

# Guide to Understanding Literacy & Essential Skills in the Workplace

## NO MORE 'SAME OLD'

"The major impediments to economic growth in New Brunswick are fairly well known. They include low levels of literacy, and lack of skills development."

*Telegraph Journal, Editorial  
August 9, 2011*



## A Message from the Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick

Today's jobs are changing as employers need to increase productivity, remain competitive and adapt to new technologies. New Brunswick needs a skilled workforce to meet these economic demands. Improving the literacy and essential skills of our workers will help us to achieve this goal.

In this booklet, you will learn how literacy and essential skills impact the workplace. Employers and employees share the challenges, approaches and outcomes of their workplace learning programs. To help you get started, a list of programs and services is provided.

As a Coalition, our mission is to provide leadership to advance literacy, lifelong learning and essential skills for all citizens of New Brunswick. We are able to support the development of a learning culture within your workplace by providing tools, supports and best practices for improving literacy and essential skills.

The Literacy Coalition is challenging employers, unions and the business and labour sector to develop a new approach to learning in the workplace.



Natasha Bozek,  
Executive Director, Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick

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Wendy's Restaurants of Fredericton

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*"On average, for every one-dollar investment on apprenticeship training an employer receives a benefit of \$1.47."*

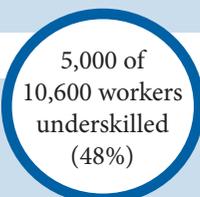
*(It Pays to Hire An Apprentice, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum, 2009)*

## Literacy Skill Shortages in New Brunswick

In a recent study, Data Angel Policy Research Inc. published literacy report cards for communities across Canada. The data and potential impact of improving literacy are reported below.

Literacy Skill Shortages  
in Metropolitan Areas of  
New Brunswick

Potential Economic Return  
of Eliminating Literacy  
Skill Shortages

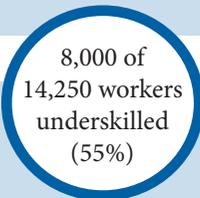


**Miramichi**

**\$35 million**

or

**\$6,700**  
per worker

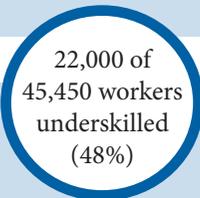


**Bathurst**

**\$57 million**

or

**\$7,300**  
per worker

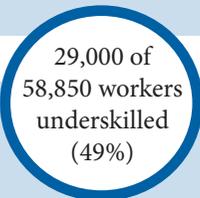


**Fredericton**

**\$141 million**

or

**\$6,400**  
per worker

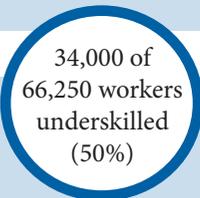


**Saint John**

**\$192 million**

or

**\$6,600**  
per worker



**Moncton**

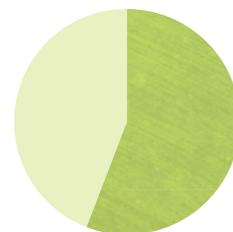
**\$226 million**

or

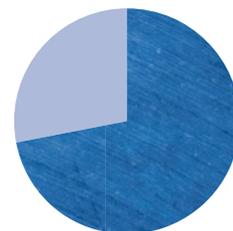
**\$6,700**  
per worker

(Addressing Canada's Literacy Challenge, [www.dataangel.ca](http://www.dataangel.ca), 2009)

**Literacy skill shortages** occur when workers do not have the level of literacy and essential skills needed for their occupation.



**56%** of New Brunswickers do not have the necessary literacy and essential skills to cope with challenges and succeed in today's economy, compared to the national average of 48%.



