

LEADERSHIP FOR LITERACY

Mr. Speaker, the ability to read and use information is a basic skill necessary for students to reach their full potential in school and later in life. Research indicates that the main reason students do poorly in school is a lack of literacy skills. This can prevent them from understanding reading material in other subject areas. This is why increasing literacy levels in the Northwest Territories is one of the top priorities of the department.

There are literacy initiatives in schools across the Northwest Territories, and this year Education, Culture and Employment staff are reviewing them to see what best practices might be used to increase literacy in all Northwest Territories schools. I want to draw the attention of the House to one such initiative in the South Slave region, recently highlighted in the Slave River Journal, that is making a difference for students and teachers. In 2007, the South Slave Divisional Education Council took action to increase reading levels in their schools and they developed the Leadership for Literacy program.

A key element of Leadership for Literacy is to focus on professional development opportunities for teachers and school staff. Full-time literacy coaches are in each South Slave school, helping train teachers in well-researched and proven strategies to increase literacy levels among their students. In addition to having literacy coaches in the schools, the strategy involves regularly assessing each student's strengths and challenges so that instruction can be tailored to the needs of individual students.

I had the chance to see this program in action when I visited the South Slave in January, and I was very impressed. Since the beginning of the Leadership for Literacy program, more students in the South Slave region are reading at, or above, grade level. In fact, 39 percent of the students who were assessed in both 2008 and 2009 showed significant improvement. In Lutselk'e, we are seeing some of the best growth in reading

levels in Canada, with nearly 10 percent of students in the community improving their reading ability by more than one grade level per year since 2007.

Much of this success is credited to the hard work and dedication of teachers and school staff who work tirelessly incorporating the new techniques they've learned in the classroom.

I want to close by thanking the South Slave Divisional Education Council, and the teachers and literacy coaches in the region, for the good work they are doing to improve literacy levels in their region. I will keep you informed of this and other school literacy initiatives in the coming months.

Masi, Mr. Speaker.