Edmonton Learning City Initiative:

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONAL-LEARNING PLAN

APRIL 18, 2013
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We live in a rapidly changing, increasingly knowledge-based world. Learning is more essential than ever to individual and collective success.

The City of Edmonton has joined more than 300 cities world-wide that have embraced the concept of a learning city as a means of improving the economic and social well-being of individuals, families and communities.

As a City of Learners, Edmonton celebrates the learning excellence already achieved in our community. The Edmonton Learning City Initiative builds on this foundation to achieve even greater success for individuals, institutions, industry and the city as a whole.

The Edmonton Learning City Initiative is a call to action to mobilize resources, in every sector, with a goal to enrich our human potential through lifelong learning. We’re committed to helping all Edmontonians achieve personal growth, social cohesion and prosperity.

The Edmonton Learning City Initiative seeks to elevate the importance Edmontonians attach to learning in all aspects and stages of their lives. The focus of the initiative is to create a network of organizations to stimulate a culture of continuous learning available to all Edmontonians. Embracing learning as a foundational principle in our community will better prepare us to meet the challenges of our complex and competitive world.

We learn throughout our lives.

Learning encompasses a vast range of endeavours that includes credit, non-credit, formal, informal, traditional and non-traditional activities delivered by an enormous range of Edmonton institutions and organizations.

Lifelong learning means more than ongoing adult learning after formal education is completed. It refers to the learning that occurs throughout our lives, including but not limited to:

- Early childhood experiences
- K-12 schooling
- Postsecondary education
- Workplace learning
- Ongoing training
- Language learning
- Health literacy
- Artistic & creative endeavours
- Adult education
- Community programming
- Family learning
- Literacy in all its forms
- Intercultural learning
- Intergenerational learning
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Four Pillars of Learning

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) describes learning using four pillars that broaden learning.

The Edmonton Learning City Initiative uses these four pillars of lifelong learning as a foundation:

Formal education systems focus on these learning pillars:

- **Learning to Know**
  Development of skills and knowledge needed to function in the world. These skills include literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and general knowledge.

- **Learning to Do**
  Acquiring applied skills often linked to occupational success, such as computer managerial and trades training.

These learning pillars are often gained in informal and non-formal ways in our families, communities and workplaces.

- **Learning to Live Together**
  Developing values of respect and concern for others, fostering social and inter-personal skills and an appreciation of the diversity of Canadians.

- **Learning to Be**
  Learning that contributes to the development of a person’s body, mind and spirit. Skills in this area include personal discovery and creativity and can be acquired through reading, use of the Internet and activities such as sports and the arts.

We have outstanding learning opportunities in our city, but we need to help more people take advantage of them.
Given that we have a wide-ranging learning environment, it is essential that we share insights from our respective areas of expertise to foster ideas and direction that will help shape a community learning strategy.

Building on our strengths

Successful learning city initiatives consistently build on the existing strengths in their communities by identifying and implementing opportunities for increased collaboration and support. Recognizing the benefit of inclusive society on lifelong learning, one of the guiding principles of The Edmonton Learning City Initiative is to bring together organizations to work together more effectively in promoting lifelong learning for all and the value of learning for the whole community.

The Edmonton Learning City Initiative founding partners are:

- City of Edmonton
- Edmonton Catholic School Board
- Edmonton Public Library
- Edmonton Public School Board
- Junior Achievement
- MacEwan University
- NorQuest College
- Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT)
- Alberta Committee of Citizens With Disabilities
- Public Interest Alberta
- The Alberta Coalition for Healthy School Communities
- The Book Publishers Association of Alberta
- The Centre for Family Literacy
- The Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association
- The Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- The Seniors Action and Liaison Team
- University of Alberta
- Success By 6®
Three priority learning goals have emerged as a result of a June 8, 2010 dialogue with representatives from different learning organizations, agencies, and groups. The Edmonton Learning City Initiative approach is to engage multiple agencies and organizations to focus on these areas for a time so that measurable outcomes are achieved.

In each priority area, a group of individuals with expertise, knowledge and experience were gathered together to create planning strategies. These discussions helped clarify and align efforts to design effective approaches, leading to a formation of strategies, for each of the priorities. This plan outlines the following strategies associated with priority learning goals:

**LITERACY**

1) **COLLABORATION STRATEGIES**
   Lead an initiative to share services, resources, tools and effective literacy practices

2) **LEVERAGE STRATEGIES**
   - Increase public information and communication on the importance of literacy for all Edmontonians
   - Infuse literacy into other activities
   - Promote and encourage workplace literacy

3) **RESOURCE STRATEGIES**
   Champion actions to increase literacy programming for adults with low literacy and young children

**EARLY LEARNING**

1) **COLLABORATION STRATEGIES**
   Provide leadership for the creation of a new governance/funding/delivery model for early learning and care to replace current fragmented model

2) **LEVERAGE STRATEGIES**
   Champion the creation of quality early development environments

3) **RESOURCE STRATEGIES**
   Support a multi-faceted communication and awareness campaign for early learning

**HEALTH AND LEARNING**

1) **COLLABORATION STRATEGIES**
   - Create leadership with current and potential players that will lead to action
   - Stimulate collaboration and communication between individuals and organizations involved in promoting health and health literacy
   - Encourage collaboration of school communities
   - Focus on cross jurisdictional strengthening that will address the problem of bullying

2) **LEVERAGE STRATEGIES**
   - Leverage leadership opportunities with current and potential players that will lead to action
   - Leverage the authority and influence of school communities and districts
   - Leverage the power of sport, play and physical activity
   - Leverage technology as a means to promote health

3) **RESOURCE STRATEGIES**
   - Ensure equitable access to programs and resources
   - Increase awareness and commitment in the workplace
   - Utilize technology as a means to promote health
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CITY COUNCIL DECLARATION MAY 2010

On May 12, 2010 Edmonton City Council declared Edmonton a City of Learners:

“Edmonton is a City of Learners, a city where people of all ages embrace learning as a fundamental component of their personal, social and work lives.