**72%** of Canadians that scored below the desired literacy level are employed.

(International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey [IALSS], 2003)

*“Rapid changes in the global economy have changed what it takes for Canadian workers and firms to remain competitive in the global market. The ability of firms to compete will increasingly depend on the basic skills of the average worker.”*

*(Addressing Canada’s Literacy Challenge, Data Angel Policy Research Inc., 2009)*

## Improving Literacy and Essential Skills

BENEFITS TO **employers** INCLUDE:

- Better skilled workforce
- Enhanced workplace efficiencies
- Increased productivity and competitiveness
- Better workplace health and safety practices and records
- Reduced absenteeism
- Greater employee initiative, motivation and retention

BENEFITS TO **workers** INCLUDE:

- Improved skills and performance
- Better able to adapt to change
- More prepared to take on new responsibilities
- Better able to understand instructions and use advancing technologies
- More self-confidence to solve problems and make decisions
- Improved communication and teamwork skills

(Adapted from NB Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour, 2009)



“The understanding of safety regulations and procedures leads to **fewer injuries**, which in turn leads to **reduced insurance costs** and **less employee downtime.**”

(Workplace Literacy Facts, ABC Life Literacy Canada)

**82%** of respondents reported **increased health and safety** after completing their workplace’s basic skills program.

(The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy Skills in the Workplace, Conference Board of Canada, 2007)

# Literacy and Essential Skills in the Workplace

Literacy and Essential Skills are needed for learning, work and life. They are the foundation for learning all other skills. Literacy and Essential Skills help people evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change.

(Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, HRSDC)

## Reading Text

Reading and understanding written materials

- Reading emails, memos, manuals and reports
- Analyzing and integrating information from multiple sources

## Writing

Writing text on paper and typing text on computers, cellphones, etc.

- Writing with a clear purpose to inform or request information
- Writing letters and reports to organize, record and document information

## Numeracy

Using and understanding numbers and thinking in quantitative terms

- Taking measurements and making calculations
- Devising budgets and schedules

## Document Use

Using and understanding information displays in which words, numbers, icons, charts, and other visual materials are used

- Understanding and entering information into documents such as charts, graphs, pay stubs, blueprints and schedules

## Oral Communication

Using speech to give and exchange thoughts and information

- Communicating clearly and concisely with co-workers
- Speaking comfortably with clients and supervisors

## Computer Use

Successful use of computers and technology

- Using email to send and receive information
- Using company-specific software

## Working with Others

Working with others to accomplish tasks efficiently

- Developing working relationships with employers, co-workers and customers
- Participating actively in group projects and team meetings

## Thinking Skills

Using a thought process for problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, planning and memory

- Considering all relevant factors before making a decision
- Managing time and resources to meet deadlines

## Continuous Learning

Participating in ongoing processes of acquiring new skills and knowledge throughout life

- Attending job related workshops or training
- Seeking learning opportunities

(Adapted from HRSDC and the PEI Literacy Alliance)

training for today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities  
training for today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities  
training for today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities

## THE WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS (WES) PROGRAM

**T**he Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour has collaborated with business, industry, community and labour organizations to deliver Workplace Essential Skills (WES) training to employed individuals and job-seekers throughout the province. The program is offered in the public and private sectors, in both official languages.

The WES training maximizes the skills and resources of New Brunwickers to ensure the competitive edge, innovation and efficiency needed to lead business into a prosperous future.

The WES team works with employers to identify labour-force gaps and assist with workforce recruitment, retention and adaptation. Specific to the needs of the employer and the employees, the WES team designs and delivers Essential Skills training that:

- Makes use of real work scenarios, authentic workplace materials and documents
- Applies newly learned skills with immediate, visible results
- Offers flexible day/evening hours of onsite training to meet workplace demands

No matter where your business/organization is located in New Brunswick, there is a WES team ready to:

- Conduct workplace training needs assessments
- Create Essential Skills Profiles for occupations in the workplace
- Develop and deliver quality training and resources
- Offer continued support throughout the training process
- Measure how well training objectives and employers' expectations are being met

Employers are exploring WES training for current and future employees. The following case studies highlight the success of New Brunswick businesses and organizations which have participated in workplace essential skills training programs.

For more information, please contact:



[www.gnb.ca/training](http://www.gnb.ca/training)

*“Enhanced literacy skills prepare employees for managerial and technological changes in the workplace and position the company for greater competitiveness.”*

*(Workplace Literacy Facts, ABC Life Literacy Canada)*

CASE STUDY:

## Workplace Essential Skills Program

METALFAB participants speak about their experience:

“I believe the WES program has had a positive impact on my team. One member has taken on more responsibility, assuming the role of CSR coordinator. She is more willing to take the initiative and more confident in her communications with others. I have seen great improvement in her organizational skills as well. **WES has been a confidence and team builder for the entire organization.** I believe we will continue to see the benefits as we move on to other initiatives and projects, both individually and collectively.”

