

EdInfo Special Edition: Literacy In B.C.

Literacy is the key to opportunity for children, adults and communities. The Government of British Columbia is committed to improving literacy in B.C. through a variety of innovative programs designed to increase literacy inside and outside of classrooms.



Since 2001, the government has funded over \$131 million in new literacy programs and initiatives. B.C.'s focus on literacy is paying impressive results. Recent international assessments have placed B.C. students near the top in the world in reading.

The need to continue to promote literacy is pressing. Approximately 1 million people in B.C. struggle with day to day literacy and have trouble with such tasks as reading a bus schedule or filling in a job application.

This special edition of EdInfo will outline prominent literacy initiatives taking place in and across B.C.

The Importance of Collaboration

Government's number one Great Goal is to make British Columbia the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction in North America. Meeting this goal requires the cooperation of government, schools and community organizations.

In order to coordinate the Province's many literacy programs, the Ministry of Education's Literacy Branch works closely with a wide range of government partners, such as the Ministries of Advanced Education, the Attorney General, Economic Development, Employment and Income Assistance, Children and Family Development, Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and Public Safety and Solicitor General.

In addition, there is a strong relationship with two key provincial literacy partners, Literacy BC and Literacy Now. The Literacy Branch values the roles and expertise that Literacy BC and Literacy Now bring to the literacy agenda.

The Literacy Branch's collaboration with its education partners mirrors the teamwork that is going on in communities across the Province, as schools and school districts, post-secondary institutions, Aboriginal groups, libraries, businesses, immigrant service providers and community



organizations collectively undertake community literacy planning and work together to provide relevant literacy programs and services to British Columbians.

BC Literacy Directory and Literacy BC

If you know people who struggle with literacy or with English, the BC Literacy Directory and related hotline may be just the place to get them started on the road to improved literacy skills.

The website and the hotline are easy to use and provide a one-stop portal for information on literacy resources in communities across B.C. A person from Nelson, for example, can quickly find out about all of Nelson's reading, writing and math programs, ESL programs and supports, programs for Aboriginal people and, finally, skills upgrading and high school completion programs.

For people whose first language is not English, the hotline is connected to an interpreting service and will take calls from speakers of all major languages.

BC Literacy Directory

<http://www.literacybc.ca/directory>

Hotline: 1-888-732-3234

The BC Literacy Directory is run by Literacy BC:
<http://www2.literacy.bc.ca/>

Literacy BC is another organization that is well worth checking out. In addition to its excellent links and resources, the Literacy BC website features a prominent Calendar of Important Dates which keeps you up-to-date on upcoming literacy events around B.C. Teachers may be particularly interested in the sections on professional development opportunities and electronic conferencing.

ReadNow BC

ReadNow BC is the provincial literacy action plan that promotes literacy programs and resources to help all British Columbians improve their reading skills.

ReadNow BC focuses on improving literacy skills by increasing: the number of children entering school ready to be successful in their learning; the number of children who read successfully; the number of adults who have the literacy and essential skills necessary to compete in today's labour market and to function in everyday life; the number of Aboriginal people who read successfully.

The ReadNow BC website (<http://www.readnowbc.ca/>) is a tremendous resource with literacy information and links arranged according to early learners, K-12 students, adults, Aboriginal people and communities.

District Literacy Plans

In the spring of 2007, the Province introduced legislation to expand the mandate of Boards of Education to formally include early learning and literacy beyond the K-12 system. Under the School Act, Boards of Education are now coordinating the planning and development of District Literacy Plans.

District Literacy Plans take into consideration the great literacy work that is already happening in communities and build from there, adding all of the opportunities that School Districts can bring to the table.

District Literacy Plans identify current literacy work, set out future goals and a plan to meet those goals. They look at the whole range of literacy learning from early childhood to adulthood. The scope of District Literacy plans is multi-pronged, including strong collaborations with community literacy organizations, post-secondary institutions, public libraries and Aboriginal organizations and businesses.

