



LiTERACY more than words



Progress Report on Literacy 2009



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Council of
Ministers
of Education,
Canada

THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION, CANADA (CMEC), IS AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL BODY COMPRISING PROVINCIAL AND TERRITORIAL MINISTERS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING. THROUGH CMEC, MINISTERS SHARE INFORMATION AND UNDERTAKE PROJECTS IN AREAS OF MUTUAL CONCERN AND INTEREST.

This report is also available in French, under the title
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Raising Literacy Levels

How can we work together better to improve the literacy levels of Canadians? What steps can we take together? These are questions that provincial and territorial governments are asking, and through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), they have agreed on a plan to take action at the pan-Canadian level.

Across the country, provincial and territorial governments support a variety of local and community literacy programs run by dedicated practitioners; but we know we can do better. Improving Canadians' literacy levels is a commitment to taking on a collaborative, cohesive, and coordinated approach. It means taking the best of what is happening from Newfoundland and Labrador to Yukon, and making it accessible to all. It means looking at literacy as a lifelong skill. It means considering where and when we can best reach those in need of resources, training, and opportunities — in school, at work, at home, and in the community. It is having a plan of action.

In this first report on progress, we look back at what has been done, particularly in the last year, and look forward to what provincial and territorial governments working together can still do to improve literacy.



Honourable Diane McGifford
Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy and Minister responsible for International Education, Manitoba
Chair of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada



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Minister of Education and Minister Responsible for Early Learning and Literacy, British Columbia
Pan-Canadian Lead on Literacy

Commitment on Literacy

Whereas literacy is a key foundation of lifelong learning;

Whereas learning is the foundation of the 21st Century knowledge society and economy;

Whereas the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, has identified and committed to raising literacy levels across Canada as a key priority in its Learn Canada 2020 declaration;

Whereas improving provincial and territorial literacy levels will benefit individuals and society as a whole – contributing to personal empowerment and fulfillment, social progress, and the furthering of democracy;

Whereas investing in literacy is investing in people, productivity, and competitiveness, and will ultimately position Canada favourably in the global environment;

Whereas improving overall pan-Canadian literacy levels is the responsibility of all sectors of society;

Be it resolved that ministers responsible for education continue with their commitment to literacy and continue to work with their partners from civil society and the private sector to engage with them in improving literacy levels in Canada.

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Responding to the Literacy Challenge

In response to Canada's literacy challenge, ministers responsible for education are working together to raise literacy levels through the CMEC Literacy Action Plan.

Approach

Pan-Canadian

With a country as large as Canada, it is challenging for provinces and territories to share knowledge and best practices in education. That is why the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), was created in 1967 to provide leadership at the pan-Canadian and international levels. A pan-Canadian approach to raising literacy levels underscores a commitment by the ministers responsible for education of all 13 provinces and territories to take action on this shared objective. Canada's diverse geography, cultures, and languages provide a richness that benefits us all. Through a cohesive, collaborative, and coordinated approach to raising literacy levels, we take advantage of this diversity by strengthening individual efforts and initiatives.

