

The Power of Literacy

Moving towards New Brunswick's Comprehensive Literacy Strategy

Marilyn Trenholme Counsell and Liane Roy

co-chairs



June 2016

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Message from Premier Brian Gallant



Literacy is the cornerstone to developing a skilled workforce and to offering a good quality of life for all. In New Brunswick, we know that a commitment to literacy and lifelong learning will bolster the economy and enhance social well-being for our citizens.

Thank you to the countless New Brunswickers who are dedicated to improving our literacy outlook.

The Power of Literacy – Moving towards New Brunswick's Comprehensive Literacy Strategy is informed by stakeholders, literacy champions, employers and government representatives. Together, they developed recommendations that will help New Brunswickers reach their potential in the workforce and thrive in their communities.

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. Thank you to everyone who shared these stories, as they are the key to the development of a meaningful strategy.

Literacy education leads to transformative changes for many individuals and serves as a stepping stone to help New Brunswick families throughout their lives. It is essential that we equip New Brunswickers with the skills they need to gain and retain employment in the new economy.

Education is the best investment we can make to ensure long-term economic growth; importantly, it is also the greatest social equalizer. This is why we are investing more in education than ever before in the history of the province.

Thank you to the strategy co-chairs and the numerous literacy partners involved in making this report a reality.

Government must create the conditions for economic and social success. Improving literacy rates through educational investment does not simply improve our economy; it creates a healthier, happier and more secure future for New Brunswickers. This report is a first step in creating that future.

A blue ink signature of Brian Gallant, written in a cursive style.

Honourable Brian Gallant
Premier

Message from the co-chairs

We accepted to be part of the development of a comprehensive literacy strategy for our province with humility and gratitude.

We have been inspired and challenged by the many people who spoke with us and sent their ideas. Throughout this process, we were supported by literacy specialists from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour.

We trust that this report will ignite a province-wide conversation and concrete, coordinated action on literacy, essential skills and lifelong learning. Our children, youth and adults are looking to all of us to help them reach their potential in learning and in life. We believe it is possible if we join together to unleash the power of literacy. Our goal should be a learning-rich environment in every home, school, workplace and community in New Brunswick. We must instill confidence by proving that this province is one of the best in Canada on any literacy scale.

With appreciation and optimism,



Marilyn Trenholme Counsell and Liane Roy

Overview

Literacy is the most important building block as we chart our course in a knowledge-based economy. To support job creation, increase productivity and combat poverty, we need a major focus on literacy (Premier Brian Gallant, 2015)¹.

Recognizing that New Brunswick is facing significant literacy challenges, Premier Gallant established the New Brunswick Literacy Secretariat in March 2015. The role of the secretariat was to engage stakeholders, individuals, employers and government representatives in the development of a comprehensive literacy report. The report is comprehensive in that it lays out a framework for literacy across the lifespan; it is also innovative given that literacy strategies inclusive of all ages are not common. This type of report builds on emerging best practices.

The secretariat developed this report in the hope that all New Brunswickers will be able to participate fully in school, at work, at home and in their communities. Building on the excellent work of past initiatives, such as *Learning Everybody's Project*, the secretariat reviewed research and best practices at the provincial, national and international levels. It also reviewed literacy strategies in New Brunswick during the last 10 years. It received written submissions from the public and held strategic individual consultations throughout the province.

Introduction

Literacy means 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. Society must create rich communication and learning opportunities for each individual to reach his or her potential.

Literacy plays an evolving, yet critical role, across the lifespan and within different contexts of life (i.e., home, work, school and community). The economic and social costs of low literacy skills affect everyone regardless of their individual skills. Given the complexity of the problem, it will take more than government to move literacy markers forward.

There is a tremendous amount of economic potential within the people and the province. We must close the skills gap by strengthening the workforce. Building a skilled workforce directly ties to education and literacy. A Statistics Canada study demonstrated that an increase of one per cent in literacy skills at work would increase productivity by 2.5 per cent and output by 1.5 per cent².

