



Saskatchewan
Literacy Network

Literacy

and Essential Skills in
Saskatchewan

Environmental Scan 2012



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Introduction	2	Literacy and Essential Skills Programming in Saskatchewan	28
Purpose of the Environmental Scan	4	1. Adult Basic Education (ABE)	28
Audience for the Environmental Scan	4	2. Family Literacy Hubs	30
Understanding Literacy and Essential Skills	6	3. SaskSmart Innovation Fund (SSIF)	30
What is Literacy?	8	4. Workplace Essential Skills Saskatchewan (WESS)	31
“Measuring” Literacy	8	5. Adult Basic Education – Essential Skills for the Workplace (ABE-ESWP)	31
Do We Have a “Literacy Problem?”	9	6. Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS)	31
What are Essential Skills?	10	7. English as an Additional Language (EAL)	31
What is an Essential Skills Approach to Literacy?	11	8. Labour Market Agreement (LMA)	31
Why Should Literacy and Essential Skills Matter?	12	Providers	32
Putting Literacy into the Saskatchewan Context	14	Infrastructure Support	32
Key Factors Affecting Literacy and Essential Skills in Saskatchewan	18	Assessment of Literacy and Essential Skills Supports in Saskatchewan	34
Education	18	Strengths	36
Aging	19	Challenges	36
Immigration	20	Conclusion	38
Aboriginal People	21	Looking Ahead	41
Access to Training	22	Acronyms	42
Employment and Economic Status	22	Endnotes	44
Poverty	23		
Health	23		
Civic Engagement	23		
Responding to Literacy and Essential Skills Challenges in Saskatchewan	24		
Political Context for Literacy and Essential Skills	26		
Literacy and Essential Skills Policy in Saskatchewan	26		



Literacy is much more than "reading, writing, and arithmetic." It is a dynamic process where we make sense of and interact with the changing world around us.

The Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) works to promote lifelong literacy and life wide learning. We believe :

- that literacy is a basic human right
- that literacy training is a social responsibility
- that learners must be central to all literacy programming and policy development
- in clear communication and respect for different needs and cultures
- in quality literacy information and programming

Created in 1989, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) promotes and supports literacy in Saskatchewan. It was the first provincial organization in Canada to bring together all agencies and individuals involved in adult literacy. The SLN is governed by an eight-person Board of Directors representing various regions in the province and reflecting a variety of interests in the area of literacy and essential skills.

The SLN engages individuals, policy makers, and organizations through communication, literacy and essential skills development, and learner involvement in order to fulfill its mission. The organization takes a wide view of literacy and essential skills across the lifespan— from cradle to grave—as these skills are used at home, at work, and in the community. The SLN stays attuned and responsive to skills challenges facing the province. Today, these challenges include skilled labour shortages, immigration, the learning needs of English as an Additional Language (EAL) speakers, and Aboriginal literacy skill development.

PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Literacy and essential skills exist within a context. That context is affected by factors such as teaching methods and available resources as well as by external factors such as the demand for skill levels and public perception of the importance of literacy and essential skills. An environmental scan is a tool that examines those external political, economic, social, and technological events and trends¹.

The SLN has prepared this report:

- To provide the context for literacy and essential skills activities in the province.
- To gain a more strategic understanding of existing and emerging skill shortages and their impact on literacy and essential skills.
- To explore the impact of the increasing numbers of people in the province seeking EAL training, the growing Aboriginal population and its literacy needs, as well as other demographic challenges faced by the province.
- To improve the understanding of the current state of literacy and essential skills in Saskatchewan: What is already being done to improve opportunities for people through stronger literacy and essential skills, and what still needs to be done?

AUDIENCE FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The SLN considered a wide variety of audiences in compiling this report including:

- governments at the municipal, First Nations and Métis, provincial, and federal levels
- labour market organizations, the not-for-profit sector, trainers, public sector organizations—including schools and the health care sector—and the private sector
- literacy and essential skills organizations including colleges and community-based organizations
- the public

Families learn and grow together.

Through family literacy activities, all family members build confidence, knowledge, and skills that are transferable to community involvement, further learning, and success in the workplace.



Understanding
literacy and essential
skills



A sound foundation
in essential skills
enables us to be
successful at home,
at work, and in
our community.

Literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right. Literacy is the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman, and child can realize his or her full potential. Literacy is the the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

WHAT IS LITERACY?

Many people consider literacy to be the same as reading. Some might add writing and numeracy to their definition. In today's technologically rich and complex world, literacy is much more. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines literacy as:

...the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.² This definition does not describe a static notion of literacy (as in being literate or not being literate) but rather describes a concept of literacy affected by context. What one does with the written material is as important, if not more important than merely reading the words.

Another way to look at literacy is from a social justice perspective:

For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right...Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.³

The social justice perspective ties literacy to gender equality, to citizenship, and to emancipation. Over the years, these two broad perspectives have alternately held sway.

The SLN understands literacy as both a functional skill, one that enables people to “do,” and as “reading the world” or critical literacy, enabling people to engage in a cycle of reflection and action. Balancing these two perspectives requires different approaches and strategies.

“MEASURING” LITERACY

The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) definitions are based on the idea that literacy is a continuum of skills. IALSS measured literacy skill levels based upon four elements⁴:

1. Prose literacy – the knowledge and skills needed to understand and use information from texts including editorials, news stories, brochures, and instruction manuals.
2. Document literacy – the knowledge and skills required to locate and use information contained in various formats, including job applications, payroll forms, transportation schedules, maps, tables, and charts.
3. Numeracy – the knowledge and skills required to effectively manage the mathematical demands of diverse situations.
4. Problem Solving – The knowledge and skills required for goal-directed thinking and action in situations for which no routine solution procedure is available.

Understanding IALSS

The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey was conducted in 2003. In Canada, over 23,000 people aged 16 and over participated.

While IALSS provides important information, it cannot give a complete picture. For instance, only urban Aboriginal people were included in the sample. Although efforts were made to have people respond to literacy tasks that they might encounter in everyday life, IALSS is still a test taken out of context of one's daily life.

IALSS will be updated with a new survey called the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). It will expand the range of skills being measured and introduce a self-reported measure of the use of skills at work. Results will be published in 2013.

DO WE HAVE A “LITERACY PROBLEM?”

According to traditional measures of literacy (educational attainment), Canada has a 99% literacy rate or 99% of the population can read at a primary school level.

As a developed country in a global and technological economy, Canada was in need of more precise measures of literacy. The IALSS tested the capacity to perform a series of literacy (prose, document, and quantitative) tasks along a 500 point scale. For the prose, document and numeracy scales, Level 3 is considered to be the desired threshold or the

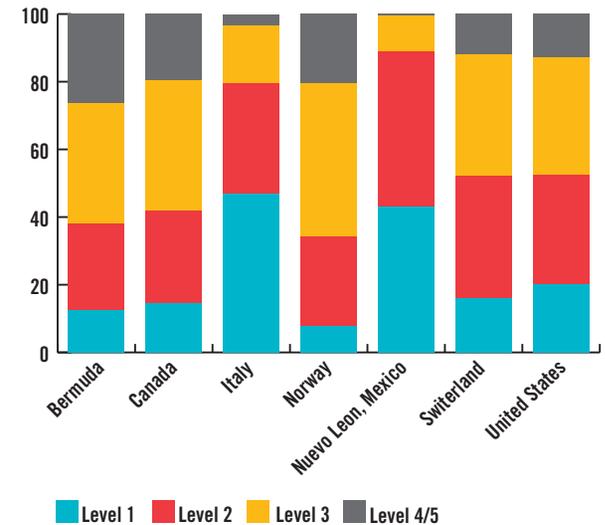
...minimum for persons to understand and use information contained in the increasingly difficult texts and tasks that characterize the emerging knowledge society and information economy.⁵

Compared to other countries participating in the IALSS, Canada performed rather well. Chart 1 shows the percentage of the population at each of the levels for prose literacy. Only Bermuda and Norway have fewer people at levels 1 and 2 than does Canada.

