

Unleashing the power of literacy

NEW BRUNSWICK'S COMPREHENSIVE LITERACY STRATEGY



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New Brunswick's Comprehensive Literacy Strategy

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Message from Premier Brian Gallant

Literacy is a key foundational skill that empowers New Brunswickers to reach their potential in the workforce and thrive in their communities. This strategy lays out the key action areas that we will address to improve literacy rates and promote lifelong learning for all citizens.

The New Brunswick Economic Growth Plan and the 10-year education plans are already making major differences in all regions of the Province. We are confident that our recently announced Family Plan will soon be having a similarly positive impact on the lives of New Brunswickers. These plans align for the wellbeing of New Brunswick families' priorities of jobs, education and health care.

The New Brunswick economy is the strongest it has been in a decade; we have cut the deficit in half, while investing more in education and health care. These accomplishments are something we can all take pride in, because we achieved them by working together. Literacy is foundational to success. By helping more New Brunswickers improve their literacy skills, we will see improved economic growth and output as well as improved quality of life.

Today, your government is unveiling the next component in its efforts to make New Brunswick the best place in which to live, work and raise a family. *Unleashing the power of literacy – New Brunswick's Comprehensive Literacy Strategy* will support New Brunswickers from birth and throughout their lives, to ensure that every person has the opportunity to develop fully their literacy competencies.

The vital role that literacy plays in the quality of life for New Brunswickers is clear. Understanding and addressing the complexity of literacy challenges goes beyond standardized assessments. The true complexity is captured in the stories of unrealized potential, barriers to employment, business losses and struggles to overcome poverty.

If we want to improve the quality of life for New Brunswick families, one of the best investments we can make is in education and training. Education is the best investment we can make to ensure long-term economic growth. More importantly, it is the greatest social equalizer. This is why we are investing more in education than any other government in the history of the province.

The New Brunswick Comprehensive Literacy Strategy builds on the recommendations in *The Power of Literacy – Moving towards New Brunswick's Comprehensive Literacy Strategy*, on the 10-year education plans and on the feedback from New Brunswickers.

Literacy is the most important building block as we chart our course in a knowledge based economy. Improving literacy rates through educational investment improves our economy and creates a healthier, happier and a more secure future for New Brunswickers.



Brian Gallant


Message from Minister Cathy Rogers

Literacy is a major contributor to our province's economy and the quality of life of New Brunswickers. It also ensures an individual's success at work, at home and in the community. One of the first steps to creating jobs and growing the economy is to ensure that the workforce has a strong foundation in essential skills, like literacy. This is why your government has made a commitment to develop a comprehensive literacy strategy that spans across an individual's lifetime and addresses literacy more broadly than just reading and writing. By having a strong focus on the early years, we thereby minimize remedial efforts required later in life.

As Minister responsible for literacy, I will work closely with the departments of Education and Early Childhood Development; Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour; as well as with the departments of Social Development, Health, and Justice and Public Safety, as well as community literacy partners, in the development of an annual action plan to support implementation of the comprehensive literacy strategy. In doing so, there will be many opportunities to build off of existing action plans such as the Family Plan, Economic Growth Plan, and the 10-year education plans. This comprehensive literacy strategy will enable us to build on successful pilots from past years such as those with libraries.

It is imperative that to achieve full success we ensure strong coordination with our valuable community partners. These include businesses, non-governmental organizations, post-secondary institutions and volunteer organizations. Libraries and mentorship organizations, like Big Brothers Big Sisters and Partners in Alternative Learning (PALS), play an integral role in promoting and advancing literacy. By working collectively we can improve family literacy levels in our province.

Literacy and lifelong learning are foundational to developing a skilled workforce and a responsive labour market. To improve literacy skills for New Brunswickers, we will work together and with an enhanced focus on co-ordination and leveraging existing partnerships. Together, with a strategic and collaborative approach to support literacy, we will create a job-ready workforce for generations to come and ensure that every New Brunswicker is able to fully thrive in their community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cathy Rogers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Honourable Cathy Rogers
Minister responsible for literacy

Introduction

Unleashing the power of literacy – New Brunswick’s Comprehensive Literacy Strategy builds on the recommendations in *The Power of Literacy – Moving Towards New Brunswick’s Comprehensive Literacy Strategy*. This report, by Marilyn Trenholme Counsell and Liane Roy, co-chairs of the ad hoc literacy secretariat, was released in June 2016 and was an important first step in the development of a comprehensive literacy strategy for our province.