The 2007 report, *Literacy Matters: A Call for Action*, championed the need to improve literacy in Canada by highlighting the key role that literacy plays in the economy. This report linked literacy to economic factors such as employment rates, personal income, productivity and structural changes in the economy.

Equally as serious as these economic factors is the social cost of low literacy. Social costs include:

- lessened social, economic and cultural opportunities for individuals;
- remedial cost of learning programs; and

¹ Premier Brian Gallant (March 2015) Public announcement of the New Brunswick literacy strategy.

² Alexander, C. & McKenna, F. of TD Bank Financial Group (2007) *Literacy Matters: A call for action*.

- inter-generational costs, as low literacy skills have been shown to be passed on from parents to their children ³.

From an international perspective, Finland is often looked to as a leader in literacy. Much of its phenomenal achievement in education is attributed to excellent teachers in literacy, science and math. A 2010 Statistics Finland report (Väljörvi and Sahlberg)⁴ identified it as the leading Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) country in educational attainment:

- more than 98 per cent of children attend pre-school classes;
- 99 per cent complete compulsory basic education; and
- 94 per cent of those who start the academic stream of upper secondary school and 90 per cent of those who start the vocational stream of upper secondary school go on to graduate.

By comparison, Canada demonstrated the same level of performance in reading as Finland on the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA, an international, standardized assessment of 15-year-olds). Canada was also well above the OECD average in reading.

New Brunswick scored below the Canadian average on PISA. British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario scored above the national average. The difference in average test scores between New Brunswick and all other provinces was not considered statistically significant. Despite the average scores, there is room to improve and a need to provide youth, as with their counterparts in other jurisdictions, with competitive skills.

Another international assessment of literacy is the 2013 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competences (PIAAC). PIAAC was a standardized assessment of adult (16 to 65 years old) use of reading skills, numeracy skills and problem-solving in technology-rich environments. This study demonstrated that Canada performs at the OECD average. The average reading level for adults in New Brunswick is the same as the national average – Level 2 (about six test points different). Nonetheless, New Brunswick has a significant opportunity to improve literacy skills.

Schools focus on literacy across the curriculum. Teaching reading and writing is not done only in language class; social studies, health, science and math also support literacy skill development. New Brunswick spends about \$1.1 billion on public education each year. Of this, \$76 million is spent on early childhood programs and services, and more than \$4.2 million is for the sole purpose of helping children and youth read and write better. Another \$11 million is used to help adults for the same reason. Early childhood literacy depends on the engagement of families and care-providers. About \$9 million is provided annually to community-based organizations working directly with families.

The progress in literacy measured by provincial assessments does not correspond with international assessments. With the investment of considerable resources in literacy during the past 10 years, New Brunswick has achieved as much as a 20-per-cent improvement on provincial assessments. Yet, international surveys of 15-year-olds and adults do not reflect the same rate of advancement. This suggests the challenges with increasing literacy among youth will require supports beyond the school system and also include the home and community.

³ Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network (February 2008). *Canada's Hidden Deficit: The Social Cost of Low Literacy Skills*.

⁴ Sahlberg, P. (September 2010) *The Secret to Finland's Success: Educating Teachers*. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education, Research Brief.

A further challenge, specific to adult literacy, is with PIAAC. Its predecessor, the 2003 International Assessment of Adult Literacy Skills (IAALS), identified Level 3 as a desired level of proficiency. PIAAC did not identify any desired level of proficiency and, in fact, while using numbered levels, follows a different scale. This has created significant confusion about the dimensions of the challenges with adult literacy. Stakeholders identified many examples, aside from standardized assessments, of how literacy continues to be a challenge for certain persons.

The vital role that literacy plays in the quality of life of New Brunswickers is clear. Increasing understanding of the complexity of the problem is more than that captured through standardized assessments. It is captured in the stories of unrealized potential, barriers to employment or business growth and struggles to overcome poverty. These stories were widely shared through the public submissions and individual consultations.

