

## **Best Practices Identified to Improve Literacy Levels in Aboriginal Peoples: TD Economics**

**Toronto, ON** -- Slightly more than 60% of Aboriginal Canadians do not have the literacy skills necessary to create a better life for themselves and their families, or to fully participate in our national economy. The heart of this issue begins before they even enter school, with First Nations children scoring poorer on school-readiness testing versus their peers. In support of National Aboriginal Day, June 21, 2013, TD Economics has released an in-depth report examining the issues and opportunities associated with low-literacy levels among Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

"Four out of ten Aboriginal children score poorly in early development testing in the areas of language and communication skills. One factor contributing to this is that less than half of First Nation children in Canada read a book every day," said Sonya Gulati, senior economist, TD Bank Group and the report's author. "If greater attention and efforts are not placed on the literacy and consequently education levels of the young Aboriginal population, a multi-generational cycle is sure to persist. This not only impedes future employment opportunities, but also negatively impacts social mobility, health prevention in the proper use of medications, and overall nutrition."

The median age of all individuals who identify as Aboriginal, as reported in the 2011 Census, was 28 years old in 2011, much lower than the 41-year old statistic posted by non-Aboriginals. This makes it among the youngest and fastest growing population segment of the Canadian population.

"Literacy proficiency, education levels and socio-economic success are intrinsically linked. The fact that less than half of First Nations youth graduate from high school compared to 80% of their non-Aboriginal peers is extremely concerning," added Ms. Gulati. "The employment rate almost doubles for an Aboriginal person who has a high school certificate on their resume, and yet the literacy level of many Aboriginal adults makes them more suited to occupations/jobs which demand less literacy proficiency. This skill disadvantage often translates into lower employment and wages for Aboriginal peoples in comparison with their non-Aboriginal peers."

Some literacy improvement among Aboriginal peoples is expected to have occurred over the last decade. Many new Aboriginal-targeted literacy programs have been rolled out over the past several years. However, international human development indices do not point to a big improvement in education and social trends in Canada, relative to other countries.

To utilize strengths in place in Canada and comparable nations, including Australia and New Zealand, TD Economics has developed a list of literacy-related programs and services to promote stronger literacy skills among Aboriginal people. The following is a summary of these best practices.

- **Engage parents to dispel the stigma associated with education and improve literacy.** Research suggest that parents who participate in literacy programs with their children experience an increase in their literacy levels, a positive change in their distrust of education, an improvement in their understanding of parenting options and greater employment status.

- **Make Aboriginal students feel valued and welcomed to improve educational outcomes.** Be more inclusive of Aboriginal culture, possess Aboriginal books, create partnerships with communities, and acknowledge the Aboriginal territory in which the school is operating.
- **Incorporate Aboriginal approaches to learning into curriculum and teaching methods to increase literacy levels.** Recognize that Aboriginal peoples learn in different ways and be open to incorporating different learning methods, such as co-operative learning, or the processes of observation, imitation, and trial and error.
- **Increasing access and targeted funding for literacy programs and supports for those Aboriginal peoples in rural and remote areas.** To overcome challenges of living in remote areas, increase the availability of computer-based programming and in some cases, focus funding directly to Aboriginal communities to carry out their own literacy initiatives.
- **Deliver teacher support and training to ensure that literacy programs are both sustainable and of high quality.** On-reserve teachers must be allocated proper ongoing support, training and resources for literacy-related topics.

“The time to act is now,” said Ms. Gulati. “If the best practices identified in our report are systematically put into action, the future will look brighter for Aboriginal peoples. There are countless examples of such initiatives being delivered across the country today to young and adult Aboriginal peoples alike. These concerted efforts, exerted over a period of time, should help reduce the size of the literacy gap.”

An executive summary and full text report can be found at [www.td.com/economics](http://www.td.com/economics) “*Literacy Matters: Unlocking the Literacy Potential of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.*”

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