In the development of their report, the co-chairs engaged stakeholders, individuals, employers and government representatives. They built on the excellent work of past initiatives, such as *Learning: Everybody’s Project*, and reviewed research and best practices at the provincial, national and international levels. As a result, they provided us with a comprehensive framework that includes recommendations in relation to literacy across all ages and in the hope that all New Brunswickers will be able to participate fully in school, at work, at home and in their communities.

An increase of 1% in literacy skills at work increases productivity by 2.5% and output by 1.5%.

— C. Alexander & F. McKenna of TD Bank Financial Group (2007)
Literacy Matters: A call for action

MOVING FORWARD

This strategy represents the next step, as well as the Government of New Brunswick’s commitment to improving literacy and encouraging and supporting lifelong learning outcomes. Literacy and lifelong learning are cornerstones to developing a skilled and ready workforce needed for full economic and social participation as well as for an enhanced quality of life for all families.

This strategy lays out the strategic priority initiatives, across every stage of life, that are needed to improve literacy outcomes and enable New Brunswickers to reach their full potential, both in the workforce and in their communities.

In order to pursue the work done by co-chairs Marilyn Trenholme Counsell and Liane Roy and capitalize on the results of their consultations, the minister responsible for literacy further engaged stakeholders through two round table sessions in mid-February 2017 (Bathurst and Fredericton). The goal of these sessions was to discuss and seek input on proposed

priority initiatives for the comprehensive literacy strategy and on the process leading to the development of an action plan that will be a living document reviewed on an annual basis.

We are grateful to all those who attended the two sessions and who provided us with valuable feedback on the proposed framework and initiatives for the comprehensive literacy strategy. New Brunswick is fortunate to have such passionate partners championing literacy across our province. The feedback validated the recommendations from co-chairs Marilyn Trenholme Counsell and Liane Roy, as well as the initiatives identified herein. A number of common points emerged and will inform our actions moving forward, including the importance of:

- Creating a long-term public relations campaign to promote the importance of literacy, essential skills, and lifelong learning.
- Having sustained funding and commitment to action.
- Reaching out to children, their families and adults who are currently underserved.
- Respecting differences in learning styles based on gender, background and age, as well as the realities of our diverse populations; French in a minority setting, English/French as a second language, First Nations, newcomers, rural, and urban.
- Improving coordination and collaboration among all partners.
- Valuing investments in adult learning, not just in the early and school years.
- Training and coaching teachers, early learning, and adult, educators in evidence-based teaching practices.
- Establishing multiple touch points with children from birth to facilitate the promotion of and access to early childhood and public school programs, services, and resources for families.
- Expanding the definition of literacy to include more than just reading and writing.
- Complementing, and not competing with, existing plans, strategies, and frameworks.
- Having the courage to be innovative, and rethink how the school and adult learning system can be adapted to better support current and future learners.

The priority initiatives in this strategy will be implemented in phases and supported by an annual action plan with clearly defined actions, timelines, pilots and measures. A working group made up of literacy partners, stakeholders, and other

experts will be established to build this action plan so we can begin our journey to achieve our shared goal of creating a strong and literate province.

WHAT IS LITERACY?

The *Power of Literacy* report defines literacy as more than learning to read and write, as traditionally taught in school or through training. Literacy encompasses the many ways that individuals engage with oral and written languages (alone or with others) in various printed or digital forms. It is the ability to use and access knowledge from a range of texts (oral, visual, multimedia, print and non-print) to make informed decisions in a variety of contexts; for instance, technological, financial, civic, food, social, and health. It includes an individual's capacity to interact effectively in all economic and social situations required to be successful in today's (and tomorrow's) society.