Canada has a significant number of people who fall below the OECD accepted literacy level. These people are able to read at a basic level, but may have difficulty with more advanced reading tasks. Many are employed, but may find aspects of their work very challenging and could find themselves at risk should the requirements of the job change.

CHART 1⁶

Percent of Populations aged 16 to 65 Prose Literacy Scores

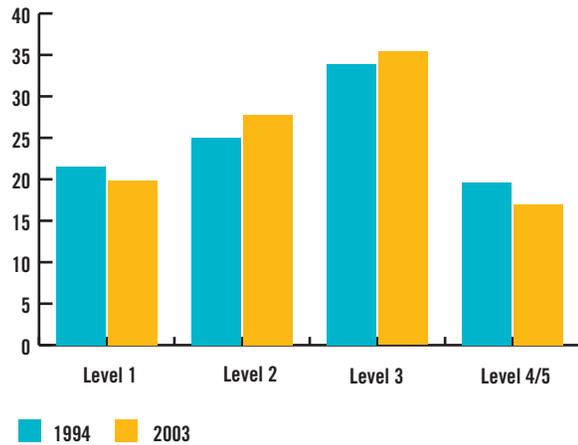


The numbers at levels 1 and 2 increased between the 1994 and the 2003 international surveys. Chart 2 indicates a 1.2% increase in the percent of the population at levels 1 and 2. There was an increase in the percentage of people at level 3 but a decrease in those at levels 4 and 5.

¹ While the international surveys measured three dimensions of literacy (prose, document, and quantitative), for the purposes of this report, only prose literacy scores are provided unless otherwise noted. Wherever possible, information is provided for adults aged 16 and over; however, for international comparisons, the age range is 16 to 65.

CHART 27

**Percent of Canadian Population Aged 16 and Over
Prose Literacy Scores 1994 and 2003**



Canada's literacy challenges arise not from the lack of an ability to read and write, which most Canadians can do, but from the limited capacity of many of its population to deal with the reading, writing, document use, numeracy, and other requirements of everyday life in the 21st century. A population that can continue to learn, to adapt, and to grow will help Canada weather economic and social challenges.

WHAT ARE ESSENTIAL SKILLS?

Essential skills is the term developed by the federal government to identify those core or generic skills embedded in all occupations. Essential skills are transferable. The same skill can be used in a variety of occupations and activities. Each essential skill has increasing levels of complexity. Understanding what these skills are and how they are used within various occupations means these skills can be learned.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) identifies the following essential skills⁸:

1. Reading

- forms and labels, if they contain at least one paragraph
- print and non-print media (for example, text on computer screens and microfiche)
- paragraph-length text in charts, tables, and graphs

2. Writing

- writing texts and writing in documents (for example, filling in forms)
- non-paper-based writing (for example, typing on a computer)

3. Document Use

- print and non-print media (for example, computer screen or microfiche documents, equipment gauges, clocks and flags)
- reading/interpreting and writing/completing/producing of documents - these two uses of documents often occur simultaneously as part of the same task, e.g., completing a form, checking off items on a list of tasks, plotting information on a graph, and entering information on an activity schedule

4. Numeracy

- refers to the use of numbers and thinking in quantitative terms

5. Computer Use

- indicates the variety and complexity of computer use within the occupational group

6. Thinking

- problem solving
- decision making
- critical thinking
- job task planning and organizing
- significant use of memory
- finding information

7. Oral Communication

- pertains primarily to the use of speech to give and exchange thoughts and information by workers in an occupational group

8. Working with Others

- examines the extent to which employees work with others to carry out their tasks

9. Continuous Learning

- an ongoing process of acquiring skills and knowledge

For all occupations requiring at least a secondary school diploma, HRSDC has created Essential Skills Profiles outlining the skill levels required and examples of how these skills are used on the job. Work continues to expand the collection to include all occupations.

WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL SKILLS APPROACH TO LITERACY?

The SLN has broadened its understanding of essential skills beyond HRSDC work-based definitions. We understand that an essential skills lens can be applied to a variety of activities, not just to the world of work. Adults have a variety of goals. Some want to read to their children, others want to pursue high school or further education, still others are seeking a change to participate in their community's activities while others are looking for meaningful employment or to retain their jobs.

Adult educators respond to these goals using a variety of tools. One of those tools is the essential skills framework that incorporates the international definitions of literacy within the context of work. While an essential skills based approach is particularly helpful in providing training to those with work-related goals, increasingly the approach of understanding and teaching the skills embedded in any task is also being used for learners with non-work related goals.

The essential skills framework provides a lens through which skills can be understood. This framework is not sufficient. It needs to be blended with an understanding of the power of literacy to improve an individual's confidence, to create a sense of community, and to encourage citizens to engage in their communities.

WHY SHOULD LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS MATTER?⁹

Literacy is fundamental for learning in school. It has an impact on an individual's ability to participate in society and to understand important public issues. And it provides the foundation upon which skills needed in the labour market are built.¹⁰

Strong literacy skills have positive outcomes for individuals. They are more likely to be employed and to have better earnings, hours, and working conditions. The higher the literacy skills the greater is one's access to further training. Strong literacy skills have also been associated with better health outcomes for individuals. Parents with strong literacy skills tend to encourage the development of those skills in their children. Having children often motivates adults to improve their own literacy skills.

Literacy also has a positive influence on the economy. Strong literacy skills are associated with greater Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Changes in the global economic structure have moved Canada to rely on more technologically complex goods and services to compete. Strong literacy skills help ensure that the Canadian labour force can meet these challenges.

A country whose population has strong literacy skills is better positioned to meet complex social challenges. The population is more engaged in the electoral process and has the capacity to carry out informed decision making. A sense of community is strengthened when the population has the skills to connect with each other.

Strong literacy skills benefit the individual, the community, and the country; thus, making the pursuit of greater skill levels the responsibility of all stakeholders in society – government, employers, labour, communities, and individuals. Education levels are strongly related to literacy skill levels, but are not synonymous. Research has shown that literacy skills improve with practice and deteriorate if not used. It also shows that individuals can hone their literacy skills outside of the formal education system - at home, in the community and at work. A country that encourages literacy activities will help ensure that its investment in formal education is maximized.

Financial literacy matters to everyone. It is the set of skills and knowledge that allow us to understand financial principles and products that aid in informed decision making about the financial products that impact our financial wellbeing.



Putting Literacy into the
Saskatchewan Context



The demands of higher-skilled jobs, a growing digital divide, and multi-generational workplaces change our communities and our lives and makes literacy more important now than ever before.

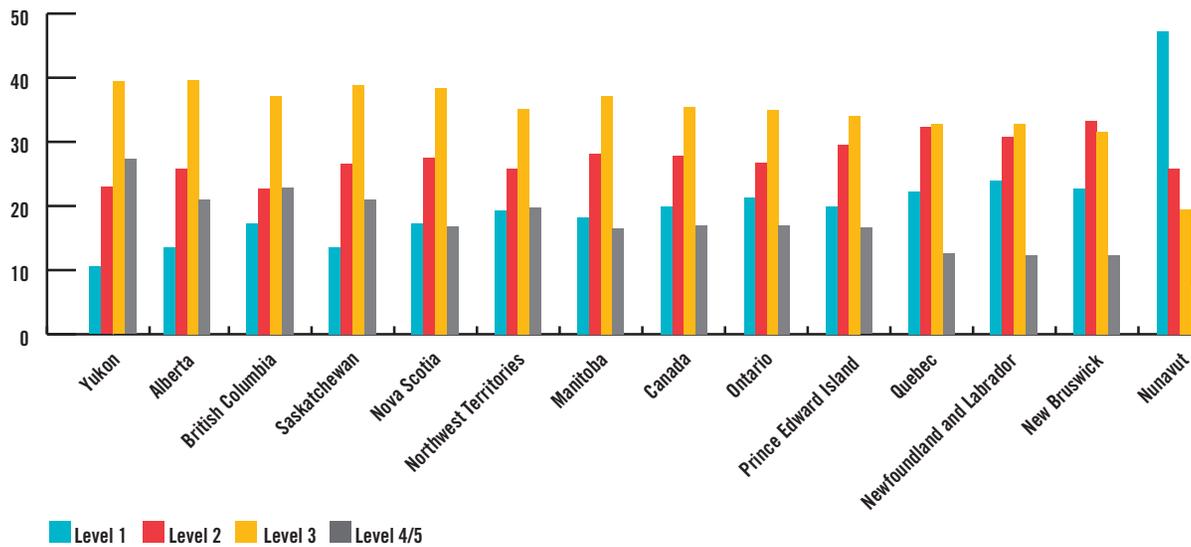
Strong literacy skills benefit the individual, the community, and the country; thus, making the pursuit of great skill levels the responsibility of all stakeholders in society - government, employers, labour, communities, and individuals.

