



# Federal Literacy Facts

an update on literacy-related developments at the national level

Movement for Canadian Literacy

January 2004

## HRDC splits into two

In December, Human Resources Development Canada was split into two new departments: Social Development and Human Resources and Skills Development. According to government backgrounders, the Department of Social Development will focus on social policy by bringing together income security and other social programs for seniors, families and children, and persons with disabilities. The Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, where the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) is situated, has a mandate to promote human development through a well functioning labour market and through effective learning systems. To achieve this, the Minister is mandated to work with non-governmental organizations, the private sector and communities to advance the social economy.

### What does this mean for literacy?

For the time being, the mandate and budget of the NLS have not been affected by the reorganization. It's possible that the status of literacy as a policy issue may rise in a smaller department where skills development is the major focus. At HRDC, literacy and skills development in general were only one small piece of a very large pie. HRDC was a mammoth department with a staff of 60,000 and a multi-billion-dollar budget. With this reorganization, literacy and essential skills development have the potential to represent a much larger wedge of a smaller pie. The possible downside is that literacy advances may be too narrowly linked to labour market development. This is a concern for those who support a broader definition of literacy that respects learning goals related not only to work, but also to citizenship, parenting and everyday life. We'll need to work to ensure that literacy considerations are integral to the work of both new departments – skills and social development. In fact, we must work to ensure literacy has a home in every department.

## Paul Martin's Promise: Is it good news for literacy?

*Making History: The Politics of Achievement* is a 16-page vision statement written by Paul Martin and released during the Liberal leadership convention in November 2003. It is an important document because it outlines the Prime Minister's broad objectives for the future and foreshadows the government's priorities, vision, and agenda as well.

*Making History* sets three objectives for Canada: (1) strengthen the social foundation of Canadian life; (2) build a truly modern 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, and (3) strengthen Canada's place in the world. A case can be made that literacy advances can help us to attain each of these three goals. However, under the second goal, the Prime Minister makes an important promise:

“...we must commit to investment in human capital – education and training. That means investing the dollars required and using the tax system to fulfill a simple promise: that all Canadians seeking to improve themselves through learning will be provided the opportunity to do so.”

This promise, to ensure access to learning for anyone seeking it, is something that the literacy community can draw encouragement from and build upon.

Other Ministers, including the Finance Minister, have already echoed the goals outlined in *Making History*. Expect to see them again in the Throne Speech, in the federal budget document, and possibly as the outline for the Liberal's election platform.

You can access *Making History: The Politics of Achievement* at: [www.paulmartintimes.ca](http://www.paulmartintimes.ca)

## ***Busy months ahead: expect a Throne speech, a federal budget and an election this spring!***

### **Throne Speech:**

A throne speech outlines the government's vision and plans for the future. The first throne speech of Paul Martin's term as Prime Minister will be delivered on February 2. MCL will provide a quick electronic analysis to our members and other interested partners.

### **Federal Budget:**

The upcoming budget will be an important indicator of what we can expect to surface as Liberal election priorities. The precise date of the budget release is closely guarded, but many expect a budget speech in March. MCL will be watching to see how, or if, literacy is affected and will report to the community.

### **Election:**

Insiders say we should expect a federal election call in early April. That means Canadians would go to the polls to cast their vote in May. In anticipation of the election, MCL will develop an Election Kit in the coming weeks with practical tips on how you can make literacy a campaign issue in your region or riding.

## ***Finance Minister Ralph Goodale: coming to a town near YOU?***

Finance Minister Ralph Goodale has been traveling across the country to gather input as he drafts his first federal budget. Setting the stage for these consultations, Minister Goodale made it clear in a speech at the Regina launch that government finances are lean and will be spent on key priorities only. Some members of the literacy community have been invited to participate in these invitation-only consultations. It's a sign that at the very least, literacy is on the new Minister's radar.

To read the Minister Goodale's speech outlining his plans and priorities, click on *media room*, then *speeches* at: [www.fin.gc.ca](http://www.fin.gc.ca).

## ***New Cabinet Minister takes over responsibility for literacy***

Joseph Volpe is the new federal Minister responsible for the department of Human Resources and Skills Development, which is home to the National Literacy Secretariat.

The Minister has represented his Toronto riding as an MP since 1988. Before entering politics, he attained a Masters of Education and worked as a school principal. His background in education, combined with positive reports from the field, give us hope that Mr. Volpe is a literacy ally who will work to ensure that literacy remains a key policy priority within the new department.

To support this, in January MCL and six other national literacy organizations wrote a joint letter to the new Minister. We welcomed him to his new post and provided some context for the ground gained over the past couple of years in relation to a national literacy agenda. We reinforced the need for concrete action on a federal literacy policy and a pan-Canadian literacy strategy. In addition, we asked the Minister to meet with us as a group to discuss the positioning of literacy as a national policy priority.

MCL sees this as only a first step. With this changing of the guard, it is important that we step up our efforts to ensure that the new Minister views literacy as integral to skills development. We won't let transition in Ottawa derail our efforts to advance a literacy agenda.

**For more info on the new Minister, check out his website at: [www.joevolpe.com](http://www.joevolpe.com)**

**To see the Nationals' joint letter to the Minister, look under government relations at the MCL website: [www.literacy.ca](http://www.literacy.ca)**