

Building the Best Adult Education System in Canada: A Roadmap and Action Plan for Manitoba

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Introduction

IN *UNEARTH THIS Buried Treasure: Adult Education in Manitoba*,¹ released in January 2022, it was found that Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) and Adult Literacy Programs (ALPs) in Manitoba are effective,² but face a range of financial and organizational challenges that limit what they can achieve. That study, based on interviews and focus groups with 30 adult educators in all parts of the province, identified those financial and organizational challenges, and advanced a series of recommendations for improvement to Manitoba’s adult education system.

By adult education I mean what is sometimes called adult basic education — educational activities aimed at achieving sufficient levels of literacy, numeracy, and other essential skills that it becomes possible for adults to obtain employment, or to qualify for higher levels of employment, or to qualify for further education and/or training. In Manitoba this means both the mature high school diploma delivered by Adult Learning Centres, which requires that students complete eight high school credits, including grade 12 English and grade 12 Math, and Adult Literacy Programs, which work to improve literacy and numeracy skills to the level necessary to be able to succeed with high school credits.

This follow-up study, based on survey results from and interviews with 36 adult educators from all parts of Manitoba, is intended to create a “roadmap” or action plan for the implementation of the changes needed to create a revitalized and highly effective adult education system in Manitoba. This study describes the changes that need to happen — as articulated by

those who are doing the work of adult education – and for each of those changes, sets out the steps to be taken to produce a significantly enhanced adult education system.

The objective is to create a roadmap for building the best adult education system in Canada. The basis to do so already exists; the foundation is in place; the task is to make the changes set out in this report.

What the Previous Study Found

UNEARTH THIS BURIED Treasure found that Adult Learning Centres and Adult Literacy Programs have been severely underfunded for years. Funding has remained flat; ALCs and ALPs have suffered in many important respects. The numbers of ALCs and especially ALPs have declined – there were 42 ALPs in Manitoba in 2009/10; in 2019/20, the latest year for which data are available, there were 30 ALPs. This decline occurred even though a 2013/14 study found that there were approximately 192,600 adults in Manitoba whose literacy levels were too low to enable them to participate fully in society. The result is a huge unmet demand for adult education, and particularly literacy programming. Enrollment in ALCs, which offer the mature high school diploma, declined from approximately 9700 in 2003/04 to 7100 in 2019/20. The numbers of graduates of ALCs dropped from approximately 1200 in 2003/04 to 900 in 2019/20 (See *Unearth this Buried Treasure*, p. 11, for the exact numbers). The earlier study concluded that adult education is treated as an afterthought, as the “poor cousin” of education. The total budget of adult education is two-thirds of one percent of the provincial Education budget. The amount allocated per adult learner is less than the amount spent per inmate in provincial and federal penal institutions, and less than the per student amount spent on the K-12 component of our educational system. In short, adult education is severely underfunded, and this has to change.

Unearth this Buried Treasure also found deep disparities in the way that teachers in the adult education system are paid. Some are unionized members of the Manitoba Teachers Society,³ and are paid at the same rate as their similarly qualified K-12 counterparts. Some are not members of a union, are paid less than teachers in the K-12 system and have limited or no benefits and job security. Some do not know until the end of the academic year if the following year’s funding will be sufficient to re-employ them. This is unfair to skilled and hard-working teachers, and in some cases Directors, and it leads to high teacher turnover that adversely affects the quality of education. This must change.

Returning to school – to an Adult Learning Centre or Adult Literacy Program – is a difficult challenge for most adults. Many adult learners and potential adult learners are living in poverty and have young children. To maximize their chances of educational success, *Unearth this Buried Treasure* argued that adult learners need more supports than are currently available, including access to childcare, counselling services and some form of payment while studying. The absence of these and other supports makes adult education impossible for many, and the costs are borne not only by those who are excluded from the opportunity to improve their education, but ultimately by all Manitobans.

The earlier study argued that a “hub model” would be most effective - combining in one physical space or in close proximity an ALC, an ALP and a dedicated childcare centre. This is a goal toward which adult education in Manitoba should move.

A revitalized and properly funded adult education system in Manitoba would play an important role in addressing two major challenges in this province – poverty and reconciliation.

Manitoba has long had a particularly high rate of poverty, and especially children growing up in poverty. In Winnipeg in 2018, 87,700 children were growing up in families living in poverty (SPCW 2020). Manitoba has Canada’s highest rate of children growing up in poverty; Churchill-Keewatinook in northern Manitoba is the federal riding with the highest rate of child poverty in Canada (SPCW 2021). Adult education can be an anti-poverty initiative in two important ways: first, adults who earn a mature high school diploma are likely, in the process, to develop the skills and aptitudes that will enable them to find the kind of employment that will pull them and their families out of poverty; and second, evidence shows that when mom and/or dad are in school or hold down a decent job, their children are likely to do better in school, and thus are less likely to end up in poverty.

Adult education is also an important part of reconciliation. Indigenous people, on average, experience less success in school than their non-Indigenous counterparts. This is attributable in large part to the long-lasting effects of the residential school experience, and the continued impact of structural racism and complex poverty. Their high school graduation rate is, on average, some 30 percentage points lower than non-Indigenous youth. However, the numbers of Indigenous adults who return to school later, via adult education, are sufficiently large that their share of adult learners is approximately two and a half times their share of Manitoba's population. Adult education is, for them, a response to the damage caused by the residential schools and colonialism. As Justice Murray Sinclair has said on numerous occasions, "education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it." It is especially adult education that will serve this purpose, and thus adult education is an important part of the reconciliation process.

Method

FOR THIS STUDY, a survey was sent to each of 46 adult educators in the week of January 16, 2022. The survey, included in Appendix One, asked how much additional funding ALCs and ALPs could reasonably use, how they would use that additional funding, and how many additional students that would be likely to produce. It also asked, among others, about teacher and instructor salaries and benefits and about the hub model.

