise awareness about adult education, but also to market school board services and explore innovative learner re-engagement techniques. Boards mentioned their varying experiences in working with community agencies and the potential for mutual benefit through greater program coordination.

Similarly, the French-language boards expressed an interest in working more closely with community agencies, namely with Newcomer Welcome Centers and immigrant settlement agencies. The French-language boards noticed an increase in French language speakers in the East and Centre–South–West, mostly due to immigration. However, the French-language boards note that French-language newcomers are often referred to English services by default. Some French-language boards would like to obtain more information about newcomers in order to better plan their services.

French-language boards have experienced some successful collaboration with community agencies (the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was mentioned as a key partner), but collaboration is based on personal relationships and is not systematic.

Boards discussed the ethics and privacy issues surrounding the sharing of information (i.e. educational and demographic/social) between ministries and community partners. Boards agreed that it would be helpful in the assessment process to be informed by learner data, such as previous experience with the education system, and in understanding the types of supports that are needed.

School boards highlighted that effective information, intake, assessment and referral requires that adult education programs and services, such as PLAR for Mature Students must be better marketed to learners in order to re-engage adults to return to further their education.

2.3 Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition for Mature Students

During the consultations, school boards described the challenges with implementing Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) for Mature Students. Boards pointed to the lack of knowledge and experience to administer PLAR for Mature Students among the staff that is also responsible for intake as a significant obstacle. Boards identified guidance counsellors as best suited to undertake

PLAR for Mature Students is the formal evaluation and credit-granting process whereby students may obtain credits for prior learning. Prior learning includes the knowledge and skills that students have acquired, in both formal and informal ways, outside secondary school. Students may have their knowledge and skills evaluated against the expectations outlined in provincial curriculum policy documents in order to earn credits towards the secondary school diploma. The PLAR process has the potential to enhance and accelerate the completion of a high school diploma, while ensuring its integrity.

To be eligible, the learner must be at least 18 years of age and not enrolled in a day school program for a period of at least one year.

In 2012-13, approximately 93,000 credits were earned through PLAR for Mature Students.

PLAR for Mature Students, but few boards reported having the funding to hire a dedicated guidance counsellor for this purpose. Boards that had sufficient funding for the extra support staff had limited time available to administer PLAR assessments.

Boards shared that adult learners are generally unaware that PLAR for Mature Students exists and boards are often averse to offering or promoting PLAR for Mature Students because of student “transience”¹. Some participants noticed that there is little consistency in how PLAR for Mature Students is applied across boards: it is delivered at different times, in different circumstances and by different professionals. Boards highlighted that the availability of qualified staff to administer PLAR for Mature Students varies across the province and that the PLAR assessments and determinations are not always shared between boards. The use of a regional PLAR coordinator or intake counsellor to assess transcripts and administer PLAR for Mature students was discussed as a potential promising option.

Some boards identified PLAR for Mature Students as a good way to re-engage adults in their learning and consequently, it should be marketed to adult learners to show them that a high school diploma may be closer than they think. Boards acknowledged that the current policy permits varied interpretation in the way prior life experiences such as parenting, volunteering or previous employment are recognized in the administration of PLAR for Mature Students. Boards identified that the current policy requirement for a student to be 18 years of age or older and out of school for a year before they can be eligible for PLAR is problematic with the introduction of the “Learning to 18” legislation. Taken together, the impact of the legislation and the PLAR for Mature Students policy is

¹ Transience refers to adult learners starting and pausing their learning in relatively short periods of time.

that many learners may have to wait for a year after leaving school at 18 until they are eligible to receive PLAR, increasing the risk of dis-engagement significantly.

The French-language boards reported that there was a good level of cooperation between more experienced boards/staff and less experienced ones with respect to PLAR for Mature Students. However, despite strong board collaboration, French-language school boards found the administration of PLAR for Mature Students too complex. They emphasized the need to streamline and standardize the PLAR for Mature Students process. French-language school boards also expressed an interest in receiving increased training and more assessment tools in French to support more effective and consistent delivery of PLAR for Mature Students to French-language learners.

2.4 Guidance, Career Counselling and Pathway Planning

Boards shared that adult learners have differing needs and aspirations, relative to learners in the traditional day school. For instance, adult learners may have previous learning experiences, family responsibilities, employment experience, etc. Adult learners need support, particularly from a caring individual, who understands the adult learner journey and who can emphasize the relevance of their academic work to their ultimate education and employment goals. Boards shared that adult learners need frequent contact with a caring individual. Such an individual is often a teacher but can also be a guidance counsellor, who will help the learner identify skills and a pathway to postsecondary education or employment.

Boards acknowledged that the role of the guidance counsellor for the adult learner must evolve to include career counselling. Participants shared that in order for adult learners to engage in pathway planning, guidance counsellor services must be accessible. Boards pointed out that guidance counsellors must have an intimate knowledge of local labour market needs, and be cognizant of A&CE offerings and all the potential pathways open to learners.