Aboriginal Family Literacy

Increasing literacy in Aboriginal communities is an important component of the ReadNow BC action plan. One exciting way that the Province is working to accomplish this is through a partnership with the British Columbia Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres (BCAAFC).



Aboriginal Friendship Centres deliver their literacy programs with the

recognition that for Aboriginal people, literacy includes the kind of traditional knowledge that is shared within families and clans and is central to helping Aboriginal people succeed in mainstream education and in the preservation of Aboriginal culture and languages.

When designing their programs, each Friendship Centre carefully took into consideration the needs of the families in their area, welcoming them to participate in the development of their programs.

Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum April 13-15, 2008

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) is the national voice for education in Canada. The CMEC Literacy Action Plan was adopted in spring 2005. It commits provinces and territories to work together to increase the literacy levels of all Canadians to help them acquire the highest level of literacy skills in the world. B.C. is the lead jurisdiction on the Pan Canadian CMEC Literacy Action Plan.

The first-ever Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum will be held on April 13-15, 2008. The forum will use real-time, leading edge technology to connect learners, parents, educators, business and labour leaders, policy makers and community partners at five interactive and three receiving sites across Canada. The B.C. site at the Marriott Pinnacle Downtown Vancouver will have up to 350 participants.

The pan-Canadian forum theme is "Literacy: More Than Words." Each of the eight host sites has its own theme. B.C. has a unique, proven approach around communities as the foundation for literacy. Therefore B.C.'s theme is entitled: "Communities Working Together for Literacy."

The forum and the archived content it generates will provide a major source of information about literacy in Canada, and raise the profile of provincial/territorial literacy initiatives within Canada and to the international education community.

To find out more, please visit:

<http://www.cmec.ca/literacy/forum.en.stm>

Family Literacy Week

This year, January 21 - 27 was Family Literacy Week and January 27 was proclaimed Family Literacy Day in B.C.

From Prince George to the West Kootenays, Squamish and the Sunshine Coast, Family Literacy Week saw B.C. communities host a range of exciting literacy events such as readings, workshops, conferences and breakfasts.

Family Literacy Week is an annual event. Look for it next year. The goal is to raise awareness of the literacy services available to B.C. families and to spotlight important issues that motivate the development of innovative family literacy programs.

Early Literacy Programs

The Province has embarked on a series of exciting early literacy programs. To find out more, please visit the ReadNow BC website and click on the “Early Learners” tab:

<http://www.readnowbc.ca/early-learners.html>

StrongStart BC

StrongStart BC is a free, drop-in early learning program for preschool-aged children accompanied by a parent or caregiver. Early childhood educators lead learning activities, including stories, music and art to help children get ready for success in kindergarten.



Parents and caregivers can expect to participate in organized sessions like story time, in play activities, and in serving a healthy snack. Caregivers are likely to discover new ways to support their

children’s learning at home and make connections with others attending the centre.

The centres are open five days a week. A list of up-and-running StrongStart BC centres is available online. Please see:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/literacy/early_learning/strongstart_bc.htm

K-12 Students: Help Celebrate Education Month!

Submit a piece of art to the Student e-Gallery Online. Deadline: February 15. Talk to your art teacher or principal to find out how.

Books For Babies

Books for Babies is a community-based literacy program focusing on the importance of reading to newborns. Every baby born in British Columbia receives a book bag containing a board book, a CD and information about library and other services in their community. Public libraries coordinate bag distribution, often working with other community agencies such as public health or hospital staff.

Research clearly shows the importance of talking, singing and reading to newborn babies. The Books for Babies program aims to create a positive association with books and the library for babies and their parents.

The program recognizes the role that public libraries play in B.C. communities providing resources and programming to support infant and children's growth and development.

Please see: <http://books4babies.bclibrary.ca/>

Visit the EdInfo site at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/edinfo/>

If you wish to add or remove your name from the EdInfo distribution list please go to:
<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/edinfo/sub.htm>

Comments, Questions, Submissions:
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