

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation - Overview and Literacy Facts

The Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation was founded by Co-Chairs Heather Reisman (CEO and Founder, Indigo Books and Music) and Dr. Heather Munroe-Blum (Principal Emerita of McGill University and Chair of the Canadian Pension Plan Investment Board) with the support of other high-profile Canadians (full Board list below).

Our mission: To ensure that ALL children in Canada are equipped to achieve their full potential, we champion, connect and develop initiatives that will enable Canada's children to become the most literate in the world.

What we will do: As catalysts for significant, long-term impact, we will identify gaps and opportunities; promote results-focused best practices; mobilize practitioner networks; as well as promote and incubate initiatives that support our goal of making Canadian children the most literate in the world.

When will we do it? We want to see Canadian children become the world's most literate in ten years and use our work as a model for other countries.

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation Board

1. Ms. Heather Reisman, CEO of Indigo and Chair of the Indigo Love of Reading Foundation
 2. Dr. Heather Munroe-Blum, Principal and Vice-Chancellor Emerita of McGill University and Chairperson of the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board
 3. Ms. Naomi Azrieli, Chair and CEO of The Azrieli Foundation
 4. Mr. Jordan Banks, former Managing Director, Facebook and Instagram, Canada
 5. Col. Chris Hadfield, Canadian Astronaut and Author
 6. Mr. Ellis Jacob, President and CEO of Cineplex
 7. Dr. Alika LaFontaine, Anesthesiologist and past-President of the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada
 8. Mr. Daniel Lamarre, President and CEO of Cirque du Soleil
 9. Mr. Peter Mansbridge, Chief Correspondent at CBC News
 10. Mr. David Walmsley, Editor-in-Chief of The Globe and Mail
 11. Dr. Maryanne Wolf, Visiting Professor and Director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners, and Social Justice, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies
- Founding CEO:** Julia Deans, jdeans@childrensliteracy.ca, 416-263-5080

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Literacy Facts

1. Too many children – especially Indigenous children and those living in low income – are not developing the literacy skills they will need to succeed.

- Literacy levels and income are strongly linked. Only eight percent of low-income Canadians are in the highest two levels of literacy combined.ⁱ
- Third grade reading proficiency is one of the most important indicators of high school graduation.ⁱⁱ
 - “Through third grade children are learning to read; after third grade students read to learn.... Without a strong foundation in reading, children are left behind at the beginning of their education. They lag in every class each year because more than 85 percent of the curriculum is taught by reading. By the end of third grade, 74 percent of struggling readers won’t ever catch up.”ⁱⁱⁱ
 - Fourth grade is the critical juncture for reading proficiency with increasing numbers of children failing to achieve it. The convergence of 1) increased curricular demands; 2) teachers who have not been trained to teach reading acquisition at this age; and 3) children who have not yet learned to read fluently presents a triple threat to all later development.^{iv}
- Canada dropped from 12th in 2011 to 18th in the PIRL global ranking of fourth-grade readers in 2016.^v
 - In 2016, approximately half as many Canadian fourth graders read at an advanced level (13 percent) than fourth graders in Singapore (29 percent) and the Russian Federation (26 percent).

2. Children’s literacy skill levels and the resources available to help them vary dramatically across Canada.

- 25 percent of Canadian households do not own a single book. (Compare this with Norway, where less than 5 percent of households do not own a book.)^{vi}
- Books in the home increase the level of education a child will attain.^{vii}
 - According to a 20-year study across 27 countries by Dr. Mariah Evans of the University of Nevada, Reno, being raised in a bookless home versus in one with a 500-book library affects the level of education that a child will attain as much as having parents who are barely literate (three years of education) versus university-educated (15-16 years of education). Both factors propel a child an average 3.2 years further ahead. Even having as few as 20 books in the home will have a significant impact in propelling a

child to a higher level of education, with more books increasing the benefit.^{viii}

- In some provinces, 18 percent of grade 8 students have below-baseline level reading proficiency, the majority of them boys.^{ix}

3. Increasing children’s literacy will reduce adult illiteracy and the significant economic, health and social costs it creates.