Information from the 2003 IALSS presents an overall picture of literacy levels in Saskatchewan.

Overall, the literacy skills of people in Saskatchewan are slightly better than those of the rest of Canadians. As depicted in Chart 3, literacy skills tend to improve as one moves from east to west. Only Yukon has a

smaller percentage at level 1, while British Columbia, Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Alberta have lower percentage of their population at level 2. When levels 1 and 2 are combined, Saskatchewan is ranked fourth behind Yukon, Alberta and British Columbia. The province is third in those at level 3 behind Yukon and Alberta.

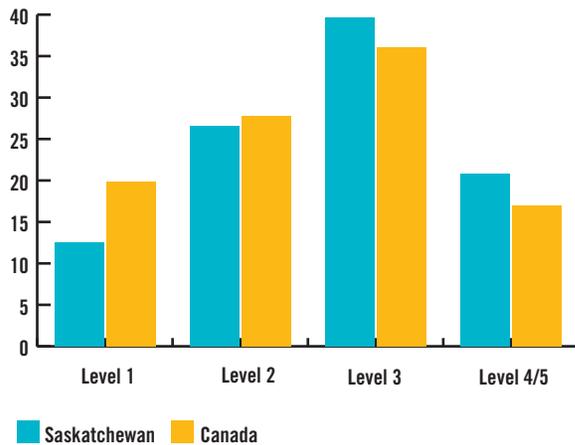
CHART 3¹¹



The stronger literacy skills are reflected when comparing Saskatchewan's scores with those of Canada as a whole. Chart 4 shows almost 48% of Canadians aged 16 and over scored at levels 1 and 2 compared to 40.1% of the Saskatchewan population.

CHART 4¹²

Percent of Populations aged 16 to 65 Prose Literacy Scores Saskatchewan and Canada



Despite these high literacy rates for the population as a whole, the province faces literacy challenges. Figure 1 below describes the attributes of those in Saskatchewan who scored at literacy levels 1 and 2. These people were more likely to be speakers of English as a home language, to have a high school education or less, and to be employed. The next section discusses some of these characteristics.

FIGURE 1¹³

Principal Characteristics of People at Levels 1 and 2 in Prose Literacy in Saskatchewan (population aged 16 – 65, 2003)

LEVEL 1

41,000
 63% male; 37% female
 13% immigrants
 59% employed; 12% unemployed

Education:

- 48% had not completed high school
- 42% had completed high school
- 10% had completed post-secondary education

Home Language:

- 71% English
- 5% French
- 24% other

Aboriginal identity:

- 17% urban aboriginals

LEVEL 2

162,000
 52% male; 48% female
 6% immigrants
 67% employed; 8% unemployed

Education:

- 38% had not completed high school
- 30% had completed high school
- 32% had completed post-secondary education

Home Language:

- 81% English
- 4% French
- 15% other

Aboriginal identity:

- 12% urban aboriginals

KEY FACTORS AFFECTING LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS IN SASKATCHEWAN

Several factors influence the province's literacy levels. These include education levels, aging, immigration, the situation of Aboriginal people, access to training, economic and labour market issues, poverty, health, and civic engagement. These factors affect the literacy level or are the consequence of a lower literacy level.

Education

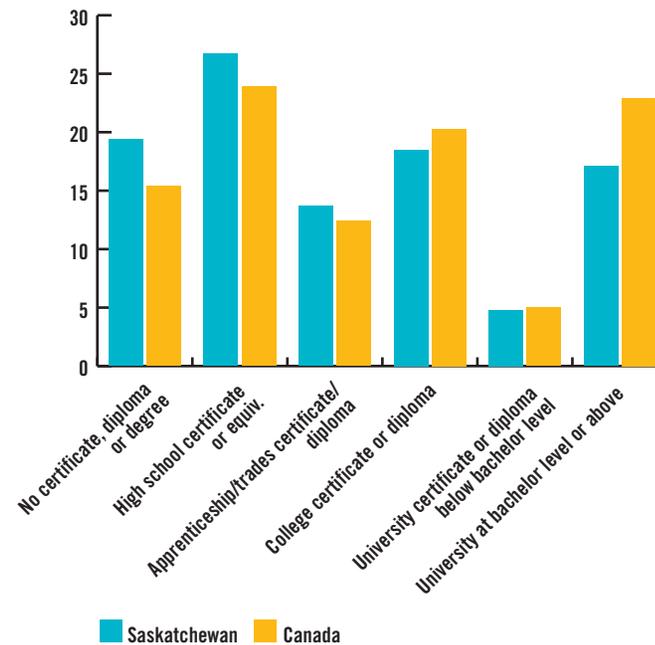
Formal education levels are not necessarily the same as literacy levels. One can have a low level of formal education and have strong literacy skills developed through life experience or through informal learning. One can lose literacy skills through lack of use despite having a high level of formal education.

Although Saskatchewan has, on average, higher literacy levels than the Canadian average, its formal education levels are lower. Chart 5 shows that Saskatchewan lags behind the rest of Canada with lower levels of those with university or college education. The province has a higher proportion of people with no certification or high school certificate than the rest of Canada.

The risk presented by these lower education levels is that some people may not have a solid base upon which new skills can be built if the need arises. The data suggests that, despite their level of formal education, many in the province have been able to develop strong literacy skills.

CHART 5¹⁴

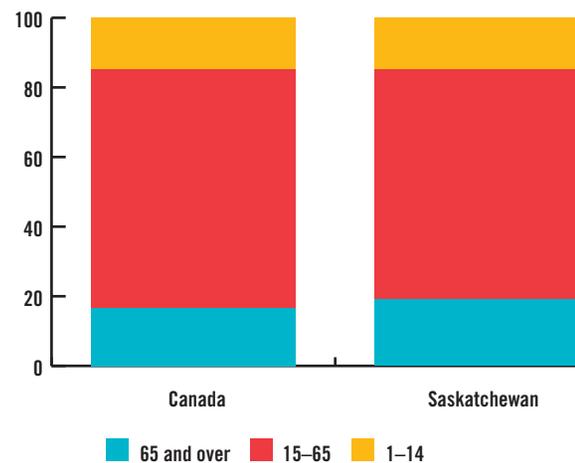
Education Levels, Saskatchewan and Canada
2006 Census



Aging

The composition of the population and its growth rate are important to know in order to determine the impact of age on literacy and essential skills needs. Chart 6 shows the distribution of the population by various age groups for Saskatchewan and for Canada.

CHART 6
Percent of Population at Various Age Groups,
2011 Canada and Saskatchewan



Saskatchewan has an aging population. According to the 2011 census, 14.9% of the population is age 65 and over, 4.8% over age 80¹⁵. The province ranks seventh out of all jurisdictions in the percentage of its population over the age of 65 and first of among all jurisdictions of those over 80. This compares to an overall Canadian population of 14.8% over the age of 65 and 4% over the age of 80; however, the rate of

growth for those over 65 is the slowest in Saskatchewan at 3%.

Literacy rates tend to fall with age. In 2003, at the national level, the largest proportion, 51.5%, of those over age 65 is at prose literacy level 1; in Saskatchewan, this figure is 46.9%¹⁶. This would indicate that some 79,000 seniors in the province could be at prose literacy level 1.