Vision

Literacy must be a priority as New Brunswick charts its course toward greater prosperity and greater fulfilment for its residents.

This will require a commitment to creating opportunities to engage in literacy-rich environments across the lifespan. Each child should be ready and eager to learn before kindergarten. Every student should receive the support and encouragement needed to attain the appropriate level of literacy. No one should graduate without meeting his or her expected literacy achievement. Every adult should have opportunities to engage in learning through a variety of ways.

Learning throughout the lifespan and having a passion for literacy can be a reality if every home, school, community and workplace believes in literacy. This will require strong leadership, coordination, communication, innovation and ongoing evaluation. Parents, caregivers and teachers at each level and all professionals who intervene throughout the early years in schools and adult programs must collaborate in the best interest of each child, youth and adult.

Similarly, strong communities can make an enormous difference in the well-being of their residents. Literacy improves when a community develops an environment rich in family-centred recreation and cultural events. Higher literacy achievement means better health, greater opportunities, an improved economy and enriched lives.

Highlights and recommendations

The following sections highlight information shared through the consultation process and provide recommendations for moving literacy markers forward. As part of a comprehensive literacy report, the highlights and recommendations are categorized as follows:

- early childhood;
- kindergarten to Grade 2;
- Grade 3 to Grade 12;
- adult and lifelong learning;
- leadership, coordination and communication;
- families and community; and
- pilot projects.

Early childhood (zero to four years old)

The family home is the cradle of learning. Literacy and language development begin at birth; parents are the first and most important educators. The province must do more to empower them in this great responsibility. Various groups have suggested approaches to increase parents' engagement and empowerment in their children's learning. The underlying theme was that families should be encouraged to sing, play and talk every day to children younger than five years old.

As part of an individual consultation for this report, Dr. Douglas Willms of the Learning Bar (University of New Brunswick) described how, from conception to the first year of life, brain development is rapid, extensive and heavily influenced by the environment. Dr. Willms described synapse formation and neuron pruning (often referred to as "sculpting" or "wiring" of the brain) as a means to emphasize the importance of this stage of development for literacy.

Speech-language pathologists from around the province met with the secretariat. They shared reports from *The Association of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists* that reinforced the message that the ages from zero to three are critical for the long-term potential of an individual. They highlighted that 50 to 60 per cent of children entering school with a low level of language skills will later have difficulties in school⁵.

More must be done to involve all health-care professionals serving expecting parents/families as well as parents/caregivers of infants to understand and to highlight the importance of these years



⁵ Tomlin (2005) Association des orthophonistes et des audiologistes du Nouveau-Brunswick.

in a child's development. As a means to provide support and continuity of care, a unique identifier for each child should be provided to track evaluations, interventions and follow-up from birth, through the formal school years and on to post-secondary and/or adult education.

There are excellent resources in New Brunswick to support these needs. The province-wide program, Born to Read/Le goût de lire, provides books, in English or French or reflective of First Nations culture, to every family with a newborn. Reading to babies from birth is critically important. It provides the sensory stimulation to different parts of the brain to enable the development necessary for language and literacy. Additionally, Talk with me/Parle-moi is the early language development program that offers free information and training to parents, community partners and the public. The program helps detect and prevent communication and learning difficulties for all children from birth to age five.

A champion of literacy, Margaret McCain, former lieutenant-governor of New Brunswick, wrote in her submission:

Reducing academic gaps and the resulting long term social inequities are dependent on improving the competencies of children before they start school. These competencies include language skills, cognitive abilities and the ability to interact with others. Assessments of kindergarten-aged children indicate one in four is vulnerable in at least one of the above named areas of development. These differences persist and often increase during the child's school years. The home environment has the strongest effect on children's competencies prior to school entry. Factors, including parent education, the health of family members and family income all influence child outcomes. The strongest outside-the-home influencers are early education and the quality of early school. Quality early education has been found to amplify benefits for all children and can help to mitigate the detrimental effects of adverse home environments on school readiness.

