



Noteworthy

Primary students make strides

Premier Roger Grimes and Education Minister Judy Foote announced tremendous improvements in the reading and writing skills of primary students based on recent assessments. The primary literacy assessments, called the Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs), were given to Grade 3 students in June 2002.

"These achievement gains are unprecedented and are a measurement in real terms of the accomplishments of our students and teachers," said Premier Grimes. "These improvements are proof that fundamental change is happening because our collective efforts to improve literacy are working."

The recent tests show there has been a significant increase in the number of Grade 3 students who are able to read and understand stories, books, and other reading materials at the required level for Grade 4. This year, results showed that 79 per cent of the students were reading at the required level as compared to 63 per cent just last year. There has also been a significant increase in the number of children who are writing at a level that exceeds what is required for Grade 4. Over one-third of our students are entering elementary school with exemplary writing skills and approximately 90 per cent are writing at the required level.

"Our 1995 results told us we needed to take action to improve the reading and writing skills of our primary students," said Minister Foote. "Our teachers, principals, and district and departmental staff took on the challenge to improve language arts performance with a range of significant initiatives."

These initiatives include innovative initiatives at the district and school levels; annual provincial testing in reading and writing; use of test results to improve teaching and learning; a new language arts curriculum with new resources; comprehensive annual in-service for all primary students; reading specialists in school districts; more instructional time in language arts; programs for children with reading difficulties; new teacher resources for assessing reading in the classroom; Read and Succeed program; and For the Love of Reading Challenge. ☞

Francophone needs met

Premier Roger Grimes, with federal Ministers Stephane Dion and Sheila Copps, announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding concerning the establishment of a Francophone school and community centre in St. John's.

"The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador acknowledges and supports the desire of the Francophone community to educate their children in the French language," said Premier Grimes. "Through this partnership with the federal government, we are able to provide a facility where our French-speaking citizens will continue to promote their language and culture in a province characterized by its cultural diversity."

The establishment of a school and community centre will be funded by both signatory parties. The Government of Canada will cover the expenses of constructing community and shared facilities, up to a maximum of \$3 million. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador will provide \$2.4 million for construction of the school component of the structure; which will accommodate up to 100 students. ☞

Comparable health indicators released

For the first time ever, provincial and territorial health ministers have reported to their citizens concurrently on a set of comparable health indicators. The reports provide Canadians with reliable information about the health of the population and the performance of the health system.

Gerald Smith, Minister of Health and Community Services, released the report for this province, *Health Scope: Reporting to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians on Comparable Health and Health System Indicators*. The report identifies indicators that address three main areas: health status, outcomes of health services, and quality of health services. It compares these indicators for Newfoundland and Labrador with those of the other Atlantic provinces and Canada, as a whole.

"I am pleased to report that overall, the health status of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians is comparable to that of the rest of Canada. Our province was comparable to the national rate for over 75 per cent of the indicators presented in the report," said Minister Smith.

"While we are comparable in many areas, we realize there are still areas for improvement. Our province has high rates for modifiable risk factors such as smoking, physical inactivity and obesity which do have negative effects, including high rates of death due to heart attacks, strokes and some cancers. The provincial Wellness Strategy, as identified in our recently released strategic health plan, will help us to improve in those areas." ☞