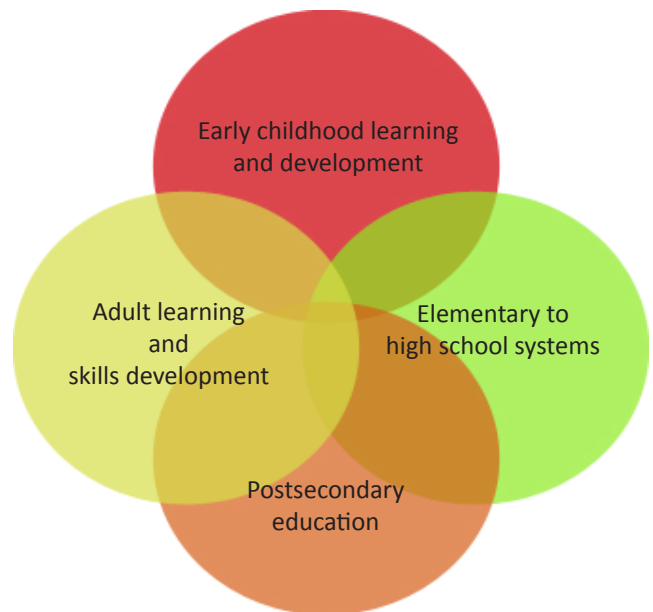
Lifelong

Taking an important step, Canada's ministers responsible for education issued a joint statement in April 2008 on a vision of education for Canada. Within this vision, it is recognized that literacy needs an integrated approach, from the early years through to adulthood. *Learn Canada 2020* supports provincial and territorial responsibility for the four pillars of lifelong learning.

This shared commitment engages governments from all 13 provinces and territories in collaborative action on literacy to achieve a common goal.

This first report on progress presents activities undertaken by provinces and territories, up until September 2009, to respond to the literacy challenge.

Four pillars of lifelong learning



Acquiring and developing literacy skills are a part of everyday living — at home, school, work, and in the community. Understanding this reality must be part of any approach to addressing literacy. This new approach in responding to Canada's literacy challenge recognizes the wider picture of individual development that leads to lifelong opportunities.

Principles

The objectives and actions taken by provinces and territories on literacy are grounded in a set of guiding principles that reflect the four pillars of lifelong learning outlined in *Learn Canada 2020*:

- Raising literacy levels is a shared responsibility, not only for government but also for social, economic, and community stakeholders, the education, health, and cultural sectors, and the general population, at the pan-Canadian, provincial/territorial, regional, and local levels.
- Raising literacy levels contributes to the foundation needed to engage in lifelong learning.
- Raising literacy levels requires access to a range of learning opportunities.
- Raising literacy levels requires preventive actions across the life spectrum, including education, culture, family, and community.
- Raising literacy levels and encouraging the maintenance of skills can only occur with a holistic, learner-centred approach, adapted to each learner's situation and prior learning.
- Raising the literacy levels of Aboriginal learners requires engagement with the diverse cultures of Aboriginal populations.



Action

In 2004, ministers responsible for education agreed on the CMEC Literacy Action Plan, a five-point plan that recognizes provincial and territorial governments' role in raising the literacy levels of Canadians. By creating a pan-Canadian vision and taking specific actions, CMEC is providing leadership in improving literacy across the country.

In accordance with the action plan, ministers responsible for education have committed to raising awareness and connecting with literacy organizations, practitioners, and learners, through sharing information and ideas on policy and evidence, and on practices that work from coast to coast to coast.

CMEC Literacy Action Plan: multi-pronged coordination at the pan-Canadian level

Bring together ideas and initiatives that work from coast to coast

Ensure that Canadians are aware of the importance of literacy and what their governments are doing to address the issue

Connect with the literacy community and reach out to all sectors of society



Share provinces' and territories' policies to address the literacy challenge

Coordinate provincial and territorial research and national data to ensure effective action on literacy

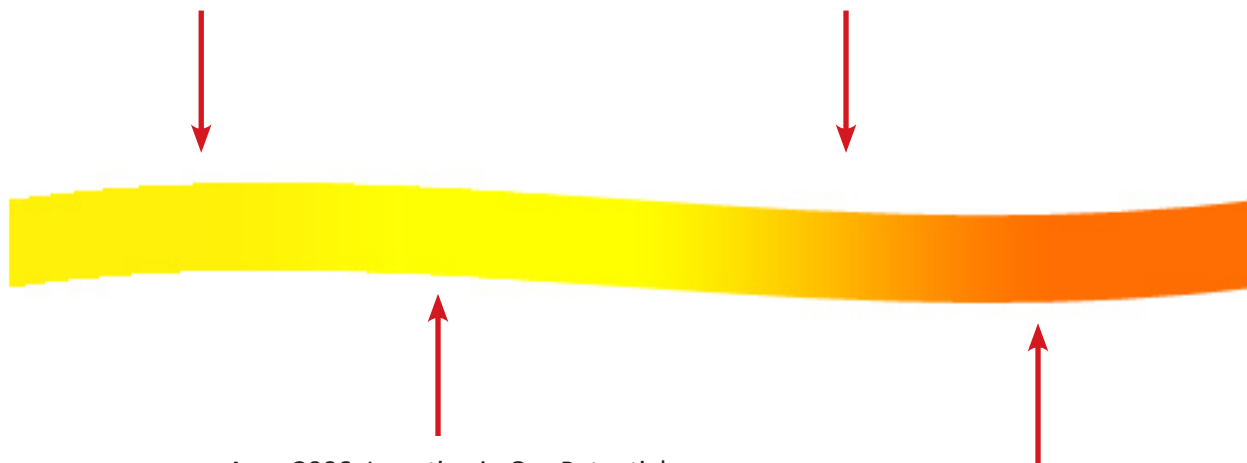
Toward a pan-Canadian strategy on literacy

