

Letter to Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning from Language and Literacies Researchers and Teacher Educators in Manitoba

TO: Tracy Schmidt, Minister of Education and Early Childhood

CC: Mona Pandey, Deputy Minister

Janet Tomy, Assistant Deputy Minister, Student Achievement and Inclusion

Leslie McNabb, Strategic Initiatives Lead

Celeste Krochak, Coordinator, Curriculum Implementation

Aryln Filewich, Executive Director, Manitoba Teachers' Society

Barb Isaak, Executive Director, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

Josh Watt, Executive Director, Manitoba School Boards Association

Dear Honourable Minister Tracy Schmidt, Minister of Education and Early Childhood,

RE: English Language Arts K-12 Curriculum (Draft August 2025)

Manitoba has been uniquely positioned, both nationally and globally, as a vibrant leader of English Language Arts curriculum largely because of the strong, trusting, and reciprocal relationships between Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, Manitoba English Language Arts educators in the field, and language and literacies teachers, researchers and teacher educators in the province's Faculties of Education. In contrast to narrow concepts of literacy and deficit-focused curriculum and assessment in other jurisdictions, our provincial ELA curricular frameworks and documents have been hopeful examples of what it means to support and empower Manitoba's diverse K-12 teachers and learners. Our provincial curriculum and the practices in our schools have been rooted in research-based understandings of expansive literacies that honour linguistic and cultural diversity, value power and agency of individuals and local communities, and contribute to decolonizing practices that honour the TRC's Calls to Action.

As a collective of language and literacy researchers and teacher educators from the Faculties of Education at University of Manitoba and Brandon University, we are writing to express our urgent concerns about the recently posted English

Language Arts K-12 Curriculum (Draft August 2025), the lack of transparent and inclusive consultation processes in the curriculum development and the content that reflects deficit-orientation that are lacking in holistic and research-informed perspectives.

Our first concern is about the processes of consultation and authorship of the draft English Language Arts curriculum documents that were posted on the Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning website in late August, just days before the school year began and after university course outlines were completed. The drafts were launched without public announcement or communication with education partners in advance. As Faculties of Education, the very place where new curriculum is expected to be taught to pre-service and in-service teachers, and where vibrant literacy research occurs, we received no invitations to contribute to the drafts or even to discuss or learn about them before they were made public.

In past development of English Language Arts curriculum documents and frameworks, there was wide consultation with Manitoba teachers, educational partners, literacy leaders, and members of Faculties of Education. This consultation process was designed to include research and expertise, contribute to draft documents, and provide multiple opportunities for iterative feedback, as well as to support wider-scale professional involvement, cohesive professional learning, and implementation. The names of the people involved in writing the curriculum and participating in the consultations were published on the first pages of the curricular documents, so it was clear who contributed to authorship and consultation processes. In the recently-posted draft curriculum documents, there is a lack of transparency in the authoring and consultation processes—no one is named as writing or consulting on the curriculum. We do know, because we were amongst many others who were never invited into the process, that key players in the research, development, implementation, and professional learning support of the document have not been invited to the tables where the curriculum drafts were conceived. Moving curriculum development behind closed doors and to seemingly secretive processes of consultation and authorship is highly problematic for a robust and democratic public education system, and it is a precedent that needs to be challenged.

Our second major area of concern is the content of the draft curriculum documents themselves. While there is evidence of the effort put into these documents and at least a surface-level attempt to make connections to the 2020 ELA Curriculum Framework, the draft curriculum documents are paradigmatically incongruent with the ELA Curriculum Framework of 2020. The draft curriculum documents do not align with the

decades of research regarding multiliteracies theories, including those endorsed by the Language and Literacies Researchers of Canada (see their research position statement here <https://www.llrc-accl.ca>). By endorsing the alternative paradigms present in these drafts, the department is essentially undermining the work of our faculties' literacies researchers, curriculum theorists and teacher educators.

In addition, these drafts are incomplete, lacking substance, and filled with errors in terms of editing and clarity. We are hoping that the concerning content, obvious incompleteness, and lack of editing means that there will be a willingness to engage in consultation regarding the (re)development of the documents. We welcome the opportunity to be part of this process.

Our final concern is that these draft curriculum documents appear to have been rushed, and we are wondering if this is due to pressure by advocacy groups, rather than research informed and consultative decision-making. We are concerned that the timing and the content are a pre-emptive response to the Manitoba Human Rights Commission's special project on the *Human Rights Issues Affecting Students with Reading Disabilities in Manitoba's Education System*. This project has been initiated mainly by a highly organized lobby group that makes claims to speak for the wider public and has been vocal in expressing their misinformed concerns about how reading is taught. While they point to the "science of reading" claims and defend their demands for phonics-based ELA programming and early-screening, these approaches are culturally and linguistically insensitive and enlist the same tactics as the "parental rights" movement, which advocate for a homogenous, white-washed curriculum, void of children's diverse identities while undermining their critical thinking and agency. The result of this trend in other contexts in Canada, the United States, and the UK has been devastating, particularly affecting minoritized and oppressed students and communities disproportionately. We can provide ample research of these adverse effects.

We welcome the opportunity to be invited to a much-needed discussion with you, Honorable Minister, about the process and content of these draft documents. We are more than willing to provide ample evidence of the importance of research informed understandings of balanced, empowering, anti-oppressive, and decolonizing literacies education in Manitoba. We hope that we can return to the strong, trusting, and reciprocal relationships we have up until now experienced and look forward to further robust conversations and collaboration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jennifer Watt, Associate Professor, University Manitoba

Dr. Michelle Honeyford, Professor, University of Manitoba

Dr. Melanie Janzen, Professor, University of Manitoba

Dr. Shannon D.M. Moore, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba

Dr. Gregory Bryan, Associate Professor, University of Manitoba

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