The Learning City Initiative aims to stimulate the creation of conditions in which Edmontonians at all stages of life can access meaningful opportunities to: learn to know, learn to live together, learn to do, and learn to be.

Many opportunities for collaboration among the partners in the Learning City Initiative will be explored, while respecting the mandates and the autonomy of all involved. Working together we can achieve measurable improvement in learning outcomes.

As a City of Learners, we celebrate the excellence our community has already achieved in learning, and we set our sights on even greater success for individuals, institutions, industry and our city as a whole. The challenges of a complex and competitive world demand nothing less than conceiving of learning as an organizing principle in our community.”

Purpose of Edmonton Learning City Initiative: Community Foundational-Learning Plan

The purpose of this paper is to advance The Edmonton Learning City Initiative by:

1) Identifying priority learning goals
2) Helping shape learning community strategies and actions
3) Advancing a go-forward strategy amongst the partner organizations
Edmonton is a vibrant city where people of all ages embrace lifelong learning as a fundamental component of their personal, organizational and societal lives.

The Learning Cities initiative will stimulate the creation of conditions in which every citizen of Edmonton has the opportunity to be engaged with meaningful lifelong learning that enhances our personal and community lives by learning to live together; learning to know; learning to do; learning to be.

Alignment with City of Edmonton direction:

With the input of thousands of residents, Edmonton City Council established a City Vision, a creative description of the city we want Edmonton to become in 2040. *The Way Ahead: Edmonton’s Strategic Plan* outlines six 10-year goals to help make that vision a reality. The *Edmonton Learning City Initiative* supports 10-year goals of:

1. **IMPROVING EDMONTON’S LIVABILITY**
   Corporate Outcomes Supported:
   - Citizens use city infrastructure and participate in services and programs that provide enjoyment and personal health benefits
   - Complete collaborative communities that are accessible, strong, and inclusive with access to a full range of services

2. **DIVERSIFYING EDMONTON’S ECONOMY**
   Corporate Outcomes Supported:
   - The City attracts talent and investment making it nationally and internationally competitive

Edmonton Learning City Initiative: Community Foundational-Learning Plan
In addition, the Edmonton Learning City Initiative aligns and advances the following objectives of The Way We Live: Edmonton’s People Plan.

1.1) The City of Edmonton provides opportunities in neighbourhood, community and public spaces to connect people and build vibrant communities

1.2) The City of Edmonton uses its social and physical infrastructure at the neighbourhood, city, regional and global level to create connections

1.4) The City of Edmonton connects individuals, families, groups, cultures and communities to the services they need to thrive and realize their potential

2.1) The City of Edmonton celebrates and promotes healthy living

3.2) The City of Edmonton increases opportunities to improve the lives of its vulnerable population

4.3) The City of Edmonton protects the public health of Edmontonians

6.1) The City of Edmonton is a socially sustainable society

According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, our diversity is a national asset. Canadians who speak many languages and understand many cultures make it easier for Canada to participate globally in areas of education, trade and diplomacy. The Edmonton Learning City Initiative recognizes the advantage of an inclusive society, of cultural and linguistic diversity and of the richness of different cultural traditions to lifelong learning. As such, the Edmonton Learning City Initiative aligns and advances the following:

1.) Edmonton Urban Aboriginal Accord Declaration

Aboriginal contributions to our city through the sharing of distinct cultural values and knowledge and through economic investment make for an enhanced quality of life for all people in our region.

2.) Immigration and Settlement City Policy C529

Community Building and Inclusion: The City of Edmonton will encourage and support immigrant and refugee communities’ participation in all aspects of municipal life.

3.) Diversity & Inclusion Framework & Implementation Plan

Create processes, policies, plans, practices, programs and services that meet the diverse needs of those we serve.

Finally, the Edmonton Learning City Initiative aligns and advances the following objectives of the ELEVATE report created by the Community Sustainability Task Force.

Focus area c: promote life-long learning

Recommendation 8) Recognize that education is the foundation of a successful future for both communities and individuals, and that life-long learning is a foundation for community sustainability. Ensure that all community-driven plans include the delivery of life-long learning opportunities for all.

Recommendation 9) Encourage the Province of Alberta to provide innovative and sustainable infrastructure funding so that existing and new schools are modern, multi-functional and able to accommodate a diversity of programs.
The Edmonton Learning City Initiative got started when a group of learning sector partners came together to look at the opportunities in Edmonton and examine what was happening in other learning city projects around the globe.

An initial event was held in April 2008 in partnership with the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) which has provided resources to other Canadian municipalities. At that event, leaders in Edmonton’s learning services community and non-government and business organizations were introduced to the concept of a Learning Community. A working group was formed to develop some working definitions and test interest from agencies.

On June 17, 2008, a Network of Edmonton organizations and representatives which included the University of Alberta, Edmonton Public Library, Edmonton Community Adult Learning Association, Centre for Family Literacy and the Government of Alberta formed a committee to explore approaches necessary to cultivate Edmonton as a Learning Community.