Unfortunately, boards shared that guidance counsellors are often overwhelmed by their workloads and as a result, the quality of service provided may be jeopardized. In addition, some school boards described that many qualified guidance counsellors are close to retirement and may have skills and mindsets that are no longer best suited to the current challenges faced by students. Several French-language boards do not have any guidance counsellors available to support adult learners.

Boards highlighted that relationships are key to building opportunities for successful pathway planning. Many school boards promoted close connections with employers and with community partners because their cooperation is essential to offering experiential learning opportunities, like co-operative learning. French-language boards also noted that there needs to be better liaison with 'regional workforce planning boards.' Furthermore, boards emphasized the importance of building relationships with colleges, while also using data to inform decision making for specialized programming.

Specialized programs, such as integrated health care or Personal Support Worker programs, support the completion of the Ontario Secondary School Diploma as well as transitions to postsecondary education and/or employment.

In other instances, boards highlighted that relationships are key to effective and ongoing re-engagement of vulnerable adult learners. They identified opportunities to work more closely with Ontario Works (OW) service providers, as they share many of the same clients. Some boards reported difficulty in maintaining collaborative relationships with OW providers, especially in 2014-15 as a result of the technology challenges that have pre-occupied OW service providers. In some cases, partnerships between school boards and OW offices have worked well while in others, boards noted a lack of communication or buy-in from OW offices.

Part 3: Common Themes

3.1 Funding Impacts

School boards identified the current funding model as a significant challenge to delivering quality adult education programs and services that meet the diverse needs of adult learners. Participants emphasized that the current funding rate for learners 21 years of age and over does not generate sufficient funding to cover the costs of needed services such as rigorous intake and assessment; guidance and pathway planning; wrap around supports, such as mental health resources; or professional development for continuing education teachers. Boards noted that the difference in the funding rate between learners who are under 21 years and those 21 years and over, which does not afford A&CE the same level of funding, could be viewed as an issue of equity and inclusion.

Boards reiterated the significance of guidance staff in A&CE education, emphasizing that expertise in pathway planning and knowledge about local labor markets is strongly needed. Some school boards indicated that the lack of funding for guidance supports results in teachers and administrative staff acting as guidance and career counsellors, in addition to their regular roles, which creates additional pressures for staff and may not provide learners with access to the right expertise. Boards stated teachers also need resources and training related to mental health and addictions to support adult learners, particularly in cases where the school cannot hire a qualified professional.

Boards explained how hourly paid continuing education teachers do not have the same type of access to professional development or paid preparation time as their full contract teacher counterparts. Boards reiterated that teachers are a valuable source of support in adult education and need to be provided professional development in order to improve their practice, such as developing skills in differentiated instruction and e-learning software. School boards indicated that collective agreements often impact how flexible or innovative boards can be in how they deliver programs due to locally negotiated job descriptions.

Participants strongly indicated that the current enrolment reporting timelines do not accommodate the more volatile attendance of adult learners. Because adult learners may not be present on the two required count dates, they are not counted for funding, resulting in financial pressures for school boards. Boards urged EDU to examine an enrolment reporting process that provides greater flexibility in terms of intake and count date options.

School boards shared that a funding model based primarily on enrolment is problematic for A&CE Programs. It creates competition between school boards, incenting boards to retain learners rather than refer learners out to the program or service that best meets the learner's goals, and ultimately impeding collaboration.

3.2 Geography

School boards emphasized that the needs and challenges of each board are dependent on location, for example, the density of the learner population across a geographically vast area and whether the board is urban or rural. School boards highlighted the need for better access to transportation networks in order to accommodate learners who are not able to regularly travel to the nearest school board. Boards reported that the further adult learners have to travel for service, the less likely they are to regularly attend instruction.

To address the issue of geography and the challenge of serving a dispersed population, some rural and remote boards are collaborating with one another and community organizations out of necessity.

Rural and remote boards participating in the Single Parent Pilot Projects partner with community organizations to provide wrap around supports and credit programming for students who are single parents. Lakehead District School Board partners with Matawa First Nation and Aboriginal organizations. In Sudbury there are partnerships with Ontario Works and Manitoulin Works.

Many boards were supportive of using innovative technologies, such as e-learning or hybrid models, to help deliver classroom lessons to learners hindered by geography. However, boards explained that implementing e-learning in remote communities is often challenging due to limited access to sufficient internet bandwidth.

3.3 Leadership

School board participants noted a perception among themselves, as well as within the wider community, that A&CE is considered to be a lesser priority than the K-12 system. Participants expressed their concern that the adult education sector is often poorly regarded as a result of this perception, and may result in negative impressions of teacher and student performance and abilities. Many boards believe that the current perception of A&CE is an obstacle to engaging learners and achieving buy-in from senior managers to invest in adult education programs and services, which may better support the success of adult learners.

Boards described the lack of attention to and priority for A&CE among senior management, due in part to a number of characteristics common to the A&CE system, including high staff turnover and inexperience of senior leaders in the adult education environment, an aversion to taking risks, as well as a general lack of awareness or knowledge about the value of A&CE. Many participants believe that a culture shift towards a more inclusive view of lifelong education needs to occur in order to increase buy-in among senior school board leadership.

