

NEWS

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Ontario Outlines Plan to Strengthen Reading Supports for Students

Reforms Will Improve Student Literacy and Provide Foundational Skills Required for Academic and Professional Success

TORONTO — The Ontario government is taking immediate action to improve student literacy and making longer-term reforms to modernize the way reading is taught and assessed in schools, with a focus on phonics. The Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC's) recently published *Right to Read* report outlines fundamental problems related to Ontario's existing elementary Language curriculum created in 2006 by the former government, noting that it does not follow the science of reading, and has led to poor outcomes for student literacy.

The OHRC noted that the Right to Read public inquiry was launched in October 2019 because it was "concerned that Ontario's public education system was failing to meet the needs of students with reading disabilities." The *Right to Read* report outlined numerous concerns and recommendations, including:

- Ending the three-cueing system, as it is based on a discredited theory from 1967 and has been incorporated into Ontario's Language curriculum since 2006
- Mandating universal early screening in kindergarten to Grade 2
- Addressing wait times for professional assessments
- Making evidence-based reading intervention programs available
- Improving access to accommodations
- Setting standards and improving consistency, monitoring and accountability in the education system
- Ensuring teacher preparation programs address critical concepts.

According to the Education Quality and Accountability Office, approximately 25 per cent of Grade 3 students in Ontario did not meet provincial standards in reading, and 30 per cent did not meet provincial standards in writing in 2018-19. There has been insufficient improvement, as at least one in four students still does not meet the provincial standard for reading and writing. Learning disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic have further created a need for learning recovery supports, particularly for students facing additional barriers.

As an immediate first step, and in response to the recommendations of the OHRC's report, Ontario is making a \$25-million investment in evidence-based reading intervention programs and professional assessments to support learning recovery and enable school boards to immediately begin meeting the needs of struggling readers. Funding is being made available for this school year and will carry through into the 2022-2023 school year.

Research shows that when reading interventions are early, evidence-based, fully implemented and closely monitored, they are highly effective in improving reading success.

In addition to this critical investment in reading assessment and interventions, Ontario's plan to boost literacy outcomes and support learning recovery also includes:

- Aligning the elementary Language curriculum and the Grade 9 English course with scientific, evidence-based approaches that emphasize direct, explicit and systematic instruction
- Eliminating all references to unscientific discovery- and inquiry-based learning, including the three-cueing system, by September 2023
- Releasing a science-based guide for educators in spring 2022 that will support effective early reading instruction
- Collaborating with partners, including faculties of education, on professional development for educators to ensure they are learning science-based reading instruction methods
- Revising the elementary Français, Actualisation linguistique du français, Programme d'appui aux nouveaux arrivants, and the Grade 9 Français curriculum by September 2023
- Beginning development of a French-language reading intervention program
- Engaging with parents and sector partners on a longer-term response and developing accessible, parent-friendly resources on literacy skills.

“Our government is committed to creating a highly literate workforce that gives young people the self-confidence and essential life and jobs skills they need to succeed,” said Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education. “Ontario is overhauling the Language curriculum with a focus on phonics, investing in new reading supports for students, and hiring more specialized staff to help put our province and country on a strong footing to compete globally and thrive economically.”

Despite relatively high education rates, an analysis of international assessments by Statistics Canada in 2013 showed that more than one in six adult Canadians fell short of passing the most basic set of literacy tests. Studies have consistently shown that improving the literacy of a country's workforce increases both GDP and productivity. In fact, literacy scores are a better predictor of long-term growth of OECD countries than educational attainment. Increasing the literacy skills in the workforce by an average of one per cent would, over time, lead to a three per cent increase in GDP, or \$54 billion per year, every year, and a five per cent increase in productivity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant disruptions in the education sector and impacts to students' academic progress. Throughout the pandemic, Ontario has taken decisive action to protect students and made historic investments to help address the learning disruptions. A key component of Ontario's learning recovery action plan is early literacy and numeracy.

Ontario continues to modernize its education system so that students are prepared for

the world of work and any pathway they choose. In addition to foundational skills in literacy and math, the provincial government is building STEM skills, expanding job skill programs, and launching a new entrepreneurship pilot.

QUICK FACTS

- The curriculum changes Ontario is making will be in line with those made by leading national and international jurisdictions.
- Literacy and other essential skills can also be linked to employment outcomes and higher earnings for individuals. The OECD estimates that a 50-point literacy score increase (or one level) translates to a 9 per cent increase in hourly wages in Canada and 20 per cent more likelihood of being employed.
- Despite the importance of literacy, one million Canadian children under the age of 15 are estimated to have below grade-level literacy skills. That is about one in eight kids. The percentage of 15-year-olds with the lowest levels of literacy has increased over the past decade.
- More students in Ontario have a learning disability versus any other exceptionality, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics. The OHRC estimates that approximately 80 per cent of people with learning disabilities have dyslexia.
- The Ontario government is investing over \$176 million in expanded tutoring supports to assist learning recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This amount includes \$175 million for school boards to provide more school-based tutoring in the 2021-22 school year and continuing into the 2022-23 school year, as well as expansion of year-round online tutoring supports in math and reading.
- The ministry is continuing its longstanding relationship with the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario by providing \$750,000 in 2022-23 to support resource development and learning opportunities for educators.
- Ontario's elementary Language curriculum was last updated in 2006.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Ontario Human Rights Commission Right to Read report](#)
- [Ontario Launches Largest Tutoring Support Program](#)
- [Ontario's Learning Recovery Action Plan for Students](#)

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