Literacy begins, however, with a solid foundation in oral language and reading, which are necessary for successful labour market participation and overall social well-being. These are not only acquired in formal learning environments; they are also gained by application in all types of life experiences. Ensuring strong reading skills at early ages helps individuals make smooth transitions to further learning or the labour market. Therefore, efforts must first and foremost focus on improving reading outcomes early across an individual's lifespan.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO ACHIEVE?

Our vision is that all New Brunswickers have the literacy and essential skills they need to participate fully at school, work, home and in their communities. This can only be accomplished through a co-ordinated and comprehensive approach to literacy development that spans an individual's life from birth to retirement years and empowers everyone to play a role in creating a strong learning environment.

In order to attain this vision all partners including stakeholders and government, must work together in a co-ordinated fashion to allow us to focus and align our efforts with the priorities of the strategy and the action plan. All sectors of society can play a role. Literacy is a shared responsibility of individuals, parents, families, government, employers and community organizations. Today, there is a multitude of literacy programs and resources across government and non-government entities. The purpose of this strategy is not to reinvent the wheel, but to build on our existing strengths and to better coordinate our efforts for the best returns possible.





Our approach must be comprehensive and integrated in order to align resources to support learning and growth throughout a person's life, within their families, as well as in schools, communities and workplaces. Every government department, not just those with specific mandates in literacy, can influence literacy and lifelong learning. We must ensure a harmonious link with other existing and forthcoming strategies, not the least of which include the 10-year education plans, the Economic Growth Plan and the Family Plan. We must celebrate our diversity and build programs and services that reflect our linguistic and cultural communities. We must involve our young and old, anglophone and francophone, rural and urban, First Nations and newcomers.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The strategic priorities have been organized along the key developmental stages in an individual's lifespan as follows:

1. Early childhood (age 0-5)
2. Kindergarten to Grade 2
3. Grade 3 to Grade 12
4. Adult and lifelong learning

As we align our resources along the continuum of learning, we must take into consideration that earlier investments produce greater returns in terms of success for everyone. This is why it is so important to focus our efforts on preventing literacy gaps in early years, instead of attempting remediation later. We must also recognize that when adults do well, families, communities and employers benefit. This requires that we work with whole families as soon as risks are identified so as to intervene and provide support where needed when faced with intergenerational literacy challenges. We are committed to supporting all citizens, regardless of where they are on the continuum.

It should be noted that the priorities related to early childhood and kindergarten to Grade 12 are directly linked to the priority areas outlined in the 10-year education plans. The plans drew heavily from the recommendations of the literacy co-chairs, Marilyn Trenholme Counsell and Liane Roy, as well as the education plan co-chairs, Karen Power and Gino LeBlanc, who in turn conducted extensive consultation with stakeholders in order to formulate their recommendations.

Early childhood (age 0-5)

High quality 0-to-5 programs for disadvantaged children can deliver a 13% return on investment.

— J.L. Garcia, J.J. Heckman, D.E. Leaf & M.J. Prados (2016)
The Life-cycle Benefits of an Influential Early Childhood Program



Language development begins before birth, making parents and families instrumental to literacy success. The first three years of a child's life is the biggest window of opportunity to influence the brain architecture in a way that will create a lifelong foundation for success in school and in life. Having engaged and empowered parents' in their children's learning through daily learning activities such as song, play and talk will result in children that are better equipped to progress to the next phase of the lifelong learning continuum. Pursuing this effort by providing rich learning experiences as children progress through their preschool years will be key. We must create the conditions to support children's development and learning so that every child has a solid foundation on which to build success. This should include early access as well as early risk assessments and intervention.