Consultation

Since 2005, CMEC has hosted several consultations with educators, researchers, and practitioners that have focused on literacy:

November 2005: Unlocking our Children's Potential: Literacy and Numeracy as a Foundation — A school-age forum in Ontario that focused on raising student achievement

January 2007: Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda Symposium — Co-hosted with Statistics Canada, with an emphasis on using research and data to inform policy and programming decisions



June 2006: Investing in Our Potential: Towards Quality Adult Literacy Programs in Canada — An adult-literacy forum in Prince George, B.C.

April 2008: A first-of-its-kind event, the Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum was held at nine sites across Canada. The forum used webcasting technology to connect more than 3,000 learners, literacy experts, and representatives from the education, non-profit, business, and labour sectors as the first step to engage the broader literacy community in a call to action.

2008-09: Changing the literacy landscape

Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum, April 2008

Highlighting CMEC's commitment to a pan-Canadian and lifelong approach to literacy that involves all sectors of society, this first-of-its-kind webcast forum brought together Canadians in Vancouver, Whitehorse, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, Arviat, Toronto, Montreal, and Saint John.

With a key goal of reaching out and mobilizing others, the forum connected 3,000 learners, literacy experts, and delegates from education, non-profit, business, and labour sectors to engage in a truly pan-Canadian dialogue on literacy policy, research, and practice.



Legacy

Most of the presentations made at the Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum were recorded and are now available on-line. More than 70 practices gathered from across Canada are profiled by keynote speakers, local presentations, and training workshops on literacy-related topics, from preschool to adult literacy.

This rich legacy of forum materials was created to facilitate continued discussion and learning post-forum, and to support efforts to raise literacy levels from coast to coast to coast.

CMEC experts' forum on literacy

A new element to bring about change, the CMEC literacy experts' forum was created in 2008 to exchange ideas, develop solutions, and advise Canada's ministers responsible for education on literacy. The forum comprises experts from ministries of education, representing various literacy perspectives — from early to school-age to adult and workplace literacy — in policy, research, and practice. The advisory forum represents a promising development in Canada's literacy landscape.

Five-Point Plan – Policy

To ensure that the CMEC Literacy Action Plan takes root across the country, ministers responsible for education are spearheading the development of policies that lead to action for improving literacy in each province and territory.

Sharing information and ideas on literacy-related policies is vital to moving the Literacy Action Plan forward and to its implementation. As evidence of the commitment of CMEC members, literacy has been moving to the front of the agenda across Canada. Since 2008, actions in a number of jurisdictions have made headlines and established a clear path to improving literacy levels.

The following examples illustrate actions that support the Literacy Action Plan and demonstrate what can happen at the pan-Canadian level when provincial and territorial governments support a policy of sharing truly effective, evidence-based ideas and practices.

To learn more about new initiatives and developments in literacy from across Canada's provinces and territories, visit www.cmec.ca.



Northwest Territories

Positioning literacy as a continuum of lifelong learning that is shared throughout communities, Northwest Territories released “Towards Literacy: A Strategy Framework — 2008–2018.” The strategy includes literacy goals for people of all ages, literacy in the 11 official languages of the territory, partnerships, and community capacity. The objectives address early childhood, school-age children, working-age adults, and elders and seniors as learner groups, as well as Aboriginal languages.

