British Columbia’s Literacy Action Plan

Working Together for Literacy
Literacy has the power to change people’s lives, forever, and for the better. That’s because literacy is more than reading and writing, more than basic math, and more than the ability to extract information from charts and graphs.

Literacy is the ability to express thoughts, feelings and ideas. It’s the opportunity to pursue personal dreams. It leads to fulfillment, confidence and security. And it allows people to participate in community life.

In fact, literacy is a good measure of the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and regions alike. And while British Columbia is a highly literate place, from reading to broader definitions of literacy, there’s room for improvement.

It’s time for ReadNow BC, an exciting new action plan.
The Challenge and the Opportunity

One in four students start kindergarten without the skills needed to succeed. That’s nearly 9,000 students each and every year.

Low literacy can follow these students throughout their lives, lowering their chances of graduating and finding a fulfilling job. Currently more than 11,000 students a year do not graduate.

This only adds to the larger problem: over one million adult British Columbians do not have the skills necessary to read a newspaper, understand a bus schedule, or fill out a job application.

These individuals and others, including many Aboriginal people, need more support, and need it now. Every hour counts. Think again about the 9,000 students who start kindergarten without the skills needed to succeed — that’s the equivalent of one an hour, every hour, all year long. Every hour is an opportunity to help someone move away from low literacy, and closer to his or her dreams.

But this challenge, and ReadNow BC, requires everyone to work together. Get involved, or better connected, and make a big difference in the lives of local people.

ReadNow BC recognizes the role schools play in communities and the many ways that communities can work with schools.
Communities are Where it All Happens

When it comes to improving literacy levels, government cannot act alone. That’s because people live, work, volunteer and raise families in their communities. When people need help improving their reading and literacy skills, and their lives, they’re going to go to a college, their employer, a library, local literacy organization, or school. Communities are also in the best position to recognize and reach out to those less likely to ask for help.

Further improvements in literacy must be community driven because each and every community in B.C. is unique with a unique set of needs. That’s good. The only traits communities must have in common are people with a passion for literacy, a community-minded school district, and community literacy organizations ready to work together to provide local families with a continuous spectrum of service. It’s time to prove that B.C. has what it takes, community by community.
Pulling Together for Literacy

There are many different reasons for low literacy, and many different people who struggle, young and old. Across B.C., community literacy organizations are doing great work, reaching out to a lot of these individuals.

But few organizations acting alone can know the real scope of low literacy in their community. Who is at risk, and who is struggling silently? What resources are available, and where are the gaps?

Further cooperation will give these learners options and a network of support. At the same time, further cooperation will prove that people at all levels of literacy benefit from getting involved, whether to give the gift of literacy to others or to further improve their own reading and literacy skills.

Many communities throughout the province are already participating in community literacy planning. Those that aren’t should start now. Call the Ministry of Education, its partners, including Literacy Now and Literacy BC, and the nearest school district. Talk with interested people at colleges, community services, libraries, early childhood programs, and other places. Help shape a vision, set goals, and make a plan.
The Role of School Districts

Community literacy organizations have a powerful new ally: their school district.

School districts have taken on the challenge of helping communities assess and build local literacy among students and the larger population.

Acting as a coordinator, school districts will reflect on the community’s literacy levels, set goals in a district literacy plan, and help community literacy organizations and other stakeholders band together to offer people a full and seamless array of services.

Expect school districts to develop working relationships within the community. While this degree of cooperation may feel overwhelming at first, many areas are finding success, and the potential for positive change is great.

The Province of British Columbia is supporting school districts as they work in partnership with their communities to create district literacy plans.

Literacy is everyone’s responsibility, and, working together, literacy is within everyone’s reach. Connect with the nearest school district today.
This Government’s Vision

The new role of B.C. school districts stems from the Province of British Columbia’s ongoing commitment to literacy and its long-term vision: making B.C. the best-educated and most literate jurisdiction in North America.

It’s the same vision that inspired the Province’s literacy action plan, ReadNow BC, which aims to raise awareness about literacy and increase access to literacy programs and resources throughout British Columbia.