Access to quality childcare is one means of providing children with rich learning experiences. The system has taken significant strides to enhance these environments through the implementation of the *New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework* and the *Curriculum éducatif – Services de garde francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick*. All early childhood centres are inspected annually and regularly monitored for their use of the curriculum. Pilot projects for those working in childcare centres, providing 30-hour online curriculum training, are underway in both sectors. Full implementation of this online curriculum training is anticipated to be complete in early 2016-2017.

It is clear that early childhood evaluations, interventions and follow-up in the pre-school years must be a priority. Many professionals – including Public Health nurses, social workers and speech language therapists – are undertaking early identification of vulnerable children. Recently in recognition of this priority, through the 18-month Public Health assessment clinics, greater attention has been placed on language development. The development of legislation for the mandatory participation of every child in the 18-month assessment is recommended.

Recommendations:

- 1) Establish a common goal with literacy stakeholders to share a united message of “sing, play, talk and read” every day to children younger than five.
- 2) Collaborate with the two health regional authorities (RHAs) to provide information and training to ensure that all medical-care providers of expecting mothers highlight the importance of literacy and learning starts at birth.
- 3) Maintain an education record, from birth, through the formal school years and on to post-secondary and/or adult education, that enhances the provision of support and continuity of care through literacy interventions.
- 4) Continue to offer all newborns, before leaving the hospital, a set of books, reflective of their linguistic culture (i.e., Aboriginal, English, French or a combination). This would be achieved through established organizations, Born to Read/Le gout de lire.
- 5) Develop legislation for the mandatory participation of every child in the 18-month assessment.
- 6) Increase supports for speech/language development with a primary focus on children up to three years old.
- 7) Improve access to childcare programs for vulnerable families by exploring systemic gaps within the current Day Care Assistance Program (also referred to as childcare subsidy).

Kindergarten to Grade 2

Grade 3 marks a pivotal point in literacy and learning. A child's ability to move into transitional reading will have a significant affect on his or her experiences with learning. Transitional reading is the point where children move from learning to read, to reading to learn.

Prior to entering kindergarten, Anglophone, Francophone and Aboriginal children are evaluated using the Early Years Evaluation – Direct Assessment (EYE-DA). It determines each child's developmental readiness for school. This information is provided to teachers and parents and helps with early detection of learning needs.

Community organizations also play a vital role in the transition of children from early childhood resources to school-based resources. Before their children enter kindergarten, parents are encouraged to participate in Welcome to Kindergarten/Bienvenue à la maternelle sessions to engage the family in the child's



school experience. This program partners with the vision to increase literacy skills through The Learning Partnership, a national charitable organization supporting, promoting and advancing publicly funded education in Canada. This partner in literacy is championing the cause with a new slogan (September 2015) of *Read! Play! Sing! Talk!*

Community-based organizations, members of the school systems and government have contributed to many strong initiatives in New Brunswick. Future success must build on current efforts to ensure effective research-based practices; a balanced approach to literacy; professional learning for staff; and resources to develop fundamental skills and promote a love of reading with young learners. It is important that work continues to ensure strong connections between the literacy practices in early learning and the early years of school.

New Brunswick should re-emphasize the priority on learning to read during the first three years of school (K-2). There should be appropriate follow-up intervention if a child does not meet milestones by the end of Grade 2. Through consultations and submissions to the secretariat, several recommendations of how the pending 10 year Education Plan may prioritize learning in kindergarten to Grade 2 were suggested and are included as recommended linkages from this report. For example, one resource available to schools is the Elementary Literacy Friends/Communautés littératie enfants francophones (ELF/CLEF) mentoring and tutoring program for Grade 2 students failing to reach their expected outcomes in literacy and language (the program will be available province-wide by 2017). Some Francophone communities support Grade 2 children through the Lire et faire lire Acadie, a program that promotes a love of reading through community volunteers.