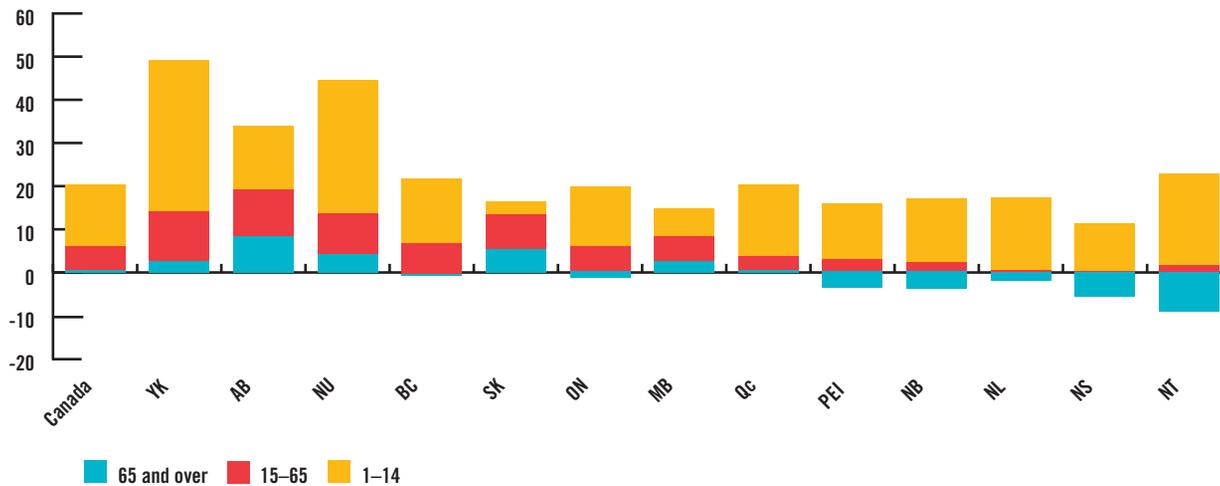
Saskatchewan has a high percentage of children – some 19.1% of the population is aged 0 – 14. Only Nunavut and NWT have larger percentages of their population aged 0 – 14; Manitoba has the same percentage as Saskatchewan. This group, which grew by 5.4% between 2006 and 2011, presents an opportunity to begin early literacy interventions, pre-school and in-school. Aboriginal people make up a large proportion of this youth cohort.

Saskatchewan has one of the lowest proportions of a working-age population; only Nunavut has a smaller population. 66% of the population is between the ages of 15 to 64 years; however, while the group is small relative to other jurisdictions, there was an 8% increase in those 15 to 64 years between 2006 and 2011. This relatively smaller population is supporting those at the younger and older levels. Maintaining employment is critical; ensuring strong literacy and essential skills will help meet this goal.

Overall, Saskatchewan has a better than average rate of population growth. Only Yukon, Alberta, Nunavut, and British Columbia have higher rates; however, within those numbers are groups requiring literacy and essential skills training—including the very young, those in the workplace, and seniors.

CHART 7

Percent of Population at Various Age Groups,
2011 Canada and Saskatchewan



Immigration

Although Saskatchewan does not have a large immigrant population, 5% of its 2006 population were immigrants. Of this group, 36% immigrated to the province within the last 20 years. The most rapidly growing group of immigrants are those admitted under the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP). The program facilitates the entry to Canada of workers whose skills and abilities best fit the province's needs. In 2008-09, the program admitted 72% more provincial nominees – some 2,914 workers and when family members are included, some 7,800 people. The workers often

need occupational language training while family members require EAL training.

Those whose home language is neither English nor French make up just over 12% of the population, a group that grew by .6% between 2001 and 2006. If those whose home language is neither English nor French were removed from the literacy statistics, Saskatchewan's score of those at prose literacy level 3 would rise by 2%¹⁸. This population requires EAL and literacy training.

Aboriginal People

In 2006, Aboriginal people made up almost 15% of the Saskatchewan population¹⁹. The Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan is growing at a faster rate than the non-Aboriginal population. Between 1996 and 2006, the Aboriginal population in the province grew by 27% while the non-Aboriginal population declined by 6.2%. The Aboriginal population is a young population. The median age for Aboriginal people is 21.7 years of age compared to 41.4 years for the non-Aboriginal population. 35.7% of the Aboriginal population are below the age of 15 compared to 16.9% of the non-Aboriginal population who are below the age of 15.

The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey sampled urban Aboriginal populations. Data for Saskatchewan indicates a lower literacy rate for urban Aboriginal people.

Chart 6 reveals that of the urban Aboriginal peoples included in the IALSS data 26.5% were at prose literacy level 1 and 36.9% at level 2. 70% of First Nations and 56% of Metis people were at Levels 1 and 2. Aboriginal people who achieved high school or higher education had better average scores than the Canadian average score. Their scores were closer to the urban non-Aboriginal scores.²⁰

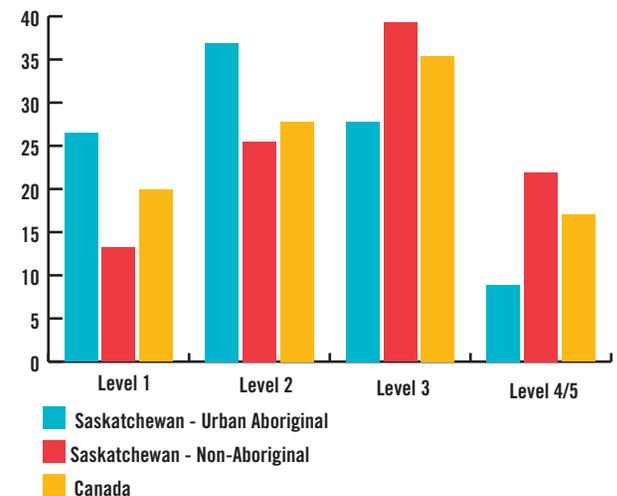
The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) cited several reasons for this education gap:

- historical (assimilation policies of education, particularly through but not limited to residential schools)
- geographic (many Aboriginal people live in remote and/or rural communities away from centres where secondary and post-secondary school programming takes place)

- cultural (practices in the institutional educational system differ from that Aboriginal culture, particularly in the non-recognition of the role of Spirit in learning)
- individual and personal barriers (finances, daycare, transportation, histories of trauma and competing priorities such as family, to name a few)
- systemic (racism, disparities in resources, as well as the policies and practices of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) which do not adequately address the high level of need in education)²²

CHART 8²¹

Distribution of Prose Proficiency Level, by Urban Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Populations Saskatchewan (aged 16 and over, 2003)



Access To Training

Literacy skills can be lost if they are not used and can be enhanced through daily use. Participation in education and training is directly related to literacy levels – the greater the literacy level, the more likely it is that one participates in education and training activities. Chart 7 indicates that for the Prairie provinces 21.2% of those at literacy level 1 received adult education and training during the previous year compared to 70.7% at level 4/5. Those with lower literacy levels are not likely to access the training they need.

Employment And Economic Status

After years of experiencing a declining population, Saskatchewan is now growing. Between the 2006 and the 2011 Census, the population of the province grew by 6.7%, compared to a decrease of 1% between 2001 and 2006. It is not possible to state where this most recent increase has taken place as all the data has not yet been released from the 2011 Census.

