# Let's Talk About Literacy

Research on the Road

October 2025

BCTF
Kids Matter
Teachers Care

## Acknowledgement Of Traditional Territory

BC Teachers' Federation members and staff live, teach, and carry out union work on the traditional and unceded territories of the many First Nations Peoples of British Columbia. We specifically acknowledge the unceded joint territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam), səlilwətaɬ (Tsleil Waututh), and Sḵwx̱ wú7mesh (Squamish) Nations on whose land the BCTF building is located.

# Let's Talk About Literacy

## Report Highlights

In Spring 2025, BCTF Research held focus groups with teachers from across the province to discuss literacy in BC schools. A diverse group of teachers, who are committed and passionate about seeing their students develop strong literacy skills, provided insights into their experiences, as well as suggestions for how BC's K-12 education system can endeavour to meet all students' literacy needs.

## What teachers told us

**New teachers can feel unprepared to teach reading** when they enter the classroom, and attribute this to critical gaps in their pre-service teacher preparation programs pertaining to literacy instruction.

**Teachers are often left to learn about literacy on their own,** spending a considerable amount of personal time and funds to build knowledge and capacity in literacy instruction to better address their students' needs.

**Sourcing and purchasing classroom literacy resources often falls on teachers,** as funding for curricular supports and resources can vary by district. This adds to teachers' workload and results in inequitable financial burden.

**Inadequate staffing and insufficient budgets impact literacy instruction, interventions and suppor**t as teachers try to meet students' needs with fewer human and material resources.

## What teachers say they need

Teachers described multiple systemic changes to supporting literacy instruction and improving students' learning conditions.

**Strengthen pre-service teacher literacy preparation** by providing teacher candidates with a deeper understanding of foundational literacy concepts and opportunities to develop robust instructional strategies.

**Fund ongoing and accessible professional learning opportunities** so any teacher may deepen their literacy knowledge and practice throughout their career.

**Provide universal access to vetted literacy resources** to reduce individual teachers' workload and out of pocket spending while ensuring the resources used for professional and student learning meet place- and research-based standards for BC classrooms.

**Increase prep, collaboration, and administrative time provisions**, so that teachers have the time to plan for and respond to their students' diverse literacy needs in collaboration with colleagues.

**Invite critical conversations about teachers' professional autonomy** in the context of literacy policy and practice, ensuring teachers have opportunities to inform system decision-making, access professional learning, and engage in collegial dialogue.

**Practice collaborative leadership and transparent communication** at school, district, and union levels to provide guidelines and meaningful supports that navigate teachers' deeply-held perspectives and commitments about literacy pedagogies.

## Universal early literacy screening: Opportunities and cautions

As the Ministry of Education and Child Care's early literacy screening initiative rolls out in the 2025-26 school year, teachers expressed support for screening but pointed to the need to acknowledge the time and staffing required for meaningful implementation. Teachers also hoped screening would serve not as an empty exercise in data collection, but as a process for driving appropriate support to students.

**BCTF Research would like to thank the BCTF members who participated in Research on the Road focus groups on literacy instruction. Your time and contributions are deeply appreciated.**

## Introduction

Across Canada, literacy has garnered significant attention over the last decade. In 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that learning to read is a human right (Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2023). Since then, concerns about student literacy achievement, including continued gaps in supporting students with disabilities and diverse learning needs, have generated broader societal discussion of literacy research and instruction with important implications for educational policy, teacher work, and classroom practices.

A growing number of studies, reports, and statements from education and cognitive science researchers, medical professionals, human rights advocates, psychologists, and inclusive education advocates have emphasized key pillars of literacy instruction for supporting students' literacy development[1] (British Columbia Association of School Psychologists, 2023; Canadian Pediatric Society, 2024; Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018; Deloitte, 2020; Dyslexia BC, 2023; Moats, 2020; National Reading Panel, 2000; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2023; Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 2023). Some Canadian jurisdictions are making changes to the way K-12 literacy instruction is delivered based on this proliferation of reading research and advocacy efforts. In addition, several provinces have moved to mandatory early literacy screening in the primary grades (Blanch, 2023; Dyer, 2024; Hobbs, 2022; Hyslop, 2024; Sampson, 2023; Zhu, 2024).

