

Statement by Tamara Lorincz, Coordinator of the Nova Scotia Working
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Education in Nova Scotia for Everyone)

The United Nations declared 2005-2014 to be the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, whose goal is “a world where everyone has the opportunity to ... learn values, behaviour and lifestyles required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.” To achieve this goal, the Canadian government funded education for sustainable development working groups in 8 provinces and territories. I am pleased that our working group here in Nova Scotia now has almost 160 representatives from government, non-governmental organizations, businesses, and municipalities that are committed to advancing sustainability education here.

I am therefore delighted to see this new GPI Education report take the framework of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development as a key basis for its indicators, and to ask the question: ***Are we learning what we need to know to live sustainably?*** Answering that question is no longer a luxury or an extra-curricular activity. For the Nova Scotia government to achieve its own targets, as laid out in the new Environmental Goals and Sustainable Prosperity Act of 2007, and for new agencies like Conserve Nova Scotia to fulfil their mandates, will require active citizen participation and knowledge. Nova Scotians will need to learn and understand the environmental impact of their actions, and how to make environmentally responsible choices in their daily lives.

The time is right for GPI Atlantic’s new approach to education indicators. This GPI report cites a recent survey showing that 85% of Atlantic Canadians rank the environment as a key priority for government—more important than any other issue. And yet only one in three Canadians say they know what they need to know to help protect the environment. The GPI report finds levels of ecological literacy to be abysmally low—with fewer than half of Canadians, for example, knowing that burning coal and oil contributes to the greenhouse effect. As well—and shockingly—the most educated Canadians are having the most negative effects on the environment. Clearly our school systems are not yet teaching us what we need to know to reduce our ecological footprint. This has to change if we’re to take care of the world for the benefit of our children and their children, and GPI Atlantic is finally showing us how we can properly measure genuine progress in this area.

This GPI report quotes the highly respected educator, David Orr, saying that ecological literacy—or knowledge of the Earth’s ecosystems and of the interrelatedness of all life—is crucial knowledge for an educated populace in today’s world, and is essential for the sustainability and wellbeing of the planet and all of its occupants.

Finally, with this GPI report, we are starting to ask the right questions about our education system—is it teaching us what we need to know to live in an environmentally responsible way, to be politically informed, and to improve our health and wellbeing? This GPI report has some good news about what is possible. It points out that the province of Manitoba has shown the greatest leadership in Canada on education for sustainable development—with financial support for schools, student grants, teacher training programs, parent resources, curriculum development, and a dedicated website on the subject. If Manitoba can do it, so can Nova Scotia.