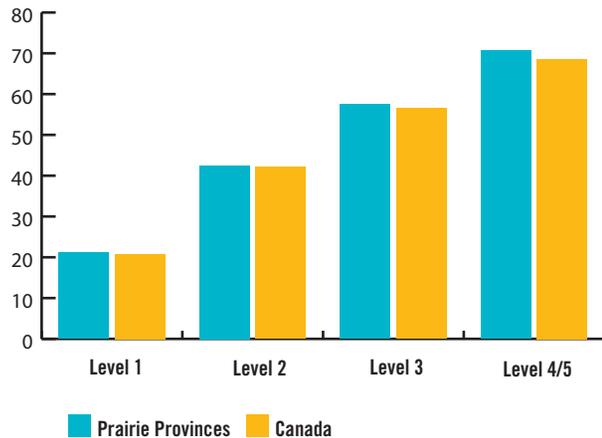
Employment has grown as well with 2011 marking an all-time high in employment. The rate of growth slowed in 2011. Between 2010 and 2011, gains were made in full-time employment (1.1%) while there was a decrease of 3.4% in part-time jobs.²⁴

Employment and economic status are related to literacy levels. The higher the literacy levels, the more likely one is to be employed. Those working in knowledge-intensive market services activities and in public administration, defense, education, and health have stronger literacy skills.

The knowledge based society and the increasing skill requirements of jobs have placed a stronger emphasis on literacy and essential skills. There is certainly a relationship between strong literacy skills and good, well-paying jobs. Income levels rise with increasing literacy levels. Those with stronger skills will be more likely to take advantage of the province’s economic growth.

CHART 9²³

Percentage Participation in Adult Education and Training by Prose Literacy Scores, 2003



Changes in the nature of work affect the requirements for literacy and essential skills. The labour force is shrinking, especially with the retirement of baby boomers, while the demands for more credentials and education are increasing. Immigration is one strategy to respond to this issue and the province is doing this through SINP; yet, at the same time, it is clear that employer provided training, improved literacy rates and a more unified education system will respond to higher skill demands²⁵. Entry-level jobs are demanding increased skills, especially digital or technological skills. “Many of the jobs that we have previously described as menial are in the fastest growing employment sectors....”²⁶

Poverty

Not everyone has been able to take advantage of the economic growth. The province has a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Aboriginal people are four times more likely to experience poverty and are consistently over-represented in the low-income category.²⁷

Internal migration has seen the de-population of rural Saskatchewan and increased infrastructure and service delivery challenges for the urban centres.

Poverty and low literacy levels are connected. While increasing literacy levels may have an effect on earnings and employment, without concerted anti-poverty efforts improving literacy alone will not be enough.

Health

Literacy affects health, and health affects literacy levels. Research shows that literacy is a significant factor in explaining disparities in health care received by adults. IALSS found a connection between physical health and literacy proficiency. Those who report poor physical health often have lower literacy scores.

Civic Engagement

Literacy levels also influence civic engagement. While IALSS did not establish cause and effect, it found a link between literacy scores and the likelihood of participating in the community and having strong community ties. Saskatchewan differs slightly from the eastern provinces by having stronger civic engagement at all literacy levels. Among those who were scored at literacy level 1, 54.8% said they were engaged in their community, the fourth highest proportion in the country behind Yukon, Alberta and Manitoba. At literacy level 2, some 76.7% indicated they were engaged, second only to Yukon²⁸. This may be the effect of the province’s overall volunteer rates. Saskatchewan has the highest rate of volunteering in the country with 58% of those aged 15 and over doing volunteer work in 2010²⁹.

Responding to Literacy and
Essential Skills Challenges
in Saskatchewan



Continuous and lifelong learning address the the basic skills everyone needs to be successful at home, at work, and in the community. Sound knowledge grounded in HRSDC's Nine Essential Skills is critical to the success of individuals, families, and communities.

Several factors influence the province's literacy levels. These include education levels, aging, immigration, the situation of Aboriginal people, access to training, economic and labour market issues, poverty, health, and civic engagement. These factors can affect the literacy level or be the consequence of a lower literacy level.

POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS

The provision of adult education and training is the responsibility of the provincial government. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration (AEEI) are the key players at the provincial level.

The Ministry of Education, through the Literacy Office, supports community-based learning opportunities for adults, while AEEI supports Adult Basic Education (ABE) primarily within recognised institutions for those without a high school certificate as well as workplace essential skills.

The federal government supports training of those without a high school education or with low essential skills through a Labour Market Agreement (a financial transfer agreement) with the province. The federal government supports provincial and national literacy organizations, tool development, research, and coordination and information exchange. It also provides funding for English as an Additional Language training and Aboriginal education and training.

LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS POLICY IN SASKATCHEWAN

Saskatchewan uses the 2003 United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) definition of literacy as its guide:

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate, and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

The province has been active in literacy for over 25 years. In September 1987, the provincial government launched the Saskatchewan Literacy Campaign, which it developed in collaboration with the federal government. The mandate of the Saskatchewan Literacy Campaign was to inform the public about literacy issues and to offer literacy programming to the province's adults. The province established the Saskatchewan Literacy Council, giving it a three-year mandate to oversee the Saskatchewan Literacy Campaign and to find ways to develop provincial literacy initiatives. The council retained the literacy programming mandate until 1990. Over the next few years, the provincial government integrated literacy programming into various units in Saskatchewan Education.³⁰

In 1997, the provincial government released the Saskatchewan Training Strategy that called for changes in the structure and delivery of education in Saskatchewan and dealt specifically with literacy and ABE. The training strategy called for an evaluation of the ABE programs which was started in 1999. Part of the feedback from the evaluation was a recommendation that the department develop a provincial literacy strategy.

In January 2001, the Department of Learning established a Provincial Literacy Steering Committee to oversee the development of a Provincial Literacy Strategy. Beginning in March 2001, the Provincial Literacy Steering Committee held consultations and in 2004, a draft Literacy Strategy was developed by the Steering Committee and presented to the Department of Learning.

On May 25, 2012, Premier Wall announced a re-organization that saw Advanced Education become its own ministry and the other elements of AEEI, including Adult Basic Education, Workplace Essential Skills Saskatchewan, Essential Skills in the Workplace Program, and Immigration responsibilities move to a new Ministry of the Economy. The change occurred as this publication was going to print. Before full details were known, this publication refers to AEEI.

The literacy definition developed for purposes of this strategy was an enriched definition that expands literacy beyond a narrow set of skills, and links it to language, learning, culture, and context:

Literacy is the foundation to a lifelong learning process that empowers individuals to draw on the gifts of mind, body, heart, and spirit toward the fulfilment of personal and family life and community responsibility.

Literacy involves a continuum of interrelated skills, practices and learnings that contribute to development of an individual's ability to understand, communicate and participate in a variety of roles (i.e., parent, citizen, and worker) and settings, in the home, at work, in education and in the community. These include:

- listening and speaking
- reading and writing
- observing, viewing and representing
- numeracy
- use of technology such as computers and calculators

Literacy is essential to and influences the ability to:

- think critically
- make decisions
- solve problems
- resolve conflicts

In 2005, the government created the Saskatchewan Literacy Commission (SLC). The SLC was established to raise public awareness of the importance of literacy and provide a strong, co-ordinated approach to basic literacy and essential skills for learners throughout life. The previous draft strategy was shelved and

instead the SaskSmart Innovation Fund (SSIF) was created to develop community literacy plans for communities identified as high need.

In 2007, the SLC was decommissioned and the SSIF became part of the Ministry of Education under the Literacy Office. The Ministry of Education has laid out a strategy that includes improved literacy and numeracy of all learners. It has continued to work on the provincial literacy strategy while supporting community-driven family, student and workplace literacy projects, and research.

ABE Levels

Level 1 and 2: Literacy Benchmarks Levels 1 and 2 include general skills, abilities, and attitudes adults need to function in their world. Levels 1 and 2 provide the foundation for learning at levels 3 and 4. The Circle of Learning is the physical representation of the Benchmarks.

Level 3: Level 3 includes courses in communications, social sciences, life/work studies, mathematics, and science, at the Adult 10 level. Learners who complete Level 3 successfully go on to further education, training, or employment opportunities.

Level 4: Level 4 includes adult grade 12 completion and GED preparation. An adult may attain a grade 12 standing by completing 7 grade 12 level classes or may write the GED to receive a grade 12 equivalency.

LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS PROGRAMMING IN SASKATCHEWAN

1. Adult Basic Education (Abe)

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is the primary formal literacy and adult education program in the province. ABE includes a range of services and programs free of charge. ABE has four levels: levels 1 and 2 are non-credit programs, while levels 3 and 4 are credit programs. Completion of level 3 provides an Adult 10 while completion of level 4 results in a secondary-level completion transcript from the Ministry of Education or a high school equivalency diploma from GED. The following flow chart outlines the intended pathways of ABE.³¹

Low-income adults pursuing ABE at a post-secondary institution may be eligible for the Provincial Training Allowance (PTA). Approximately two-thirds of all learners who attend ABE programs receive the PTA.³² Those attending ABE levels 1 or 2 at a non-post-secondary institution, e.g. a community-based organization are not eligible for the PTA.

In 2010-11, there were 9,829 learners involved in ABE programming. Data from AEEI indicate the following demographics of the ABE learners.

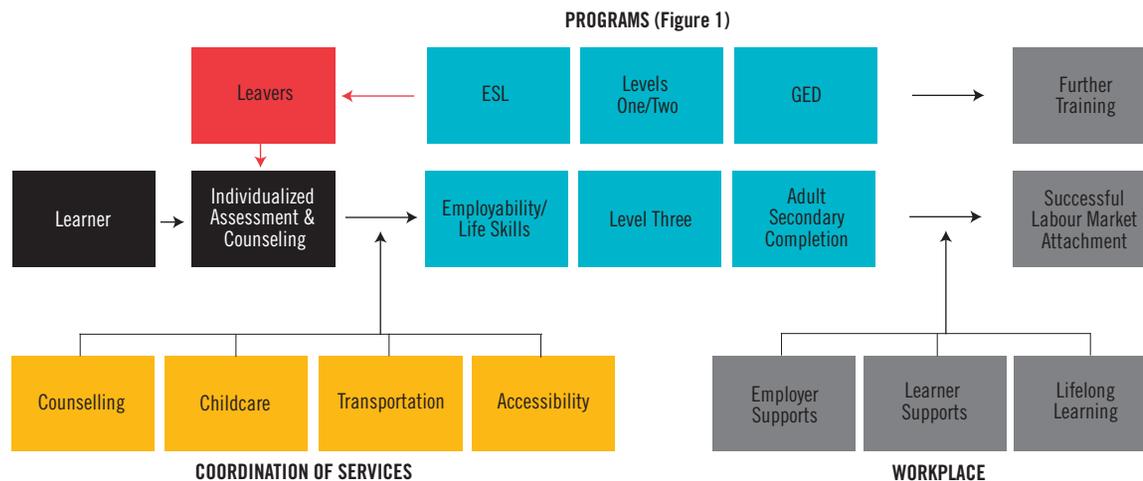


FIGURE 2

Demographic Data: ABE Follow-up Surveys³³

2005 - 2006	2006 – 2007	2007 – 2008	2008 – 2009	2009 – 2010	2010-2011
5,364 full-time learners	5,526 full-time learners	6,254 full-time learners	* 8,819 learners	* 9,266 learners	*9,829 learners
62.6% were female 37.4% were male	63.1% were female 36.9% were male	65.2% were female 34.9% were male	65% were female 35% were male	62% were female 38% were male	60.7% were female 38.7 were male
60.2% self-declared as Aboriginal	66.1% self-declared as Aboriginal	59% self-declared as Aboriginal	65% self-declared as Aboriginal	* 65% self-declared as Aboriginal	*53.3% self-declared as Aboriginal
7.1% self-declared as disabled	7% self-declared as disabled	6.2% self-declared as disabled	6 % self-declared as disabled	5% self-declared as disabled	5% declared as disabled
3.3% were ESL learners	5.6% were ESL learners	8.6% were ESL learners	11.7 % were ESL learners	16.7 % were ESL learners	19.5% were ESL learners

Approximately 2,000 part-time learners were not included in surveys prior to 2008-09. Demographic characteristics are generally not collected on these learners so this would affect Aboriginal Rates. 65% self-declared Aboriginal is an estimate.

Since 2007, a portion of the ABE budget and activities has been targeted to ABE On-reserve. Some 2,769 learners have benefited from this program since 2007, with 812 learners participating in 2010-11.³⁴

Funder: AEEI provides grants to post-secondary institutions to deliver all levels of ABE, both on- and off-reserve. The Literacy Office, Ministry of Education provides funding to post-secondary institutions and some community-based organizations to deliver Level 1 and 2 programming. The Literacy Office shares responsibility for Circle of Learning (Saskatchewan Adult Literacy Benchmarks Levels 1 and 2.)

Budget: In 2011-12, the provincial government spent just over \$20 million on ABE.³⁵ Provincial funding for ABE increased 17 per cent in 2010-11 over the previous year due to one-time federal stimulus grant funding.

Beginning in 2007-08, a portion of the ABE funding has been provided to educational institutions for the delivery of ABE On-reserve programs.³⁶ For the past two years, the funding has been \$3.8 million.

2. Family Literacy Hubs

Ten service providers have been designated as regionally-based “Family Literacy Hubs.” The hubs promote and deliver family literacy programs and services tailored to fit community needs in four core areas, including:

- public awareness
- quality programs and services
- practitioner training and support
- community outreach and networking

Ten organizations are funded to act as Family Literacy Hubs. The ten organizations are:

- Balcarres Communities Literacy Network Inc.
- College Mathieu (on behalf of Service francosaskois de formation aux adultes)
- Great Plains College on behalf of two regional hubs (Southwest Literacy Committee in Swift Current and the West Central Literacy Committee in Biggar/Rosetown)
- Lloydminster Learning Council Association
- Moose Jaw and District Chamber of Commerce Inc. (on behalf of the Moose Jaw Literacy Network)
- Northlands College
- Parkland Regional Library
- Prince Albert Literacy Network Inc.
- READ Saskatoon Inc.
- Regina Literacy Network Inc.

The Literacy Office partners with the Saskatchewan Literacy Network and the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network to support the ten hubs.

Funder: Literacy Office, Ministry of Education

Budget: These organizations receive funding for Family Literacy work on annual basis. In 2010-11, \$452,458 in funding was provided to literacy hubs.

3. SaskSmart Innovation Fund (SSIF)

The SaskSmart Innovation Fund (SSIF) funded community-based literacy projects that include both family and workplace literacy components. These one-year projects enabled communities to undertake a needs assessment and develop a Community Literacy Plan (CLP). The “Expressions of Interest” portion of the SSIF, which enable communities to organize themselves in advance of applying for a CLP ended March 31, 2012. The CLP portion and the SSIF itself ends March 31, 2013.

The Literacy Office contracts with the Saskatchewan Literacy Network and the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network to provide support to communities in the development of their projects.

Funder: Literacy Office, Ministry of Education

Budget: \$350,000 to \$400,000 per year.

Through the Literacy Office, Ministry of Education, the Family Literacy Hubs and the SSIF budget was about \$1,222,458 in 2010-11.

4. Workplace Essential Skills Saskatchewan (WESS)

The Workplace Essential Skills Saskatchewan (WESS) Initiative supports business and industry to train low-skilled job seekers and existing low-skilled employees in the workplace to gain the workplace essential skills needed for long-term employment and/or advancement. WESS provides funding to employer, industry, and training institution partnerships for the development and delivery of essential skills training that is tailored to their workplace.

Funder: Program Innovation Branch, AEEI
Budget: \$1.1 million 2010-11

5. Adult Basic Education – Essential Skills For The Workplace (ABE-ESWP)

The Adult Basic Education – Essential Skills for the Workplace (ABE-ESWP) program focuses specifically on Literacy Levels 1 and 2 and helps First Nations, Métis and the unemployed gain workplace skills that allow them to enter the workforce. In 2010-11, 393 adult learners registered in 19 ABE-ESWP projects. Of the 393 enrolments, there was a 66% completion rate (57% completed, 5% withdrew for employment and 4% withdrew for further education).³⁷

Funder: Program Innovation Branch, AEEI
Budget: In 2011-12, \$1.7 million from the federal stimulus fund was spent on 19 ABE-ESWP projects and 24 projects were approved using \$2.5 million of provincial funding.³⁸

6. Aboriginal Skills And Employment Training Strategy (ASETS)

Skills training including essential skills can be provided under the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS). The Gabriel Dumont Institute and the Saskatchewan Indian Training Assessment Group hold the ASETS agreements for the province.