The BC Ministry of Education and Childcare (MECC) is the latest to announce the implementation of mandatory universal screening for kindergarten students beginning in Fall 2025 – part of a $30 million dollar investment to improve literacy outcomes.[2] The MECC has also created the Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years (POPEY) Resource Program to "increase K-3 educators' capacity to support all primary English literacy learners, including diverse learners, in an inclusive classroom setting."[3]

[1] The National Reading Panel in the United States (2000) outlined five pillars of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Researchers and some jurisdictions have added a sixth pillar to include oral language as a foundational component supporting reading development (see Government of Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, n.d., Nation & Snowling, 2004; Snow, 2020). These pillars have been taken up in diverse ways in policy, curriculum and instructional frameworks across Canada.

[2] See *https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024PREM0020-000563*

[3] See *https://www.popey.ca/about-us*

In an effort to include BC teachers' perspectives in these policy initiatives, BCTF Research held four focus groups in Spring 2025. These focus groups were part of a new initiative, Research on the Road (ROTR), which aims to capture teachers' experiences and viewpoints on emergent issues in BC K-12 public education [see pp. 17-18 for further information]. In these discussions, a diverse group of BCTF members from across the province provided insights into the day-to-day challenges of providing literacy instruction, as well as their suggestions for supporting teachers and improving students' learning conditions.

## What Teachers Told Us

Each focus group opened with the question: What do you think are the important issues we should be talking about when it comes to K-12 literacy? This question was intentionally broad so that participants could emphasize the aspects of literacy that were most relevant to their particular experiences and practice.[4] It elicited a range of stories and experiences, illustrating BC teachers' commitment to providing exceptional literacy instruction to their students yet concerned about their ability to do so in their current circumstances.

Many participants shared stories of seeing increasing numbers of their students struggling to read and write. These concerns extended beyond the primary grades, as some participants shared how they were seeing students at the intermediate and secondary levels struggle too. These struggles have profound emotional impacts on both students and teachers. Participants shared how some of their students "feel like failures." As one teacher explained:

> *High school teachers here talk about how kids feel by the time they get to high school. Even by the time these kids are eight and nine years old, they feel like failures. And that's heartbreaking. To have a child so young come in and already feel like they can't succeed... And that, to me, is just, that is the heartbreaking part of how our education system is set up right now, is that we're not doing right by our kids. And we need to do that for them.*

[4] The BC K-12 curriculum defines literacy as "the ability to understand, critically analyze, and create a variety of communication forms, including oral, written, visual, digital, and multimedia, to accomplish one's goals." See *https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/learning-pathways/k-12-learning-progressions*

Participants shared how, as teachers, they felt an incredible weight, both personally and professionally, seeing their students struggle and not having what was needed readily available to intervene. They were concerned about potential impacts on the long-term personal, social, and economic wellbeing of their students.[5] One participant recounted their experience with a student: "...not only has this little girl not learned to read, but it is a human right, and it's going to impact her entire life. It's going to impact her employment, her mental health, her physical health. That's a huge weight to bear as a teacher."

This teacher's comments illustrate the awareness that participants had about the importance of their roles as literacy teachers as well as the responsibility they shoulder to meet every student's literacy needs while not receiving sufficient support.

## New teachers often feel unprepared to teach reading

One of the most salient topics addressed in the focus groups was teacher preparation programs. Participants told stories about entering their classrooms as early career teachers (ECTs) feeling that they had insufficient knowledge and skills to teach literacy. Some felt their pre-service programs had not prepared them to address the diverse student needs they encountered. One teacher recounted: "My first teaching position was in grade one. I was like, oh, I don't know how to teach kids how to read. I'm a teacher. I'm a certified teacher. I checked. How was I allowed to graduate and not actually have that foundational knowledge?" Another participant shared:

> *I had that moment as an early primary teacher where I'm like, I do not know how to teach reading. I'm like, what is going on with this little girl? She's so bright and keen, and I keep reading these [publisher name] books with her, and she is just not getting it, and I did not understand why.*

"Nothing I was trained with equipped me to deal with such a situation on a colossal scale..."

Participants described how relevant theories and pedagogical strategies with respect to literacy instruction were not foregrounded in their teacher education program experience and suggested this could explain some of the challenges they or their colleagues encountered when first teaching literacy.

[5] See Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018; Deloitte, 2020 for an overview on the various long-term impacts of low literacy on public health, the economy, educational attainment, and overall wellbeing.