Recommendations:

- 8) Schools, parents, communities and agencies must work together to help children as early as possible to develop the literacy skills they will need to succeed in the classroom. Children must be given every opportunity within and beyond the school day to learn to read. Examples include: using social media; sharing common messages; and engaging in community events.**
- 9) Ensure families are provided with some practical ideas to help them support stronger literacy skills with their child/youth at each grade.**
- 10) Establish annual measures of literacy achievement, which support increases in performance, in every New Brunswick school.**
- 11) The pending 10 year Education Plan should strongly emphasize language development from kindergarten to Grade 2.**
- 12) This plan should explore options to provide additional learning opportunities, beyond the regular school day, for those children in K-2 who are most vulnerable.**
- 13) This plan should create a process to identify and intervene with students showing challenges with learning to read.**
- 14) The provincial government should name a literacy champion to support this plan.**

Grade 3 to Grade 12

Following the K-2 experience where children are “learning to read,” we must support them in reading to learn. Further attention must also be paid to encourage literacy-rich environments from Grade 3 to Grade 12 to maintain reading skills and reading practices. Throughout the consultation process, several stakeholders commented on the need to continue focusing on literacy after Grade 2. It appears as though there is a gap in the programs and services within the education systems and among non-government organizations providing literacy support in these grades.

New Brunswick is proud of its excellent teachers. Their sharing of best practices and ongoing professional development are outstanding. The provincial government should coordinate the requirement of having at least one course on teaching the mechanics of literacy at the post-secondary level. Standardization of course content should be examined across post-secondary programs in education.

Dr. Ann Sherman, dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, encouraged both educational sectors to continue to be progressive in their work with teacher development. Through strategic consultation with Dr. Sherman and her colleagues, she proposed the education system review its understanding of literacy and formative assessments. She also suggested that literacy knowledge be broadened beyond text-based literacies, practices and theories. This review would be to better reflect and enhance multi-modalities and creative digital literacies. Dr. Sherman encouraged a focus on engaging students in the production of literacy instead of consumption alone: the creation of books, stories, films, documentaries, art pieces, structures and mathematical equations of their own design. She spoke about the importance of engaging with Aboriginal students and to continue to contextualize curricula to create a deeper life context of Aboriginal communities.

Dr. Marianne Cormier, dean of the Faculté des sciences de l'éducation at the Université de Moncton, proposed to integrate language strategies across subject areas. As part of her participation in the strategic consultation, Dr. Cormier emphasized that motivation to read and the development of a reading culture are of key importance in literacy skill development and that school libraries play a significant role in supporting this.

Schools and post-secondary education institutions must work closely to support students as they leave high school. Through individual consultations and written submissions, representatives from the colleges and universities identified that the challenges being experienced by youth are with other essential skills linked with literacy (namely perseverance/continuous learning).

Throughout the secondary and post-secondary years, enhanced ability for identification of and intervention for learning disabilities should be supported. Equally as important, is for there to be programs with a diversity of challenging literacy activities/resources available for all exceptional students across the spectrum of learning.



Recommendations:

- 15) Ensure families receive practical ideas to help them support stronger literacy skills with their child/youth at each grade.
- 16) Provide families ongoing coaching and support related to enhancing literacy skills at home.
- 17) Encourage all teachers to continue to incorporate creative digital literacies and multi-modalities into learning and to increase students' production of literacy throughout the secondary school years.
- 18) Provide incentives to post-secondary students who support literacy by reading to children.
- 19) As part of the pending 10 year Education Plan, create a process to identify children and youth struggling with reading beyond Grade 2 and establish targeted interventions to close gaps.
- 20) As part of the plan, explore options to provide learning opportunities between 3 p.m. and 5 p.m. that reflect the unique needs of each community, giving priority to those children who are most vulnerable. These opportunities should promote the valuable programs and resources available through public libraries, family enrichment centres and non-government organizations.
- 21) As part of the plan, strengthen linkages for youth who drop out of (or who are at significant risk of leaving) high school and adult learning opportunities.
- 22) Pre-service teachers: As part of the plan, universities should require all students enrolled in a bachelor of education program to complete at least one course in literacy instruction, including the fundamentals of reading.
- 23) The plan should include as part of its professional development priorities ongoing training, coaching and support related to teaching and developing literacy.

