



A culturally responsive Yukon literacy strategy and plan: Growing student success

For Yukon Education-operated schools



Overview

Developing and improving literacy skills throughout life is essential to an individual's right to an education. Literacy is a top priority for the Department of Education. Literacy is complex and involves more than learning to read. It expands into the ability to make meaning from text and express oneself in a variety of modes. This includes comprehending, making connections, critically analyzing, and creating and communicating for a variety of purposes.

Yukon Education-operated schools currently use a “balanced literacy” approach to develop students' literacy skills. Concerns have been raised that this approach may not adequately address some foundational building blocks of learning to read. For example, an increased emphasis on phonological awareness is considered necessary by some experts as a fundamental building block.

The Department of Education acknowledges the research that states that if students fall behind with their basic reading and writing skills by the end of their primary school years, they are extremely unlikely to catch up in later years and their chances of graduating Grade 12 are significantly reduced. The Department of Education recognizes that a gap in foundational reading and writing skills exists and a targeted and comprehensive strategy is needed.

Yukon Education's Literacy Strategy

Teaching literacy is complex as there is no single approach that works for all students. At Yukon Education, our literacy strategy is to support educators to develop their knowledge on a wide range of strategies and approaches. Taking a multi-faceted, holistic, and student-centred approach to literacy learning matches the diversity that exists within each classroom. Research continues to unveil new insights into how students learn to read, understand language and communicate meaning. Some of these evidence-based approaches will require educators to employ different ways of teaching literacy skills, specifically in the teaching of reading.

Transitioning towards different approaches is not easy and cannot happen overnight. To improve literacy learning, we must invest in capacity-building for educators as they develop additional knowledge and skills while increasing their instructional 'toolkits'.

A working group has provided recommendations for a Yukon Education literacy strategy. The working group includes:

- educators;
- school administrators;
- individuals and community organizations involved in literacy development;
- professionals engaged in directly supporting learners who experience difficulty with language skills (e.g., educational psychologists and speech-language pathologists); and
- organizations and individuals focused on supporting Indigenous learners.

The group's work resulted in 13 recommendations that underpin the Culturally Responsive Yukon Literacy Strategy and Plan, rooted in the co-constructed vision.

Vision

Through a culturally responsive and evidence-based approach, educator efficacy and student skill in the area of literacy development will be strengthened. Rooted in best practice of training and delivery, a consistent, comprehensive, and cohesive strategy will be developed for long-term literacy success of all Yukon learners.

Areas of focus

- Educator capacity
- Supports and resources
- Diverse needs and targeted supports for students
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Culturally responsive and reflective
- Alignment with BC/Yukon curriculum
- Continued research and development

Implementation

Key deliverables

A phased approach over the next three years will include, but is not limited to:

- Increasing learning opportunities for educators and implementing literacy support teachers in schools to provide continued support to educators, guided by a literacy consultant.
- Ensuring culturally inclusive materials and approaches to support structured literacy.
- Using up-to-date, evidence-based practices, meaningful consultation with partners, and frequent review and quality assurance processes to measure success and provide iterations of support where necessary.

Timeline

Priority activities will begin in the 2023-24 school year and will continue to full implementation by 2025-26. Annual review and quality assurance processes will take place. The plan will be implemented in Yukon Education schools with open communication and collaboration with internal and external partners and stakeholders.

Partners and stakeholders

- School boards
- First Nation governments
- Elders and Knowledge Keepers
- Community organizations
- Education partners
- Subject matter experts
- Yukon educators and administrators

Recommendation	Timeline	Focus Areas
Ensure access to decodable books for each K-3 classroom with different perspectives, including First Nations' perspectives, if available.	Selected, procured, and delivered in the school year (SY) 2023/24.	Supports and resources Culturally responsive and reflective
Ensure recommendation resources for K-12 literacy include those that support a structured literacy framework. Ensure other appropriately linked curriculum material is available to support educators system-wide in all facets of literacy development.	Inventory of training opportunities and resources compiled over SY23/24. Offering specific structured literacy training opportunities in SY23/24. Inventory and training plan updated yearly, ongoing.	Supports and resources
Include a structured literacy approach to provide explicit and systematic instruction in the key branches of literacy. Includes, but is not limited to, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, reading strategies and First Nations ways of knowing, doing and being (writing, reading and oral language).	Mandate and communications plan developed early in SY23/24. Quality assurance assessment for administrators to ensure implementation is ready for SY24/25.	Supports and resources
Build literacy expertise within the Department of Education and in Yukon schools to include a structured literacy approach.	Ensure education consultants are trained in structured literacy approaches in the SY23/24. Have a designated literacy consultant for Yukon Education schools in place by the SY24/25. Employ school-based literacy support teachers in each K-7 Yukon Education school for SY24/25.	Educator capacity