Focus group participants' reflections on their experiences with pre-service teacher education programs align with findings from the BC Teacher Council's (BCTC) *2021/22 British Columbia New Teacher Survey*,[6] where respondents were asked about their working conditions, teacher education program coursework and practicum/field experiences, and initial year of teaching. The survey report notes that "by far the most common comment was the lack of concrete teaching skills in the [initial teacher education] curriculum, especially in relation to literacy" (p. 77). Further, participants' experiences align with research from outside Canada that has documented similar gaps in literacy teaching in pre-service teacher education (Hudson et al., 2021; Moats, 2020).

## Teachers are left to learn about literacy on their own

"We took our own time, we did our own learning."

Virtually all participants talked about embarking on their own learning journeys to build their own knowledge base and understanding about literacy instruction. A common thread was how they took on the task of teaching themselves, off the sides of their desks, in the evenings and on weekends, while they continued to work during the day. As one participant shared:

> *I had taken some time out of the regular classroom and returned to it [and I was] realizing that more and more children were coming to me, with lots of foundational skills that were missing. And I was going, okay, well, what do I do? How do I solve this? I teach grade four. I don't know. We were deep into [literacy program name] in our district at that time. But I wasn't getting any results. And it was frustrating, because it wasn't working. So I started to do my own learning. And again, like so many of us here have said, we took our own time. We did our own learning.*

Building their knowledge and capacity in literacy instruction sometimes included receiving additional credentialed training and education, such as pursuing a master's degree or becoming trained in a specific literacy program. While pursuing such programs was what participants felt was needed to meet their students' needs, it was often accompanied by increased stress, additional workload, and personal financial expenditures. Further, several teachers pointed out that not every teacher has the available time, circumstances, or financial capacity to pursue additional education while working.

[6] See *https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/teacher-education-programs/bctc_survey_2021_report_results.pdf*

## Sourcing and purchasing classroom literacy resources often falls on teachers

Teachers shared how in addition to being 'on their own' in building their knowledge and capacity in literacy instruction, classroom resources and other curricular supports were often not provided. Instead, they felt compelled to source those themselves:

> *I went to school 20 years ago, and I don't really remember us being explicitly taught very much. We might have spent an hour on it... it really was not very helpful in terms of what we needed to know K-7 period in the classroom. But I also feel like the district really underfunds resources. And so teachers end up, you know, scurrying around trying to find what might work for their classroom. And, you know, we don't necessarily have a lot of training in even what to look for in a good program. And the district certainly provides very minimal money for it, so we're spending our own money, and people are limited by what they can afford to buy. And so you have huge inequities from school to school, and from even classroom to classroom.*

"We're spending our own money, and people are limited by what they can afford to buy."

In some cases, procuring resources and curricular materials fell almost entirely on the shoulders of individual teachers. Participants explained that districts may vary in the funding and support they provide teachers to buy materials for a grade level or individual classroom; however, the common thread was that the onus is often on the teacher to search, select, and purchase what their class needs when the funding provided does not cover the total cost of supplies. Often teachers make up the difference by crowdsourcing supplies, finding free resources, or using their personal funds, which are well-documented trends within Canadian schools (Rachini, 2023). One participant explained what this looked like for their teaching:

> *I'm using [free online literacy program] because that's all I can get, or I'm printing off copies of books on my own computer, and I'm stapling them together, I'm going- I'm looking at the good decodables from different universities...So, I'm committed to that [but] what literacy teacher wants to put in 1,000 hours to create your own resources, and are they all good?*

Teachers discussed the substantial time they spend searching for resources to use in their classes, and noted the unique circumstances of classroom teachers who are teaching multiple subjects and creating curriculum for each one, on top of literacy: "the list is endless and we're supposed to be creating curriculum for all of it and it just is so overwhelming and time intensive."

Despite doing their best to 'learn on the job' and find appropriate resources that would support their teaching, many teachers shared that they weren't fully confident about discerning whether a resource was high-quality and evidence-based or just the result of good product marketing. Leaving teachers to evaluate and pay for their own professional and classroom resources is not only inefficient and costly but adds to workload and results in inequitable distribution of resources across schools and districts.[7] As one teacher stated, "there's more efficient ways for us to be doing it."

## Inadequate staffing impacts literacy instruction and support

"We can have goals…but if we don't have enough people on the floor, it's not going to get done."

