

Ontario's Education Strategy Consultations 2013 OCULA Response to Questions

Information about the Ministry of Education Consultation is at:
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/excellent.html>

Question 1 What are the skills, knowledge and characteristics students need to succeed after they have completed school, and how do we better support all learners in their development?

Students need to develop enthusiasm for learning and to be able to take responsibility for their learning. They need to be able to build knowledge collaboratively and respectfully. There are multiple literacies that students need:

- information literacy, which is an understanding of how to access information efficiently in a variety of formats (print, online, video, audio, etc.), critically assess the quality of that information, and apply that information to their particular need;
- digital literacy, which addresses how to use technology appropriately within a learning context
- reading, writing, and spelling skills, which are crucial for students' ability to do concentrated reading, in-depth analyses and critical evaluation, write papers, put together presentations, and search databases effectively. These skills are especially important for students who have grown up with texting language and all of its brevity and abbreviations.

School libraries can help support learners because libraries are a collaborative learning space that provide access to a wide range of resources and technology and allow students to control their own learning. Library programs are inquiry-based and can help students learn a range of literacy skills.

Question 2 What does student well-being mean to you, and what is the role of the school in supporting it?

Student well-being means that students are well-equipped and well-positioned to make the most of learning opportunities; this includes imagination, confidence, cultural awareness, and mental health.

School libraries are vital for supporting student well-being. Teacher-librarians can help students to navigate their way through various resources, to critically evaluate them and to use them effectively, which can help to lower stress levels related to research and study. School libraries can provide students with the freedom to explore ideas and follow their passion. By providing a wide range of reading materials and encouraging students to read for pleasure, libraries help students to learn about others and develop empathy, and to imagine new possibilities for themselves.

Question 3 From your perspective, what further opportunities exist to close gaps and increase equity to support all children and students in reaching their full potential?

Most important here is the opportunity to give every student access to a quality school library staffed by highly trained teacher-librarians. Currently, students do not have equitable access to

school libraries and this means that they are not equally prepared to succeed in their postsecondary studies. Quite simply, many students arrive in college or university libraries not understanding how to look up resources such as a novel or a scholarly journal article. Many students also do not understand that the library is the repository of existing scholarly knowledge in their areas of study, and are not able to connect their ideas to that existing literature, which seriously hinders their educational progress.

Question 4 *How does the education system need to evolve as a result of changes to child care and the implementation of full-day kindergarten?*

Teacher-librarians need to be fully involved in supporting full-day kindergarten teachers with early literacy programs and materials and with play-based programming. Partnerships with public libraries should be explored, to further expand the programs and resources available to teachers and students.

Question 5 *What more can we all do to keep students engaged, foster their curiosity and creativity, and help them develop a love of life-long learning?*

Teacher-librarians can provide rich collections, in a variety of formats, to engage students in reading both for information and for pleasure. School libraries can be spaces that support creativity, giving all students access to technology, collaborative spaces, maker spaces, and learning coaches.

Question 6 *How can we use technology more effectively in teaching and learning?*

The use of technology in teaching and learning must be combined with an understanding of information literacy, digital literacy and digital citizenship. Technology should not be relegated to “computer labs” but should be fully integrated with students’ learning spaces. School libraries are natural technology hubs and the school library space, re-visioned as a “learning commons,” can blend technology into current learning experiences. Teacher-librarians can help make these connections with technology and learning.

School libraries should be supported to invest in online resources, such as interactive textbooks and online reference databases. The more that students learn how to access high-quality information online, the better they will be equipped to pursue postsecondary studies and the more capable they will be as lifelong learners.

Question 7 *In summary, what are the various opportunities for partnership that can enhance the student experience, and how can they benefit parents, educators and our partners too?*

Partnerships between teacher-librarians and teachers are vital for student success. If students see these relationships as a natural and integral part of their learning experience, they will be encouraged to seek assistance from college and university librarians during their postsecondary education, which will ensure that they can effectively find and use the resources they need for their continued learning. Educators will benefit from increased teacher-librarian involvement in the classroom, since teacher-librarians bring expertise that will allow other educators to focus on their primary areas of expertise. Finally, the more that teacher-librarians are involved in students’ learning, the more that those students’ parents will be exposed to library services and resources that can also be of benefit to them in their own pursuit of lifelong learning.

Partnerships between local school libraries and university or college libraries can also be beneficial. For example, some high school teachers are able to bring students to local campus libraries for tours and classes. Students are thereby oriented to a university or college library before they start their postsecondary studies, and they may also learn about resources and services that could be helpful for high school projects and assignments. This partnership also benefits academic librarians by keeping them in touch with their institutions' future students.

Teacher-librarians can also partner with librarians in other types of libraries, such as college, university, public, and special libraries, to give students access to a wide range of resources. Librarians all have strong connections with and knowledge about their local communities and resources, and such networking can therefore have great benefits for all.

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) and the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) division of OLA are valuable partners as well. For example, OSLA members have worked to develop the Together for Learning vision for an integrated learning commons approach to Ontario's education. OSLA can also help the Ministry of Education to establish staffing standards for school libraries and thereby ensure equitable access to school libraries across Ontario.