Adult education and lifelong learning

New Brunswick has embraced its responsibility to offer educational opportunities to all adults who experience challenges with literacy. The province has made improvements but must do more.

Adult education and lifelong learning engage individuals in a range of life stages, from a variety of backgrounds and with a diverse list of reasons for participating in programs and services. Developing additional learning pathways in a format that is easily used and understood by adult learners and referral agents would assist in promoting and linking adult learners with opportunities. Tools that present learning pathways would facilitate linkages for adult learners between literacy and essential skills programs.



Establishing adult literacy programs with the flexibility and relevance desired by the target population is a significant challenge. It is a challenge confirmed by participation rates in existing programs in the province and other jurisdictions.

A study by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour in 2012 identified several barriers to client participation related to financial situations, transportation, family responsibilities, childcare issues and program schedules. Through the consultation process, it was suggested that a network of learner-support coaches work with clients from intake to completion to provide a positive, relatable support. Additionally, increased capacity of the Community Adult Learning Network (CALNet) would support more adult learners engaging in programming.

Too few employers are engaged in continuous learning programs or workplace training. Part of the reason is a continuing lack of awareness among employers and employees about the opportunities available. It is recommended to increase delivery of Workplace Essential Skills (WES) training to employed adult learners and to continue to increase awareness of other workplace training programs to employers. Employers should be consulted and encouraged to participate in workplace essentials skills programs; to create learning and literacy environments in the workplace; and to advance literacy in their communities.

A common theme from the consultations was that the provincial government needs to explore alternative adult literacy programs and to continue to build programs based on the principles of adult learning (i.e., learner-centred, contextualized, etc.). Stakeholders are encouraging consideration of the following:

- programs that embed literacy in subject matter that appeals to adult learners (e.g., healthy living or financial literacy);
- programs that use digital technologies or offer online modalities (as appropriate for the target group); and
- programs that are designed for newcomers to New Brunswick who have literacy challenges.

Recommendations:

- 24) Develop a tool that describes learning pathways in a format that is easily understood by adult learners and referral agents to assist them in promoting and linking opportunities for continuous learning.
- 25) Establish a network of learner-support coaches to work with adult literacy clients from intake to the completion of their intervention.
- 26) Enhance the capacity of community-based adult learning organizations.
- 27) Increase outreach to employers and workers to underscore the importance of literacy at work and its relationship to the priorities of business such as: increased productivity, workplace health and safety, and/or enhanced customer service.
- 28) Increase delivery of Workplace Essential Skills (WES) training to employed and unemployed adult learners.
- 29) Establish innovative learning opportunities for adult learners by embedding literacy training within programs that have greater relevance to the public (e.g., Nutrition Class, Financial Management, Helping with Your Child's Homework).
- 30) Explore alternative delivery methods for adult literacy classes using digital technologies and/or online modalities (as appropriate for the target group).
- 31) Explore partnerships with post-secondary institutions to identify, support and monitor outcomes of students experiencing difficulties with literacy as a means to recruit, retain and increase graduation rates.

Leadership, coordination and communication

As noted previously, despite numerous strengths and gains in the coordination of literacy services, there is still significant work to do at the provincial and community levels. Stakeholders identified that greater coordination would align goals/direction, raise awareness and communication and avoid some duplication. One key example is with respect to communication of crucial literacy messages to ensure a common understanding and to de-stigmatize the need for support.

A cross-departmental unit with strong leadership based on proven experience in literacy and lifelong learning should be established within one of the departments but with a clear mandate that is interdepartmental and involves external stakeholders. This unit must represent Anglophones, Francophones and Aboriginals. It would provide a mechanism for inter-sectorial coordination to avoid gaps and duplication.