The City of Edmonton was engaged in recognition that Learning City initiatives have been most successful when initiated by the municipal government as neutral ground among the partners. The intent is to build a forum where issues related to lifelong learning success can be discussed and measured in a community-side context. This can improve quality of life and empower workforces and citizens. Co-ordinating learning themes across participating groups and agencies for a specific time can lead to improved measurable outcomes in those areas.

At a January 20, 2010 City Council meeting, Administration was directed to develop the Terms of Reference for a City of Learners Initiative.

On February 24, 2010, the Terms of Reference were approved by the Edmonton City Council and on May 12, 2010, Edmonton was declared a City of Learners.

On June 8, 2010, representatives from different learning organizations, agencies and groups came together to discuss The Edmonton Learning City Initiative. Participants were asked to:

- Identify opportunities for working together to improve learning in Edmonton
- Identify the challenges to full participation to learning in Edmonton
- Identify challenges that might affect efforts to work together to improve learning
- Identify priority actions

Next, in order to map out a go-forward strategy, a group of representatives with expertise, knowledge or experience to recommend actions / strategies was formed for each of the identified priority areas. These discussions helped clarify and align efforts to design effective strategies for each one of the priorities.

On February 25, and March 1, 2011, the Edmonton Learning City Initiative held a second “Edmonton City of Learners Dialogue” to garner reactions to the proposed strategies and the draft Community Foundational-Learning Plan, and to seek guidance from stakeholders on how the initiative would best support its partners to achieve its goals.

Finally, to ensure continuity and sustainability of the Edmonton Learning City Initiatives, City of Learners Steering Committee has identified a governance model to help support the implementation of the priorities and actions identified in the Community Foundational-Learning Plan.

Community Foundational-Learning Plan Developed

This Community Foundational-Learning Plan outlines three priority-learning goals. It maps out a go-forward strategy and further engages current and potential partners to the learning initiative.
The Edmonton City of Learners Dialogue was held in June 2010 with public and partner agency representatives. The workshop examined opportunities and challenges in the area of learning and helped identify priorities and specific recommendations for action that could be adopted to enhance equitable access to learning opportunities.

The top ten areas of focus for The Edmonton Learning City Initiative were identified, in no particular order, as:

- **Increasing Awareness of Existing and New Learning Opportunities**
  The responders requested that a campaign be created to spread awareness and generate interest in new and old learning initiatives. Example: Utilize “211” more effectively.

- **Equity and Inclusiveness**
  There is a desire to see broader and more equitable access to learning opportunities with assistance provided to ensure that structural barriers do not prevent any from taking part. Example: Efforts to address transportation costs for learners. Related to this is a desire to see more inclusive instances of Edmontonians from diverse backgrounds learning side by side and form each other. Example: Youth teaching seniors how to use technology.

- **The Need for Networking**
  Focus on building collaboration between, but not exclusive to, groups of similar interest and focus through a “network of networks.” This also contains the idea of creating some sort of database so groups can meet and organize themselves into a learning community. Example: Online collaboration tools.

- **Focus on the Needs of the Learner**
  Change programs to fit the needs of the learners, as opposed to changing the learners to fit the needs of the program. Example: Programs which focus on learners’ strengths.

- **Awareness of Multiple Types of Learning**
  This idea reflects the respondents’ desire to see as much recognition for informal learning as there currently exists for formal learning. Many respondents saw encouraging participation in the various learning opportunities in Edmonton as a vital aspect of The Edmonton City of Learners Initiative. Example: Passports and Internships

- **Early Childhood Learning and Development**
  Many respondents requested that The Edmonton City of Learners Initiative focus on making early childhood learning a priority, as it would create better life-long learners and allow a more inclusive environment by breaking down cultural and systemic barriers to learning. Example: More and better child care services.

- **Functional Literacy and Literacy Skills**
  Participants stressed the importance of promoting literacy as a window into other forms of learning. Respondents mentioned functional literacy specifically because, for many of them, it is the foundation for all other types of learning. Example: Functional literacy programs.

- **Family Learning**
  Instead of focusing on one specific age group, it was recommended that programs be initiated to include learning experiences for the entire family. Example: Create programs where the parent is just as much a participant as the child.

- **Life-Long Learning Process**
  This area of focus is about generating acknowledgement that learning is an inescapable aspect of life and must be celebrated because of it. Example: Celebrate life-long learning!

- **Funding**
  Funding and support are a vital part of any successful initiative. Participants requested that it be ensured that the Learning City Initiative receives substantial and lasting support from a variety of contributors. Example: Create partnerships with businesses and other institutions aside from the City of Edmonton.
Foundational learning conveys an appropriate level of communication, literacy, numeracy, critical thinking and general knowledge that is required in order to engage with the demands of living and succeeding in today’s society.

Based on feedback from the City of Learners Dialogue, three priority-learning goals have emerged including the area of fostering lifelong learning.

Since Edmonton is a learning city with the goal of promoting lifelong learning and because the three priority learning goals also contribute to promoting lifelong learning, the City of Learners Initiative establishes the fostering of lifelong learning as its outcome and not an area that requires specific recommendations.

The City of Learners Initiative recognizes that in order to maximize lifelong learning opportunities for Edmontonians, the focus should initially be on three areas that will greatly impact Foundational Learning in Edmonton: literacy, early learning and health and learning.

The City of Learners Initiative also examined and identified a number of topical learning areas such as financial literacy and environmental literacy. At the outset, the City of Learners proposed to focus on the three foundational learning areas, and to address the two topical learning priorities in the future.

The City of Learners Initiative outlines three goals to help us make our vision a reality.