To this end, we will:

1. Ensure that all preschool age children benefit from rich learning experiences focused on emerging literacy skills, particularly language acquisition and vocabulary development, as these are the building blocks to learning to read and write.
2. Support parents to maximize their children's optimal development by proposing a single-point of access from birth to early childhood and public school services. This would facilitate the promotion of and access to programs, services and resources for families in their communities.
3. Improve access to child care for vulnerable families. Research shows that quality early learning and child care programs have significant social and economic benefits and support the child to reach their full potential.
4. Identify, as early as possible, children who are at risk for developmental delays and living with factors of vulnerability. Addressing risks earlier will provide access to earlier interventions in many programs and services and will reduce the gaps prior to school entry. This will have a significant impact on the learning capacity of these children to be successful in school and in life. The return on investment in the early years has longer term benefit on society.
5. Provide quality programs, services and intervention for children and families according to their individual needs setting the stage for each child's learning pathway to ensure a positive continuum of learning.

Kindergarten to Grade 2

Students who are not successful readers by the end of Grade 2 are most likely to remain frustrated as they move through school.

— K. Stanovich (1986) *Matthew effects in reading: Some consequences of individual differences in the acquisition of literacy*

Kindergarten to Grade 2 years are critical to establishing a culture of confident learners who have mastered foundational literacy skills and developed a love of reading. Grade 3 marks a pivotal point in literacy and learning; a child's ability to move into the transitional phase of reading while in kindergarten to Grade 2 will have a significant effect on their long-term success in school. Transitional reading is the point where children move from learning to read, to reading to learn. Opportunities for children to be exposed to texts, involved in conversations, build vocabulary and learn to read cannot be over-emphasized. This work must be started in homes and communities and continue to develop in schools. Children must be provided rich opportunities to learn to read, and apply this skill to reading to learn as they progress through school. Interventions and an understanding of how to teach reading are needed to ensure this is done.

To this end, we will:

1. Provide learners with quality learning experiences and instruction including opportunities for all students to develop reading, writing and oral communication skills so they can apply them in various learning and life settings.
2. Provide effective, timely and targeted literacy interventions to ensure that the needs of the range of learners are met. Early interventions have the widest and strongest social benefit. They are the most efficient and, most often, have the deepest impact.
3. Explore ways to provide learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day, giving priority to those who are most vulnerable. Opportunities for high-quality, engaging ways to spend afterschool time, can help vulnerable children and youth overcome learning and developmental risk factors.



Grade 3 to Grade 12

Literacy has a large impact on earnings and accounts for about one-third of the estimated return on education. Each additional year of education raises annual earnings by about 8.3%. Of that, about 3.1 percentage points result from the combined influences of education on literacy and, in turn, literacy on earnings.

— Statistics Canada (2001)
Literacy, Numeracy and Labour Market Outcomes in Canada



Between Grade 3 and Grade 12, learners move from learning to read to reading to learn. These years are critical to developing a love of learning in our students. Studies have identified that there is a strong correlation between the level of literacy skills attained and the student's choice of post-secondary education options. Students with weak reading and writing skills are less likely to complete high school, while those with strong skills are more likely to go on to college or university after graduation. If we want more students to attend post-secondary education and the choice to attend is linked to strong reading and writing skills, then the need to produce highly literate students becomes an economic imperative as well as a social one.¹ In addition, in this digital age we must capitalize on innovative forms of interactions and learning that go beyond the traditional methods we have relied on this far. We must build environments that enable the development of critical and creative thinking, as well social and life skills, all of which are required to be successful in life so that no one is left behind.

To this end, we will:

1. Provide learners with quality learning experiences and instruction, including opportunities to develop mastery in reading and writing, as well as critical and creative thinking. Reading and writing are fundamental skills; however, literacy today is more than print. Communication in the digital age demands that learners use, understand and produce texts that combine multiple symbol systems — multi-modal texts (e.g., visual, musical, linguistic).
2. Provide effective, timely and targeted literacy interventions to ensure that the needs of the range of learners are met. If needs go unaddressed, literacy gaps widen and learners are limited in accessing complex materials, making successful interventions more challenging.
3. Explore ways to provide learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day, giving priority to those who are most vulnerable. Opportunities for high-quality, engaging ways to spend afterschool time can help vulnerable children and youth overcome learning and developmental risk factors.
4. Provide support for youth who have dropped out or are at risk of dropping out of school. Dropouts are less likely to find a job and earn a living wage, and more likely to live in poverty and suffer from adverse health outcomes.