In addition to under-resourcing, participants shared how severe budget and staffing shortages have made tangible impacts on their day-to-day work. As one specialist teacher shared, "I'm running off my feet trying to do referrals and IEPs, trying to get testing for that grade seven student. I'm pulling kids. [But] we need more bodies on the ground. And we're losing bodies. They're cutting us".

Teachers described how continual staffing shortages and turnover, what some called "the revolving door of staff," create instability that undermines the critical continuity of literacy support that young learners need. As another participant explained:

> *…you need some continuity watching that kid from K to 4. So, if you do stay in the same school, and you do see that child progress from K to 4, you hold that continuity. But if you have a revolving door of staff, what happens with records and notes, and so that somebody, say you're there for K1, you leave, somebody comes, now they're seeing this kid for the first time in grade 2. How do you track those students? Is there enough stability in staffing?*

[7] The BCTF's 2024–25 Member Survey found that only 2 out of 5 teachers (39.0%) agreed that their overall workload was manageable, and half (50.6%) reported increases to their workload just in the past year (BCTF, 2025, p. 4).

BC's ongoing teacher shortage is well-documented (Hyslop, 2023; Wong, 2025). While efforts are underway to address the staffing shortages, budget constraints districts face due to inadequate funding mean they may not have funds to hire the additional teachers they need, and a vicious cycle ensues, ultimately undermining the ability to solve the shortage. Many participants expressed frustration that literacy specialists (and other necessary teaching positions) were being cut due to budget constraints precisely when the need for these roles is at the greatest they have seen.

Cuts to programming and staffing are felt by all students, but particularly those with disabilities and diverse learning needs. Participants discussed how scarcity of staffing and resourcing can often mean essential student support is rationed in their schools. As one teacher explained:

> *I think the thing to keep in mind is, like I know at our school that we have kids who really benefit from LST support, but there's like a ceiling over how much they can service…It's the same thing with SLP support. We have more kids who need it than actually get it.*

In addition to rationing of support, participants explained that staffing shortages can also make collaboration time virtually impossible, as teachers are often pulled to cover colleagues' absences during designated collaboration time. Understaffing thus creates a barrier to connecting with colleagues to deepen their understanding of literacy instruction or discuss students' needs. Teachers noted the interconnectedness of the multiple challenges they face in their schools, observing that increasing collaboration time or student support isn't possible if ongoing staffing shortages are not meaningfully addressed.

## What BC teachers and students deserve

As outlined in the previous section, focus group conversations opened with participants speaking candidly about the challenging teaching circumstances they encountered. Discussion then moved to consider: What is an important thing you need right now to support literacy instruction in your classroom(s) that would make a difference?

## Strengthen pre-service teacher literacy preparation

As discussed, many participants shared stories of feeling unprepared to teach reading when they started out as teachers. They spoke to the personal and emotional impact of those initial experiences such as confusion, overwhelm, and frustration, as well as the personal and financial toll of doing one's own learning while on the job. Scholars have called this unexpected experience of unpreparedness praxis shock; they argue that teacher education programs must prepare teachers to navigate the 'mismatch' of ideals and knowledge cultivated in initial teacher education (ITE) and the realities of early career teaching (ECT) demands in public school systems (Ballantyne & Retell, 2020; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002).

While most BC teacher education programs require a literacy course component for elementary grade candidates,[8] participants noticed significant gaps between what they learned and what they wished they knew in their first classroom assignments. When speaking about how pre-service teacher literacy preparation should be improved, participants emphasized the need to provide teacher candidates with a deeper understanding of foundational literacy concepts. One participant explained:

> *I would like to see a mandatory course for all elementary teachers on supporting reading acquisition…we should know how reading happens in the brain, the foundational skills that contribute to it, how to assess in order to support it, which is that preventative, like multi-tiered system of support model informed by universal screening.*

Others offered more general suggestions such as ensuring pre-service teachers "understand literacy development across the lifespan" and are taught "all of the things that it takes to make a reader, all the things that it takes to make a literary person."