**GOAL 1: LITERACY**

Edmontonians achieve and maintain levels of literacy that allow them to actively participate in society and achieve their life goals.

**Outcome:**
- To increase Edmontonians’ literacy skills through incidental, community based and formal learning.

**GOAL 2: EARLY LEARNING**

Every child has a firm foundation for life long learning and healthy development.

**Outcomes:**
- To ensure a sound base of development for early and lifelong learning.
- To ensure equitable opportunities for all Edmonton children.

**GOAL 3: HEALTH AND LEARNING**

Edmonton is a healthy community through equitable access to healthy learning and opportunities to participate in healthy lifestyle.

**Outcome:**
- To encourage Edmontonians to embrace healthy lifestyle choices.
LITERACY PRIORITY

Introduction

Literacy is: “The ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning to enable an individual to achieve his or her goals, to develop his or her knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in the wider society.”

According to the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL), literacy is one of the most unknown problems for Canada as a country, Alberta as a province and, specifically, Edmonton as a city.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, there are five levels of Literacy:

**LEVEL 1:** indicates persons with very poor skills, where the individual may, for example, be unable to determine the correct amount of medicine to give a child from information printed on the package.

**LEVEL 2:** respondents can deal only with material that is simple, clearly laid out, and in which the tasks involved are not too complex. It denotes a weak level of skill, but more hidden than Level 1. People at this level may have developed coping skills to manage everyday literacy demands, but their low level of proficiency makes it difficult for them to face novel demands, such as learning new job skills.

**LEVEL 3:** is considered a suitable minimum for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a complex, advanced society. It denotes roughly the skill level required for successful secondary school completion and college entry. Like higher levels, it requires the ability to integrate several sources of information and solve more complex problems.

**LEVELS 4 AND 5:** describe respondents who demonstrate command of higher-order information processing skills.

The City of Learners Initiative outlined “literacy” as one of three goals to help us make our vision a reality. The goal for literacy is as follows:

Edmontonians achieve and maintain levels of literacy that allow them to actively participate in society and achieve their life goals.
Opportunities and Challenges

The CCL identified six main low-literacy level groups in Canada which require help.

GROUP A1 – This group is Canadian born, and has English as a mother tongue (possesses a potential reading disability). This group possesses a literacy ability of high level 1.

GROUP A2 – The majority of this group are immigrants, with non-English (and non-French) mother tongues. This group possesses a literacy ability of low level 1.

GROUP B1 – The majority of this group are born in Canada, with English as a mother tongue (potential reading disability), and possesses a mid-level 1 literacy ability.

GROUP B2 – The majority of this group are immigrants, speaking a non-English (and non-French) mother tongue. The average literacy level of this group is a high-level 1.

GROUP C – The majority of this group was born in Canada, and the majority speaks with English mother tongue. This group’s average literacy level is a mid-level 2.

Group D – The majority of this group was born in Canada, and the majority speaks with English mother tongue. This group’s average literacy level is a high-level 2. The difference between this group C and group D is that group D consists of people who scored higher on the Print Skills portion of the assessment.9

ADULTS REQUIRING ENGLISH-LANGUAGE INSTRUCTIONS, AGED 16 AND OVER.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>Print Skills (ISRS)</th>
<th>Comprehension Skills (ISRS)</th>
<th>Oral Language Score (ISRS)</th>
<th>Average Prose Literacy Score (IALSS)</th>
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<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Canadianborn, English mother tongue (potential reading disability)</td>
<td>Very Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>58.6</td>
<td>High-Level 1 (201)</td>
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<td>A2</td>
<td>Majority immigrants, non-English (and non-French) mother tongue</td>
<td>Very Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>41.8</td>
<td>Low-Level 1 (165)</td>
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<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Majority born in Canada, English mother tongue (potential reading disability)</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>Mid-Level 1 (193)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Majority immigrants, non-English (and non-French) mother tongue</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>48.9</td>
<td>High-Level 1 (204)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Majority born in Canada, majority with English mother tongue</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>Adequate*</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>Mid-Level 2 (233)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Majority born in Canada, majority with English mother tongue</td>
<td>Adequate*</td>
<td>Adequate*</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>High-Level 2 (259)</td>
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Outcome for the “Literacy” priority goal:
To increase Edmontonians’ literacy skills through incidental, community based and formal learning.

- The number of Canadians with literacy skills below Level 3, in absolute terms, will increase by “25% ... (due to population growth and demographic trends)... to a total of 15,029,000 adults by 2031.” This trend will be similar in Edmonton, with 36% of the population with a literacy level 2 or below.¹⁰

- According to the same report, 48% of Canadians over the age of 16 have a low level of literacy. However, the problem is that by 2031, according to indicators, this number will have changed to 47% - an improvement of just one percent.¹¹

- The Conference Board of Canada agrees with the assessment that there is a problem with literacy in Canada. They claim: literacy skills “are widely used in workplaces of all sizes—across all sectors and regions. Each skill plays a role in promoting communications in the workplace and in ensuring smooth operations with minimal misunderstandings or errors.”¹²

- “Maintaining a high level of health and safety in the workplace depends on everyone being able to communicate, make decisions, and work together to achieve common goals.” According to the report, the findings were still convincingly in favour of literacy having a direct effect on the quality of work.¹³

- A separate report echoes the importance of literacy in the workplace, except in this case it focuses not only for safety reasons but for economic ones too. Mike McCracken and T. Scott Murray claim “that the proportion of low skilled adults reduced long-term growth rates, and that literacy impacted economic growth independently of one’s participation in attaining post-secondary education.”¹⁴

### ADULT LITERACY PROJECTIONS IN CANADA

Jurisdiction: Alberta - All Cities  
Age Group: All Ages  
Immigration Status: Canadian-born  
Education Level: All Education Levels

This graph shows the total number of adults (according to variables selected above) at literacy Levels 1 through 5, over five-year spans between 2001 and 2031.

