

Literacy BC, Family Literacy Week Breakfast of Champions

Premier Gordon Campbell

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Check Against Delivery

You're very fortunate, today, that you're going to hear from John Abbott who's the director of the twenty-first century learning initiative in the United Kingdom.

We know how important literacy has been in terms of the government of the United Kingdom's agenda. John's been teaching for nearly 40 years and has been involving children and parents and teachers in education in all that time, in many, many capacities. So I think it's great, John, that you've decided to come to Vancouver. Welcome to British Columbia, and we want you to come back as often as you can.

Also, today we're going to hear from the director of the human early learning partnership at UBC, Dr. Clyde Hertzman. Clyde has done something for our province that I think is going to be very helpful. We often know there's knowledge out there we can use, but there are times when we resist it because it creates some difficult challenges for us and it makes us sort of stand up and face them. Clyde agreed that he would map the whole province, and he would map a whole series of determinants across the province so we could see how we were doing in different regions of the province. You know, when you have a province the size of British Columbia, it's important to know that different regions do face different challenges. So Clyde has been working with us in the human early learning partnership; it's something that British Columbia is proud of.

We are going to take that same initiative and show the rest of the country how it works in terms of improving the quality of life of individuals that live here. It wouldn't be possible without Clyde and all the people that are working with him, as we move ahead. I want to say thanks, Clyde, to you for your dedication.

The theme of this year's Family Literacy Week is: setting the course for a lifetime of learning. We know that the sooner we set our young people on the course of learning, on the course of literacy, the better off we are. We know that we have to make sure that we communicate those benefits to parents, as well as to our institutions, because the most important learning institution that we all have is our family.

We've set a goal for ourselves in the province that we call one of the great goals of the next ten years: to be the most literate jurisdiction in North America. We live in a country with resources, with expertise, with creativity that will allow us to show the rest of the world how they can reach out to become a totally literate society. Underline that: a totally literate society - not partly, not almost, but totally.

It requires us to think of individuals and how they learn – not as massive groups or massive populations, but as people. I think we are now in a place where we can start making progress in that direction.

I was talking earlier to one of the delegates here today, and we talking about how sometimes you feel frustrated when you don't get quite as far as you would like to.

But I think if you look out and you set your goals a little further out and you're willing to accept progress in that direction, you actually will be amazed at what you can accomplish when you have a longer-term goal, as opposed to an immediate goal.

I understand the importance of immediate sort of gratification for the hard work you've put in, but if we set our goal out ten years and we look back and we say we want British Columbia to be a totally literate province, to develop the programs that we can give to other communities and other parts of the country and other parts of the world, I think we'll be able to look back and see our success in doing that. We just have to accept that larger challenge.

I want you to know that what you've done makes a big difference. It makes a huge difference in people's lives: you see that in stories of people's lives all the time.

When I was in Vancouver, we launched a literacy program for our workforce, working with CUPE 1004 and with the City of Vancouver. I can remember going to one of our first graduation ceremonies; it stays with me; it's a story I tell all the time. One of the people that I had been in contact with as mayor graduated. I had never known he had a challenge with literacy. But he graduated from this program, and he said to me: "You know, it has made such a difference in my life, not just here at work. It makes a difference in how my kids interact with me; it makes a difference in how I feel with my colleagues, with my friends, and with my neighbours." Clearly, you could see just from his eyes, that the whole world had opened in front of him and had opened for his family as well.

So we have launched the beginning of a major literacy initiative in the province. In November we had a literacy summit. That literacy panel named at that summit will be delivering their first report by the end of February of this year. That panel is chaired by Linda Mitchell, who's with us today and who is my sort of literacy angel.

We announced \$23.4 million as part of that program. Twelve million dollars is going to be invested in public libraries over the next three years, in making sure that they can open their doors and open opportunities for British Columbians. There's a million dollars for 41 adult literacy programs that are currently serving about 6,000 individuals. There's \$5 million for Literacy Now, which Linda and her advisory panel are working on.

What we really ask Literacy Now to do is to look beyond the boundaries of institutional government and say: what can we do that really moves the agenda forward, that finds new programs and finds ways to meet individual needs and fill the gaps for people?

There's also \$5 million that we set aside for literacy innovation grants programs in schools. And today I can tell you that every one of B.C.'s 60 school districts will receive a share of that \$5-million to support innovative literacy programs. I think that's really important because the people that are discovering what makes the difference in people's lives, particularly in children's lives, are the teachers and the parents who are on the front lines of schools all over British Columbia.

We want to celebrate their successes, so there will be communities all over the province, who in the next few days, will hear from us exactly how much they're getting to support their special innovative literacy programs. We certainly hope that that makes a difference in their lives and in their ability to deliver services for people.

Really, at the end of the day we know this: literacy starts with each of us; with each of us as individuals being a part of the literacy army across the province. It starts at home, for people.

We hosted nearly a thousand ready-set-learn open houses across B.C. aimed at children and families: giving parents the understanding and the knowledge about what we can do and what they can do. Two books were available to the children at those open houses: *My Animal Friends* and a French rhyming book. In September of 2004, the province also provided every kindergarten child with their own special copy of *The Pacific Alphabet* and *Stella* - which happens to be a French-language book.

Last year the Province also matched the Raise-a-Reader campaign that was launched by Global as part of a major initiative. The Vancouver Sun has been a true leader, not just in British Columbia but across the country. They raised \$370,000 and we matched that with another \$370,000. The Raise-a-Reader campaign reaches out to all parts of our province to try and provide additional support for people. And I should just recognize Louise Watson and the great work that she's done in the Raise-a-Reader campaign. Louise, thank you for that.

So at the end of the day this is about working together. This is Family Literacy Week, and it's about families. But it's about the provincial family, of reaching out and opening doors to literacy for people all across our province.

We know how difficult it is when people see that door: to actually walk through it. Imagine, if you can, what it's like for someone who does have challenges with literacy in our society. We know that it's something that people actually don't want us to know about them. They don't want their friends or their colleagues to know about it, so we have to make that door as open and as welcoming as possible.

So for all of those of you in your communities who open those doors, that stand sometimes on the other side of the door waiting for a learner to come through, let me say thank you for your dedication and thank you for your patience and thank you for your

professionalism and thank you for caring about British Columbians who need your help, who want to walk through that door to learning.

We're going to keep on trying to provide the support you need to bring those people in, to show them the excitement of learning, to show them what they can build for themselves and their families as they step through.

On behalf of all of my colleagues and, more importantly, on behalf of all the people of British Columbia, thank you for what you do.