¹ N. Dion & V. Maldonado (2013) *Making the Grade? Troubling Trends in Postsecondary Student Literacy*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Adult and lifelong learning

Essential Skills training can deliver 23% returns on investment for employers in the first year after providing training.

— Social Research and Development Council (2014)
UPSKILL: A Credible Test of Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills Training

Employment is key to the economic prosperity of most families, but many adults do not have the literacy skills required to gain employment and/or thrive in the workplace. Adults with literacy challenges must be supported in ways that are personalized to their unique situations. Research shows that learners and potential learners identify many barriers to participation in adult learning. We must work to better understand and remove these barriers. We must improve access to training opportunities to help New Brunswickers gain and maintain employment and take advantage of opportunities that arise in the workplace. Employers have consistently reported the benefits from improved essential skills of employees: increased ability to undertake training; better team performance; improved labour relations; improved quality of

work; increased output; fewer errors; better health and safety records; and better employee retention. These all contribute to greater productivity and flexibility, and ultimately economic competitiveness and success.

To this end, we will:

1. Engage and support learners in adult literacy and essential skills training that advances them toward their individualized employment and learning goals; raise awareness of programs and services, build capacity and improve training delivery.
2. Develop innovative, quality adult literacy and essential skills training to meet the needs of specific labour force priority groups; pilot innovative training options that increase the potential for specific target groups to successfully access and retain employment.
3. Work with employers to develop adult literacy and essential skills training that meet labour market needs; partner in research, identify best practices and develop customized training solutions.



Conditions for success

Successful implementation of this strategy requires that certain conditions be in place within the system to support the learner directly or indirectly and to serve as a catalyst for change. We have identified the following key elements that will be required to enable improved access, delivery and impact of literacy programs and services. These include:

1. Improving co-ordination, collaboration, communication and shared ownership across government departments, other levels of government, early learning centres, schools, post-secondary institutions, employers and community-based organizations. This is critical to facilitate the efficient use of resources and avoid duplication, while maximizing the quality, availability and delivery of programs and services in a cohesive way.
2. Establishing a data and accountability framework to measure return on investment and to better understand literacy rates and the factors that impact them.
3. Providing support and coaching to families to enhance literacy skills at home and at school. Research shows that increasing families' participation in their children's learning and development reaps powerful benefits.
4. Providing training and coaching for early childhood educators, teachers and adult educators in high-yield strategies to ensure they have the skills, expertise and competencies required to teach literacy and to best serve learners' diverse needs. Quality instruction matters more to student achievement than any other aspect of schooling.
5. Exploring ways to strengthen the role of libraries in supporting literacy at the community level. Libraries play a key role in creating literate environments and promoting literacy through outreach services and programming that support the needs and interests of the community.
6. Exploring with universities how bachelors of education programs can better equip teachers in the fundamentals of literacy to develop confident, literate learners.
7. Working to ensure new initiatives are based on research/best practices and piloted prior to full rollout. This will increase the likelihood of success in terms of program sustainability and achievement of program outcomes.



CONCLUSION

Government must play a leadership role in the creation of conditions for economic and social success. Improving literacy outcomes through educational investment does not simply improve our economy; it creates a healthier, happier and more secure future for New Brunswickers.

The vital role that literacy plays in the quality of life for New Brunswickers is clear. *Unleashing the power of literacy: New Brunswick's Comprehensive Literacy Strategy* considers the complexity of literacy challenges and goes beyond the traditional classroom and standardized assessments measuring a discrete skill.

This strategy, focused on key developmental stages in an individual's lifespan, will allow us to pursue our vision that all New Brunswickers have the literacy and essential skills they need to participate fully at school, work, at home and in their communities. To get there we will need to pursue our efforts in a sustained and coordinated manner through the years to come.

Finally, we look forward to continuing to engage with literacy partners, stakeholders and other experts to build and deliver on an action plan to create a better, healthier, and stronger New Brunswick. Together, we can achieve our shared goal to create a strong and literate province.