Actions / Strategies

To ensure success, efforts to improve literacy and learning in the City of Edmonton must:

- Be inclusive and accessible for all Edmontonians with a clear message that literacy matters to all;
- Help to create a comprehensive, integrated and systematic Learning City Initiative that is committed to improving learning opportunities and outcomes for all;
- Build on existing effective practices, research, knowledge and organizations;
- Encourage collaborative partnerships with organizations, institutions, agencies, businesses, communities and individuals;
- Be learner-focused - recognizing and addressing the diverse needs and situations of different learner populations.

1) COLLABORATION STRATEGIES

Lead an initiative to share services, resources, tools and effective literacy practices

Across the city, province, country and world there are effective literacy practices that could be easily implemented, such as Northeast Edmonton’s “literacy friendly environments” project, and resources for “clear communication”.

2) LEVERAGE STRATEGIES

Increase public information and communication on the importance of literacy for all Edmontonians

Many Edmontonians do not understand that literacy is an issue. A public awareness and communication campaign could build upon CBC Edmonton’s five-year initiative to create programs that highlight issues around literacy.

Infuse literacy into other activities

Incorporate literacy in other activities to increase access and inclusion and to remove the stigma associated with low-literacy. As just one example, learning and literacy could be incorporated into Edmonton’s festivals and events to position learning as fun to demonstrate that we are a City that lives and learns.

Promote and encourage workplace literacy

Literacy is critical to health, safety and productivity in the workplace. Employers should be encouraged, supported and recognized in their efforts to provide workplace literacy programs.

3) RESOURCE STRATEGIES

Champion actions to increase literacy programming for adults with low literacy and young children

The specific learning needs of adults with low literacy, including Aboriginal peoples, new Canadians, Canadian-born and seniors and a focus in the early years with early literacy family/literacy involving parents and caregivers of young children are priorities for additional literacy programming.
Introduction

Early learning is: when children learn to know, to do, to live together and to be, between the ages of 0 – 6. It is a time when children’s experiences can have a foundational effect on how their brains are “wired.” Some key components which are influential in a child’s early development include: parental education, parenting style, family income, neighbourhood socio-economic characteristics, access to quality parenting and child development programs and quality early learning and care programs and services.15

One of the stunning new pieces of information is the assessment of James Heckman, who won the 2002 Nobel prize in economics for his work on the return of public investments at different stages in human development. This chart uses data from the United States and shows quite clearly that investment in the early years, before the formal school system begins, gives the greatest return – an $8 return in early childhood as opposed to $1 for adults.

The early years establish the foundation for health, learning, and behaviour throughout the life cycle. Heckman’s work supports the argument that the establishment of tolerant, prosperous, non-violent communities begins in early childhood. It is also worth noting that the chart does not include the return on the early years investment on physical and mental health. Adult education, whether aimed at parenting, language or employment skills, is associated with better outcomes for children.16

Investing in early childhood development is a shared responsibility that is more important than previously expected. “From the earliest days of life, young children begin to interact with their communities. Whatever the kind of community, each has the potential to provide new experiences and opportunities that help children learn, grow and develop. Indeed, it does take a village to raise a child! All of us have a role to play – as members of a child’s village – in promoting early childhood development.”17

The City of Learners Initiative outlined “early learning” as one of three goals to help us make our vision a reality. The goal for early learning is as follows:

Every child has a firm foundation for life long learning and healthy development.
Opportunities and Challenges

- Early learning and development is an area of keen interest and activity, as it is evident in Alberta Education’s commitment to map the competencies of young children throughout the province, in the Muttart Foundation’s initiative to promote new approaches to supporting early childhood education and care, and in the choice of early childhood as the focus on the first report of the Medical Office Of Health for Alberta Health Services.

- There are examples of excellent, innovative practices locally as well as access to information about such practices nationally and internationally. Locally, we can learn from the Intercultural Early Learning programming at McCauley Transition Centre and Balwin School and the Aligning the Early Learning and Care group.

- The current delivery system is fragmented. There is no one ministry responsible for the sector, and there are multiple funders and providers that may or may not be connected.

- The area of early learning in Edmonton lacks coordinated leadership.

- In Let’s talk About the Early Years, the June 2011 report by the Alberta Chief Medical Officer of Health, it is reported that fewer than 5% of children born in Canada are born with known limits to their development. Furthermore, by school age more than 25% of these children are behind in their physical, social/emotional, language or cognitive development.  

Adapted from Founders’ Network (Carneiro, Heckman, Human Capital Policy, 2003)
Outcomes for the “Early Learning” priority goal:
To ensure a sound base of development for early and lifelong learning, and
To ensure equitable opportunities for all Edmonton children.

Actions / Strategies

These recommendations are intended to help develop a knowledgeable citizenry that understands the critical nature of the early years in a child’s development / learning, recognizes a role for all community members in supporting this development, and advocates for the development of a new governance model, different from what currently exists, that is more accessible, responsive and comprehensive.

1) COLLABORATION STRATEGIES
Provide leadership for the creation of a new governance/funding/delivery model for early learning and care to replace current fragmented model. The new model should:
• Be consistent with the following recommendations and the stated intent/purpose;
• Provide an accessible continuum of options;
• Clarify role of school jurisdictions and other levels of government;
• Enable local delivery within a coherent policy framework;
• Support high quality, accessible and affordable early learning and care; and
• Be supported by a strategic plan that demonstrates how the transition from the current to the desired state will proceed.

