

BACKGROUND ON THE CMEC LITERACY ACTION PLAN

The CMEC Literacy Action Plan was adopted in spring 2005. It commits the provinces and territories to work together to increase the literacy levels of all Canadians, and to help Canadians acquire the highest level of literacy skills in the world.

By taking specific actions and establishing a pan-Canadian vision in these areas, CMEC will provide leadership in improving literacy across the country.

Literacy is essential to the social and economic well-being of Canadians. More than 70 per cent of all new jobs in Canada now require some form of postsecondary education (“Knowledge Matters,” 2002). Furthermore, there is a direct correlation between literacy skills, income, and employment. There is some indication that literacy may also be linked with positive social outcomes such as

- better health
- greater civic engagement
- lower crime rates

Canadian students tend to perform well on international literacy tests. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Canadian fifteen year olds ranked second in the world in their literacy skills in 2000. However, performance between Canadian regions and schools varied and boys performed less well than girls. Further, the study did not identify the factors contributing to childhood literacy.

Other research identifies areas for improvement:

- The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) found low levels of literacy among adults, with more than two in five lacking the basic literacy skills required for successful participation in the labour market.
- Survey results from the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLSS) are anticipated later this year. It is expected that they will identify the following groups as facing the greatest challenges: at-risk youth, including Aboriginal youth; new Canadians; Canadians from isolated regions; and those with learning disabilities.

Under the Action Plan, two national forums are planned:

- The first will be held in Ontario in Autumn 2005 and will focus on school-age literacy.

- The second, planned for British Columbia in Spring 2006, will address adult literacy.

The forums will bring together a broad cross-section of stakeholders, to provide the means to understand better the challenges of literacy, and help identify strategies to increase literacy significantly. The forum proceedings will provide a valuable source of new information and ideas for the Canadian literacy community.

CMEC will also work with national partners such as Statistics Canada and international bodies such as the Organization for Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) to develop the assessment tools needed to improve literacy in Canada. Joint work with the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP), which provides interjurisdictional comparisons of student performance in Canada, is also being considered.

Other action plan activities include policy research through the Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC), and the involvement of CMEC members in international studies such as ALLSS and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Survey (PIRLS).

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