Thirty-six Directors responded to the survey (a 78 percent response rate). Most responses included considerable detail. In some cases, I followed up with survey respondents by phone or email to clarify details and solicit additional information. On April 22, 2022, I presented the outline of this report and its recommendations to the Adult Secondary Education Council (ASEC) conference, attended by many ALC and ALP Directors. The response was positive. This was followed by phone conversations in May, 2022, with 16 Directors to elicit their further thoughts about the recommendations in this report. This produced useful additional information and insights into the changes that Directors believe are needed. The recommendations were discussed with the Acting Director of Adult Learning and Literacy and two additional ALL staff members in May 2022. Another draft was prepared following these conversations. It was circulated in late May 2022, to eight Directors for their comments and suggestions. Almost all this feedback was incorporated in this final report.

The Main Recommendations

THE MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS arising from this process are set out in summary form immediately below. More detailed explanations of each recommendation follow further below.

- Double the budget allocation to Adult Learning and Literacy immediately.
- Bring all ALC teachers and ALP instructors to the salary and benefit levels of similarly qualified teachers in the K-12 system, or in those cases where an ALC is affiliated with a post-secondary institution, to the salary and benefit level of similarly qualified teachers or instructors in that institution. This can be done by making these teachers and instructors employees of the school division or other educational institution or First Nations education authority with which their ALC or ALP is affiliated. This would also mean that in almost all cases these teachers and instructors would automatically be unionized. The cost of increasing these salaries and benefits is to be over and above the doubling of the budget allocation to ALL.
- Direct school divisions and other educational institutions/First Nations authorities with which ALCs and ALPs are affiliated to provide a full range of administrative supports to ALCs and ALPs. Create a budget line to compensate school divisions and other educational institutions/First Nations authorities for the cost of providing these services.

- Move as rapidly as possible toward the creation of adult learning hubs – combining ALCs, ALPs and childcare centres.
- Shift Manitoba’s Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program from its current “work first” orientation, to a commitment to “adult education wherever possible.”
- Promote the Indigenous character of adult education, building upon the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, especially Calls to Action #62 and #63.
- Develop an online learning strategy for adults in those communities without an ALC or ALP, and adults whose circumstances prevent them from physically attending classes on a regular basis. This includes access to high speed internet, provision of laptops and other necessary technology to adult learners and live streaming between teachers and learners. More broadly, develop a plan by which at least some ALCs and ALPs can include online learning where needed.
- Create a permanent home for Adult Learning and Literacy. Most Directors believe ALL should be permanently located in the Department of Education. Some believe it should be in the same department as advanced education, or in its own stand-alone department. More discussion is needed, but ALL needs a permanent departmental home.
- Move from the current annual funding applications that ALCs and ALPs are required to submit, to a multi-year application process – once every three years or five years – with provisions for amendments in the intervening years. The federal Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) is already doing this.
- Create a more unified and transparent adult education system.
- Launch a province-wide, provincially-funded advertising campaign for adult education, and in addition, add to the budgets of ALCs and ALPs to enable them to run innovative promotional campaigns in their local communities.
- Develop a plan to increase the availability of adult education courses and programs in Faculties of Education at Manitoba universities.
- Create a Transition Committee to begin to work on the details of implementation of each of these areas of action.

Roadmap to Canada's Best Adult Education System

IT IS IMPORTANT to note, first, that each ALC and ALP is different, with its own unique characteristics and surroundings and learner profile. Some are urban, some rural and others northern. Some are large and others small. Each ALC and ALP has built a program rooted in its local circumstances. As one rural Director wrote, “Each centre is unique....We need to appreciate and recognize the differences as much as the similarities.” It is not a case of one-size-fits-all when seeking to build the country’s best adult education system. The goal of this second report is to gain a better understanding of the needs and the potential of each of the ALCs and ALPs in Manitoba, taking into account both individual characteristics and broad system needs.

What follows is a brief discussion of areas where reforms are needed, together with a description of the particular steps that need to be taken to put these reforms in place.

Double the Adult Learning and Literacy (ALL) Budget Immediately

Directors were asked how much additional money they could reasonably use, and how they would use it. Every Director said they needed additional funding. Responses ranged from an increase of 16 percent to a three-fold increase in a current annual budget. The average response was that a 50 percent increase in annual funding could reasonably be put to good use. I believe that the way to start the revitalization of adult education is with an immediate 100 percent increase in the budget allocation to Adult Learning and Literacy.

Many Directors low-balled their estimates of how much additional funding they could reasonably use. They appear to have been constrained in their response by the long experience with flat-line budgets. Further, in most cases Directors said they could reasonably use “at least” an increase of a certain amount. For example, the Director of a rural program said she would hire two additional instructors, but added, “My school is so small that I could not do any more than that. If, however, I had enough funding to move to a bigger building with more classrooms I would hire more staff,” which could also lead to her program being open five days per week rather than four. In other words, it is likely that the percentage increases that many Directors identified are an underestimate of what they could reasonably use. I believe the place to start is with an immediate 100 percent increase to the Adult Learning and Literacy budget.

Not every ALC and ALP would get a 100 percent budget increase. Adult Learning and Literacy would get a 100 percent increase in their annual budgetary allocation, and that dollar amount would then be distributed to individual ALCs and ALPs based on their submissions setting out how much additional funding each believe they could reasonably use. Broad guidelines would have to be set out for the allocation of this additional funding.

Once this 100 percent increase in funding is allocated, a sustainable funding model will need to be established, setting out a formula for annual budgetary increases. At a minimum, this should mean that budgets increase with the cost of living, growth in enrolment and the need for infrastructure renewal, and a method is in place to enable an adequate and timely response to new and emergent needs and opportunities.

Bring the Salaries and Benefits of all ALC Teachers and ALP Instructors up to the Same Level as that of Similarly Qualified K-12 Teachers, and Similarly Qualified Instructors in Other Affiliated Educational Institutions.

The 100 percent increase to ALL is to be over and above the amount that is needed to bring all teachers' salaries and benefits up the level of teachers in the K-12 system, and instructors' salaries and benefits up to the level in the education institution with which they are affiliated. This would mean that for those ALCs and ALPs whose teachers and instructors are paid less and have fewer benefits than similarly qualified K-12 teachers or similarly qualified instructors, those teachers and instructors would first be brought up to appropriate salary and benefit levels, and *then* there would be an increase to their budget.