Community literacy champions should be identified. These carefully selected persons would serve on a voluntary basis for one to two years under the unit. They would identify literacy strengths and weaknesses in their communities and promote the goals of this report.

School leadership

Recognition should be given to exemplary leadership, especially in languages and literacy. Principals should be challenged to share their experiences and successes with their counterparts and teachers in other schools. Exemplary teachers should continue to engage parents in their children's learning to the fullest extent possible. A high value should be placed on literacy-rich environments, inside and outside the classroom, for teachers, students and parents.

Recommendations:

- 32) Establish a unit that functions across departments within the provincial government. The role of the unit is to facilitate communication; coordinate activities at a provincial level in collaboration with the regions; ensure monitoring and evaluation of activities; provide leadership; and build capacities within the literacy system across the lifespan. It should consist of representatives, with expertise in literacy, from the Anglophone, Francophone and Aboriginal communities.
- 33) Establish a community literacy developer within each library region to serve as the coordinator of literacy at the community level (i.e., serves as the linkage with the unit and the community).

Families and community

It is clear that government, communities, families and individuals have a shared responsibility to increase literacy skills, regardless of a person's age. Research and best practices bear this out. So, too, do reports such as the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE), issued by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Previous literacy strategies as well as the comments received during the secretariat's consultations said likewise.

New Brunswick has a wealth of community programs, groups and business organizations with expertise and an investment in literacy. There is a consistent message from stakeholders at all levels about the need to improve communication and coordination of the system. Some communities have already successfully adopted new approaches to improve literacy and lifelong learning. Outstanding examples are Literacy Greater Moncton, Achieve Literacy Greater Saint John and Centre de bénévolat de la Péninsule acadienne inc.

Parents and all caregivers of pre-school children benefit when their community provides strengths-based support, but they need to be made aware of the availability and the value of these programs. These resources should be available not only to the most vulnerable; all families can be strengthened in a community that creates learning and literacy-rich environments. Family



resource centres and similar community organizations provide valuable early childhood programs and parent support. They represent an important link in community services related to literacy and learning. Likewise, the Community Adult Learning Network provides learning opportunities for parents, potential future parents and other adults who serve as caregivers and role models to children and other adults in the community.

Libraries represent another community asset for literacy. They are well-positioned to support literacy and lifelong learning programming for all ages at the community level. Numerous consultations highlighted the fact that a greater awareness is needed of the many valuable literacy related programs that are already available in public libraries (e.g., digital services, programs for pre-school children and families). It is recommended that library hours be expanded to increase accessibility. Library staffs play a significant leadership role in promoting and coordinating literacy in their communities.

Participation in affordable festivals, concerts, sports events and art performances contribute greatly to learning. There are many literacy-related events throughout New Brunswick. Some examples are the Frye Festival; the Moncton Wild Cats' *Reading is Wild/Mordus de la lecture*; the *Imagination Library* supported by Rotary Clubs; les Caisses Populaires' *Lire, écrire et découvrir*; the Fredericton Calithumpians summer theatre; the *Art sur roue* projects; and the *Salon du livre* in Caraquet, Dieppe and Edmundston.

Municipal governments could play a greater role in providing leadership, coordination and support for literacy, involving stakeholders from the social, economic, cultural, political and educational sectors.

As human beings, our basic needs (e.g., food/drink, shelter, safety/security) must be met first before we can engage our need to learn things such as reading.

– Inspired by *Overcoming Poverty Together – The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan*, Léo-Paul Pinet, president of the Centre de bénévolat de la Péninsule Acadienne inc.

The Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, identified through the consultation process, four pillars of a participation approach to community development:

- the public;
- government;
- the private sector; and
- community organizations.

Mr. Pinet also reinforced the necessity of linking this literacy report with the poverty reduction strategy, to which 2,500 persons participated in 2009.