As both research and participant accounts bear out, effective reading instruction is "extremely complex to implement well" (Hindman et al., 2020, S197; see also Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018; Hudson et al., 2021). Scholarship on teacher preparation emphasizes that building teachers' theoretical and practical knowledge requires more than coursework and must be

[8] In March 2025, BCTF Research contacted all BC Teacher Education Programs to request information about literacy course requirements. Seven of eight responded, with three providing sample syllabi for detailed review. This scan of BC post-secondary teacher education programs indicated all but one (of seven respondents) ***did*** require a literacy course component for elementary grade teacher candidates. However, a review of sample syllabi showed considerable variation in content and emphasis regarding theoretical perspectives and practical applications.

complemented by “multiple, highly focused, classroom-based opportunities for deliberate practice and feedback” (Hindman et al., 2020, S197). As the prevalent one-year program model for preparing generalist elementary teachers for BC schools may not allow sufficient time for developing deep knowledge and practice, it is especially important that ECTs can access ongoing professional learning opportunities after they graduate.

## Fund ongoing and accessible professional learning opportunities

In addition to strengthening pre-service teacher literacy preparation, participants recommended that “training for all teachers in literacy” be made widely available for teachers to continue to deepen their literacy instruction strategies throughout their career. This could mean a district “needs to provide time and release for K-1 teachers,” as several teachers noted the current approach of ‘learning literacy off the side of your desk’ is not sustainable. One teacher explained the need for having more regular professional learning on literacy “to make sure everybody’s on the same page.” Another participant suggested that given the shortage of LST time and support in some districts, “if classroom teachers can also be trained in the same programs that LST is trained in or are using, it would only be beneficial.”

One way to accomplish this equitably would be for the MECC to fund universal in-service training in early literacy instruction and assessment initiatives for all BC primary teachers. Scholarship indicates that professional learning should be of sufficient duration (i.e., not ‘one-off’ events) and provide teachers with “active learning opportunities” and “collective participation opportunities” along with appropriate individualized support (Brownell et al., 2017).

## Provide universal access to vetted literacy resources

As previously established, many BC teachers spend their own money to buy both professional learning and classroom resources to support literacy instruction in their classrooms. Additionally, teachers shared the concern that they sometimes don’t feel equipped to properly assess the quality of the resources they come across online or on social media.

One suggested solution was that districts provide free, universal access to a vetted library of professional learning and classroom resources: "a repository to draw from that you should have access to," as one teacher explained. Another teacher described being able to "pick and choose pieces and supplement for the kids in your class [and] provide an overall kind of good foundation."

While participants discussed the need for greater professional preparation, in-service training, and vetted resources, there was an awareness of the tension these ideas may have in relation to teachers' professional autonomy around literacy resources and approaches. Regarding teaching resources, one participant explained:

> *It should be, you know, you're teaching kindergarten, grade one, grade two. Your classroom should come with [resource]. I don't think you should be told, you must do this for 15 minutes a day. But here is a resource that is great to use for your students to be educated about it.*

Another teacher imagined a resource repository as:

> *...a library of resources to choose from. So therefore, we're not mandating. But a grade two teacher knows this is what you're choosing from. And if you need to go lower, this is where you're choosing from. And if you need to go higher, this is where you're choosing from. We need that. It needs to be explicit. It needs to be properly displayed and told to teachers.*

The BCTF's TeachBC database, eBook Library, and provincial book lending service are examples of open-source repositories that enable members to access professional literature and BC-based teaching materials (see pp. 19-20 below). The MECC's Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years Program (POPEY) is also endeavouring to connect primary teachers around literacy practice through "online and in-person workshops, resources, and provincial networking."

Connecting more teachers to existing hubs and expanding the breadth, availability, and accessibility of resources can reduce individual teachers' workload and provide stronger assurance that the resources used for professional and student learning meet place- and research-based standards for BC classrooms.

## Increase prep, collaboration and administrative time provisions

Teachers acknowledged that carving out time to connect with colleagues and complete paperwork and other administrative tasks, as well as plan lessons is challenging when prep and collaboration time are frequent scheduling casualties of understaffing.

Despite the current staffing shortages, several teachers spoke about how their schools and districts are able to carve out opportunities for staff collaboration and prep time, and the positive impact this has on their teaching and student learning. One teacher described how their school has both testing time and "administrative" time built into LSTs' schedules. In addition to providing an opportunity for collaborating with staff and administration, these blocks of time are also "a period of time to catch up on things," resulting in improved mental health and a sense of self-efficacy. This dedicated time "made me feel like a better teacher," they reflected. Another remarked, "what I really like about our program is we have monthly meetings where our helping teacher shares any new research."

Ensuring that prep time is consistently available to all and that collaboration time is protected would go a long way in improving teachers' ability to meet students' diverse literacy needs.