A major problem in ALCs and ALPs, and a major source of inequity within the adult education system, is that some teachers and instructors are paid at the same rate as, and are entitled to the same benefits as, K-12 teachers or post-secondary instructors, while others are not. Not only is this not fair, but also, it adversely affects the quality of education because it produces high teacher turnover when salaries are low and benefits are inferior or non-existent. The fact that this problem exists in the adult education system is further evidence that adult education is treated as the poor cousin of the K-12 and post-secondary systems. Adult education needs to be part of the "education continuum," on a par with K-12 and post-secondary education.

All teachers in ALCs should be fully certified. Most now are; it appears that a small number are not. It should be a future requirement that they be certified. Those not certified but currently teaching at an ALC should be grandparented. All teachers in ALCs should be unionized, either by the Manitoba Teachers Society or by the union representing teachers and instructors in whatever educational institution/First Nations authority with which their ALC and/or ALP is affiliated. There may be some exceptions for particular reasons, but in general unionization should be the default condition.

Fairness and equity in teachers' and instructors' salary and benefit levels can most easily be achieved by the provincial government requiring that all teachers working in ALCs become employees of the school division or other educational institution with which they are affiliated, so that they are, by virtue of that employment relationship, unionized and entitled to the same salary scale and benefits as their K-12 or post-secondary counterparts.

It may be a bit more complicated in the case of instructors in ALPs. A higher proportion of instructors in ALPs are not certified teachers. Some Directors take the view that “Certified teachers would bring more academic integrity to the programs,” thus adding to the legitimacy and reflecting the importance of adult literacy. Others believe that being a certified teacher does not necessarily make for strong teaching of adult literacy. However, what is clear, as shown in *Unearth This Buried Treasure*, is that it is not appropriate that the rates of pay earned by instructors in ALPs vary so wildly. This has to change.

It is essential that adult literacy instructors be unionized so that they are being paid at union rates and are entitled to benefits and job security. As one rural Director said, it is now “very disheartening to have such a vast difference in pay” for literacy instructors. It is likely that further discussion will be needed to determine exactly what qualifications adult literacy instructors should be required to hold. The intention, as with teachers in ALCs, would be to “grandparent” existing adult literacy instructors.

How Would Adult Learning Centres and Adult Literacy Programs Use the Increased Funding?

EACH ALC AND ALP that responded to the survey knows exactly how they would use a budget increase.

Almost every ALC and ALP, with some minor exceptions, would hire additional teachers and/or instructors, so that they could accommodate greater numbers of adult learners, and improve retention and graduation rates. Adult Literacy Programs have been particularly underfunded and would add instructors and in some cases rent additional space. Some Adult Learning Centres would add a literacy program. In the case of one rural program, for example, the Director would hire two additional instructors, one with a literacy specialty so she could open an ALP, in order to meet the needs of those in her area not quite ready for mature high school courses.

Two experienced Directors of Adult Literacy Programs advised me that in *Unearth This Buried Treasure* I had underemphasized the importance of adult literacy, focusing too much on the mature high school program. Adult literacy is a crucial part of adult education; it is often the poorest in the province

who are taking, or need, adult literacy programming; yet funding for adult literacy is even softer than for adult education overall. In a great many ways, “literacy learners are complex,” as one Director explained. Many struggle with the problems related to complex poverty, and need supports that are “beyond just classroom teaching.” Further, those with years of experience teaching adult literacy argue that the Stages approach is not sufficiently effective, and that what is needed is “to develop an actual curriculum beyond the simplistic Stages booklet.” It is important that increased funding benefit ALPs as well as ALCs, that in as many cases as possible ALPs be located in the same physical location as ALCs, and that a range of supports be made available to adult literacy learners to ensure their success. In general, adult literacy needs to be taken more seriously than has historically been the case.

Many Directors said they would hire a counsellor or crisis support worker or student advisor. They explained — as is well known by all those involved in adult education — that many adult learners come into an adult education program burdened with the life challenges created by complex poverty and trauma. They need supports beyond classroom teaching. They need help in advocating with landlords, with legal aid, with Employment and Income Assistance. They come to class having been moved out of their rental unit or burdened with the stress of a son in the remand centre and needing legal aid, or a worker cutting off their financial support. They may struggle with anxiety or addictions or mental health issues. “Self-esteem is incredibly low” in many cases, a rural Director said. These are the challenges that make it so difficult for adult learners to succeed. A rural Director said, “a 0.5 counsellor would be useful as many of our struggling learners are not struggling with the academics as much as pressures from other aspects of their lives.” The Director of an urban literacy program wrote, “Low literacy is not the only issue they are dealing with, but it is an issue that can play into the continuation of their circumstances if not addressed. Managing personal issues, domestic violence, food insecurity, housing insecurity...all affect how our students approach their learning.” This “is an enormous piece of the ‘success in adult education’ puzzle,” the Director of a Winnipeg program wrote. It is very likely that almost every ALC and ALP would benefit from being able to hire a full-time or in some cases a part-time support worker to respond to these needs. Now, employment of a support worker is rarely allowed. One Winnipeg Director said that she uses various forms of fundraising, including small grants, to hire a part-time “classroom assistant,” because that kind of support worker position is not currently funded by ALL, even though the position “is vital to our classroom.”

Related to this, many Directors would use some of their additional funding to provide breakfast or lunch programs for their adult learners. Many adult learners who are struggling with complex poverty need nutritious food if they are to succeed with their studies. A free breakfast or lunch program for adult learners and their children would not only meet the need for nutritious food but would also improve attendance and retention.

A specific budget line should be included for graduation ceremonies. Graduation ceremonies at ALCs and ALPs are inspiring events. Graduates' children and relatives are often present, and the ceremony creates an important sense of pride in achievement. Now, ALCs and ALPs have to do their own fundraising to cover the costs of graduation ceremonies. This is short-sighted and needs to change.

Many Directors said they would use additional funding to add classes – evening classes, or weekend or summer classes. They said the demand is there and being able to move beyond a 9 to 5 model would significantly improve accessibility. Some programs are not open five days a week and would use new funding to add additional days. One Director said that with additional funding she would be able to offer core courses more than once per year. All these measures would not only add to the number of adult learners in the system but would also improve retention and enable learners to move more quickly through to completion of their programs.

Several Directors emphasized the importance of digital literacy and recommended that a computer skills course be part of the mature high school curriculum. As one rural Director put it, “being able to navigate the internet is nearly as important and expected as literacy and math skills in many vocations.”

