



## Five Pillars of Literacy

Modeled after the Right to Literacy Convention - June 13, 2009 Buffalo, New York, USA

### PILLAR #1: BUILDING THE COMMUNITY

**WHEREAS** families of every community have different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and individuals have different learning abilities and skills

Therefore, communities must recognize, respect and incorporate the diverse cultures of their residents as well as accommodate each person's abilities and individual learning differences, difficulties and disabilities.

**WHEREAS** many people with limited literacy skills face additional obstacles such as racial, cultural and language biases, child care and transportation issues that discourage or prevent them from attending literacy classes

Therefore, communities must adopt policies, programs and incentives ensuring that youth and adults have access to learning as part of their larger commitment to building a just and equitable community.

**WHEREAS** the interests and needs of communities are often unmet due to fragmented relationships and competition for scarce resources among learners, educators, literacy providers and other community members

Therefore, stakeholders in all sectors of a community must commit to building community-wide literacy collaborations and sharing resources to promote a thriving community.

**WHEREAS** the security and well-being of our communities depend upon an informed and active citizenry, and whereas most communities lack awareness of the serious consequences of low literacy

Therefore, community leaders must develop, fund and implement public awareness campaigns about the importance of literacy in order to gain public support for all levels and types of literacy instruction.

**WHEREAS** the unique assets and needs of the senior adult community are rarely recognized, and too many senior adults lack literacy and technological skills to participate fully in the life of the community or advocate for their health and well-being

Therefore, senior adults must have opportunities to acquire the health, technological, financial and literacy skills they need for self-advocacy and active participation in the life of our communities.

## **PILLAR #2: STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY**

***WHEREAS*** *successful literacy education requires participation of learners, educators, families and communities*

Therefore, people of all ages – children, parents, seniors – must participate in creating a culture of life-long learning that respects the abilities, challenges and experiences of all learners.

***WHEREAS*** *the literacy level of adults is critical to children's success in school because parents and guardians are a child's first teachers*

Therefore, all parents and guardians must be welcomed as important participants in the education system and be guaranteed access to strong adult and family literacy education.

***WHEREAS*** *there is limited support for families who struggle with unrecognized learning disabilities and family issues*

Therefore, communities must build collaborations among schools, governments, social service agencies, faith communities and struggling families to overcome obstacles.

***WHEREAS*** *effective literacy programs require teachers who reflect the culture and language of the community and are skilled in helping learners and parents become self-determined, critical learners*

Therefore, every educational system must fund and ensure high quality literacy training, curriculum development, and best practices for all teachers from early literacy through the lifespan.

***WHEREAS*** *family literacy is a vital ingredient to transforming individuals, families, and communities and breaking the cycles of inter-generational low literacy/high poverty*

Therefore, family literacy programs must be encouraged and funded in all communities.

## **PILLAR #3: ENSURING PEOPLE'S RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION**

***WHEREAS*** *learners are increasingly subjected to narrowly-defined teaching material and methods and judged by high-stakes testing disconnected from their experiences, knowledge and strengths*

Therefore, all learners must have learning opportunities that emphasize problem solving and critical thinking, encouraging them to find and use their own voices, and allowing their learning to be measured in appropriate, various ways.

***WHEREAS*** *learners of all ages, especially low-income and learners of color, immigrants, older people, and learners with special needs, are neglected, segregated, subjected to inequitable education, and denied a voice in designing their education*

Therefore, all learners must have an active role in planning, administering and evaluating the education system so that resources are distributed equitably.

***WHEREAS*** *learners with limited literacy rarely have access to the growing spectrum of technological resources necessary for full participation in society*

Therefore, learners must be engaged in the design and delivery of technological systems and services, including assistive technologies, so they are available and easy to use by people with different learning styles, languages, and abilities.

***WHEREAS*** adults with limited literacy skills are frequently discouraged by the fragmented and inadequate educational systems and are shamed into silence

Therefore, adult learners must be trained in self-advocacy so that they take their rightful place in the forefront of transforming adult literacy into a valued and essential component of the education system.

***WHEREAS*** learners whose first language is other than English are frequently excluded from discussion about “literacy rights”

Therefore, learners must have access to culturally competent literacy programs.

#### **PILLAR #4: IMPROVING THE WORKFORCE**

***WHEREAS*** low literacy costs our businesses billions of dollars each year in lost productivity and affects our ability to compete economically at the global level

Therefore, literacy education, “soft skills”, and workforce training by highly-skilled professionals and volunteers must be offered to those with the most limited skills (reading below an eighth grade level) leading to a greater return on investment.

***WHEREAS*** a large percentage of inmates who will ultimately be released need adequate literacy skills to achieve success in society

Therefore, prison systems must provide basic literacy and workforce skills and offer transitional workforce planning and support so men and women can succeed in the workplace.

***WHEREAS*** most jobs now require a minimum of 12th grade literacy skills, most self-sustaining and ‘green’ jobs require at least one year of post-secondary education, and the economy of the future will require ever increasing numbers of skilled workers

Therefore, workforce literacy classes, vocational English-language programs and incentives for workers to improve their literacy skills must enable working and non-working adults to acquire the literacy and technology skills they need for jobs with family-supporting wages.

***WHEREAS*** there are long waiting lists in many areas for persons needing basic skills and English language training for jobs

Therefore, adult literacy must be a recognized and funded component of the workforce development system, including every community partner who provides basic workforce skills training and the literacy field must be re-trained to meet contemporary workforce needs.

***WHEREAS*** low literacy hurts the efficiency and quality of our workforce, with as many as 48% of working age Canadian adults lacking basic skills

Therefore, community collaborations must develop formal plans that provide creativity and problem solving throughout pre-employment and on the job training, and strengthen adult and K-12 programs that provide case management/career counseling services.

#### **PILLAR #5: TRANSFORMING THE LITERACY SYSTEM**

***WHEREAS*** the global competitiveness and economic security of our country and well-being of our citizens are seriously held back by widespread low literacy in Canada, and

***WHEREAS*** having an adult population with high level literacy skills is a key component of success in early childhood education, health care, welfare, technology, and America's workforce

Therefore, literacy must be a national priority and an integral part of our country's public policies, supported by an educational system that equips all learners to make informed decisions, manage their lives effectively, and achieve their fullest potential and contribution.

***WHEREAS*** the current educational assessment system overemphasizes standardized, high stakes tests that are culturally biased

Therefore, literacy assessments must be grounded in current research and theory, incorporate a variety of approaches, be designed to eliminate biases based on students' language, culture, socio-economic or ethnic backgrounds, and be age- and interest-appropriate.

***WHEREAS*** the current educational system fails to meet the self-identified and evolving needs of today's individuals and families and fails to utilize technology to create more accessible learning opportunities

Therefore, the current education system must be transformed so that it is consumer and community driven, and designed to meet learners' goals.

***WHEREAS*** high literacy skills are critical to individual freedom, family well-being, and community development

Therefore, the education system must be transformed into a comprehensive, culturally appropriate, lifelong, training and learning system that aligns national and international policies based on the principle that children are successfully educated when adults are fully literate.

***WHEREAS*** the current adult and family literacy system and services are fragmented, underfunded, and inflexible

Therefore, integrated, accessible, and comprehensive services must be provided to all learners in a well-funded education and literacy system.

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