Recommendation	Timeline	Focus Areas
<p>Protect the integrity of learning assistance teachers (LATs) and literacy support teacher roles. LATs or literacy support teachers must not be pulled from their roles to carry out Teacher on Call (TOC) duties and/or other related school duties.</p>	<p>Improving mechanisms to increase Teacher on Call (TOC) availability ongoing.</p>	<p>Educator capacity</p>
<p>Follow <i>7 Characteristics of Effective Professional Development (PD)</i> as outlined in the Community of Practice on PD (RISE – Reimagining Inclusive and Special Education).</p>	<p>Development of professional learning quality checklist informed by Community of Inquiry (COI) on Professional Development for Re-imagining Inclusive and Special Education (RISE) in SY23/24.</p> <p>Implementation of targeted sustainable professional learning structures in accordance with the checklist in SY24/25 and continuing in SY25/26.</p>	<p>Educator capacity</p> <p>Continued research and development</p>
<p>Provide ongoing and high quality in-servicing that focuses on the foundational concepts of oral and written language and that supports educators in applying a scientific and other evidence-based reading instruction with a structured literacy approach. In order to ensure success, educators must be provided with multiple opportunities for this training and the training must be mandatory.</p>	<p>Phased approach in developing and mandating mandatory training and professional learning SY23/24 SY25/26.</p>	<p>Educator capacity</p> <p>Continued research and development</p>

Recommendation	Timeline	Focus Areas
<p>Facilitate literacy support in Yukon school communities through a literacy coach and school-based literacy support teachers, trained in the structured literacy approach, with curriculum-linked literacy goals. This will include how to strategically learn about, apply, reflect upon and refine instruction. Train a literacy coach to work with literacy support teachers at identified pilot schools to build capacity (collaboration between Yukon Education, Yukon Association of Education Professionals and schools).</p>	<p>Designated education consultant to support literacy in SY23/24.</p> <p>School based Literacy Support Teachers for K-7 schools in place by SY24/25.</p>	<p>Educator capacity</p>
<p>Continue to work with already established curriculum goals, where needed and applicable. E.g., text production, comprehension, and engagement with reading materials.</p>	<p>Ongoing using current Curriculum and Assessment training opportunities.</p>	<p>Align with BC/Yukon curriculum</p> <p>Diverse needs and targeted supports</p>
<p>Expand intervention models to include interventions that deliver evidence-based, timely and specialized, targeted, and/or intensive supports (e.g., Wilson, see Yee (2021), p. 20) that align with and focus on specific areas of educator training needs across the grade levels and literacy across the curriculum, based on a rigorous implementation of the Yukon's response-to-intervention model</p>	<p>Working group to continue exploring intervention models and provide further recommendations in SY23/24.</p> <p>Use recommendations to begin pilot intervention(s) in SY23/24: review data and evaluate efficacy of intervention tool.</p> <p>Move forward with training and full implementation of intervention(s) once evaluation and selection processes are complete.</p>	<p>Diverse needs and targeted needs</p> <p>Culturally responsive and reflective</p>

Recommendation	Timeline	Focus Areas
<p>Update Apple iBook pertaining to assessment – Communicating Student Learning.</p> <p>Provide in-service training for teachers, administration and Educational Assistants to include and administer evidence-based universal screening measures at least three times a year. Training to include how to use this data to inform instruction.</p>	<p>Select and begin pilot screening tool in SY23/24: review data, evaluate efficacy of screening tool.</p> <p>Move forward with training and full implementation of screening tool once evaluation and selection processes are complete. Fully implemented by SY25/26 or earlier.</p>	<p>Culturally responsive and reflective</p> <p>Diverse needs and targeted supports</p> <p>Align with BC/Yukon curriculum</p>
<p>Create action groups to continue the necessary literacy work to follow through and implement the recommendations in a focused manner with specific timelines/ deadlines.</p> <p>The Department of Education lead is the point of contact between Yukon Association of Education Professionals and the schools.</p>	<p>Phased approach, as required, to complete deliverables starting in SY23/24 and maintained as long as required.</p>	<p>Continued research and development</p>
<p>Continue the working group to specifically deepen the recommendations and develop further recommendations with respect to Indigenous approaches to teaching literacy and literacy interventions.</p>	<p>Working group is facilitated by someone with a strong background in Yukon First Nations cultural and pedagogical practices.</p> <p>SY23/24 to invite and engage with potential working group facilitators.</p> <p>Working group continues if strategy is active, within the three-year span.</p>	<p>Continued research and development</p>