

NWT Literacy Strategy

Mr. Speaker, increasing literacy levels among the people of the Northwest Territories is a top priority for the Department of Education, Culture and Employment. We recognize the importance of literacy across the lifespan and throughout society. Literacy is not so much a matter of whether or not people can read, but rather, about how well they can read and use different kinds of information. *The NWT Literacy Strategy, Towards Literacy 2008-2018*, focuses on helping people lead fulfilling lives and contribute to society. The new Strategy represents the ongoing commitment of the Government of the Northwest Territories and our partners including schools, Aurora College, the NWT Literacy Council, communities, families, individuals and others to improve the overall literacy of Northerners.

We built upon our past strategy and have increased funding in a number of areas. For the 2009/2010 year, there is a total of \$3.4 million budgeted for the *Literacy Strategy*. Some of our increased investments include \$350,000 to provide literacy programming in smaller, remote communities throughout the NWT, and \$150,000 to support community libraries. This money helps bring books to Northern communities to give residents access to resources they need to improve their literacy.

Another focus of our revised *Strategy* is for those NWT adults who have not finished high school. ECE is in the process of implementing an adult diploma equivalent to the

NWT Secondary School Diploma. The new model allows NWT adults to earn a grade 12 diploma through a combination of academic course credits and prior learning assessment and recognition credits. ECE is presently working to put the supports for the adult high school diploma in place.

Youth literacy is also a critical area of concern in the NWT. We are investing in youth literacy by \$250,000, focusing on youth between 16 and 25 years of age. We are specifically targeting out-of-school and at-risk youth. To reach this vulnerable group, we are working with youth centres across the NWT to emphasize the importance of literacy and help young people develop their literacy skills.

The Department is also undertaking a Youth Literacy Gap Analysis to look into best practices and practical steps that we can take to increase youth literacy in the NWT. A Youth Literacy Working Group was established that will direct the work on the Youth Literacy Gap Analysis. Recommendations from the report will be used to develop a youth literacy action plan for the duration of the strategy.

With 11 official languages, it is also important to encourage Northerners to use traditional languages. We are increasing our emphasis on supporting Aboriginal language literacy, emphasizing the importance of being able to speak in the indigenous languages of the North. This will form part of a larger plan to invigorate and support aboriginal languages.

In closing, we also established a Literacy Strategy Advisory Committee which represents all regions of the NWT and includes representation from the NWT Literacy Council, and Aurora College as well as other organizations that have a strong interest and commitment to literacy. This committee will guide the implementation of the NWT Literacy Strategy. Literacy is important to everyone from infants to Elders, in all official languages and requires the involvement and support of everyone in society in order to achieve our goals. We look forward to continuing to work with our many partners to increase literacy awareness and levels in the NWT.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.