

FEBRUARY 19, 2021

Submission to the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget



PREPARED BY THE CANADIAN CHILDREN'S LITERACY FOUNDATION ON BEHALF OF:



ABC Life Literacy Canada
abclifeliteracy.ca



Calgary Reads
calgaryreads.com



Canada West Foundation
CWF.ca



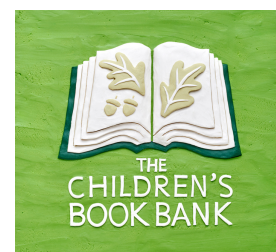
Canadian
Children's
Literacy
Foundation

Fondation pour
l'alphabétisation
des enfants
canadiens

Canadian Children's
Literacy Foundation
childrensliteracy.ca



Centre for Family Literacy
famlit.ca



The Children's Book Bank
childrensbookbank.com



Decoda Literacy Solutions
decoda.ca



Dollywood Foundation of Canada
imaginationlibrary.com/ca



SHRCC Partnership Grant,
Ensuring Full Literacy in a
Multicultural and Digital World
ensuringliteracy.ca



Explorations
explorationslearning.com



First Book Canada
firstbookcanada.org



The Fraser-Hickson Institute, Montréal
minibiblioplus.org/index.php/en



Literacy:
Learning for Life.

L'alphabétisation,
Une leçon pour la vie.

Frontier College
www.frontiercollege.ca



Further Education Society
Strengthening Communities

Further Education Society of Alberta
furthered.ca



Kids Can Fly
kidscanfly.ca

PREPARED BY THE CANADIAN CHILDREN'S LITERACY FOUNDATION ON BEHALF OF:



Let's Talk Science
letstalkscience.ca



Maggie's Place Family Resource
Centre — Colchester
maggiesplace.ca



Margaret & Wallace McCain
Family Foundation
mwmccain.ca



Mothers Matter Centre
mothersmattercentre.ca



Mount Pleasant
Neighbourhood House
mpnh.org



NWT Literacy Council
nwtliteracy.ca



Offord Centre for Child Studies,
McMaster University
offordcentre.com



Ontario Library Association
accessola.com



The Reading Partnership
readingpartnership.com



Rotary Club of
Cumberland Centennial
rotarycc.org



Saskatoon Public Schools
Foundation Corp.
spsfoundation.ca



Storybooks Canada
storybookscanada.ca



THE UNIVERSITY
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Language Sciences
Research Excellence Cluster

UBC Language Sciences Initiative
languagesciences.ubc.ca



Women's Contact Society
womenscontact.org

Recommendations

We support the development of a high-quality, accessible and affordable early learning and childcare system in Canada. To enable its success, we recommend that improved children's literacy be articulated as one of the goals of the system.

Making early literacy a goal would provide the federal government with the opportunity, in partnership with provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples, to

- identify and share best practices from across the country and globally to ensure all children arrive at school ready to learn to read;
- improve data collection and dissemination about the status and quality of early literacy supports for children under age six and their families, in order to support evidence-based decision-making; and
- consult with the people and organizations that work with young children and their families to help inform the development of further innovative and effective early literacy strategies.

Introduction

We applaud the Government of Canada's commitment to a significant, long-term and sustained investment in a Canada-wide early learning and childcare system. Recognizing increased children's literacy as one of the goals of such a system supports an inclusive pandemic recovery that will have long-term positive impacts on the economy and society.^{*,1,2}

Over one million children in Canada — at least one in eight — do not have the literacy skills they need to reach their full potential in school and life.¹ One of the biggest contributors is that many children — more than 25 per cent — start Grade 1 without the fundamental skills they need to learn to read.^{3,4} This means too many children are developmentally vulnerable in important areas, including communication and social-emotional skills, and have weak knowledge of books and words.

Many of these children never catch up. Preliminary data indicate that pandemic disruptions have made these problems worse.^{5,6,7}

Unfortunately, a disproportionate number of children who are below grade level in reading come from low socioeconomic status communities or households.^{1,8} If they do not get the support they need to develop strong literacy skills, they are more likely to face unemployment, poor health and other negative outcomes when they grow up.¹

Failure to address inequitable access to early literacy development would have lasting implications for our pursuit of a more equitable future for Canada.