The multitude of literacy programs and resources, both government and non-government, need to be identified on a community, regional and province-wide basis. Equally, an assessment of the literacy needs and realities at the regional and community levels is necessary to plan proper interventions, coordinate them and evaluate them properly. This mapping should include the targeted population for each service/program and tools needed to address individual and community needs appropriately. Asset mapping will help to identify gaps in services as well duplication and overlapping.

Recommendations:

- 34) Coordinate a province-wide meeting of stakeholders where providers of formal, non-formal and informal learning opportunities present their role, activities and outcomes that support literacy. The aim is to support stakeholders working together toward a common vision that focuses and complements best practices.
- 35) Clarify interpretation of statistics on literacy rates in New Brunswick and increase the balance of positive messaging by highlighting the positive impacts of literacy efforts by stakeholders.
- 36) Through the leadership of a cross-departmental unit and community literacy developers, identify literacy champions to serve as leaders and advocates of public engagement in lifelong and life-wide learning. These champions would cross the various levels of stakeholders (e.g., school leaders, municipalities, employers, community organizations and individuals). Identification of literacy champions would be done by building on existing literacy champion awards (e.g., Council of the Federation, Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick awards and Conseil pour le développement de l'alphabétisme et des compétences des adultes du Nouveau-Brunswick), the vision of "Learning Everybody's Project" and the Andy Scott Awards.
- 37) Develop a provincial asset map of literacy programs, services, tools and supports to better understand strengths, gaps and overlap. The asset map will document both resources earmarked specifically for literacy and resources that, although not directly targeted for literacy, clearly support the need (e.g., Public Health book hand-outs to young children).

Pilot projects

The cross-departmental unit should consider a pilot approach to implementing new initiatives. Each pilot should be based on research/best practices and emphasize monitoring and evaluation. Projects will take place in various regions, be inclusive of both official languages and include a First Nations community.

Possible pilot projects

- Extending the school experience. Languages, literacy and learning are acquired in many ways beyond the traditional classroom – music and the arts, play and sports, libraries, debating, story-telling and writing, financial transactions, volunteering and mentoring, to mention a few possibilities for children and youth. Sistema NB is a proven example of learning beyond the usual school hours. New Brunswick could be a leader in giving extra

learning opportunities to children and youth – time to enrich learning so that each child has a greater opportunity to achieve his or her potential.

- New models for adult literacy education. Establish innovative learning opportunities for adult learners by embedding literacy training within programs that have greatest relevance to the public (e.g., Nutrition Class, Financial Management, Helping with Your Child's Homework, etc.).
- Learning communities. This approach could inspire communities to implement a comprehensive literacy strategy. The learning community models emphasize inter-sectorial coordination; monitoring and evaluation; and concerted interventions. According to UNESCO's Global Network of Learning⁶, learning communities or regions aim at reinforcing individual empowerment and social cohesion, economic and cultural prosperity, as well as sustainable development. These communities effectively mobilize their resources in all sectors to promote: learning from basic to higher education; learning in families and communities as well as in the workplace; using modern learning technologies; carrying out monitoring and evaluation; and promoting a culture of learning throughout life.
- Further development of the McCain pilot projects for early childhood development and parent engagement, perhaps in combination with the École Sainte-Anne model in Fredericton.
- Dr. Renée Guimond Plourde, a professor at the Université de Moncton, Edmundston campus, has established a successful interdisciplinary approach involving literacy, zootherapy and stress management. A project based on Dr. Guimond Plourde's work could be piloted in another community⁷.

⁶ UNESCO (2013). *Global Network of Learning Cities. Key features of Learning Cities*. UNESCO (2013a). *Déclaration de Pékin sur la création de villes apprenantes*. Adoptée par la Conférence mondiale sur les villes apprenantes, Pékin (Chine), 21-23 octobre.

⁷ Guimond Plourde, R., Guimond, D., & Plourde, M. Written submission at the Comprehension Literacy Strategy, August, 2015.