Some programs would add classroom or other space. A rural Director wrote, “We are in desperate need of more space.” Some literacy programs do not have access to suitable, permanent space. In other cases, literacy programs could be added if additional space could be rented. Moving to a hub model, where an ALC and ALP are co-located, will likely involve additional funding, and these amounts should be in addition to the doubling of the ALL budget.

Directors were asked, “How many additional adult learners might you be able to accommodate over a five-year period, if you were to get the annual funding” they said they could reasonably use. Some said it was hard to estimate, and some did not include a number, but adding together the numbers of those who did make an informed estimate – two-thirds of respondents included a specific number – comes to 10,830 additional adult learners over a five-year period. That is a very significant number, since in

2019/20 there were 8892 adult learners enrolled in ALCs and ALPs. Directors are saying that enrollment could be more than doubled over a five-year period with additional funding and given that one-third of respondents said their enrolment would increase but did not include a specific number, it is likely that enrolment growth would be more than double. More than that, retention would improve. One rural Director said, in response to this question, “I think a 50 percent increase [in her annual budget] could increase our enrollment by at least 30 percent, but more importantly I would predict a greater percentage of learners remaining in the program and actually completing their courses/program instead of dropping out due to other issues.” She estimated that “instead of having only 50 percent of learners complete their credits, we could increase our completion percentage to the 75 percent range.”

In short, Directors of ALCs and ALPs know *exactly* how they would use additional funding, and they are confident that additional funding would lead to significant growth in the numbers of adult learners in their programs, and improved retention and course completion. A doubling of the budget allocation to Adult Learning and Literacy would therefore be likely to produce *more* than a doubling in the current numbers of graduates.

Expand the Role of School Divisions to Include an Obligation to Support Adult Education

Almost all ALCs and most ALPs are affiliated with a school division or First Nations education authority or other educational institution. In some cases, the school division/educational institution/First Nations authority provides substantial support – payroll management, human resource issues, other administrative tasks, for example – and in several cases the school division/educational institution/First Nations authority also provides some financial support, and in some cases very substantial financial support. Another example is the Aboriginal Community Campus in Winnipeg, which is a stand-alone adult education program that gets substantial support from the Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development (CAHRD).

Support of this kind can make a substantial difference. One Director of an ALC wrote:

Our school division covers anything that isn't covered by our ALL grant. They provide professional development opportunities, human resources/ payroll/accounting services, IT services, internet access, website and online

registration platform, school software, all costs associated with our building, photocopier, books etc. Our [Adult Learning and Literacy] grant basically covers staff wages....We are very thankful to have the support of the division. We can focus on students and not worry so much about funding.

This supportive and collaborative relationship is ideal. It produces meaningful improvements to adult education.

However, in many cases the school division or other educational institution or First Nations authority with which an ALC and ALP is affiliated provides little or no support. The administrative tasks must then be taken on by the ALC or ALP, cutting into their already limited budgets.

The provincial government ought to require that all school divisions and other educational institutions/First Nations authorities with which ALCs and ALPs are affiliated provide administrative and other supports to ALCs and ALPs, and the government ought to provide to school divisions and other educational institutions/First Nations authorities a specific budget line to compensate them for providing these services. It is cost effective for administrative tasks to be done by school divisions or educational institutions/First Nations authorities, since they are already performing those functions.⁴

While school divisions and other educational institutions take on administrative responsibilities, ALCs and ALPs must continue to hold the decision-making authority for their educational efforts. Adult education differs from K-12, and adult educators are best placed to make decisions about their programs. As one Director put it, any directive that school divisions and other educational institutions take over administrative responsibilities would have to be done in such a way that it does “not result in a loss of adult education’s unique DNA.”

These measures would be a big step forward in building a revitalized adult education system in Manitoba.

The Hub Model for Adult Learning

THE CREATION OF adult learning hubs was a major recommendation of *Unearth This Buried Treasure*. The argument advanced there is that we should be delivering adult education in a way that is interconnected and has a strong network of supports. The idea is to bring together in one physical space an ALC, an ALP and a childcare centre. This may not be possible in every case and should not adversely affect smaller centres and satellite operations. It should, however, be pursued in every case where practical. It already exists in a small number of cases. The Aboriginal Community Campus/CAHRD is a good example, where wrap-around services are provided — evidence of the expertise developed in recent decades by the Indigenous community.

Adult Literacy Programs are best located in the same building as Adult Learning Centres. Doing so produces many benefits. The transition from an ALP to the mature high school program is difficult. This may be due to a shortage of grade 10 courses or other courses that facilitate the transition to high school-level courses. It may be due to adult learners' fears of the unfamiliar, their fears of new and more difficult challenges in a new place. Such fears are much more likely to be overcome by co-locating adult literacy and mature high school programming, creating a seamless web from one level to the next. Where this co-location exists, it works well. ALPs ought to be co-located with an ALC, to facilitate the transition to a higher level of learning.

Childcare is a necessary support for success in ALPs and ALCs. Directors consider it to be *essential* if adults living in complex poverty are to succeed in adult education. The hub model would include a childcare program in the same building as an ALP and ALC, or in close proximity. This ought to be at the forefront of strategic planning as the province rolls out the federally driven universal and affordable childcare program that is intended to create 23,000 new spaces over five years.

Individual ALCs and ALPs should immediately submit applications for childcare centres, if possible in partnership with other community organizations. This may be a role for Adult Learning and Literacy to take on, coordinating the most effective strategy for the development of childcare centres as part of the hub model.

When ALCs and ALPs submit their applications for their share of the doubled funding that is to be made available to Adult Learning and Literacy, they should be instructed to outline how they will work toward the creation of a hub model, and applications with clear and detailed plans to create a hub model should be prioritized.

Shift Employment and Income Assistance from a “Work First” Orientation, to a Commitment to “Adult Education Wherever Possible.”

The reorientation of Manitoba’s Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) program is an important component of the revitalization of adult education. EIA should shift from its current commitment to moving people into the paid labour force as quickly as possible, to a greater commitment to adult education in every case where that is possible.