## Invite critical conversations about teachers' professional autonomy

The topic of professional autonomy came up at various points in relation to literacy practice, resources, and school and district leadership. Teachers invoked the concept of professional autonomy as individual freedom and collective agency, but also a mechanism for compromising either of these if misapplied.

Some participants described professional autonomy as the freedom to make decisions and exercise judgment calls in their classrooms, including teaching in ways that they felt best met their students' literacy needs. Following Pitt & Phelan (2008), autonomy in a teaching context is about "thinking for oneself in uncertain and complex situations in which judgment is more important than routine…and involves placing one's autonomy at the service of the best interests of children" (pp. 189-190). As one teacher shared: "I've been very fortunate…I've been at schools

where I've been given 100% autonomy. I mean, this is my X year of teaching, so people are very respectful of that…so I've always had that autonomy to do what I think is right."

Others spoke about professional autonomy as freedom from the imposition of a specific literacy program or micro-managed teaching. As one teacher explained:

> *I don't think it should be prescribed to the teacher that you must spend 15 minutes a day on phonological awareness. But at the same time, teachers should know that [program] exists. They should be given a copy of the program to use should they wish to use it, or it should be available to them.*

While teachers discussed the need for more knowledge and clearer district/Ministry guidance about best practices in literacy instruction, they expressed mixed views and concerns about defaulting to directives or excessive oversight of teaching practice.

Teachers also spoke to the conditions they felt were necessary for exercising professional autonomy in relation to literacy issues, such as having sufficient knowledge to make sound pedagogical judgments. In the words of one participant, "If we're not informed, then we're not autonomous. And I have to say what I want for my union is to uphold our professionalism by having high standards in training, [and] supported, informed autonomy."

Finally, teachers recounted instances where they felt undermined or stifled by the misapplication of professional autonomy discourse. For example, some expressed concern that professional autonomy was being used by school districts to place responsibility on individual teachers to find and pay for their own resources under the guise of 'respecting' their agency in the classroom: "I think autonomy is critical for our profession, but I also feel like it's often used as a cop-out for the district not to pay the money to get us the tools we need to do our job. And that's very problematic." Paradoxically, more than one teacher also described being told not to use certain materials they obtained on their own as they were not pre-approved or aligned with their school or district's literacy framework.

Participants' comments highlighted the complexity and malleability of professional autonomy within the shifting landscape of literacy education in BC schools. As teachers shared how the same concept could be used to both support and diminish

teacher agency, they emphasized the need to keep collegial and union spaces open to talk about what professional autonomy looks like for individual practice and the teaching profession.

## Provide collaborative leadership and transparent communication

Participants discussed how literacy instruction has at times been contentious in their schools, and spoke to the leadership and communication they would like to see from their school and district leaders, as well as their union, to move forward.

At the school level, teachers described needing school-based administrators to bring teams together and create spaces of collaboration because "teachers feeling safe within their schools makes all the difference." Participants described administrators who ideally create a sense that "we're in this together" where the professional culture "is not about performance of one teacher or another teacher." This could include the formation of a school literacy committee or inclusion of teachers in strategic planning. One teacher provided this example: "Our school is guided by our strategic plan. I'm on the committee. I sat down, and I wrote the goals. We look at the research. We look at the data."

At the district level, teachers asked for leaders who communicate a sense of coordinated effort. They also would like to ensure that individuals in senior leadership roles bring "enough practice or training" in literacy to understand and make decisions grounded in the complexities and realities lived out in their district's school communities.

At the union level, teachers pointed out the important role the union can play in cultivating professional conversations amongst colleagues about literacy. This requires spaces guided by open dialogue and respect that recognize literacy instruction as a "sensitive conversation that people take to heart…because we're in the business of kids, and we want our children to do better." One teacher argued that "The BCTF has to step it up to make sure that they have leadership to support learning, to support conversations."

## Universal early literacy screening: Opportunities and cautions

BC school districts have been mandated to roll out the MECC's early literacy screening initiative in the 2025-26 school year (BC MECC, 2025). Focus group participants were generally supportive of primary grade screening, and several indicated that their district already engaged in it: "I believe in screening, screening frequently, seeing if what you're doing is working, and if it's not, dumping it and trying something different;" "The district created a screener. It's great. It is... sequential. It's scientific."