Manitoba

Leading the way in adult literacy, Manitoba's new *Adult Literacy Act* is the first of its kind in Canada. The act strengthens collaboration with community partners through the development of an adult-literacy strategy. It formalizes the governance of current adult-literacy programs and refines the criteria for funding, program standards, and learning outcomes. The new direction is supported through increased provincial funding for adult-literacy programs.



Nunavut

Direct and positive consequences for literacy in Nunavut — that is the goal of Nunavut's new *Education Act*. Focusing on real and progressive change to engage learners, the new legislation includes bilingual education for all students, the inclusion of Inuit culture throughout the education system, local control, and more support for students to stay engaged and succeed.

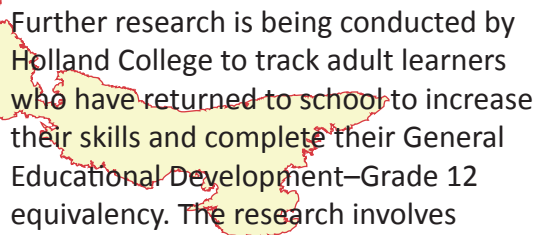


Five-Point Plan – Evidence

In order to know whether progress is being made on the literacy front, it is necessary to have access to relevant data to track achievement and progress. It is also important to identify gaps, challenges, and research priorities, and to improve access to research. In light of this, CMEC is spearheading a pan-Canadian strategy on research and data on literacy in a coordinated effort to:

- improve the sharing of, and access to, up-to-date information about the literacy skill levels of Canadians;
- communicate literacy research to policy-makers and practitioners;
- promote research to fill the knowledge gaps in literacy.

Prince Edward Island

A map of Prince Edward Island is overlaid on the text. The map shows the island's outline in red with a yellow fill. The text is positioned to the right of the map.

Further research is being conducted by Holland College to track adult learners who have returned to school to increase their skills and complete their General Educational Development–Grade 12 equivalency. The research involves following up three years later to determine if adults' reading skills have increased, stayed the same, or lessened.

Assessment

Assessing the skill level of the whole population leads to more efficient policy development and program design.

Elements of CMEC's research and data strategy include involvement in the design, implementation, and analysis of both pan-Canadian and international assessment programs of literacy skills.

The **Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)** tests the achievement of 13-year-old students in mathematics, reading, and science.

Highlights of PCAP 2007: Report on the Assessment of 13-Year-Olds in Reading, Mathematics, and Science:

- Overall, 88 per cent of all students from across Canada performed in reading at or above the expected level for their age group.
- Female students achieved a mean score in reading that was significantly higher than that of male students.

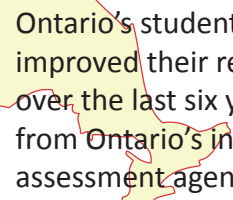
The **Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)** is an international assessment of the skills and knowledge of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics, and science. All 10 provinces take part in PISA every three years. Canada's participation is a partnership of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, CMEC, and Statistics Canada. On an international level, Canada has performed very well in all PISA assessments.

- *In the 2006 science assessment, only Finland and Hong Kong-China had significantly higher scores than did Canada.*
- *In the 2003 mathematics assessment, only Finland and Hong Kong-China performed significantly better than did Canada.*
- *In the 2000 reading assessment, only Finland scored significantly higher than did Canada.*

Research and Analysis

Monitoring and evaluating literacy, knowing what is effective and the impact that literacy has, is critical to achieving positive and sustainable results. Research and analysis is the foundation of this work; it drives the development of a pan-Canadian literacy research strategy, of which the goals are to improve the sharing and accessibility of research and to promote research in order to address knowledge gaps.

