



Letter to the Editor

Saskatchewan needs Strategy

The Star Phoenix recently published an article which discussed the literacy levels of youth in Saskatchewan. The article suggests that youth in Saskatchewan are scoring lower than their Canadian counterparts, with about 15% (1 in 6) not meeting what would be considered "baseline proficiency." While this statistic may be alarming, it comes as no surprise if one considers the literacy rates of adults in the province.

The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey from 2003 shows that 1 in 3 adults in Saskatchewan do not have the literacy skills necessary to fully engage in society. Considering 1 in 3 Saskatchewan adults struggle with their literacy skills, it stands to reason that those adults who are parents could have children who also struggle with literacy skills.

These statistics display the urgency needed for a focused strategy supported by schools, families, communities, and governments. Schools recognize the need for higher achievement and are actively working to improve learning; they also stress the need for a holistic approach which involves collaborative support from families, communities, and government. The response needs to be immediate in programming, accountability and practices based on sound research.

READ Saskatoon and the SLN have over fifty years of experience supporting literacy within family and community settings. Learning begins at home, with parents as their children's first teachers and as crucial partners in their children's education within the school system. Creating a learning culture requires partnership between home, school, and community and means greater successes for children and parents. Within this partnership, parents at all levels of literacy can be involved in supporting success and addressing the identified gaps as reported.

More adult and family literacy programs offered within the school as well as community settings would benefit children and their families, schools and the province as a whole. Families benefit in terms of their health and well-being, fulfillment of personal goals, as well as school achievement, employment opportunities and skill levels. Schools benefit by enhancing attitudes towards learning, as well as parental support and involvement in school. The province as a whole benefits as citizens are better prepared to actively contribute to their communities and economies.

These benefits will be realized only through deliberate, strategic, and focussed attention with schools, community organizations, and government coming together to address this alarming trend. Adult and Family Literacy programs are offered in Saskatoon and throughout the province. For more information about programs in Saskatoon, contact READ Saskatoon at 652-5448 and for information about programs outside Saskatoon; contact the Saskatchewan Literacy Network at 651-7288. And be sure to visit our websites to learn ways you can become more involved in your child's learning.

Sincerely,

Carm Michalenko, Chair, READ Saskatoon
Mark Wiliment, President, Saskatchewan Literacy Network