Ensuring the right conditions in the early years is more effective and far less costly than correcting problems later. ¹⁹

Investment in early childhood is one of the greatest opportunities we have to enhance the health and well-being of all Albertans. ²⁰
2) LEVERAGE STRATEGIES

Champion the creation of quality early development environments

(Example: Environments ranging from formal settings such as childcares, dayhomes to informal settings including libraries, playgrounds, community leagues, shopping centres, homes, etc) that:

- Recognize the pivotal role that parents and caregivers play in the day-to-day experiences of young children;
- Provide information and supports to parents, formal and informal caregivers and community members to encourage broader involvement;
- Require significant education/training for the providers of early learning and care;
- Involve quality standards and monitoring of community programs;
- Identify systemic and policy changes required and advocate for them; and
- Recognize and are responsive to the diverse perspectives, backgrounds and needs of families.

3) RESOURCE STRATEGIES

Support a multi-faceted communication and awareness campaign for early learning that is:

- Anchored in strong research-based evidence;
- Cognizant of, and builds upon, current initiatives;
- Aimed at various audiences (decision makers, parents, practitioners, general public);
- Consistent with the stated context/purpose; and
- Integral to a development of a common and easily accessible database.
Health and Learning Priority

Introduction

Health (including mental health) and social factors have a profound effect on learning. Still, all types of education, not just health education, support good health.

There is an interrelationship between health and learning. High levels of health literacy (skills to enable access, understanding and use of information for health) are likely to lead to high levels of health. High levels of health are shown to support increased energy, resources and commitment to learning. For children, there is a measurable link between improved health and improved achievement outcomes. The more healthy people are, the more likely they will become lifelong learners.

The City of Learners Initiative outlined “health and learning” as one of three goals to help us make our vision a reality. The goal for health and learning is as follows:

Edmonton is a healthy community through equitable access to healthy learning and opportunities to participate in healthy lifestyle.

Average Health-Literacy Score by Age Group and Education Level, Canada, 2003

Opportunities and Challenges

- Health literacy is an important link between education and health outcomes.

- Health, including mental health disorders, and social factors have a profound effect on learning.

- Schools represent a profound and limitless opportunity to influence children and youth’s health values at a young and impressionable age. As such, it would be valuable to prioritize engaging organizations, like school boards, that have huge potential to influence health literacy, mental health prevention and health outcomes among children and youth.

- Identifying the health literacy issues of adults, youth mental health problems and health/obesity concerns for children underlines the critical need to increase resources for adult, youth and children’s health.

- As reported by Canadian Council on Learning in 2007, the majority of adult Canadians (60%) do not have the necessary skills to manage their health adequately.

- The proportion of adults with low levels of health literacy is significantly higher among certain groups, a finding that raises questions of equity.

- Improved health literacy, leading to improved health, would likely result in improved workplace productivity.

- The world has become complex – different age groups and demographics have different needs. We need to tailor resources according to these different needs in order to ensure equity.

- The higher a person’s education status and ability to learn about health, the better that person’s health.

- Seniors tend to have the lowest levels of health literacy.

- Childhood obesity has become an “epidemic” in Canada. Obesity rates are increasing worldwide, but Canada has one of the highest rates of childhood obesity in the developed world, ranking fifth out of 34 OECD countries.

- The House of Commons Standing Committee on Health in March 2007 announced that 26% of young Canadians aged 2 to 17 years are overweight or obese; in Alberta, this figure is 29%. Obesity levels in this age group have increased 250% in the last 30 years.

- Even more distressing is the evidence that 55% of First Nations children on reserve and 41% of Aboriginal children living off reserve are either overweight or obese."
Outcome for the “Health and Learning” priority goal:
To encourage Edmontonians to embrace healthy lifestyle choices.

Actions / Strategies

These recommendations are intended to support health and learning among Edmontonians as one of our three goals. We believe that support of these recommendations will lead to increased health literacy, improved health outcomes and enhanced learning opportunities for the citizens of Edmonton.

1) COLLABORATION STRATEGIES

Create leadership with current and potential players that will lead to action

- Explore partnerships with businesses/corporations to take a leadership role in promoting healthy living (Example: Poster series on healthy eating sponsored by a major grocery chain).

Stimulate collaboration and communication between individuals and organizations involved in promoting health and health literacy

- Determine what initiatives are in place at the local level to support health literacy and positive health outcomes. Create an inventory of the active living opportunities and programs that Edmontonians have access to and, if possible, determine what’s working, and what’s not;
- Determine mechanisms that would link local initiatives with city-wide commitment (share best practices, etc.);

- Create opportunities to educate people about making healthy choices (Example: Posters or marketing materials that could be available through schools and recreational facilities. If the two school districts acted in collaboration to send health information home with their students, they would reach 80,000 students in EPSB, 40,000 in ECS, & 200,000 parents).

Encourage collaboration between school communities

- School Boards should work together cooperatively in this area;
- Improve collaboration among agencies and groups that are providing services/supports for student health.