Ontario



Ontario's students have significantly improved their reading and writing skills over the last six years, according to results from Ontario's independent education-assessment agency. Elementary-level achievement has increased by at least 11 percentage points and secondary-level achievement is up 13 percentage points, with 85 per cent of secondary students passing the agency's literacy assessment on their first try. Many of these improvements are a result of programs that encourage teachers and schools to work together to analyze student-achievement data in order to identify specific areas and student groups that require more focused attention, in order to help all students meet the provincial standard for literacy achievement.

In addition to this work, CMEC has commissioned research activities in areas of common interest among provinces and territories, producing reports and publications to inform the development of literacy policies and practices. These include *The Development and State of the Art of Adult Learning and Education* and the *Programme for International Student Assessment 2006 Canadian Report*. These publications, and others, can be found at www.cmec.ca.

Five-Point Plan – Practices

CMEC is committed to the creation of literacy networks to encourage the sharing of effective literacy practices from across Canada.

Literacy needs vary from situation to situation. We know that no single literacy practice or method will meet all needs. However, documenting and sharing ideas about what works sheds new light and stimulates new approaches to the same issues, challenging existing patterns and bringing to the table highly relevant perspectives.

The first step to establishing a broad literacy network was to create an easily accessible, on-line site to showcase the more than 70 literacy practices from across Canada that were presented during the April 2008 Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum.

The next step in this process is to make information about literacy research, results, and practices more accessible to the literacy community.



British Columbia

British Columbia's Community Literacy System links communities, school districts, and government to ensure that the literacy needs of every British Columbian (early, school-age, adult, and Aboriginal) are being addressed. The system is supported by a network of Literacy Outreach Coordinators who work with school districts and communities to develop literacy goals and implementation plans. These District Literacy Plans are documented annually, reporting successes and identifying work that still needs to be done to address the literacy needs of everyone in the community.



Newfoundland and Labrador

Aboriginal literacy continues to be a focus in Newfoundland and Labrador. An Aboriginal consultant is partnering with stakeholders to articulate and develop adult-literacy priorities. For Inuit students, an evaluation of literacy instruction in Inuktitut is being conducted. The review will identify gaps in the curriculum and help to determine how best to meet the literacy needs of Inuit students. In collaboration with the Innu Nation, resources for school-aged children have been produced in their own language.

Alberta

To ensure that adults who are learning to read or who are improving their reading skills understand Alberta's human-rights laws and services, a special issue of *English Express*, entitled "Human Rights in Alberta," was published. Approximately 60,000 copies of *English Express* are regularly distributed free of charge, accompanied by teaching notes for instructors and tutors who want to use the publication with learners. The publication is available at www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca.



Yukon

Yukon teachers are the first in Canada to be trained in a specialized reading program. The program addresses the learning styles of students who have language-based learning disabilities such as dyslexia. It may also be beneficial to students who lack basic reading and spelling skills. Yukon is engaged in ongoing professional and community dialogue to develop a literacy framework that responds to the diverse and evolving needs of Yukon learners.

Five-Point Plan – Engagement

Improving literacy levels in Canada means engaging all sectors of society. Provincial and territorial governments are working together to do just that at the pan-Canadian level by connecting with multiple partners to promote collaboration.

While ministers responsible for education have a responsibility to ensure that everyone has the chance to acquire literacy, they cannot do it alone. Bringing in many partners and encouraging the broader literacy community, new partners, and traditional organizations to come together to address literacy challenges constitutes laying the foundation to achieve our common goal.

To this end, in September 2009, ministers adopted the Commitment on Literacy to support ongoing provincial and territorial efforts to engage all sectors of society.

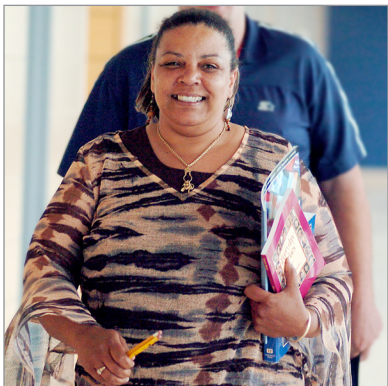
Civil society has always been a crucial partner in designing flexible programs for specific groups at the community level and in lobbying for the interests of vulnerable populations. After all, it is in communities themselves that literacy is practised and sustained. Therefore, community engagement is essential to creating an environment in which literacy programs can be successful.