-Paula Baker

Controller, Metalfab

“I’ve seen significant changes in many of the participants – for the better. Many participants are now more articulate and interested in participating in company events. **My challenge, and our challenge as managers, is to build on the foundation that this program has given us.** We want to keep up the momentum, [and are] currently doing this with the Lean Manufacturing and Continuous Improvement events.”

-Gordon Green

President & Owner, Metalfab

“One thing that I noticed with WES training is that the staff here seems to be more confident when expressing their opinions, etc. They also seem more eager to learn. **Also, the WES training has set the stage for more training.** We have recently trained the staff in WHMIS and all successfully completed the training course. We also used this opportunity to train two of the WES participants to be WHMIS Trainers. They acquired excellent presentation and communication skills while completing WES.”

-Krista Schriver

Human Resources, Metalfab



## CASE STUDY:

# TIES 2 WORK

## TRAINING IN ESSENTIAL SKILLS

In January 2009 the Saint John Learning Exchange and Vibrant Communities Saint John partnered with employers, government and educational institutions to support a new employer-specific training approach called TIES 2 Work.

TIES 2 Work is a three-year demonstration project funded by the Department of Post-Secondary Education, Training and Labour (PETL) as part of the WES program. It facilitates matches between employers and potential employees through 12 weeks of essential skills training including a three week job placement which results in employment.

TIES 2 Work is an alternative method for employers to use when recruiting new employees. Employers get reliable employees who are able to adapt to the workplace using the skills they obtained through this new training approach. Employers are integral to the success and longevity of this program and interest is continually building.

The innovative TIES 2 Work training approach has captured the interest of many partners in the Saint John community. One of the first employers to participate was Coast Tire & Auto Service, a tire and automotive business with 26 locations across the Maritimes. Shirley Mitchell is the Human Resources Manager and an employer representative on the TIES 2 Work leadership team. Shirley said, "Much of

the economy depends on our ability to safely move products by truck, and our industry has become more regulated and complicated. New workers now require training and certification which they may not have anticipated, so getting and keeping good people has become more difficult. TIES 2 Work gives potential employees a clearer understanding of our requirements; they learn about our terminology and standards, and they get three weeks of work on the shop floor. All of that will result in workers who are better prepared and more likely to fit well into the job and our organization."

As one of the first participants, Melissa was hired by Coast Tire. She states, "As a single parent of two children I struggled to make ends meet. It was hard to find a good paying job with benefits. I participated in TIES 2 Work at the Learning Exchange, a new start for me. It gave me the skills and connections to a job. I work at Coast Tire and Auto Service and love it. Although I work and my kids are in daycare, I don't feel so tied down and my outlook is totally different. TIES 2 Work gives you the essential skills to succeed." Melissa continued to succeed in her employment moving from a position

as a tire technician to working with commercial accounts.

To date the program has had 19 employers and 50 clients participate. Participating employers have reported high levels of satisfaction in the program. Many are thrilled with the quality and enthusiasm of their new staff members.

**"People are like diamonds in the rough; given the right opportunity, they will discover their capacity to learn and make a positive contribution."**

The program offers a solution to the difficulties with finding the right people for particular jobs, and it provides the break that potential employees need to make a fresh start. As Coast Tire Manager Chris Veniot says, "People are like diamonds in the rough; given the right opportunity, they will discover their capacity to learn and make a positive contribution."



Melissa Hachey enjoying her work at Coast Tire in Saint John after participating in the TIES 2 Work program.

## CASE STUDY:

# WES Training at Wendy's Restaurants of Fredericton

## AN EMPLOYEE'S STORY

### Why did you enroll in the WES program?

I enrolled in the WES program because I wanted to move up in the organization and become a Shift Supervisor. I wanted to work on my communication skills as it would help me in this new role. I always struggled in school as a youth so I was a bit intimidated at first, but after the first class I realized how much fun this program was going to be! I used to hate getting up in the morning but I always made it to the WES class at 8 a.m. and went to work after that feeling full of confidence and excitement.