Focus on cross jurisdictional strengthening that will address the problem of bullying

- Examine what schools, sports groups as well as the Municipal, Provincial and Federal Governments are doing to address bullying. Identify gaps and opportunities.
2) LEVERAGE STRATEGIES

Leverage leadership opportunities with current and potential players that will lead to action

- Encourage organizations to identify a health champion within their leadership teams;
- Encourage the City and School Boards to demonstrate leadership by offering healthy food selections in vending machines and concessions in schools and recreational facilities;
- Libraries represent significant potential in the area of promoting health and learning, given their central place in communities and links to different age groups. The EPL system should be engaged to develop cohesive approaches to prioritize health in libraries across the city.

Leverage the authority and influence of school communities and districts

- School Boards have the opportunity to create policy and demonstrate leadership in promoting children’s health. As children embrace healthy living, they can be catalysts in improving the health habits of their parents;
- School boards can provide information and supports for parent health that would have a positive impact on their children’s health.

Leverage the power of sport, play and physical activity

- Sport, play and physical activity are powerful resources supporting healthy living. They should continue to be encouraged and expanded. Continue endorsing and supporting sport and the reduction of barriers to engage in sport.

Leverage technology as a means to promote health

- Support the role of technology in promoting health and learning (Example: current technology, integrated websites, iphone & other apps, social media).

3) RESOURCE STRATEGIES

Ensure equitable access to programs and resources

- Develop programs to engage people with disabilities with seniors, immigrants and others;
- Build awareness of the different approaches, services and challenges involved with improving the health of marginalized/disadvantaged populations;
- Acknowledge the growing multi-cultural community in Edmonton and seek to create and coordinate culturally appropriate opportunities to promote health and learning.

Increase awareness and commitment in the workplace

- Develop a workplace survey that would assess the state of health in any particular workplace. This survey would inform employers about the state of health in their working environment and would stimulate the creation of improved workplace health resulting in increased productivity. At this time, there does not appear to be a common template across the City to assess workplace health;
- Identify systemic issues that impact workplace health and explore solutions to challenges.

Utilize technology as a means to promote health

- Conduct an environmental scan of current resources on the internet with a special focus on local connections;
- Consider developing a single website, coordinating and focusing on all health related activities and programs in Edmonton.
## STRATEGIES & ACTIONS SUMMARY

### Lifelong Learning Continuum

Strategies identified for the three priority areas are interrelated and support learning throughout people’s lives.

#### LITERACY

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<th>LITERACY</th>
<th>Early Childhood</th>
<th>Child</th>
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<td>1.4 Promote and encourage workplace literacy</td>
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<td>1.5 Champion actions to increase literacy programming for adults with low literacy and young children</td>
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#### EARLY LEARNING

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* We recognize the emphasis of these strategies and actions on early learners, but the dividends also extend to other continuum areas.
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<td>3.2 Stimulate collaboration and communication between individuals and organizations involved in promoting health and health literacy</td>
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<td>3.3 Encourage collaboration between school communities</td>
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<td>3.9 Ensure equitable access to programs and resources</td>
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<td>3.10 Increase awareness and commitment in the workplace</td>
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Next Steps on Governance and Organization:

Edmonton Learning City Initiative, from the outset, was recognized as a meeting ground for collaboration among the partners, but it was clear that the City would not be the long term home for the initiative. Given the positive reception for the initiative and the enthusiasm for continued collaboration to move forward with the implementation of the strategies identified in the Community Foundational-Learning Plan, a coalition-based governance framework is recommended.

As the initiative moves forward, the network of organizations and partners may, at their choosing, continue to be organized under the City of Learners banner, with Edmonton Public Library serving as the ‘home’ of the coalition. Edmonton Public Library’s recently approved five-year Strategic Plan dedicates one of its four pillars to supporting and enabling learning, and specifically commits to ‘Be the home of the City of Learners’.

Thus, the Edmonton Learning City Initiative will live on, supported by the community, which will guide the implementation of the strategies contained in the Community Foundational-Learning Plan and continue to collaborate on emerging lifelong learning opportunities.

Next Steps on Learning Priority Recommendations:

The Edmonton Learning City Initiative took on the responsibility for stimulating lifelong learning opportunities for Edmontonians, and to advance this vision, it has created the Community Foundational-Learning Plan. This plan represents an effort by the Edmonton Learning City Initiative to engage and coordinate learning goals across groups and agencies in the city of Edmonton.

The Community Foundational-Learning Plan has identified shared strategies and priorities in the areas of literacy, early learning, and health and learning. Edmonton Learning City Initiative’s joint effort to date offers optimism for the communities’ ability to implement such strategies. In addition, a continuum of options ranging from collaboration, to leveraging, to resourcing was identified to offer numerous opportunities for involvement.

Some areas have advanced more thoroughly than others, and provide an example to emulate. For example, the Literacy recommendations are have led to the formation of the Edmonton Literacy Coalition, which is continuing to drive promotion of the issue as well as collaboration on service delivery.
The Early Learning group is in a more formative stage but has great enthusiasm for continued collaboration under the banner, and the leaders are especially excited about coming together with the Library to solidify their coalition.

The Health and Learning recommendations proved harder to build a coalition around, since the opportunities cross so many different organizations and are so diverse, but there is specific interest from Edmonton Public Library in partnering to deliver programs with a health and wellness dimension, which will help identify potential coalition partners.

The Initiative hoped to reach further in the area of measurement, but the dissolution of the Canada Council on Learning midway through our work significantly impacted the ability to measure, monitor and compare Edmonton indicators. There are other indicators and measures that may apply and those are encouraged for exploration in the future work.

