

An open book is shown from a top-down perspective, lying flat on a wooden surface. The pages are white and slightly aged. Above the book, various letters and small words are floating in the air, as if being blown by a breeze. The letters include 'o', 'z', 'v', 'g', 'u', 't', 'n', 'a', 'x', 'g', 'y', 'e', 'u', 's', 'b', 'p', 'd', 'm', 'c', 'o', 'w', 'j', 'r', 'i', 'f', 'h', 't', 's', 'y', 'a', 'h', 'k', 'p', 'q', 'l', 'g', 'k', 'p', 'q'. The background is a solid orange color. In the bottom right corner, there is a blue starburst shape containing the text 'September 2018'.

More Than Words Can Say

**September
2018**

Literacy: Why it Matters

In celebration of International Literacy Day 2018, Community Literacy of Ontario is pleased to present "Literacy: Why It Matters" to showcase the importance of literacy to our province, and to share the intersections between literacy, health, poverty, employment, the economy, and more. These are issues that matter and they impact Ontario's citizens and our province in profound ways.

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Literacy Skills in Ontario

- Literacy is an essential skill in 21st century Ontario. However, many people in our province do not have the literacy skills that they need for home, work, and life. In fact, 1 in 6 (or 15%) of Ontarians aged 16 to 65 scored at, or below, Literacy Level 1. People scoring at this level struggle with very serious literacy challenges, and have trouble reading even the most basic text.¹
- A further 32% of Ontarians scored at Literacy Level 2, meaning they can read, but with difficulty and will likely have problems with basic forms and directions encountered in everyday life such as employment or rental agreements, medication instructions, and more.¹

“Today I can say I can read and write and no longer do I avoid and hide from the world.”



Numeracy Skills in Ontario

- Numeracy skills are an even more significant challenge for the 22% of Ontarians aged 16 to 65 who scored at, or below, Numeracy Level 1. People scoring at this level have very limited math skills. In addition, 31% of Ontarians scored at Numeracy Level 2. This means that they have difficulty accomplishing commonly needed numeracy tasks.²
- In total, 53% of Ontarians have less than Level 3 numeracy skills. According to Employment and Social Development Canada and the Conference Board of Canada, people require at least Level 3 numeracy skills to function well in modern Canadian society.²

“I can do my own work: grocery shopping, banking and being more independent. In the future I hope to become a great person and also to get a good job.”



Literacy and Poverty

- The relationship between literacy skill level and the likelihood of living in poverty is strong. In Canada, 46% of adults at the lowest literacy levels (Levels 1 and 2) live in low income households.³
- Comparatively, only 8% of adults at the highest literacy levels (Levels 4 and 5) live in low income households.³



Grade 10 Literacy Test Results

- The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) measures whether high school students are meeting the minimum standard for literacy. Successful completion of the literacy test is one of the requirements to earn an Ontario Secondary School Diploma.⁴
- In 2016-2017, 81% of all Grade 10 students who wrote the OSSLT were successful; 19% were unsuccessful.⁴
- When looking at success rates in academic versus applied course types, there is a large difference in success with the OSSLT; 92% of students taking academic level courses passed the literacy test, while only 44% of students taking applied courses were successful.⁴



High School Graduation Rates in Ontario

- In 2016, the high school graduation rate had increased to 86.5% in Ontario. However, this still means that 13.5% of young people did not complete their high school education.^{5,1}
- As well, of all Ontarians aged 25 to 64, 10.4% have not attained their high school diploma.^{5,2}

“In my literacy class, I’m getting the help I’ve always needed. I’m doing better than I ever have in the past. I plan to get my GED and get a better job for myself down the road.”



Literacy and Health

- The impact of low literacy levels on health is a very serious issue. Canadians with the lowest levels of literacy are more than twice as likely to be in poor health compared to Canadians with higher literacy skills.⁶

“Since going to a literacy program, it is much easier to cope with life and I don’t know how I survived with the education that I had. I can figure things out for myself and I don’t have to ask so many questions any more.”



Literacy and Employment

- Skills levels are also strongly co-related with successful employment outcomes. Canadians with low literacy skills are more than twice as likely to be unemployed than those with higher level literacy skills.^{7.1}
- Further, educational attainment is strongly related to employment. In 2016, only 55% of Canadians aged 25-64 who did not complete high school were employed. Conversely, the employment rate was 82% for those who had obtained a college or university credential.^{7.2}
- Research has also found that approximately 45% of Canadians in precarious or “no contract” work have not attained an educational credential beyond a high-school diploma.^{7.3}

“Thanks to my new found skills and self-esteem, I feel more capable to go out and find a great job that I am worthy of.”



