

SPEECH

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ALBERTA EDUCATION

PAN – CANADIAN LITERACY FORUM

LITERACY MORE THAN WORDS

8:15 AM

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INTRODUCTION

- Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the second day of the Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum.
- I'd like to start by taking a moment to thank all of you for participating in the Forum and for demonstrating your commitment to literacy.
- I'd also like to thank our partners – Literacy Alberta, the Community Learning Network and the Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium – who recognize literacy as a critical component of Alberta's flourishing society and economy.
- The good work all of you do makes a big difference in the lives of Albertans every day.
- I'm pleased to talk about literacy from the perspective of Alberta Education.
- In collaboration with students, parents and school authorities, we strive to ensure our province's children and youth can develop foundational skills.
- The continuum of literacy skills are the foundation for life long learning, and lead to success in everyday life.
- Those skills include reading, writing, speaking and numeracy, but they also extend to the ability to reason, cooperate with others and use technology effectively.
- Our education system must focus on what all students need to learn and to participate successfully in an economy and society undergoing fundamental changes.

- As Alberta trades out more and more into a globalized world, we know that specialized knowledge and skills will become ever more valuable.
- Even more than is the case today, highly literate people will generally enjoy better health and employment prospects.
- Policy experts also say that in the near future, 80 percent of jobs will require some form of post-secondary education. Access to higher education depends heavily on literacy.
- It is for these reasons that we must renew our efforts to ensure the highest possible levels of literacy in all our students.
- Yet as we strive to teach literacy skills to prepare our students for life long learning, the education system faces many special challenges.
- We face rising public demand for choice and flexibility. A one-size-fits-all approach simply doesn't meet the diverse needs of our learners.
- We face a challenge to literacy, ironically, from the prosperity we prize as Albertans.
- We are striving to position our students to take advantage of Alberta's robust economy.
- But that economy has the potential to attract our young people into the labour force and out of school, leading to a decline in high school completion rates.
- We face ever-changing demographics as the province becomes increasingly urbanized and more learners join us from other provinces and countries.
- Because it's so complex, literacy isn't something we can simply drop into a school curriculum. Literacy is developed over a lifetime, with deep roots in a learner's social, cultural, and geographic context.
- To increase the literacy of our students, we need flexible and diverse approaches.
- We need a life long learning system that is responsive and nimble, one that can reach out to individuals in remote locations, adapt to diverse learning styles and foster learning communities.
- We need to identify at-risk learners early and respond with appropriate interventions.
- We need to provide new learning pathways and support technology integration to increase program choice and access for students.
- And we must strive to improve the success of Aboriginal learners.

Aligning to the Government of Alberta's Priorities

- So how do we begin?
- Premier Stelmach has asked me to increase broad-based supports and early intervention initiatives for at-risk children to improve their learning outcomes.
- We know the learning that takes place during a child's first few years of life will help determine his or her success in school and beyond.
- Giving our youngest Albertans a head start on literacy will reap lasting benefits.
- As we look for new ways to provide literacy learning opportunities for young children, we'll continue to build on existing partnerships with community organizations.
- Because, after all, learning does not begin or end in the classroom.
- Family literacy, early literacy and head start programs provided through community-based programs encourage children to develop language and other basic skills long before they enter school.
- Alberta Education also recognizes the importance of effective strategies for First Nations, Métis and Inuit student success.
- We'll continue to work with parents, students, educators, partners and stakeholders to remove barriers to Aboriginal learners and improve their chances for success.
- Teaching literacy skills to Aboriginal students requires innovative and culturally sensitive approaches, as we work to implement the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework.

Pan-Canadian Perspective

- Literacy truly is the most important competency we can teach our students, with implications for every facet of their lives.
- As a result, literacy has been identified as a pan-Canadian priority by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC).
- And education ministers from across Canada have worked together to develop a Literacy Action Plan.
- The Forum is a key component of the pan-Canadian Literacy Action Plan, and I'm sure you'll hear more about that as the day goes on.
- Alberta has a chance to provide solutions and demonstrate leadership in literacy.

- Being in one place together allows us to work closely, and build and strengthen our literacy relationships.
- I trust that you found yesterday's speakers and discussions interesting, insightful and inspiring.
- I hope that today and tomorrow will be as beneficial too.
- Thank you!