Next Steps for the City of Edmonton

In addition to the Community Foundational-Learning Plan work, the Initiative aimed to shift thinking in the community around the value of our excellent Primary, Secondary and Post-Secondary organizations. Acknowledgements and strategies affirming this have been embedded in The Way We Live and The Way We Prosper strategic plans. Edmonton Economic Development Corp has promoted Edmonton as a City of Learners, positioning our education system as a competitive differentiator. And, most recently, Mayor Mandel spoke fervently of the importance of our learning institutions in Edmonton in the 2013 State of the City Address. All these efforts are recommended to continue.

As the Initiative transitions to the stewardship of the Edmonton Public Library, City of Edmonton Community Services is encouraged to continue to add value as a liaison to the relevant ongoing initiatives, such as ELEVATE, Child Friendly Edmonton, Diversity and Inclusion, Seniors, Poverty Elimination and others that have learning aspects.

The terms of reference of the Learning City Council Initiative call for a roll-up by October of 2013, by which time transition to the Edmonton Public Library should be underway.
An International Movement

Cities are home to 80% of Canadians. Though cities offer economic, educational and cultural opportunities, they also face a number of challenges. These include income inequality, integration of newcomers, maintenance of social cohesion and civic engagement.

One approach to managing the opportunities and challenges of the modern city is the creation of Learning Cities. Pioneered in Europe and Australia, this strategy recognizes that optimal social and financial well-being occurs under conditions that favour lifelong learning for all. European and Australian cities have taken steps to become learning cities where “lifelong learning is explicitly used as an organizing principle and social/cultural goal to foster safer, healthier, more inclusive, better educated and creative cities.”

The Learning Cities movement is taking root in Canada. In 2003, Victoria began the process of becoming a learning city with the goal of being known by 2020 as a leading learning community. Victoria has identified a number of specific objectives to transform their downtown into a Place of Learning over the next decade. These include:

- Quality early childhood learning for the children of downtown workers and residents
- Individual learning plans for at least half of downtown workers
- Elder college participation among at least half of downtown seniors
- Increased cross-sector initiatives related to the arts and learning
- A two-fold increase in educational tourism

The City of Vancouver designated itself a Learning City in 2006 and embraced the principles of equitable access to learning and inclusivity and collaboration, as essential to greater prosperity and collective well-being. Fredericton used a learning initiative to enhance their residents’ participation in cultural activities and festivals which enhanced quality of life and increased municipal revenue. Grande Prairie used a learning initiative when they were faced with a skills shortage. The community organized effective job training programs and improved the productivity of their economy while increasing their local learning levels.25

Measuring results

In Hume, Australia the Learning Towns initiative resulted in a 50% increase in library memberships and circulation over the first two years of the project.

In Birmingham, U.K., learning city initiatives resulted in a 25% increase in parental involvement in school curriculum activities, a massive increase (from 30% to 70%) in the proportion of 11-year-olds with good skill levels and a 25% reduction in the number of adults with poor basic skills.26

The Canadian Council on Learning’s Composite Learning Index (CLI) is now being used to measure a city’s progress toward achieving lifelong learning goals.27
APPENDIX B
EDMONTON LEARNING CITY INITIATIVE PRINCIPLES

Edmonton has distinctive elements, considerable resources and a vast range of organizations involved in some aspect of life-long learning. Successful learning city initiatives have consistently built on the existing strengths in their communities by identifying and implementing more effective ways to support each others’ work, and Edmonton offers an enormous potential in this regard. Throughout this process, Edmonton Learning City Initiative based their efforts on a clear commitment to a foundation of principles. They provide a solid basis for the ongoing development of the Edmonton Learning City Initiative.

Principles related to goals

- Bringing together organizations to work together more effectively in promoting lifelong learning for all, and the value of learning for the whole society
- Developing a framework/local infrastructure of sustainable cooperation and collaboration for increasing access to opportunities and improved outcomes in all aspects of lifelong learning
- Helping to build capacity and enhance learning opportunities for individuals, groups and the community
- Focusing on the four pillars of learning as identified by UNESCO (Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to Live Together, Learning to Be)
- Working to foster the growth of an overall “culture of learning”
- Helping to further the growth of social inclusion, citizen engagement and the empowerment of citizens
- Contributing to improvements in social and economic wellbeing, as well as developing the full potential of all individuals
- Recognizing the fundamental importance of the role of individuals in a learning community, in addition to the role played by organizations and institutions
- Recognizing that both individuals and the community benefit from individuals’ involvement in lifelong learning
- Building on the need to ensure a stimulating culture of learning and a personal valuing of learning by all citizens of, all stages of their lives

Principles related to operations

- “Taking the long view” by fostering improvements through long-term, sustainable actions
- Being inclusive by recognizing and working with the diverse range of individuals, groups, organizations and communities in our city, and by employing the principles of “universal design” to guide our efforts
- Recognizing, respecting and building on the contributions to lifelong learning currently being made by a broad range of institutions, organizations and individuals
- Thoroughly identifying the state of current activities related to lifelong learning in our city, as well as the gaps and opportunities for improvement
- Identifying the barriers to learning for individuals and groups, and developing strategies to address them
- Consistently using evidence and drawing on the expertise and support of learning organizations in our decision making, including the experiences of other learning city initiatives
- Where possible, make use of new technologies and new community building tools to create innovative structures for a learning community
APPENDIX C
ENDNOTES


9 Reading the Future: Planning to Meet Canada’s Future Needs (Ottawa, 2008). 29


11 Reading the Future: Planning to Meet Canada’s Future Needs (Ottawa, 2008). 4


13 Ibid.

14 Mike McCracken and T. Scott Muray, The Economic Benefits of Literacy: Evidence and Implications for Public Policy. 38-39


18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.


23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.


26 Ibid