The Province consulted experts and stakeholders and set four overall goals:

- increasing the number of children entering school ready to succeed;
- increasing the number of children in school who read successfully;
- increasing the number of adults with the reading and literacy skills needed to function in everyday life and succeed in the workplace; and,
- increasing the number of Aboriginal people who read successfully.

The plan is at once targeted and inclusive. After all, all British Columbians deserve the opportunity to improve their reading and writing skills, and their lives.

Learn more, get connected, and make an even bigger contribution.
The easiest way to reduce low literacy is to prevent it, making sure children get the encouragement and exposure they need to begin a lifelong love of reading.

Together, the Province, school districts, libraries, and community organizations are expanding literacy programs such as StrongStart BC early learning centres, the Ready, Set, Learn kindergarten readiness program, and Literacy, Education, Activity and Play (LEAP) BC. School districts and communities are collaborating further on other innovative and effective early learning and family literacy programs.

Children, families and entire communities across B.C. are already benefiting from these programs and partnerships that coordinate early learning efforts. There’s more work ahead, but the direction is clear. Contact the nearest school district to join forces with other community literacy organizations.
B.C. students have been ranked on international tests as some of the most literate in the world. This is proof that B.C. schools are on the right track.

But one in five B.C. students still has difficulty reading and many don’t graduate. That needs to improve, and schools are responding. With the help of record-high funding, including provincial literacy innovation grants, schools are successfully targeting students with literacy challenges.

The problem is that many students with literacy challenges come from families that struggle with reading. To really make change for these young people, it’s necessary to reach out to those families. That takes the coordinated resources and support of the school district, community literacy organizations, and larger community. Build a strong partnership today; enjoy a strong community tomorrow.
Adult Learners

Adults with strong reading skills tend to have more self confidence, more opportunities, and a greater sense of belonging in their communities. When people are free to pursue their dreams and succeed, everyone benefits: the individual, their family, their community, and the province. That’s why the Province recently introduced ReadNow BC’s Adult Opportunities Strategy making all adult basic education tuition free.

That is a big step forward, but adult learners need a whole network of support in their communities, and every community is different. Places with large or growing construction and industrial sectors may decide to focus on workplace literacy, challenging business and industry to improve employee self confidence, safety, and productivity. Those with large or growing populations of landed immigrants and new Canadians may choose to focus on English-as-a-second-language programs to help these much-needed individuals move into the skilled jobs that will best build on B.C.’s booming economy.

Ask, what services does this community offer, and are there overlaps, gaps, or ways to improve? If there is, there’s likely also a range of potential partners ready to work together to make positive change. Make those connections today.

B.C. will see more than one million jobs open by 2020. With only 650,000 young people in the school system, B.C. employers will need to draw on immigrants to address skill shortages.
Aboriginal People, Literacy and Learning

Aboriginal learners with strong reading skills are more likely to succeed in school, in other learning opportunities, and in the workplace. The confidence that comes with improved literacy skills can also help Aboriginal learners express themselves, building on the rich traditions of their people.

The Province is working toward completing Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements in all 60 B.C. school districts. These agreements between the Province, school district, and Aboriginal community, bring Aboriginal elders, culture and teaching practices into the classroom to engage Aboriginal students.

The success of these agreements, and others, proves that it’s time for everyone — Aboriginal groups, school districts, post-secondary institutions, community literacy organizations, and others — to work together. Aboriginal people are leading the way, from partnerships with government and school districts to new cooperative efforts among various Aboriginal organizations. Get involved. It’s time.
Learners, community literacy organizations, and others wanting more information should call:

1 888 READ234  (1 888 732-3234)

This toll-free literacy hotline provides British Columbians with details on how to access literacy programs and services.

Translation services are available in Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Farsi, French, Punjabi, Spanish, Vietnamese, and more.

The Province has also launched a ReadNow BC website:

www.readnowbc.ca

This interactive website includes audio to help guide people with low literacy levels.

Find information on each of the four groups served by ReadNow BC: children entering school, students, adults and Aboriginal people.

Or follow the link to a database of literacy programs and services available throughout B.C., community by community.