Currently, the EIA program is committed to moving recipients into the paid labour force as quickly as possible, irrespective of their skills or level of education. The *EIA Administrative Manual*, the program’s detailed policy manual, states that “General assistance recipients have work experience expectations and are expected to find employment as soon as possible.” Adult education may be approved “in exceptional circumstances only” (*EIA Administrative Manual* S.6.11.20).

This is short-term thinking. There is a body of scholarly literature attesting to the limits of this “work first” approach. It pushes people off the social assistance rolls as quickly as possible, even in those very many cases when an EIA recipient does not have the skills and education, nor

the self-confidence and self-esteem, needed to thrive in employment. The result is that many with low levels of skill and education are pushed into jobs that are poorly paid and have no benefits and no career prospects. As one ALC Director wrote: “Our experience is that many individuals who are on EIA struggle to get meaningful, full-time employment that allows them to support themselves, due at least in part to their lower literacy levels or lack of a grade 12 diploma.” This does nothing to solve the problem of poverty, which is the root cause of the large numbers on the EIA rolls. Those pushed into such jobs are likely either to leave such a job in frustration and go back on the welfare rolls, with another “failure” to further weigh them down, or to stay on the job and, because the pay is so low, remain in poverty.

The better alternative is to think long term, by taking the time to build the capacities and capabilities of EIA recipients. This can be done by encouraging as many EIA recipients as possible to take advantage of the opportunities made available via ALCs and ALPs, and supporting them in doing so, in order that they can improve their education, increase their skill level, and build improved levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Investing in EIA recipients’ education significantly increases the likelihood that they will gain employment that enables them to pull themselves permanently out of poverty, thus building a better future for themselves and their families.

But this is not what has been happening, especially in recent years. EIA workers are much less likely to encourage and support EIA recipients in doing adult education. One long-time rural Director wrote: “When I first started, EIA would refer *many* of their clients to our centre. They would come to the centre to check in on their clients and build relationships with staff. Now, our worlds rarely intersect — so much so, that I can’t even tell you who the EIA worker is in my community.” Another Director wrote: “When I took over as ED I spoke with [EIA] workers regularly and had generally positive, collegial, professional interactions with most EIA staff. In the past two years EIA has been decidedly unsupportive of adult learners returning to adult education....We have had many students drop out because of removal of funds.” She added, “I have spoken to a number of our current students who say they have friends and family who want to have the opportunity to return to adult education but who have been told they will lose their funding if they return to school.” A rural Director said, with respect to EIA workers, that her program “in the last few years has had less and less contact with them,” and “almost always people don’t even know their counsellor.” A Winnipeg Director wrote, “We do get referrals from EIA but we have noticed a huge decline in the referrals recently....They seem bent on removing students.”

Another rural Director said much the same, adding “If EIA workers helped to promote the option of returning to school for long-term EIA clients, I think that would be a proactive approach to breaking the cycle of families using assistance.”

All of this is notwithstanding the fact that there is a dedicated adult education program on Lombard Avenue in downtown Winnipeg for EIA recipients.

Enormous benefits could be achieved by shifting the orientation of the provincial EIA program away from “work first” to a commitment to adult education first. This longer-term approach would significantly increase the likelihood that EIA recipients would be able to secure the kind of employment that would not only take them off the welfare rolls permanently, but also lift them and their families out of poverty, with all the many financial and societal benefits that would follow.

Promote the Indigenous Character of Adult Education

Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in adult education in Manitoba. While approximately 18 percent of Manitoba’s population are Indigenous, 45 percent of adult learners in ALCs and 38 percent in ALPs are Indigenous. Indigenous people are particularly likely to be candidates for adult education, due to the higher incidence of complex poverty and lower rate of on-time high school graduation among the Indigenous population. This is largely attributable to the intergenerational effects of the residential school experience. As Justice Murray Sinclair has often said, and as is reflected in the TRC’s Calls to Action, “Education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it.” Adult education can play a particularly important part in this process of reconciliation via education.

This should be reflected in every way possible as we work to build the best adult education system in Canada. Community support workers/counsellors should be part of every ALC and ALP. Those hired in these roles should as often as possible be Indigenous. Wherever possible new teacher and instructor hires should be Indigenous. Space and funding should be available to bring in elders and knowledge keepers and other Indigenous role models. Online learning with the kinds of supports described below should be available in rural and northern Indigenous communities that do not have ALCs or ALPs. Transitional programs should be available for Indigenous students coming to Winnipeg, Brandon or Thompson from rural and northern communities.

Indigenous cultures should be part of the curriculum in all mature high school programs. In *Unearth This Buried Treasure* Aja Oliver, a graduate of Kaakiyow Li Moond Likol ALC in Winnipeg’s North End, described how transformational it was for her to learn about the residential schools and the *Indian Act* and colonialism more generally in her Aboriginal Studies class.

In every way possible, the strong Indigenous presence in adult education should be reflected in the character of adult education – including hiring practices, curricula and cultural representation. This should be reflected in the allocation of the increased funds to be available upon the doubling of the allocation to Adult Learning and Literacy.

Develop an Online Learning Strategy for Adult Learners

While in-person classes have always been considered the best learning environment for both adults and children, self-paced online learning has been an important component of Manitoba’s adult education system for at least the past 15 years. Since the arrival of the pandemic, much has changed in education, including increased awareness and use of both asynchronous and synchronous online learning. The experience with online learning over the past couple of years has revealed some of its challenges, and its potential.

The asynchronous (self-paced) online option became available in the early 2000s when the Province put several self-paced Independent Study Option (ISO) high school courses on the WebCT platform. These courses were available to certified teachers in the K-12 and ALC systems. By 2006 there were 41 online courses available. Since many rural ALCs had been using the self-paced ISO print material, some were keen to make the switch to the online option. However, it soon became obvious that it took a lot of time for teachers to learn the platform, to make improvements to the content, and to contact and support students on an individual basis. Many ALCs gave up on the online option, but Midland Adult Education Centre in Carman, Louis Riel Institute in Winnipeg and Sunrise ALCs in eastern Manitoba continued.

The asynchronous online delivery filled a gap allowing adult students with transportation, childcare, work scheduling or even mental health issues to take courses and work toward their goals. Adult Learning and Literacy asked Midland to accept online students beyond the borders of its local school division. Registrations grew quickly and online delivery became Midland’s specialty. Louis Riel Institute and Sunrise ALCs supplemented their regular in-class programming by offering some online courses.