- 17 percent of Canadian adults are text-challenged.^x
 - In 2012, 17 percent of Canadian adults aged 16 to 65 had a literacy score corresponding to level 1 and below, meaning that they could only find single pieces of information in short texts or only had a basic vocabulary.
 - Only about 13 percent of adults were in the two highest categories of literacy skills (level 4 and level 5) meaning, for example, that they were able to integrate information from multiple dense texts and to reason by inference.
- Without intervention, it is expected that, by 2031, 47 percent of adult Canadians will have difficulty using written material.^{xi}
 - Brain development, particularly for precursors of literacy such as language, is time-sensitive.^{xii}
 - In the first few years of life, more than 1 million new neural connections form EVERY SECOND. After this period, connections are reduced through a process called pruning, which allows brain circuits to become more efficient.
- Higher levels of schooling significantly reduce the probability of arrest and incarceration.^{xiii}
- Reading to young, preschool children is one of the best predictors of later reading.^{xiv}
- Without early childhood intervention, low literacy is generational.^{xv}
 - Children learn early literacy skills from their parents or caregivers. Parents or caregivers with low literacy skills tend not to read to their children, or to model reading and writing for them, which affects the children’s future literacy abilities. By the time a child reaches school age, many of the early developmental stages that promote literacy have occurred, and a child who has not experienced them within the family circle is at a disadvantage.

ⁱ Heisz, A., Notten, G., & Situ, J. (2016). “The association between skills and low income”. *Insights on Canadian Society*. Issue Number 2016001. Statistics Canada Catalogue 75-006-X201600114322. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2016001/article/14322-eng.pdf>

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- ⁱⁱ National Research Council. (1998). *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*. Edited by C. Snow, S. Burns, and P. Griffin, Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties in Young Children. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. (Original source, not available online)
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- ⁱⁱⁱ The Children's Reading Foundation. *Third Grade Reading Success Matters*. Web. Accessed 15 October 2018. <https://www.readingfoundation.org/third-grade-reading-matters>
- ^{iv} Wolf, M. (2007). *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*. New York: HarperCollins.
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- Wolf, M. (2018). *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*. New York: HarperCollins.
- ^v Mullis, I. V. S., Martin, M. O., Foy, P., & Hooper, M. (2017). *PIRLS 2016 International Results in Reading*. Retrieved from Boston College, TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center. <http://timssandpirls.bc.edu/pirls2016/international-results/pirls/performance-at-international-benchmarks/achievement-at-the-international-benchmarks/>
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- ^{vi} Statistics Canada (May 11, 2005). *Adult Literacy and Life Skills (ALL) Survey, Statistics Canada and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005*. Accessed 15 October 2018. <https://ca.awp.autotask.net/3/filelink/c56mq-cyd5xm-4lkdbxy4>
- ^{vii} University of Nevada, Reno. "Books in home as important as parents' education in determining children's education level." *ScienceDaily*. 21 May 2010. <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/05/100520213116.htm>
- ^{viii} M.D.R. Evans, Jonathan Kelley, Joanna Sikora, Donald J. Treiman. "Family scholarly culture and educational success: Books and schooling in 27 nations." *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, 2010; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2010.01.002>
- ^{ix} O'Grady, K., Fung, K., Servage, L. & Khan, G. (2018). "PCAP 2016: Report on the Pan-Canadian Assessment of Reading, Mathematics, and Science". Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. <https://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/381/PCAP-2016-Public-Report-EN.pdf>
- ^x Heisz, A., Notten, G., & Situ, J. (2016). "The association between skills and low income." *Insights on Canadian Society*. Issue Number 2016001. Statistics Canada Catalogue 75-006-X201600114322. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2016001/article/14322-eng.pdf>
- ^{xi} Canadian Council on Learning, "Reading the Future: Planning to meet Canada's future literacy needs" (Ottawa: 2008). Page 6. <http://www.en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/future/future.pdf>
- ^{xii} Center for the Developing Child, Harvard University. *Key Concepts: Brain Architecture*. Web. 15 October 2018. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/brain-architecture/>.
- Also see new brain-imaging studies by pediatric neurologist, John Hutton, as quoted in Wolf, 2018.
- ^{xiii} Lochner, L. & Moretti, E. (2004). "The Effect of Education on Crime: Evidence from Prison Inmates, Arrests, and Self-Reports," *American Economic Review*, American Economic Association, vol. 94(1), pages 155-189, March. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/aea/aecrev/v94y2004i1p155-189.html>
- ^{xiv} Wolf, M. (2018). *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*. New York: HarperCollins.
- ^{xv} ABC Life Literacy Canada. "What are the effects of low literacy". Web. Accessed 15 October 2018. <https://abclifeliteracy.ca/sites/default/files/Effects.pdf>