

Backgrounder

Literacy Framework for Nunavut Schools

Literacy is more than the ability to read and write.

The term *literacy* refers to a complex set of knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes that enable individuals to think critically, communicate effectively, deal with change and solve problems.

Research identifies underdeveloped literacy skills as the number one reason why students fail to graduate from high school.

High school completion rates are improving in Nunavut but are still significantly below other jurisdictions in Canada.

Nunavummiut have expressed concerns that our schools are not providing students with the literacy skills they require in order to access career and post-secondary opportunities.

Many graduates are unable to move directly to post-secondary education. They often require two or more foundational years focused on building literacy skills.

Currently the Department and our schools have no common consistent way to teach or assess student literacy skills.

There are no standardized assessments of literacy skills in Nunavut, other than at the grade 12 diploma level.

To improve literacy we are identifying research-based, evidence-based, effective approaches to teach reading and writing that will be consistent and used across all schools in Nunavut.

The first phase of our literacy framework will focus on K-8 programming using a *Balanced Literacy* approach, resource development (all languages) and professional development.

Balanced Literacy is a comprehensive approach to literacy development and includes strategies to support reading, writing and word study.

Guided Reading, Guided Writing and Word Study are key instructional components of the Balanced Literacy approach.

Students will experience a balance of direct and indirect instruction as they move from support to independence in word study, reading and writing.

Steps of the *Guided Reading* program:

- Reading Aloud_teacher reads a selection aloud to a small group of students.
 This provides a model of how fluent reading sounds. It also builds a community of readers and helps students develop active listening skills.
- Shared Reading_teacher and students read a text together. This allows the teacher to model reading strategies and it provides students with essential demonstrations of how reading works and what readers do to construct meaning.
- Guided Reading_teacher introduces a selection at the student's instructional level. This gives the students the opportunity to practice their reading skills, increases comprehension and encourages independent reading.
- Independent Reading_this allows students to choose texts that interest them.
 It develops fluency by reading just-right books and fosters self-confidence by reading familiar and new text.

Steps of the *Guided Writing* program:

- Modeled/Shared Writing_teacher and students collaborate the write the text; teacher does the writing. This models the connection among and between sounds, letters, and words.
- Interactive Writing_teacher and students compose together using a shared pen technique where students do some of the writing. This helps students learn how to plan and construct texts and it increases spelling knowledge.
- Independent Writing_students write independently. This supports reading development and develops active independence.

Word Study:

In order to become fully literate, students must have the ability to accurately recognize words. They also have to adequately use written words to convey meaning. Because word study is based on phonics spelling and vocabulary, it's a way for students to manipulate and fully examine words.

In Word Study students use meaningful games and activities to discover:

- 1. Letters and the sounds they make
- 2. How to pick out root words, and how suffixes and prefixes can change the meaning

- 3. Spelling involves finding patterns
- 4. How to get clues to word meaning and pronunciation by examining the parts of a word.

In *Word Study* teachers use a variety of activities to improve spelling, word recognition and vocabulary: word searches, pattern sorting and proofreading

Students who struggle will be provided with timely, focused intervention to ensure that all students have the opportunity to be successful.

Reading programs will use leveled books, allowing students to master increasingly difficult text while providing parents with an understanding of their child's development in relation to grade level outcomes.

Teachers will receive high quality professional development training in literacy acquisition to help them provide our students with high quality learning experiences.

The Department is also supporting schools by purchasing and developing resources to support the initiative. We have purchased English language leveled books for all schools and we are currently working with a local publisher to produce an extensive series of leveled books in Inuktut.

The *Balanced Literacy* initiative will begin with kindergarten to grade four in the 2014-2015 school year and move into grades five to eight and nine to twelve in successive years.