To be successful, online learning has to include the means for personal contact between adult learner and teacher. This personal contact is essential. Midland, for example, maintains close contact and develops supportive relationships with their online learners via phone, text, email and other methods, and can arrange face-to-face meetings. Midland has also arranged for their online learners to connect in person with any ALC or ALP in the learners' geographic area. Several years ago, Adult Learning and Literacy provided special funding to enable Midland to travel to and connect in person with other ALCs and ALPs in the province. All of this speaks to the crucial importance of personal contact in adult education.

One rural Director suggested that in the case of a geographic area that did not have an ALC or ALP, a library or school or band office could serve as a physical site where adult learners could gather. The site would include appropriate technology, and a teacher. Students in that geographic area, unable to attend a full ALC or ALP because of distance or other reasons, could go to the local site for access to technology and in-person support as needed. The site would be less than a full ALC or ALP, and students would be learning primarily online, but they would have the advantage of personal contact and support.

A northern Director said that she wants to do the same kind of online learning in northern communities, starting with one community and building on that experience. She too would use an onsite support staff in those communities using online learning.

It is important to note that asynchronous (self-paced) online learning is for students who *cannot* attend scheduled classes whether they are online or at a physical site. Without the opportunity for self-paced learning, these students would not progress toward their goals.

Some ALCs and ALPs have moved during the pandemic to synchronous learning, or blended learning, with some students in class and others at home. This has produced certain unforeseen advantages. For example, a learner may have to go home for some time, for a funeral for example, or some other reason, and may be away for a couple of weeks or more. With a synchronous or blended model that student can keep up with her studies by being online – assuming her community has adequate internet service. Students in such situations could particularly benefit if there were coordination with an existing ALC or ALP in their home community, or if there were a physical location equipped with technology and staffed by a teacher as described above.

One Director, in describing her use of synchronous learning during the pandemic, said “the biggest barrier is technology.” Adequate internet service is not available in some communities in Manitoba, and in many cases adults do not have access to a suitable computer and/or other necessary technologies. These are among the challenges that have to be met if full advantage is to be taken of online learning. The provision of adequate internet service is of course not a cost to be borne by Adult Learning and Literacy. That is a broader provincial and federal responsibility. However, for online learning to reach its full potential, budgetary provision will have to be made for access to computers and other necessary technology, perhaps the establishment of local sites where online learners can have access to technology and a teacher, and staffing will have to be maintained at a level such that teachers working online can maintain personal contact with all adult learners.

Just before the pandemic, Adult Learning and Literacy recognized the need for coordination among centres offering asynchronous online learning. As a result, Midland, Louis Riel and Sunrise began to collaborate in some intake and administrative procedures. Continued collaboration and streamlining of asynchronous online learning will be advantageous.

Move Adult Learning and Literacy into a Permanent Departmental Home, Most Likely the Department of Education but Perhaps Some Other Department

In recent years Adult Learning and Literacy has been bumped from one provincial government department to another and then another, adding significantly to the sense that adult education is an afterthought and is not valued and respected. Most Directors of ALCs and ALPs believe that ALL belongs in the Department of Education, because it needs to become an important part of the education continuum in Manitoba, on a par in importance with K-12 and post-secondary education.

One Director stated that it really does not make sense for ALL to be anywhere other than in the Department of Education. She wrote, “All ALCs grant/submit credits through partnerships of some kind with school divisions or larger institutions....[and] students receive a diploma signed by the Minister of Education. It all seems a bit convoluted. Centralization seems important,” and that should mean ALL becoming a permanent part of the Department of Education.

A minority opinion expressed by some Directors is that the Department of Education is so narrowly focused on K-12 education that adult education would not thrive in such a setting. It would be “sucked into an abyss,” feared one Director. The principle ought to be that adult education needs a permanent departmental home, and it needs to be seen as a crucial part of the education continuum in the province. This issue will need further discussion.

Launch a Province-Wide Provincially Funded Advertising Campaign, and Ensure that Each ALC and ALP Has a Reasonable Advertising Budget

There is a huge unmet demand for adult education programming. In 2013/14 it was estimated that there were approximately 192,600 Manitobans with literacy levels so low that they could not fully function in society. Every effort must be made to ensure that all of these people who are capable of improving their educational level have a full and meaningful opportunity to do so. An impediment to this is that what ALCs and ALPs have to offer is not widely known. They are “buried treasures.” One rural Director wrote: “It always surprises me how people in the community don’t know about literacy programs or even if they know about them they don’t understand what they offer.” A well-designed, province-wide advertising campaign could move many more adults into ALCs and ALPs, so that their lives could be improved.

Budget lines for advertising by ALCs and ALPs are now far too small. Another rural Director wrote: “This year we received \$400 for advertising. Putting a tiny text-only ad at the bottom of a page in a local online news has a relatively small cost. Attending job fairs requires large and professionally made signage, and a simple pop-up display costs about \$2000.”

A province-wide and provincially funded advertising campaign needs to be rolled out to make people aware of adult education. There was a broad consensus among Directors about this. As a rural Director described it, the campaign ought to be “similar to the quit smoking, use seatbelts, or the ‘participaction’ campaign of years ago.” Such a campaign would increase awareness of adult education, contribute to the perceived legitimacy of adult education, and hopefully remove some of the stigma that continues to be attached to a lack of literacy skills. “People are often ashamed of having low literacy skills, so an ad campaign to de-stigmatize low literacy skills would be beneficial,” said a northern Director.

One Director suggested that a provincial advertising campaign might be something along these lines:

Although Canada’s education system strives to provide citizens with the skills they need to thrive in our technological society, many people miss out on their educational opportunities. It is estimated that one in every five adults in Manitoba lacks the basic literacy skills many of us take for granted. If you, or someone you know struggles because of low literacy skills, there are training centres across the province that help.

A variety of other interesting local methods to attract students were suggested by respondents to the survey. A rural Director would hold “open houses.”

We would invite potential learners, as well as liaisons from local agencies (Employment, EIA, Housing, Mental Health, etc.), and local employers [to which could be added Women’s Centres and Friendship Centres and other community-based organizations]. We would rent a large space for food, local entertainment and activities for the kids. A dedicated quiet space would be available to meet with potential learners, and tours of our facilities would be arranged. We would include the assistance of past adult graduates who would meet with small groups to describe their success journeys.

