

Literacy and Youth

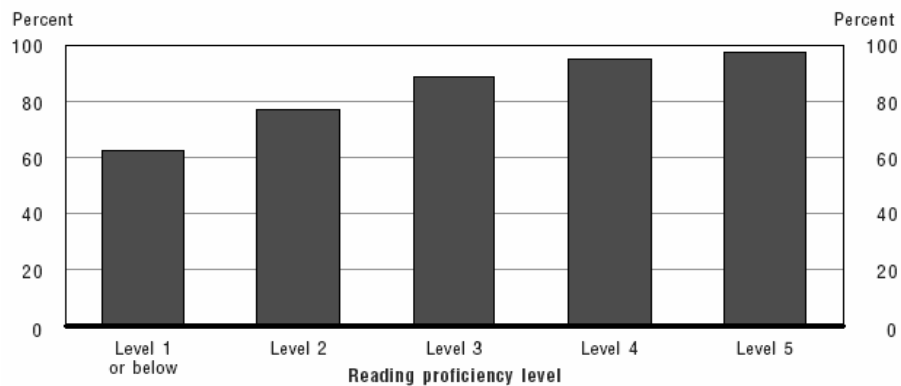
Youth outcomes based on literacy levels

The International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey – or IALSS – measures skills on five levels (see sidebar)¹. Literacy is a factor in determining whether youth complete high school, or not. In Canada, only about 60% of young people at Level 1 or below completed high school. This compares to almost 100% of those at the highest levels (see Figure 1).

IALSS Skill Levels

Level 1	People have difficulty dealing with any written material
Level 2	People can deal only with written material that is clear and well laid out.
Level 3	People can understand and use the information they need for daily life
Levels 4/5	People can understand and use complex written material

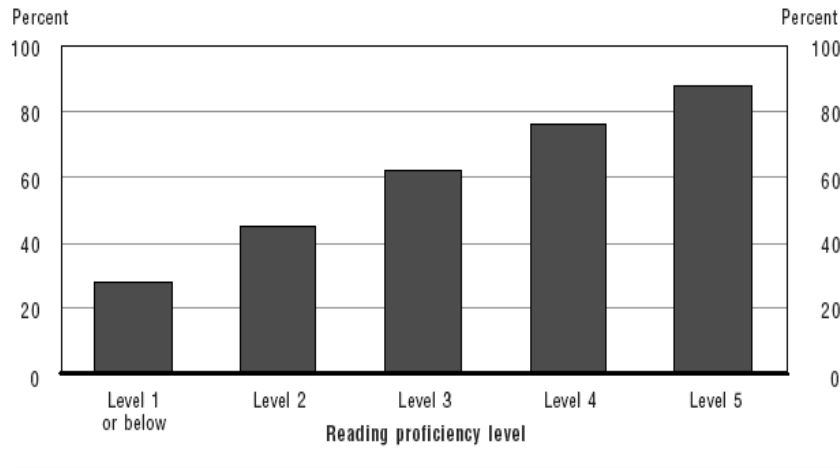
Figure 1: Percentage of youth who had completed high school by age 19 by their reading proficiency reading level at age 15



Source: *Measuring and Monitoring Literacy in the NWT: A Profile*²

This is reflected in post-secondary participation. Young people with low level reading skills at age 15 are much less likely to participate in post-secondary education (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Postsecondary participation rates by reading proficiency level at age 15

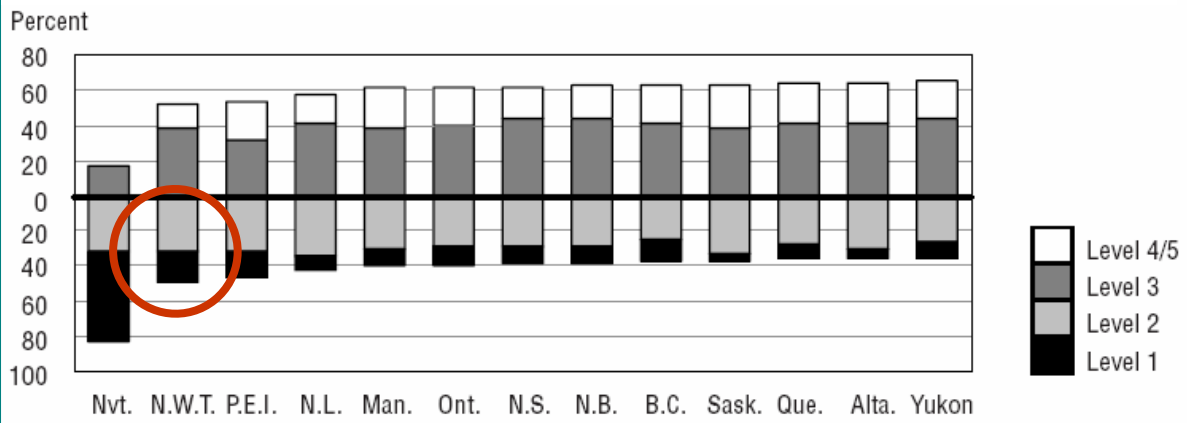


Source: *Measuring and Monitoring Literacy in the NWT: A Profile*²

Youth in the NWT

Young people aged 16 to 25 make up about 21% of the NWT's population. Almost half of NWT youth are at Levels 1 and 2 for prose literacy (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Distribution of prose proficiency levels by jurisdiction, population aged 16 to 25 years, 2003



Source: *Measuring and Monitoring Literacy in the NWT: A Profile*¹

More than half of NWT youth are at Levels 1 and 2 for numeracy.

Table 1: Percentage of NWT youth aged 16-25 performing below Level 3 compared to the national average

	NWT	Canada
	%age below Level 3	%age below Level 3
Prose	48%	38%
Document	49%	35%
Numeracy	53%	45%

Source: *Building on our Competencies: Northwest Territories Results*³

The percentage of NWT youth below Level 3 in all skill areas is considerably higher than the national average (see Table 1). It is also higher than in all provinces and territories in Canada, except Nunavut. Youth whose parents have not completed high school have the lowest literacy scores³.

What do these figures mean?

These figures mean a disproportionate number of NWT youth are already at a disadvantage because of low literacy. As we know, disadvantage multiplies. It is more difficult for young people with low literacy to find employment, and they will likely end up earning less money than those with higher literacy levels. The cycle of disadvantage is difficult to break.

Why is youth literacy important?

Youth literacy is important because youth are the future of the NWT. They are the people with the most time to contribute their skills to their families, communities and workplaces. They are future leaders who will be making decisions through voting, or participating in society through volunteering. Youth are the NWT's and Canada's future skill supply. If almost half our youth lack the skills they need for today's world, it affects us all.

¹ Human Resources and Skills Development Canada & Statistics Canada. (2005). *Building on our competencies: Canadian Results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2003*. Catalogue no. 89-617-X1E. Ottawa.

²Murray, T.S. (2008). *Measuring and monitoring literacy in the NWT: A profile*. Presentation at Territorial Adult Educators Conference, Yellowknife, NT, March 3, 2008.

Murray, T.S. (2008). *Measuring and monitoring literacy in the NWT: Sharing the investment, sharing the rewards*. Presentation at Literacy Matters Workshop, Yellowknife, NT, January 29, 2008.

Murray, T.S. (2008). *Measuring and monitoring literacy in the NWT: The cost of complacency*. Presentation at Literacy Matters Workshop, Yellowknife, NT, January 29, 2008.

³Human Resources and Skills Development Canada & Statistics Canada. (2005). *Building on our competencies: The Northwest Territories results of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey 2003*. Ottawa.

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