



Federal Literacy Facts

an update on literacy-related developments at the national level

Movement for Canadian Literacy

May 2004

Election offers opportunities to advance literacy agenda

It's official – the federal election campaign is on and Canadians will cast their ballots on June 28th. What remains uncertain is the result of that vote. With polls showing that the election is too close to call, many sources say we should expect one of the most hotly contested federal election campaigns in many years. That means candidates will be working extra hard to earn your vote. With this in mind, there's no better time to work to secure your future MP's support for literacy.

What opportunities does the election hold for the literacy community?

- 1. Influence Canada's future decision-makers.** In return for a chance at your vote, candidates will give you their ear. Use this opportunity to turn your future MP into a literacy champion. Even losing candidates may emerge as high-profile community leaders who can further our cause.
- 2. Get the candidates on the record on literacy.** Commitments you receive during the campaign can be used to leverage action after Election Day.
- 3. Inform the public.** Use public forums, such as all-candidates debates or radio call-in shows, to raise literacy with the candidates and at the same time educate the public on literacy issues in your community.
- 4. Strengthen local connections with your future MP.** Use the election as a reason to invite the candidates to your program or office.
- 5. Empower learners.** Elections provide a great opportunity to teach learners about civic rights.
- 6. Mobilize our community.** Use MCL's on-line election tool kits to strengthen our movement.

MCL launches on-line resources for Election 2004

MCL has been working with Elections Canada to develop easy-to-understand resources for Canadians whose literacy challenges make the election process difficult to understand:

Interactive multimedia voter information

This on-line resource offers animation, voiceovers, step-by-step demonstrations, and interactive tools to make the election process more accessible. This is a great resource for programs, or for any community organization that works with the public. Elections Canada plans to post it on their website in the near future.

Study Kit for use in programs

This downloadable resource offers interesting and fun teaching activities and materials to encourage understanding and participation in the election.

In addition, we have put together a collection of action-oriented resources to help you make literacy an election issue in your community:

MCL's Literacy Action Kit

Make your vote count! This kit contains tools, templates, and step-by-step guides that you can use to make literacy an election issue in your riding. In this section, you will also find the Party Leaders' responses to MCL's questions on literacy to help inform your vote.

You can find all of these resources under "What's New" at www.literacy.ca

Federal Quick Facts

Senator Fairbairn has been reappointed as Special Advisor on Literacy.

On April 30th, Senator Joyce Fairbairn was reappointed as the Special Advisor on Literacy to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development (HRSD). This is welcome news, as the Senator has proven to be a staunch ally to the literacy community and advocate for literacy advances. We hope the position will be renewed when the post-election Cabinet is formed.

The positioning of the NLS raises some important questions.

As the dust clears in the months following the reorganization of HRDC into two separate departments, it remains unclear what long-term impact this might have on the direction of literacy policy in Canada. Some are concerned that NLS' positioning in Human Resources Skills Development (HRSD) rather than the other HRDC offshoot, Social Development, is cause for concern. Will NLS' positioning at HRSD lead to a very narrow definition of literacy as simply a tool for labour market development? Will continued restructuring within HRSD undermine the Secretariat's capacity? The impact of NLS' positioning at HRSD and the impact of continued transition in the post-election phase are emerging issues that MCL will be watching closely.

Canadian Council on Learning

The final structure of the Council remains unclear. However, MCL learned recently that federal funding for the Council has been decreased from \$100 million over five years to \$85 million. MCL will continue to monitor developments to see how the evaluative focus of the Council might impact on literacy and the literacy sector.

Join MCL's Fall 2004 Literacy Action Campaign!

Watch for the launch of MCL's 2004 Literacy Action Campaign this Fall. MCL is still working out strategy, details, and new twists for these campaigns. However, in keeping with past years, we do plan to include these key components: (1) tools to assist you to reach out to local MPs in the community in September and early October, and (2) Literacy Action Day on Parliament Hill, which is tentatively scheduled for October 21st.

Our community has made great strides in the past few years. We've informed and influenced Parliamentarians and Cabinet Ministers. We've made our case with key bureaucrats. We've worked with others, outside of the community, to make literacy a priority. Now, we need to work with Ottawa's new powerbrokers and build on past achievements. Our Fall Literacy Action Campaign provides an opportunity to do that.

This year's campaign is especially important. In the post-election phase we will be working to inform and influence a new Parliament, with new Members, new Cabinet Ministers, and possibly a new government. In addition, with the new Parliament we can expect a new Throne Speech and Budget.

The stakes are high but, with your help, the opportunities to influence change are great. Watch future issues of *Federal Literacy Facts* and MCL's website for updates!