

Bridging Cultures, Building Attendance: The Needs of Immigrant and Refugee K-12 students



Milan Le, Natasha McBrearty, Jessica Whitley, Maria Teresa Garcia
Canadian School Attendance Partnership, Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa

BACKGROUND

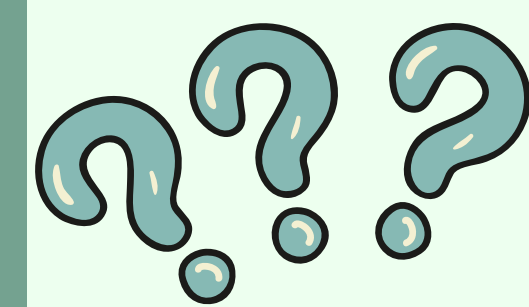
- Between **30%** and **70%** of students in Canada are classified as chronically absent in some regions (Carman & Wesley, 2024; OECD, 2023).
- Chronic absenteeism is associated with negative academic, mental health, and long-term outcomes (Ansari & Gottfried, 2021; Carman & Wesley, 2024; Gottfried, 2014).
- Immigrant and refugee students may face additional barriers to school engagement, including acculturation stress, financial hardship, language barriers, and difficulties navigating school systems (Kearney et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2020; Sirin et al., 2013).
- Despite the growing population of immigrant youth in Canada, limited Canadian research has examined their school engagement and support needs (Statistics Canada, 2017).



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Grounded in the **Kids and Teens at School (KiTeS) framework**, this study conceptualizes student needs as embedded within interconnected school, family, and broader socio-ecological systems rather than isolated individual factors.

QUESTION



What are the specific needs of immigrant and refugee K-12 students identified through the Multicultural Liaison Officer (MLO) program at the Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO)?

METHODS

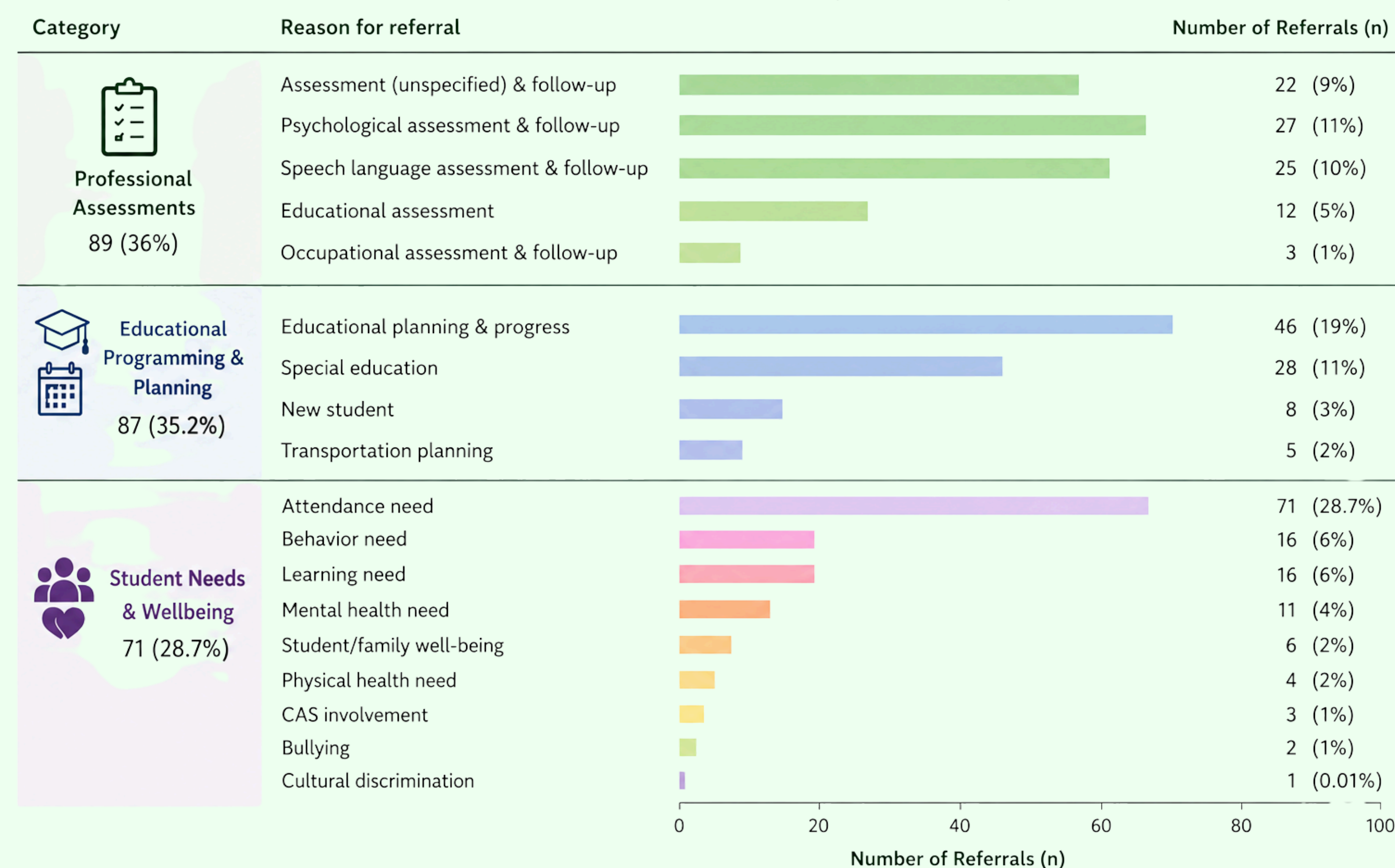
Design: Qualitative document analysis

Data sources:

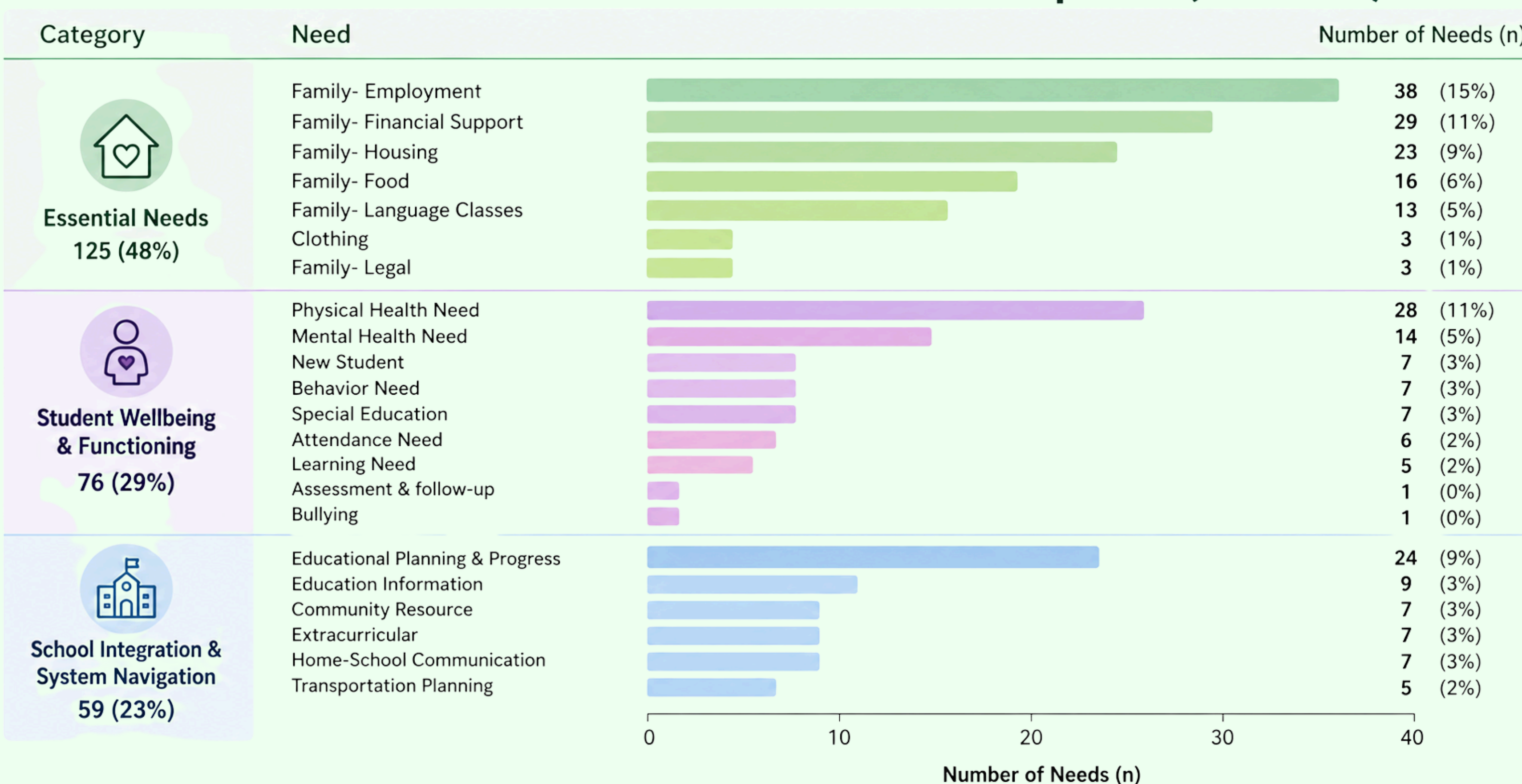
1. 367 referrals from Master referral sheet (January–June 2025)
2. Monthly narrative reports (January–June 2025)

RESULTS

Reasons for Referral (N = 247)



Needs Identified from Narrative Reports (N = 260)



CONCLUSION

- Immigrant and refugee student needs are multifaceted and system-embedded within a KiTeS ecological systems framework, with language and communication barriers shaping access across home-school contexts; the MLO program plays a key bridging role.
- Schools are critical sites for the identification of student and family needs, with teachers and key transition points (e.g., kindergarten, grade 6) central to recognizing barriers in assessment, educational planning, family engagement, and broader financial and employment circumstances.
- Findings highlight the need for culturally and linguistically responsive, proactive supports to improve equitable access and outcomes within the education system.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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References:



Additional questions can be directed to
mle093@uottawa.ca