Funder: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

7. English As An Additional Language (EAL)

Adults wishing to develop English as an Additional Language (EAL) can take Stage One English or the federal Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) courses at the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST), at several regional colleges, and at community based organizations including Saskatoon Open Door Society, Regina Open Door Society, Prince Albert Multicultural Council, Moose Jaw Multicultural Council and Immigrant Women of Saskatchewan. These courses are offered free of charge.

Funder: Citizenship and Immigration Canada

8. Labour Market Agreement (LMA)

The federal government transfers funds to the province under the Labour Market Agreement (LMA) for programs for those not eligible for training under the Employment Insurance Act. One of the priority areas for the LMAs is people without a grade 12 or with low levels of Essential Skills. Programs such as ABE-ESWP and WESS are funded under this agreement.

Funder: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
Budget: \$90 million between 2008-09 and 2013-14.

PROVIDERS

Publicly-funded post-secondary, organizations receive funding to deliver ABE programs at no cost to the learner. Funded institutions include SIAST (Woodland, Kelsey, Wascana, and Palliser Campuses), Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Dumont Technical Institute (DTI), and the seven regional colleges (Northlands College, Cumberland College, North West Regional College, Great Plains College, Carlton Trail Regional College, Parkland College, South East Regional College).

Five community-based organizations throughout the province receive funding to provide non-credit upgrading (ABE Levels 1 and 2). The five organizations are Circle Project, Lloydminster Learning Council Association, READ Saskatoon, Regina Public Library, and Service francosaskois de formation aux adultes.

Libraries have been particularly active in the area of family literacy, early childhood literacy, adult tutoring, and homework support. The Literacy Office is housed in the government office responsible for libraries. Various community-based organizations have incorporated literacy and essential skills into their programming. Examples include the Adult Centre for Employment Readiness and Training run by the Regina Food Bank, the Learning Disabilities Association of Saskatchewan, the John Howard Society of Saskatchewan, and the Regina and Saskatoon Trades and Skills Centres. In addition, SSIF, WESS, ABE-ESWP, and family literacy projects involve a wider group of partners from business, First Nations, the health system, early childhood education, and community action groups.

INFRASTRUCTURE SUPPORT

Quality literacy and essential skills programming requires support beyond the classroom. The provincial and federal governments provide funding to organizations to build capacity, encourage collaboration, and enable local community planning.

The Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) brings together those active in the Literacy and Essential Skills field in Saskatchewan. The federal government's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) recognizes the SLN's value to the field by providing it with annual core funding. The provincial government regularly contracts with the SLN to provide support for its initiatives including being part of the management team for the Family Literacy Hubs and one of the facilitators for SSIF support. It also provides funding to the SLN to support its learner activities. Among the projects coordinated by the SLN are the development of the ABE benchmarks (in collaboration with AEEI and the Literacy Office), the Family Literacy Bursary, Family Literacy HUB review, Research in Practice, and Annual Knowledge Exchange. The SLN resources also come from cost recovery activities such as training, resources and consulting, and fundraising activities such as Raise-a-Reader.

The Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network (SALN) is a provincial, nonprofit organisation that works with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and non-Aboriginal people and communities to promote and support Aboriginal literacy. The SALN and the SLN share a capacity building role supported by the provincial government. In this role, the SALN supports Family Literacy Hubs and SSIF projects.

The Service francosaskois de formation aux adultes (SEFFA) delivers literacy training in the French language as well as promoting the use of French in Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Adult Basic Education Association (SABEA) is the professional association for instructors of ABE in Saskatchewan. It brings together ABE instructors to support and promote ABE in the province. SABEA also sponsors instructor professional development and provides advice to government.

TESL Saskatchewan is the professional association for teachers of English as a Second Language. It provides networking, professional development, and accreditation for ESL instructors.

SK TEAL is dedicated to the teaching of ESL at the Kindergarten to grade 12 levels. It is one of the Saskatchewan Teacher Federation's special subject councils.

Digital literacy is the ability to use and understand technology. It encompasses all digital devices and technology that help us locate, organize, and analyze the world around us.



Assessment of Literacy and
Essential Skills Supports in
Saskatchewan



Learning is fun.
Learning happens
everywhere.
Celebrating family
literacy is as easy as
the passing of
knowledge from one
generation to the next.

A clear statement about strategy and policy along with a robust funding program for community literacy is needed. The province has opted to support a literacy and essential skills infrastructure as well as direct literacy training. Initiatives such as the SSIF, the Family Literacy Hubs, and the contracting partnerships with SLN and SALN speak to this focus on capacity building. Attention is paid to regional concerns and to supporting community planning and development.

STRENGTHS

Saskatchewan's literacy and essential skills efforts are based on an ABE program offered in all regions of the province primarily through publicly funded institutions such as SIAST, regional colleges, SIIT, and DTI. The ABE system offers a province-wide certification for ABE Level 3 and 4. Levels 1 and 2 Benchmarks are required to be used in literacy programs funded through AEEI and through the Literacy Office.

The province has opted to support a literacy and essential skills infrastructure as well as direct literacy training. Initiatives such as the SSIF, the Family Literacy Hubs, and the contracting partnerships with SLN and SALN speak to this focus on capacity building. Attention is paid to regional concerns and to supporting community planning and development.

Aboriginal literacy is a priority. The ABE-ESWP program targets Aboriginal people while the past few years has seen LMA money targeted to ABE On-Reserve. Partnerships with Aboriginal educational institutions to deliver programs and provide needs assessment information are in place.

The province has taken up the challenge to encourage employers to provide workplace Essential Skills programs through the WESS program.

CHALLENGES

The public institutions dominate the ABE field. Few community-based organizations are supported directly to provide literacy. Further, students attending Level 1 and 2 upgrading programs offered by community-based organizations are not eligible for a living allowance under the PTA. Consequently, learners must work to support themselves and cannot attend literacy training on a full-time basis. Learners requiring income support must attend a public institution rather than a community-based program. The programs in the public institutions often have long waiting lists and are scheduled for full-time classes leaving learners unable to work if financial support is not available.

Responsibility for literacy and essential skills is divided between two ministries, each with a small staff. This arrangement can enhance the status of the issue by having two cabinet ministers responsible, but it can also be confusing and possibly duplicative unless there are clear ways to ensure synergy between the two offices.

There is a dearth of information about what is happening in the province. Data on the numbers of learners and their outcomes, the amount of funding, or the impact of programming is not publicly available. Evaluations of initiatives such as the SSIF or the WESS do not exist.

These issues prevent a clear understanding of the impact of the government's efforts. Without knowing how well existing initiatives are working, it is difficult to plan or to customize efforts to meet the needs of specific target groups, regions, or providers.

Initiatives such as the SSIF provided only short-term funding which prevents communities from realizing their full potential. Most literacy initiatives take up to three years before becoming entrenched and require sustained support beyond this period.³⁹

A literacy strategy for the province has not yet been released. Such a strategy would help to guide the province's efforts to improve literacy levels and could help to embed literacy as a priority within other government activities such as labour force development or poverty reduction. A literacy strategy could also lay the framework for research and evaluation efforts.

Embracing a new hobby, or learning a new skill helps us develop literacy skills that form the foundation of our future success.





Learning in the workplace is a continuous lifelong process. Soft and hard skills are vital to achieving success in the 21st century workplace.

Strong literacy and essential skills have positive outcomes for individuals, their communities, and the province. A province whose population has strong literacy skills is well positioned to meet complex economic and social challenges.