The Economic Impact of Strong Literacy Skills

A recent analysis by Deloitte Canada indicated that a one per cent increase in adult literacy could create an annual economic benefit of \$67 billion for Canada, the equivalent of approximately \$1,800 more in the pockets of each Canadian each year.^{9,1,10} Moreover, the economic benefit of increased literacy levels in the population will likely grow because literacy is foundational to the skills required in an increasingly knowledge-based economy.^{1,11} Strong literacy skills also support a child's ability to develop competencies, including creative and critical thinking, that are essential to prepare them for future work and citizenship roles.

Strong adult literacy begins in early childhood. In fact, it begins at birth. Science shows that a child's brain develops more — and more rapidly — in the first five years than at any other point in a child's life.¹² Starting to build literacy skills early also delivers the best return on investment. Data show that every \$1 invested yields six times the economic benefit.^{1,13} This is a far greater impact than investments made later in a child's education and in adulthood.¹

Canadians also agree that we should be doing more to get young children off to a strong start. More than half of respondents to a recent Deloitte Canada survey believe that early literacy has a significant impact on future employment, and more than one-third were concerned that most children do not have the literacy skills necessary to be successful.¹

“Build Back Better” by Acknowledging and Addressing Gaps in Children's Roads to Reading

Over the last year, the signatories to this submission have collectively supported countless families and consulted with hundreds of people and organizations who are working tirelessly with young children and their families.¹⁴ What is clear is that Canada has a patchwork system for supporting early literacy development that is rife with missed opportunities. These are some of the critical gaps in support for children on their reading journeys:

- A lack of awareness among parents, caregivers and professionals who work with families about the importance of building literacy skills at home, in childcare and in the community in a child's early years;
- Significant barriers to participation in early learning and literacy programs for families experiencing poverty, isolation, competing priorities or cultural differences;
- No books, or an insufficient number of books, at home for families with children under age six due to financial or other constraints;
- Limited access to in-person early learning and literacy community resources, such as public libraries, due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic;
- Inconsistencies in the quality of literacy-development training for childcare providers; and
- An absence of structured and sustained methods for groups delivering early literacy programming to enhance their impact by sharing best practices and resources.

For Canada to achieve a meaningful increase in children’s literacy, and in turn adult literacy, we must address these gaps. Pan-Canadian collaboration, as detailed in our recommendations, would enable more children to get a strong start on their reading journeys.

Detailed Recommendations

We support the development of a high-quality, accessible and affordable early learning and childcare system in Canada. To enable its success, we recommend that improved children’s literacy be articulated as one of the goals of the system.

We commend the federal government for acknowledging the crucial role of early learning and childcare in economic growth and an inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed investment in a Federal Secretariat on Early Learning and Child Care (the Secretariat), among other related initiatives, is an important step in creating a pan-Canadian early learning and childcare system.

By recognizing improved children’s literacy as one of the goals of the early learning and childcare system, the Secretariat would have the opportunity, in partnership with provinces, territories and Indigenous Peoples, to

- identify and share best practices from across the country and globally to ensure all children arrive at school ready to learn to read;
- improve data collection and dissemination about the status and quality of early literacy supports for children under age six and their families, in order to support evidence-based decision-making; and
- consult with the people and organizations that work with young children and their families to help inform the development of further innovative and effective early literacy strategies.

This work would enable the federal government to deliver on its goal of a high-quality early learning and childcare system since strong early literacy practices are widely recognized as fundamental to quality in early learning.^{15,16,17}

We would welcome the opportunity to support the Secretariat and its partners in advancing these opportunities.

Conclusion

The Government of Canada is seeking to achieve a robust economic recovery that benefits all Canadians. Enabling all children to access early literacy support does just that.

People who have strong literacy skills are better able to navigate the many challenges facing Canadians, especially in this time of unrelenting adversity. Strong literacy allows us to separate fact from fiction. It supports informed decisions about life's necessities. It enables us to communicate messages of hope and empathy. It lets us escape into books, enhancing our mental health.

Literacy is a core ingredient in learning new skills and adapting and moving forward with confidence. Literacy shapes our whole lives, and it begins in early childhood.

As we all seek an equitable, inclusive recovery from the pandemic, we need to pursue a Canada in which all children have the literacy skills necessary for reaching their full potential and contributing to Canada's success.

Our children are counting on us.