Participants, however, pointed to the need for sufficient time and adequate staffing to complete this screening. As one teacher advised, "It is a great tool, but I think the district needs to provide time and release. Bring in a TOC for two days [for] all the K teachers or One teachers...instead of pulling away from the already stretched resources within the school to do this."

In addition to time and staffing considerations, teachers also emphasized the importance of following up screeners with appropriate support. Following Neuman, Quintero & Reist (2023), screening must be adopted as a meaningful systemic practice accompanied by "a corresponding commitment to comprehensive supports for students" (p. 5). Some districts appear to be moving in that direction: "One of the promising things is [my] district is now working on identifying screeners for K-3 and also looking afterwards. Like, what do we do afterwards?"

Screening must drive appropriate support to students or otherwise risk becoming an empty exercise in data collection that does not lead to meaningful follow up after students' needs have been assessed. As Cherry and Trotter (2024) state, "[s]creeners and diagnostic tools must be quick and useful. This is not about more data but helpful data."

## Conclusion

The *Spring 2025 Research on the Road* focus groups drew teachers who are committed to and passionate about their students developing strong literacy skills and self-confidence. They shared how they want and need more tools to ensure they can do their jobs, and, importantly, that efforts to meet all students' literacy needs cannot continue to fall primarily on individual teachers alone. Every public education stakeholder group must play its part to ensure the provision of:

- place- and research-informed education policy
- adequately resourced district implementation
- universal access to fully funded teacher in-service
- full staffing
- sufficient time for teachers to engage with students and each other

Only collaborative, transparent, and meaningfully implemented efforts across the K-12 education system can deliver better literacy results for students and families who cannot wait any longer. It is our hope that the professional expertise and advice contributed to this report by BCTF members can serve as part of that input.

# Research Notes

## About BCTF Research

BCTF Research staff carry out projects that support the leadership priorities and key objectives of the BCTF in bargaining, education policy, professional practice, and social justice.

Drawing on a broad range of education research and quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the BCTF Research team advocates for the development of educational policy, school programs, and classroom practice based on teacher knowledge, perspectives, and experiences.

## Research on the Road

In Spring 2025, BCTF Research launched *Research on the Road (ROTR*) to capture and mobilize BC teachers' grassroots experiences and perspectives on pressing issues in public education. Going to members' communities to facilitate conversations on topics they have put forward enhances BCTF members' opportunities to both catalyze and engage in BCTF Research projects and events. Taking research inquiry 'on the road' disrupts a centralized model of objective setting and data collection, in keeping with efforts to carry out research with and for teachers to advocate for meaningful change.

## Let's Talk About Literacy Instruction: Methodology

*ROTR* focus groups aim to foster constructive dialogue through facilitated, place-based conversations with BCTF members throughout the province. A focus group is a facilitated discussion among selected individuals about specific topics (David, 2016; Morgan, 2011). The aim of union focus groups is to gauge a range of perspectives held by members to gain deeper insight and understanding about what members think, feel, and experience. Focus groups are not meant for validating union decisions or building a case for a predetermined union action. Also, while a focus group might surface important insights into the perspectives and experiences of some members, it should not be used to generalize about the entire membership.

In early 2025, BCTF Research staff contacted organizers of upcoming professional development events in two BCTF zones[9] to identify potential sites and topics for an inaugural ROTR pilot project. When literacy instruction emerged as an issue for members in both regions, Research staff adopted that as the focus group theme with the consensus of local contacts.

The *ROTR* session, Let's Talk Literacy Instruction: Focus Group, was offered as a workshop choice at two regional Professional Development (PD) events in Spring 2025. One event was held in a predominantly urban school district while the other drew participants from multiple rural school districts.

Participant recruitment occurred through event registration systems where any attendee could sign up for the 90-minute workshop option. Both morning and afternoon sessions were offered at each venue. A total of 24 members attended the four focus groups, with registration capped in each session to ensure sufficient time for deeper conversation. To protect participant anonymity, BCTF researchers did not inquire about or retain individual names, work sites or teaching assignment information. Participants who happened to self-identify during focus group conversation described their work as primary grade and Learning Support Teachers with varying years of teaching experience.

BCTF Research staff sent an email to registered participants prior to their scheduled session, via event organizers, containing informed consent information. Two documents outlined details about research objectives, focus group protocols, participant anonymity and confidentiality, purposes, storage and usage of audio recordings and transcripts, and freedom to withdraw participation/consent at any time before, during or after the focus group discussion.