A Winnipeg Director would arrange a “bring a friend day...to encourage the learners already attending to allow someone else to experience how friendly and comfortable the environment is.” This is consistent with the observation by a northern Director that “Traditionally, adult learning has been best advertised through word of mouth. Students who experience support and success are the best advocates.” A Winnipeg Director whose program is located close to some large Manitoba Housing complexes would go door-to-door to promote the benefits of adult education.

Part of the means to “unearth this buried treasure” — i.e., to maximize the potential of adult education — is to make many more people aware that it is a treasure that can produce benefits for those in need. Promoting adult education via a provincially funded advertising campaign, plus a budget line for local campaigns, would result in a significant increase in enrollment in ALCs and ALPs. Everyone benefits from such an outcome.

Move to a Multi-Year Application Process

The current requirement to submit a detailed funding application each year, and in many cases to submit two such applications each year, one for an ALC and a separate one for an ALP, is unnecessarily burdensome. One Director wrote, “Having to put in for a grant every year and normally not getting every item that is requested is time-consuming and frustrating.” A rural Director said, “We would like to see a three or five year funding model to stabilize programming and reduce bureaucracy.” This seems fully justifiable, as does a single application where an ALC and ALP are co-located as part of a single organization, rather than having to prepare two separate applications. Another Director expressed the frustration: “I just finished our crazy funding document requirements for both our ALC and Literacy program plan applications, interim statistical returns and budgetary requests and approvals – it’s insane how microscopic our Provincial oversight is on Adult learning.” This was a common theme in Directors’ responses to the survey.

Much of this can be solved by moving to a multi-year application cycle, with applications submitted once every three or five years – some Directors have experience with the federal Department of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, which has already moved to multi-year funding applications – and with a single application process where an ALC and ALP are co-located. There is unanimity about this reform.

Create a More Unified and Transparent Adult Education System.

A rural Director made the case for this quite clearly. She wrote: “Establish an adult education structure that fosters cohesion/collaboration between centres; consistency in services/expectations; partnerships/teamwork. So many Centres operate in isolation from each other. The current structure is very much like each Centre recreating their own wheel.”

Directors of ALCs and ALPs should be meeting on a regular basis with ALL, working to create a more collaborative and transparent adult education system. This should include an annual or at least bi-annual conference of adult educators, at which professional development and sharing of ideas takes place.

Develop a Strategy for Adult Education at Manitoba’s Faculties of Education

It would be advantageous for students in Faculties of Education to be able to take post-secondary courses in adult education/adult literacy in order to be exposed to this teaching specialty, and it would be especially advantageous if it were possible to take a post-Baccalaureate specialty or a Masters of Education specialty in adult education/adult literacy. However, there is currently very little adult education programming in Manitoba’s Faculties of Education.

At the University of Manitoba’s Faculty of Education, there have in the past been conversations about adding an adult education stream in the undergraduate program, but this has not happened. The “streams” now available are early, middle, and senior years. The system is completely “framed in the K-12 system,” as one person described it. Adding an adult stream, or even one or more elective courses in adult education, would be difficult because the curriculum is tight and students are able to take few electives.

The Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education (PBDE) — where courses are typically at the 5000-level leading to a 30-hour credential that can move teachers up the pay scale — offers a few courses in adult education, but not a complete coordinated program. Courses could be added at the PBDE level, but such courses run on a cost recovery/demand basis and are offered only if 20 or more students register.

There is a small Master of Education program at the University of Manitoba Faculty of Education that combines adult education and post-secondary education, but it is currently being revised and has not accepted admissions for the past six years. However, there appears to be some interest in reviving this program, perhaps in an online format with a summer in-person component.

The University of Winnipeg’s Faculty of Education has a mandate to support the certification of teachers in the K-12 system. Their focus is therefore on children and youth, and not adults.

Brandon University’s Faculty of Education offers no undergraduate courses in adult education/adult literacy, and while three Masters-level courses with an adult education focus are on the books, none have been offered in recent years. The graduate education committee has of late talked about developing a certificate or concentration in adult education that would include several adult education courses, but this does not now exist.

The relative paucity of course and program offerings in adult education in Manitoba’s Faculties of Education reflects the marginalization and “poor

cousin” status of adult education in Manitoba more generally. Students preparing for a teaching career should at least be exposed to adult education. Teachers already working in adult education/adult literacy, or wanting to do so, should have a wider range of courses available to them. Teacher certification is not enough, wrote one experienced northern Director. “All instructors in ALCs need to have a strong theoretical and practical background in adult education.” Several Directors of ALCs and ALPs said that Directors would benefit from specialized courses. Yet-to-be-determined educational programming should be developed for adult literacy instructors.

The establishment at one of the Faculties of Education – most likely the University of Manitoba – of a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education with a specialty in adult education is very likely warranted. Demand for such a program could be created if the provincial certification branch were to create a certificate in adult education/adult literacy, and if pay levels were to be enhanced for those teaching in the area and holding such a certificate. Certificates currently exist for school counsellors, special education (faculties have requested that the name be changed to inclusive education) and educational administration.

The details of any enhanced programming in adult education at the post-secondary level would have to be worked out by those directly involved, including those currently working in both the Faculties of Education and ALCs and ALPs. Exactly what should happen with enhanced programming in adult education at the post-secondary level should be the subject of further investigation and consultation.

However, as a beginning step it would be useful if students in Faculties of Education were to be able to choose to do a teaching practicum placement in an ALC offering the mature high school diploma, or in an Adult Literacy Program. This would increase awareness of adult education amongst teachers – as one adult educator said, most Education students “have no idea” that adult education is a career option for them – and it would add to the perceived legitimacy of adult education generally. This has been done in at least some ALCs and ALPs, and Directors of those programs report positive results.

Create a Transition Committee

All of the initiatives set out above are too much to handle for existing Adult Learning and Literacy staff, who have their ongoing functions to perform.

