

## 2006 Pan-Canadian Forum to Address Adult Literacy

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Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell  
Prince George  
Monday, June 19, 2006

Thank you. It's a pleasure to be here with so many leaders of the adult literacy community.

Our system's strength owes much to your dedication to life-long learning and to your excellent work in developing strategies to address problems of low literacy levels in Canada.

On behalf of the government of British Columbia and Premier Gordon Campbell, I would like to thank the national and international speakers who have come to British Columbia to share their knowledge with us.

Our great goal for this province is to become the best educated most literate jurisdiction in North America in the next decade. I was not surprised to see that was one of our great goals because I've known Gordon Campbell for 20 years – starting back when I was the mayor of Saanich. And I've seen his dedication to improving literacy skills. I recently met a librarian who said, "Did you know that when Gordon Campbell was mayor he used to come into the public library on his lunch hour and read to the children?" I actually didn't know that but it didn't surprise me.

I would also like to thank two members of my staff in the Ministry of Advanced Education: Veronica Osborn and Martin Young, who have put countless hours into organizing this forum.

It was a great pleasure this afternoon to have the opportunity to listen to Vanessa Little from Australia whose experience in forming learning partnerships gives us insight in how to successfully reach learners.

I know that delegates also appreciated the presentations of Barry Brooks, the Director for Lifelong Learning at Tribal Education, and Mike McCracken, Chair and CEO, Informetrica. Our collaboration over the past few days is an essential part of our goal to create a pan-Canadian vision for adult literacy.

Seniors, new immigrants and people with special needs often have unmet literacy needs that affect the quality of their lives. We know that people with low literacy skills are more vulnerable to such social and economic factors as poverty. We're grappling with the problem that one out of every four Canadians has some difficulty with basic literacy skills.

I have seen dramatic improvements in people's lives when they do the hard work it takes to learn and achieve higher literacy levels. I want to make it as easy as possible for those people who have the courage to work on their literacy skills. And I want to thank the learners who have come to this forum to share their inspirational stories with us.

Good literacy skills not only provide the foundation on which further learning is built, they open the doors to jobs and improved self-esteem, and help people of all ages participate more fully in our society. High level adult literacy skills are critical to our ability to compete internationally and for continued economic prosperity in Canada.

The workshops that you have participated in this week, and the ideas that you have exchanged are solid steps towards creating a cohesive adult literacy strategy. I'm confident that if we can harness our combined knowledge we can reach those who need our help and in doing so, we can drastically improve their lives while we strengthen our communities.

Your work, and that of your colleagues, deserves much of the credit for the high quality of literacy programs in Canada today. My goal – and I know you share it – is to continue, bit by

bit, to reach more learners. We want to acquire the highest level of literacy skills in the world.  
And we will have you to thank for it.

Thank you.