The private sector and labour organizations also have a particular interest in an educated workforce, and have a vital role to play as partners in developing workplace literacy and skills programs.

Nova Scotia

Farmers across Nova Scotia celebrated the first Agricultural Literacy Day in 2008 by reading books about agriculture to students in Grades 2 and 3. In more than 20 schools, farmers read and talked about what they do. The books stayed in the classrooms, along with activities to help teachers and students explore the science and culture of farming.





New Brunswick

The Community Schools Program is growing in both the Francophone and Anglophone sectors of the New Brunswick Department of Education. This initiative encourages the community to take a more active role to ensure all children experience success. The program positions schools as centres of learning by using school resources and facilities, community resources, volunteer groups, parents, public services, government departments and agencies, and recreational and cultural opportunities to support a culture of lifelong learning.

Saskatchewan

A Saskatoon company with 1,000 workers recognized the literacy challenges experienced by some of its employees and approached Read Saskatoon for help. Working with the community-based organization, a resource centre was set up on the business premises that now offers services to more than 3,000 people, including employees and their families. The Saskatchewan government was involved in funding the initiative, and is now supporting the adoption of the model at other work sites.



Five-Point Plan – Awareness

Literacy is not the responsibility of any one group or government. It is a societal issue present across the country and around the world. It requires focused attention at all levels — families, communities, schools, postsecondary institutions, employers, and governments.

To engage people around a particular issue, they must first be aware of its relevance and importance. Ministers responsible for education are taking coordinated action to raise public awareness and interest in literacy and to inspire actions and initiatives that will help raise literacy levels on a pan-Canadian scale.

Over the last year, CMEC has directed greater attention to the importance of literacy at home, at school, at work, and in the community. Press releases and publications have included “Canada’s Education Ministers Make Literacy a Priority,” “Canada Celebrates Family Literacy,” and “Adult Learners — Key to a Successful Economy.” These releases, and others, can be viewed at www.cmec.ca.

Provinces and territories have also been raising awareness and promoting literacy among youth and adults.

Quebec

Again this year, the Ministry of Education, Recreation and Sports conducted a province-wide adult-literacy campaign to raise awareness of the Literacy Foundation’s Info-Alpha hotline. The campaign included a TV spot, media placement, and distribution of promotional materials in locations frequented by individuals with low literacy skills.



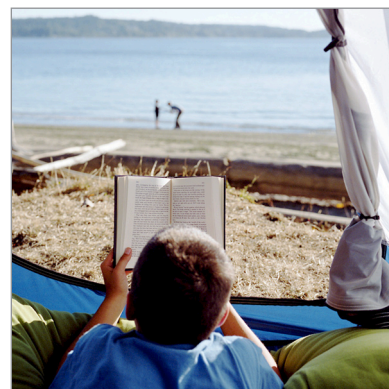
Moving Forward

The stage is now set for provinces, territories, and CMEC to look to the future and continue to take action and implement change — guided by *Learn Canada 2020* and the CMEC Literacy Action Plan.

Responding to Canada’s literacy challenge means sharing information across jurisdictions and sectors. It means engaging with colleagues involved in all facets of literacy across Canada, sharing information, and asking the questions: What works? How do we know? Who is doing something new and interesting?

CMEC is reaching out to those who are not yet involved on a broad scale, recognizing that we all can contribute to discussions and action at the local, regional, provincial, and national levels. It is through the spirit of partnership and combined effort that we will make a difference to individual Canadians who struggle every day with low literacy.

What does it mean to improve the literacy levels of Canadians? It is an investment that will benefit every member of society, whether it be from the perspective of economic competitiveness, societal progress, or personal empowerment and fulfillment. Improving the literacy skills of Canadians means tapping into our collective strengths, creativity, and knowledge to create a truly Canadian vision for a better future.





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