A dedicated “transition committee” should be established to direct this process. It should include not only senior ALL staff, but also representatives of school divisions, senior people from related government departments and programs — Education; Employment and Income Assistance; Advanced Education, Skills and Immigration; Families; Indigenous Reconciliation and Northern Relations, for example — as well as a strong contingent comprised of Directors of ALCs and ALPs from across the province.

The Transition Committee should be established immediately and should be tasked with working out the details of each of these initiatives so that action can be taken as quickly and effectively as possible.

Conclusions

ADULT EDUCATION IN Manitoba is a buried treasure. It is exceptionally valuable in multiple ways, but its full potential needs to be unlocked. Enhancing and expanding Manitoba's mature high school and adult literacy programs will produce a wide range of benefits – to adult learners, their immediate and extended families, and all Manitobans. Cost-benefit analyses of educational programming reveal that it is cost effective. The broad economic benefits exceed the costs.⁵

We need to build upon the solid base that now exists – the Adult Learning Centres and Adult Literacy Programs, and the many talented and dedicated individuals who are teaching in and directing these programs. It is completely realistic to think that we could create the best adult education system in Canada, and that ought to be our goal.

The many adult learners who do well in literacy and mature high school programs have a much-improved chance of finding a job that will pull them and their families out of poverty. Given the particularly high incidence of poverty in Manitoba, this is important. The children of a parent or parents in adult education are themselves more likely to do well in school, and thus more likely to avoid a life lived in poverty.

Adult education is also an important part of reconciliation. Manitoba has one of the highest proportions of Indigenous people in Canada. Winnipeg has Canada's largest urban Indigenous population. The country is striving to move toward reconciliation. Adult education can be a particularly important part of reconciliation.

Adult education also matters to all Manitobans because, like much of the industrialized Western world, we are facing soon a shortage of skilled labour, and now we are facing a shortage of workers in many industries. Moving more Indigenous people and newcomers and Manitobans generally into the paid labour force is increasingly important from an economic perspective.

Most importantly, adult education contributes mightily to building better lives for many. Success in adult education means not only finding a good job that pulls families out of poverty. It also means building more fulfilling and more satisfying lives. Adult education builds not only skills but also self-confidence and self-esteem, without which full participation in our increasingly complex society is extremely difficult.

The measures outlined in this report, all of which come from those working directly with adult learners on a daily basis, are eminently achievable, relatively inexpensive, and cost effective. Implemented in their totality, they will create the best adult education system in Canada. The benefits will be dramatic and will roll out for generations to come.

Appendix

SURVEY OF DIRECTORS of Adult Learning Centres and Adult Literacy Programs

I. If additional money were to be made available to your program, as a permanent addition to your annual budget, how would you use it?

- Would you hire additional teaching staff? If so, how many do you think you could use?
- Would you hire support workers or counsellors?
- Would you rent additional space?
- Is there something else you would do with additional annual funding?
- How much additional money – i.e., how much of an increase to your annual budget – would you need to do the things you think need to be done? Would it be double your current annual budget? A 50% increase? Some other amount? Assume that things have changed, and you could get the full amount of what you could use.

II. By how much do you think you could increase enrollment in your program, if you were to get the amount of funding that you identified in #I above?

- Could you increase enrollment by 100%? By 50%? By some other percentage?

- How many additional adult learners would that be, relative to your current enrollment? For example, someone might say, we currently have 100 adult learners, and with the funding identified in #1 above, we could add an additional 100 learners. Or an additional 50. Or whatever you think to be an accurate assessment.
 - How many additional adult learners might you be able accommodate over a five-year period, if you were to get the funding identified in #1 above?
- III. What steps would you take to increase enrollment in your program? Or put differently, what would you do to attract additional adult learners into your program?
- Do you think an advertising campaign promoting the virtues of adult education would work?
 - If so, what might it look like?
 - Is there something else that you would do to attract adult learners?
- IV. What kinds and what amount of support do you get from the educational institute with which you are affiliated? Do you get administrative support – payroll for example? Do you get any other in-kind support? Do you get financial support? Could you use additional supports, and if so, what would that be?
- V. What specific things would you have to do to move to the “adult learning hub” model described in the report? The hub model would bring together in one space, or in close proximity, an Adult Learning Centre, an adult literacy program and a childcare centre.
- Would this be possible for your program?
 - What kind of partnerships would be needed to move your program to an “adult learning hub” model?
 - Is your program co-located with a childcare centre? If not, is there a childcare centre near your program? If there is no childcare centre near your program, what would it take to get a childcare centre co-located with your program?
 - Does your program currently include both an adult literacy program and an ALC? If you are running an ALC, is there an adult literacy

program nearby? If not, would you be interested in establishing one? If so, what would be required?

VI. What do you think about changing the way EIA operates so that EIA workers are instructed to encourage EIA recipients to attend adult education programming, and ensuring that recipients in an adult learning program continue to get their EIA payments?

- Is this something that you would support?
- What has been your experience with EIA? Have you experienced any cases where a qualified adult learner was prevented from attending adult programming by her or his worker?
- Do you think there are many people currently on EIA in your area who could succeed in an adult education program – either the mature grade 12 or adult literacy?

VII. What is your opinion of the recommendation in the report that all instructors in Adult Learning Centres and in adult literacy programs be fully certified, and members of the Manitoba Teachers Society?

- Is that something you would support?
- Would that create any problems for your program?
- How much might that cost?
- What other thoughts do you have about this idea?

VIII. What other things do you think need to be considered in creating a “roadmap” for the implementation of an enhanced and revitalized adult education system?

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Endnotes

1 <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/unearth-buried-treasure>

2 Earlier studies have detailed the effectiveness of Manitoba's adult education program from the perspective of adult learners. See Silver 2014, 2013 and Silver, Klyne and Simard 2003, for example.

3 A smaller number of adult educators are members of other unions that represent workers at the educational institution with which their ALC or ALP is affiliated.

4 Administrative tasks to be undertaken by school divisions or other educational institutions/ First Nations authorities for ALCs and ALPs would include at least the following: human resource management, payroll, accounting, IT services, internet access, website preparation and upkeep and others as needed. The ALL budget should be left to cover staff salaries and benefits, and rent.

5 Jesse Hajer and John Loxley. 2021. *Social Service Private Gain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. pp. 46–50. Professor Jesse Hajer. *Personal communication*. March 11, 2022.



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