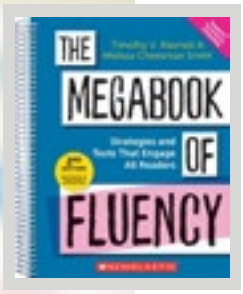
Three BCTF Research staff cofacilitated the focus groups, alternating between facilitating conversation, note-taking, and monitoring recording devices. The resulting transcripts were checked for accuracy and subsequently double coded (Saldana, 2025) by the same three researchers to construct the findings presented in this report.

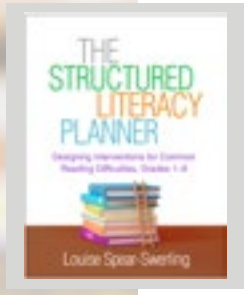
For further information or questions about BCTF Research or this report, contact *research@bctf.ca*.

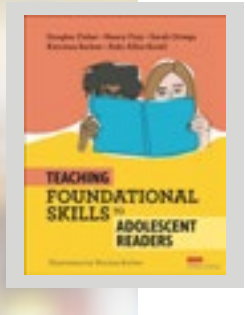
[9] The BCTF's 76 locals and sublocals across the province are divided into seven regional zones: Kootenay, Metro/Fraser Valley, Metro West, North Central/Peace River, North Coast, Okanagan, and Vancouver Island.

# Library Literacy Resources

**Did you know the BCTF Library has three unique offerings: a lending libary, an eBook library, and classroom resources?**


## LENDING LIBRARY

The newest service offered by the BCTF Library is the book lending service. BCTF members can browse the catalogue and borrow up to three books at a time. The books will mailed to you to enjoy for one month. Return postage is included. Check out the lending library catalogue by clicking the “Book Loans” tab at *bctf.ca/library.*

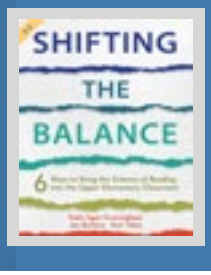
The BCTF Lending Library contains 35 titles on the subject of literacy. These include literacy planning guides, activity books, and theoretical deep-dives at the K-12 level. Pictured here are some of our most frequently borrowed titles!

## EBOOK LIBRARY

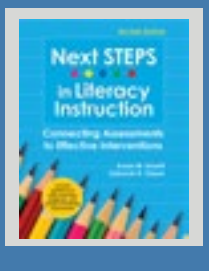
The BCTF eBook library is free to access for members. You can borrow and read eBooks by logging into your BCTF account. New eBooks are regularly added to the library collection, which includes books for teachers’ professional development and classroom use. Visit *bctf.ca/library* to log in and start browsing.

## CLASSROOM RESOURCES

TeachBC is your go-to site for free downloadable lesson plans, posters, and classroom resources. Teachers can upload lesson plans and resources to share with their colleagues or download resources submitted by their colleagues from across the province, as well as partner organizations in education. Learn more at *bctf.ca/classroom-resources.*

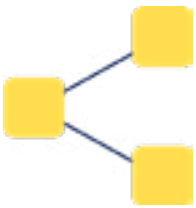




MOVING OUR WORK FORWARD

# Research to action

One of the most common questions we get after completing a research project is: "what's next?" The answer is up to you. Here are some ideas that can help move the work forward.



## SHARE WITH YOUR COMMUNITY

BCTF Research highlights teachers' perspectives and experiences on key issues—from professional practice to education policy and social justice topics. **Research findings can be widely shared with colleagues as well as the broader public.** You could share on social media or email, or put a copy of the report in your school staff room.

## HAVE A CONVERSATION

Use research findings to spark further conversation. This might be at your school, within your community, or in your local union. For example, you could organize a "lunch and learn" at your school, or have a "book club" type discussion at a library or local coffee shop with colleagues. You could also reach out to community partners and **invite a conversation** on shared issues or concerns.


## USE RESEARCH TO TAKE ACTION

Members (you!) drive actions of the BCTF through set decision-making processes. You can bring motions to your local union, who in turn bring motions to the governance bodies of the BCTF, including the Annual General Meeting. A research report can help you **identify a key issue to raise** with your local and build your argument for why others should support this action.

*research@bctf.ca*

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