Part 4: Regional Highlights

4.1 London

School board participants from the London regional consultation explained that collaboration already exists to an extent between coterminous boards. Boards understood the correlation between the changing economic landscape of the region and the recent increase in numbers of adult learners; however, they indicated that reaching the adult learner is a challenge. The region is composed of a mixture of urban and rural boards that experience unique challenges in delivering adult education. Some London boards discussed the merits of the hybrid pilot project and the flexibility it offers for adult learners.

4.2 Barrie

School boards from the Barrie area agreed that the region has a rich history of collaboration. Some boards were confused about how to implement regional school board collaboration, and preferred to strengthen and grow partnerships with community groups, which has allowed for creativity in service delivery.

4.3 Toronto

The Toronto region is very large, dense and has a culturally diverse learner population. The Toronto boards saw the benefits of collaboration, but had difficulty in understanding how it could be realized.

4.4 Ottawa

Ottawa is characterized by a vast geography, spanning urban and rural boards. Although the region has experienced stable employment, the Ottawa boards described pockets of areas where the mindsets of adult learners make service delivery very difficult. Boards identified the necessity for a culture shift among the population and a change in perception of adult education.

4.5 Thunder Bay

The boards' innovative approaches and dedication to serving adult learners and re-engagement activities are unique. While coterminous relationships are well established, the Northern boards saw broader collaboration as an opportunity to capitalize on the expertise of their regional counterparts.

4.6 French-language

French-language school boards described a positive history of collaboration among each other and with various organizations and networks, including colleges. In some areas of Ontario, French-language learners have limited school board adult education programs and services available to them in French or are referred by default to English language services.

French-language boards also have to serve a small population dispersed over large geographical areas. In some regions, needs vary greatly from one community to the next and meeting these various needs is a challenge. Moreover, French-language boards have limited capacity to partner or collaborate with the numerous English-language agencies that could provide wrap-around supports to their learners.

French-language school boards also pointed out that the priorities promoted by different ministries of the government could be viewed as conflicting and result in competition between service providers of the programs:

- Achieving an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.
- Pursuing postsecondary education.
- Transitioning to employment.

The French-language boards remarked on the competitiveness they experience in offering adult education programs run by the three ministries and urged the Ministry of Education to consider how these stakeholders might be involved in further discussions.

Appendix A: Summary of Meeting with TVO Independent Learning Centre

The TVO Independent Learning Centre (ILC) offers a range of secondary school credit distance courses in English and French leading to an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. ILC courses follow a blended learning model, combining print and online components. The following sections provide a summary of the notes submitted by ILC staff in response to the EDU Adult Education Strategy consultation questions.

Opportunities and Challenges in Implementing the Four Key Areas of the Ministry of Education Adult Education Strategy

Flexible Delivery

Learners are able to begin ILC distance education courses anytime and anywhere (360 days per year) which allows maximum flexibility to meet other personal demands on their time. Support for learning is provided online and/or by phone by certified teachers and can be accessed anytime and anywhere, but teacher response is not necessarily immediate. As the ILC moves to more digital online course delivery, learners without the technical skills or resources may not have the requisite skills to access the curricula that meet their needs. In addition, adult learners may not be aware of the opportunities for furthering their education through the ILC.

Coordinated Information, Intake, Assessment and Referral

ILC provides individualized support for potential students upon inquiry by reviewing their educational and other experiential history, ascertaining their current goals and then designing a plan for achieving their Ontario Secondary School Diploma and/or postsecondary, workplace, and personal goals. This service is provided only upon request. The ILC acknowledges that the distance education format is not conducive to the 1:1 face to face meeting that may be required to support adult learners in their pathway planning.

Prior Learning and Assessment for Mature Students

The ILC provides a policy-based PLAR for Mature Students package to learners seeking an opportunity to acquire credits through recognition of prior learning. The ILC only uses the evidence based documentation for PLAR assessments e.g. out-of-province transcripts, and does not currently have a mechanism for conducting equivalency or challenge-based PLAR assessments.

Regional Guidance, Career Counselling and Pathway Planning

The ILC provides ongoing guidance and pathway planning to students on an individual request basis through the services of guidance counsellors. Learners can access this support on a one on one format but given the ILC's more than 20,000 students and limited guidance allocations, the service is limited to an on-request request basis, however, not all learners are aware of the services that are available to them through the ILC, and may not realize they must make a request.

Feedback on Regional Collaboration

The ILC currently collaborates on a case by case basis when the learner is moving from or to the ILC with another adult centre, or when a learner working simultaneously within a board program and the ILC requires support.

The ILC provided a number of suggestions that may improve collaboration between the ILC and school boards, including:

- Sharing of information on the full range of school board and ILC programs and services.
- Better sharing of student information, including assessment information, so that the learner's student record is honoured and the learners' needs are better met.
- Include the ILC in regional meetings with school boards to promote the sharing of best practices and resources, and to build coordinated support of learners.