### What benefits did you find?

Throughout the program I found that I was better able to communicate with my peers at work. The skills I learned from training helped me to be more patient and communicate more effectively. It also helped me understand other people's challenges and I was better able to support them.

### Did you enjoy that the training was held in the workplace?

Yes, I found it very convenient.

### What's next for you?

The day after training ended, the store manager handed me a set of keys and offered me a promotion to Shift Supervisor. I guess he felt that my commitment to training showed my ability to be a good leader at work.

## THE EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

"We recently completed our second WES program and have seen three positives from being involved in the program:

### Morale has improved.

Our staff feel like we care and that we are interested in helping them develop, improve and grow. They realize that we want them to excel because it helps us be a better operation.

### Turnover has improved by at least 50%.

The year prior to WES we averaged 125-150% turnover and this has dropped to 65-80% in the last two years. This factors into retaining 10 employees over the course of a year and at approximately \$500 to train a new employee results in savings of approximately \$5,000. As well, retaining staff provides a more stable work environment and allows for better operations.

### Recruitment has improved.

Our staff recommends us as a good opportunity to their friends and helps us build our teams. We offer more opportunities and are no longer seen as a temporary place until something else comes along. The staff see opportunities to grow and to follow educational opportunities and realize that they can follow their goals and still develop with us."

-Warren Robinson  
General Manager  
Wendy's Fredericton

## PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:

Please contact these organizations for more information on literacy and essential skills in the workplace.

### LITERACY COALITION OF NEW BRUNSWICK

The Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick provides literacy and essential skills tools and resources for the workplace, as well as a referral service for programs and support.

1-800-563-2211  
[lcnbexecutived@nb.literacy.ca](mailto:lcnbexecutived@nb.literacy.ca)  
[www.nb.literacy.ca](http://www.nb.literacy.ca)

### WORKPLACE ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The Workplace Essential Skills (WES) Program provides customized essential skills training in the public and private sectors, in both official languages throughout the province.

1-877-444-0510  
[www.gnb.ca/training](http://www.gnb.ca/training)

### LAUBACH LITERACY NEW BRUNSWICK

Laubach Literacy New Brunswick (LLNB) offers literacy and numeracy training in communities throughout the province. Volunteer tutors work with adults in need of basic literacy skills.

(506) 384-6371  
[laubachliteracy@nb.aibn.com](mailto:laubachliteracy@nb.aibn.com)  
[www.nald.ca/llnb](http://www.nald.ca/llnb)

### SAINT JOHN LEARNING EXCHANGE

The Saint John Learning Exchange provides literacy upgrading, GED Preparation and Workforce Essential Skills training.

(506) 648-0202  
[sjlearn@nb.aibn.com](mailto:sjlearn@nb.aibn.com)  
<http://sjle.org>

### FÉDÉRATION D'ALPHABÉTISATION DU NOUVEAU-BRUNSWICK

If you would like to know more about Francophone programs in New Brunswick please contact la Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick (FANB).

1-866-473-4404  
[info@fanb.ca](mailto:info@fanb.ca)  
[www.fanb.ca](http://www.fanb.ca)

## RESOURCES:

[www.hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills)

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada offers a variety of free, easy-to-use customizable tools to support workplace learning. These resources can help you to learn more about Essential Skills, assess an individual's or organization's learning needs, and support skills development on the job and in the workplace.

[www.nald.ca](http://www.nald.ca)

The National Adult Literacy Database (NALD) is an online repository of program models, teaching materials, research documents and other resources designed for numerous audiences, from employers, unions and workers to policy-makers and instructors.

[www.conferenceboard.ca](http://www.conferenceboard.ca)

The Conference Board of Canada creates and shares insights on economic trends, public policy and organizational performance. Their website offers free assessment tools and a link to their public website, Workplace Literacy.

[www.workplaceskills.ca](http://www.workplaceskills.ca)

The Centre for Workplace Skills engages in research and publishes materials meant to have a tangible impact on Canadian businesses and workers. The Centre's projects capture and disseminate best practices in workplace skills development.

[www.councils.org](http://www.councils.org)

The Alliance of Sector Councils (TASC) is the network of Canada's sector councils dedicated to implementing industry-driven labour market solutions in key sectors of the economy.



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