Jobs of the Future

- People with low literacy skills may be particularly disadvantaged in the labour market of the future. Robotics and artificial intelligence are dramatically changing the workplace and increasing the demand for high-skilled workers.⁸
- While the demand for high-skilled workers is growing (up 19% since 1998, according to Statistics Canada), the need for low-skilled workers is declining (down 11% over the same period).⁸
- Based on Canada’s levels of literacy and numeracy, many Canadians do not currently have the literacy, numeracy and digital skills needed for the jobs of the future.⁸



Literacy, Justice and Corrections

- It is critically important to offer educational programs in Canada’s prisons. Correctional Services Canada reports that approximately 75% of offenders admitted to federal custody had an education level of less than grade 12.^{9.1}
- Correctional Services Canada further notes that when educational programming is provided to inmates, it results in reduced recidivism, better release outcomes, and improved future employment opportunities.^{9.2}



Digital Literacy

- An international survey measured “Problem Solving in a Technology Rich Environment” (PR-TRE). In our province, 44% of Ontarians scored at the lowest levels (at, or below, PR-TRE Level 1), while 38% scored at Level 2 or 3 (the two highest levels), and 18% did not respond to the survey.^{10.1}
- Currently, almost 100% of the population under 45 years of age are using technology and computers. But, even with rising digital literacy, higher literacy skills are still needed to see positive outcomes in life such as self-reported health and political efficacy.^{10.2}



Literacy and Civic Engagement

- Positive political efficacy dramatically rises with increased education and skills. The level of political efficacy was measured by whether people disagree or agree with the statement “People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.”¹¹
- Among Canadians with less than a high-school diploma, just 32% report positive political efficacy, compared to 60% of people who have obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher.¹¹

“Literacy has helped me to read the newspaper. Now I am able to give my own opinions about what is going on in the world.”



Literacy and the Economy

- Higher levels of literacy lead to a stronger Canadian economy, an increased gross domestic product, an enhanced competitive advantage, improved workplace safety, and a more productive workforce.^{12.1}
- Literacy also provides a substantial socio-economic return on investment. There is strong evidence that investment in literacy can benefit the Canadian economy by: reducing costs in areas such as social assistance, healthcare, and justice; and it results in increased productivity and earnings. The 2011 report, From Poverty to Prosperity: Literacy’s Impact on Canada’s Economic Success, placed the annual savings in social assistance alone of raising every Canadian adult to Level 3 literacy at \$542 million.^{12.2}



An Overview of Ontario's Literacy and Basic Skills Program

The evidence is clear. There is a strong need to increase literacy and numeracy levels in Ontario. In response, Ontario's Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), through Employment Ontario, funds the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) program. The program serves adults who want to improve their literacy and numeracy skills to achieve their goals of post-secondary education and training, employment, apprenticeship, secondary school credit, or independence.

The LBS program is delivered by three sectors: community-based agencies, school boards, and colleges. It supports literacy upgrading for adults in four streams: English language, Aboriginal, Francophone, and Deaf. Each of these sectors and streams brings their unique strengths and together they effectively serve the diverse needs of adult literacy learners in Ontario. Literacy instruction is free and is provided through a variety of methods including one-to-one tutoring, small group and classroom instruction, and online learning, via e-Channel.

In order to help adult learners meet their goals, Ontario's literacy agencies work closely with diverse community stakeholders (such as Ontario Works, social services, Employment Services, other education providers, employers, community agencies, and more).

Currently, LBS educators are working collaboratively with MTCU to strengthen Ontario's adult education system. The process has been designed to address many of the issues raised in the LBS evaluation report, including but not limited to enhanced funding, performance management, curriculum design, and rebranding, marketing, and awareness.

For more information about the LBS program:

- Read MTCU's "Overview of Literacy and Basic Skills" www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/programs/lbs.html
- Visit the "Adult Learning" section of MTCU's website to find your local LBS agency and learn more about the Literacy and Basic Skills program www.ontario.ca/page/adult-learning

In "Literacy: Why It Matters", we hope that we've clearly demonstrated that literacy strongly intersects with issues Ontarians care deeply about: employment, health, poverty, the economy, civic engagement, and more.

This publication is freely available on Community Literacy of Ontario's website (www.communityliteracyofontario.ca) along with more detailed sourcing and links to the cited research reports. CLO encourages readers to share "Literacy: Why It Matters" to raise awareness and understanding of this critical issue.



Sources

For more info, visit: www.communityliteracyofontario.ca

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