NOTES AND SOURCES

*In this submission, we define literacy as “the ability to understand, evaluate, use, and engage with written texts to participate in society, achieve one’s goals, and develop one’s knowledge and potential” (OECD, 2013). Literacy encompasses more than the ability to read and write and includes other important dimensions such as numeracy, comprehension, and the interpretation and evaluation of texts. Literacy skills vary depending on the age and stage of the individual. Very young children, in particular, develop “early literacy” or “pre-literacy” skills, which are defined as “everything a child knows about reading and writing before a child can read or write” (Winnipeg Public Library. Early Literacy Skills. Last updated February 9, 2021. <https://guides.wpl.winnipeg.ca/earlyliteracy/skills>). Pre-literacy includes things like whether or not a child is familiar with books, can turn a book’s pages, understands that print conveys meaning, and knows that reading occurs from left to right (for English and French), among many other indicators. Developing strong early literacy skills, as well as the communication and social-emotional skills that early literacy skills enable, is critical to reaching grade-level performance standards in reading, writing and numeracy.

1. Deloitte. (2020, November). *An Economic Overview of Children's Literacy in Canada*. Canadian Children’s Literacy Foundation. <https://childrensliteracy.ca/cclf/media/PDFs/Deloitte-Report-An-Economic-Overview-of-Children-s-Literacy-in-Canada.pdf>
2. Family and Community Engagement Research Compendium. (2008). Early Literacy. <http://teacher.scholastic.com/products/face/pdf/research-compendium/early-literacy.pdf>
3. Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. (2015). *Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study: The Performance of Canada’s Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics*. <https://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/365/PISA2015-CdnReport-EN.pdf>
4. Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2018). *Results of the Grade 3, Primary Division — EQAO*. <https://www.eqao.com/the-assessments/results/latest-grade-3-results/#2018>
5. Alphonso, C. (2020, November 26). School shutdowns have put children up to eight months behind in reading, research indicates. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-school-shutdowns-have-put-children-up-to-eight-months-behind-in/>
6. Hanuschek, H., & Woessmann, L. (2020, September). *The Economic Impacts of Learning Losses*. OECD. <http://www.oecd.org/education/The-economic-impacts-of-coronavirus-covid-19-learning-losses.pdf>
7. *Pandemic putting young readers behind the learning curve, says education expert*. (2020, November 19). University of Alberta: Folio. Retrieved February 15, 2021, from <https://www.ualberta.ca/folio/2020/11/pandemic-putting-young-readers-behind-the-learning-curve-says-education-expert.html>

-
8. *Reading Achievement in Canada and the United States: Findings from the OECD Programme of International Student Assessment*. (2004, May). Learning Policy Directorate, Strategic Policy and Planning. <http://publications.gc.ca/Collection/HS28-3-2004E.pdf>
 9. Lane, J., & Murray, T.S. (2019). *Literacy Lost: Canada's Basic Skills Shortfall*. Canada West Foundation. https://cwf.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2018-12-CWF_LiteracyLost_Report_WEB-1.pdf
 10. Schwerdt, G., & Wiederhold, S. (2018, October). *Literacy and Growth: New Evidence from PIAAC*. http://www.dataangel.ca/docs/LiteracyandGrowth_revised_October2018.pdf
 11. World Economic Forum. (2020, October). *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2020.pdf
 12. Canadian Paediatric Society: Caring for Kids (2017, October). *Your Baby's Brain: How Parents Can Support Healthy Development*. https://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/pregnancy-and-babies/your_babys_brain
 13. Shuey, E. A., & Kankaraši, M. (2018, November). *The Power and Promise of Early Learning* (OECD Education Working Paper). OECD. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/the-power-and-promise-of-early-learning_f9b2e53f-en
 14. Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation (2020, June). *Early Literacy Matters: Roundtables 2020*. <https://childrensliteracy.ca/cclf/media/PDFs/Early-Literacy-Matters-roundtable-report-EN-June-2020.pdf>
 15. Enns, J.E., Brownell, M., Janus, M., Cuhn, M. (2019). *Early Childhood Development in Canada: Current State of Knowledge and Future Directions: A Discussion Paper for the Public Health Agency of Canada*. https://umanitoba.ca/faculties/health_sciences/medicine/units/chs/departamental_units/mchp/projects/media/Early_Childhood_Development_in_Canada_EN_20200106.pdf
 16. Schoon, I. et al. (2015). *The Impact of Early Life Skills on Later Outcomes*. OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, Education Policy Committee. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10051902/1/Schoon_2015%20The%20Impact%20of%20Early%20Life%20Skills%20on%20Later%20Outcomes_%20Sept%20in2015.pdf
 17. The Canadian Language and Literacy Network. 2009. *National Strategy for Early Literacy: Report and Recommendations*. <http://en.copian.ca/library/research/nsl/report/report.pdf>