While Saskatchewan's population generally has stronger literacy skills than those of other provinces and territories, certain groups, such as Aboriginal people, immigrants, and seniors, have weaker skills. Weaker skills are related to poverty, lower employment rates and income, a lack of access to training and educational opportunities, poorer health outcomes and weaker civic engagement.

Employment has grown in the province with 2011 marking an all-time high in employment; however, the rate of growth slowed in 2011. Changes in the nature of work affect the requirements for literacy and essential skills. The labour force is shrinking, especially with the retirement of baby boomers while the demands for more credentials and/or education are increasing. Jobs are requiring greater literacy and essential skills, especially digital skills. Saskatchewan has a higher proportion of people with no certification or high school certificate than the rest of Canada. This will have an effect on the match between people and jobs.

The province has a strong ABE system, especially as delivered by the public institutions. Recent initiatives to support workplace essential skills, expand ABE programming on-reserve, and support infrastructure provide a solid foundation. The involvement of two ministries, one concerned with education and the other with employment and immigration, is a welcomed holistic approach.

There remain challenges. Community-based organizations are underfunded. Learners can receive financial incentives to attend full-time literacy programs at public institutions but not at community-based organizations. Because of these funding challenges, community-based organizations are finding themselves with a funded and growing EAL client group and a declining literacy client group.

The province has yet to release a literacy strategy. Performance measurement is lacking. Information on numbers of learners, outcomes, and funding is not publicly available. Decisions such as the termination of the SSIF are being made in the absence of evaluation.

The improvement of literacy levels in Saskatchewan is critical to meeting the developing labour market needs in the province and to improving the quality of living for all residents of the province.

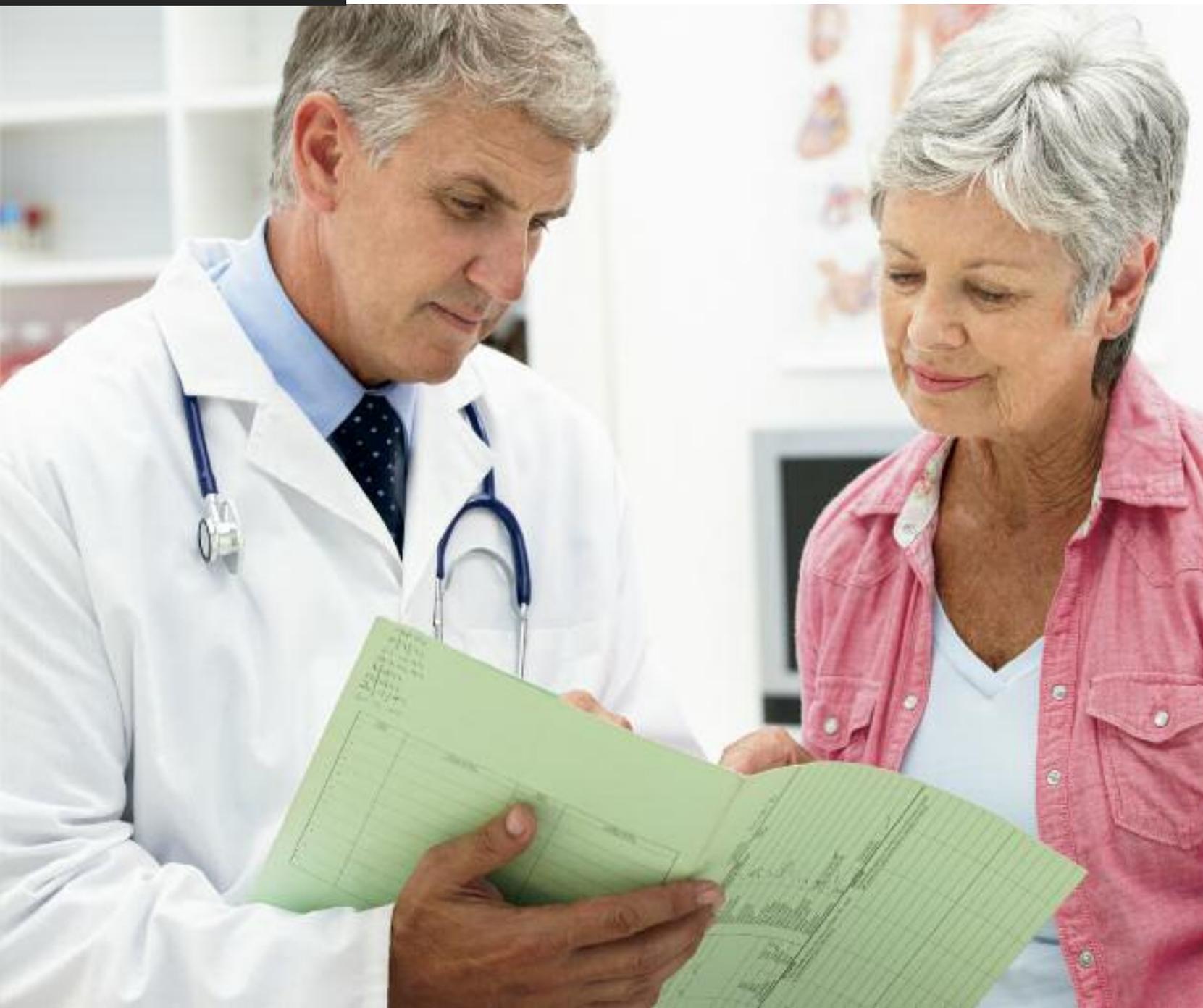
LOOKING AHEAD

The absence of a provincial Literacy Strategy and the termination of the SSIF, create the perception that the provincial government is moving away from adult literacy. A clear statement about strategy and policy along with a robust funding program for community literacy is needed. In addition, the province could act to improve consistency, avoid duplication, improve accountability, and foster partnerships to advance literacy levels in the province. An accountability framework is needed including performance measurement activities at the provincial level, such as data on outcomes and evaluation, and at the program level, with realistic expectations for beginning level programs in terms of program lengths, resource needs and the success measures.

Literacy programs, particularly those outside of the larger public institutions, are surviving day by day. Along with a provincial commitment to literacy would be a commitment to stable ongoing funding. Predictability enables long-term planning and the capacity to look beyond today's needs. Community-based literacy programs have to turn to non-literacy clients, frequently EAL clients, since they are unable to compete with the public institutions, which can offer PTA support. The capacity of programs to provide appropriate services can be bolstered through increased professional development. The place of community-based literacy programs within the provincial Literacy Strategy needs to be defined.

The changing labour market with its ever-increasing skill demands and technological changes can only be supplied when workers have the skills they need. These workers are often already in the workforce and so innovative ways of reaching and training them are needed. Special initiatives are needed to respond to the needs of Aboriginal people and those whose first language is neither English nor French.

The existing population of Saskatchewan ought to have all of the skills necessary to live and work in the province. Without full participation, particular sectors will not benefit from of the province's economy.



Strong literacy skills are fundamental to understanding our health and wellbeing.

ACRONYMS

ABE	Adult Basic Education
ABE – ESWP	Adult Basic Education – Essential Skills for the Workplace Program
AEEI	Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration
ASETS	Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy
CCL	Canadian Council on Learning
CLP	Community Literacy Plan (part of SSIF)
DTI	Dumont Technical Institute
EAL	English as an additional language
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRSDC	Human Resources and Skills Development Canada
IALSS	International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey
INAC	Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
LINC	Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada
LMA	Labour Market Agreement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLES	Office of Literacy and Essential Skills
PIAAC	Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies
PTA	Provincial Training Allowance
SABEA	Saskatchewan Adult Basic Education Association
SEFFA	Service francosaskois de formation aux adultes
SIAS	Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology
SIIT	Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies
SINP	Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program
SLC	Saskatchewan Literacy Commission
SLN	Saskatchewan Literacy Network
SSIF	SaskSmart Innovation Fund
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation
WESS	Workplace Essential Skills Saskatchewan

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UNDERSTANDING LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS

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ASSESSMENT OF LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS SUPPORTS IN SASKATCHEWAN

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