NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY

WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS IN ADVANCE OF THE 2025 FEDERAL BUDGET

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Government of Canada expand the mandate of Employment and Social Development Canada's Office of Skills for Success to research, develop and support the implementation of a National Literacy Strategy to address literacy, numeracy, digital and other foundational skills gaps impacting the prosperity of diverse communities across Canada. The National Literacy Strategy would promote and enhance more equitable outcomes in the provincial, territorial, federal, Indigenous, and international systems that ensure high quality, effective systems of education, training, and labour market integration in Canada.

PREAMBLE

Canada has among the highest literacy rates in the world. Despite this, a large share of Canadians' literacy, numeracy and digital skills fall below what is needed to thrive in an increasingly knowledge-based economy. Literacy researchers estimate that a 1% increase in adult literacy (based on the 2018 GDP) could create an annual economic benefit of $67 billion for Canada, the equivalent of approximately $1,800 more in the pockets of each Canadian every year (Canada West Foundation, 2018). To ensure a fiscally sound and competitive future, Canada must address the widening literacy, numeracy, and digital skills gaps that persist across Canada.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Government of Canada expand the mandate of Employment and Social Development Canada's Office of Skills for Success to research, develop and support the implementation of a National Literacy Strategy to address literacy, numeracy, digital and other foundational skills gaps impacting the prosperity of diverse communities across Canada. The National Literacy Strategy would promote and enhance more equitable outcomes in the provincial, territorial, federal, Indigenous, and international systems that ensure high quality, effective systems of education, training, and labour market integration in Canada.

The federal government has an opportunity to promote the enhancement of literacy skills at all ages with evidence-based policy and programming that address skills gaps through innovative, community-based solutions that are customized for specific populations, and complementary to local jurisdictional efforts. This new investment is essential to complement the education and labour market transfer payments to the provinces and territories, to support improved outcomes through increased national capacity to address Canada's increasing diversity, mobility, and rapidly changing workforce needs. Now is the time to address current skills gaps, and to prevent future gaps through preventive care.

The literacy sector in Canada includes local, regional and national organizations, and individual experts, who champion all the "literacies", including reading, writing, numeracy, and digital skills. The sector is coming together, and we are poised to support the federal government in developing an evidence-based National Literacy Strategy that is responsive to rapidly changing learning and employment contexts. The Strategy would address the unique needs of Indigenous, Black, newcomer and racialized learners, Francophones within and outside of Quebec, as well as those in rural, remote and northern communities, leading to improved outcomes through greater access to flexible, inclusive services and support.

BACKGROUND

With an expanded mandate for the Office of Skills for Success and a dynamic, responsive National Literacy Strategy, the Government of Canada will reduce the siloed nature of literacy support across the life cycle in Canada, in order to improve monitoring and timely remediation, with the goal to ultimately reduce the rate of adults on the lower half of the literacy scale. As noted in Budget 2021, "45 per cent of Canadians lack the literacy, numeracy, and digital skills that are increasingly necessary to succeed in jobs in the knowledge economy" (Canada, 2021). New data will be available in December 2024, and we anticipate that results will be impacted by Canada's demographic and immigration changes of the last decade.

Increasing literacy rates and learning success in the communities most vulnerable, while tackling intergenerational low literacy and labour market disengagement, will result in a more inclusive, productive, and prosperous economy in Canada. A new federal strategy will provide a framework for innovative collaboration of institutions, governments, and community organizations to address gaps in the acquisition and remediation of child, youth, and adult literacy and foundational skills. This is particularly important for educational and economic empowerment in communities and populations that are impacted by intergenerational poverty and under-represented in the labour market, including those from Indigenous, Black, Newcomer and Francophone communities across Canada.

Systemic disparities in outcomes can no longer be treated with a siloed approach. A federal strategy will promote effective data sharing across jurisdictions, the sharing of best practices and high-quality resources, as well as provide community-based programs for learners who are struggling, and who may be further from the labour market. A home in the federal government will enable centralized, evidence-based policy and program development.

CALL TO ACTION

The literacy sector in Canada is diverse and includes organizations, individuals, and agencies mandated to support early childhood and family literacy, primary and secondary school students, and adult learners. This includes provincial-territorial and Indigenous governed education and literacy stakeholders from coast to coast to coast. We are coming together to advance the common cause of increased equity in education and skills development outcomes, including systemic improvements.

The literacy sector is poised to support the federal government in developing a National Literacy Strategy that addresses the unique needs of Indigenous, Black, newcomer, racialized and Francophone learners, as well as those in rural, remote, and northern communities, to improve outcomes through greater access to flexible, inclusive services and support.

In consultation with key leaders and experts from the literacy sector, the following vision and goals have been identified as priorities to be pursued and promoted through the initial stages of a National Literacy Strategy. Our vision is that everyone in Canada has the literacy skills necessary to fully participate in school, work, and in community life. Our shared goal is to foster inclusive economic growth by leveling the playing field and protecting populations vulnerable to inequitable outcomes through robust literacy policies and programming.

We, the undersigned, believe that together we can build a Canada in which:

1. All families have universal access to language and literacy support from birth, ensuring a solid foundation for lifelong learning and success regardless of Postal Code.

2. All children and youth receive high-quality, evidence-based, and culturally inclusive reading and writing instruction - and remedial support - at school that enables them to acquire the literacy skills they need to thrive today and throughout their lives. All children and youth have access to supports within their family and their community to enhance their literacy growth and outcomes.

3. Literacy education and training opportunities in community settings and workplaces are readily accessible to all adults and out of school youth who are seeking to strengthen their literacy skills for a 21st Century knowledge-based economy, including those with diverse learning needs and backgrounds.

4. Literacy and skills data is shared across jurisdictions to support high quality policy/program design and evaluation, with particular attention to identifying the root causes of lower literacy outcomes to inform evidence-based prevention and remediation strategies.

5. Prioritize equitable access to literacy programs through plain language communication, accommodations for learning disabilities, and outreach and interventions that respect the cultural diversity and needs of underserved groups.

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Prepared and signed by:

ABC LifeLiteracyCanada

abclifeliteracy.ca

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation / Fondation pour l'alphabétisation des enfants canadiens

childrensliteracy.ca

125 United for Literacy / Littératie Ensemble

unitedforliteracy.ca

Endorsing organizations and literacy experts:

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary and Area

Bookmates

Calgary Learns

CANADAWEST FOUNDATION

canLEARN Society

Centre for Family Literacy

The Children's Book Bank

Children's Reading Room

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Dyslexia Canada

Literacy Nova Scotia

Literacy Unlimited | Alphabétisation sans limites

Literacy Lambton

MAGNET

NACY ANEJ
National Alliance for Children and Youth
L'alliance nationale pour l'enfance et la jeunesse

ola
:. ontario library association

Ontario Native Literacy Council

PEI Literacy Alliance

PGFL
Peter Gzowski Foundation for Literacy

Rotary Club of Calgary

The Reading Partnership

Turtle's Back Publishing

vibrant communities calgary

Yamaska Literacy

YW