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## **Access to Information for Ontarians: Leveraging and Providing E-Resources for All Ontario Students**

Proposed by:

Ontario Library Association (OLA), The Federation of Ontario Public Libraries (FOPL), The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario (TALCO)

And in consultation with:

Southern Ontario Library Services (SOLS), Ontario Software Acquisition Program Advisory Committee (OSAPAC)

### **Introduction:**

E- resources such as online subscription databases are an important resource supporting research, student projects and the curriculum. Regional and province wide collaborative negotiation and purchasing amongst school, academic, and public libraries is standard practice in a number of jurisdictions across Canada and results in considerable savings and broader, more ubiquitous access for students and parents. In Ontario there are a common set of e-resources that are suitable for both school and public library access as they support classroom teaching, homework requirements and life-long learning.

**However, Ontario does not currently have a province-wide strategy for leveraging costs and licensing databases across all school boards and public libraries.**

E-Resources in libraries take two shapes: libraries license large vaults of content (i.e. articles, reference materials, information) in database form or acquire individual or collections of e-books (fiction and non-fiction).

Province wide access to a common set of core e-resources offers all students a level of equity.

### **Current Situation:**

There is some consortial purchasing currently in Ontario resulting in cost savings. Our recommendation is to increase further cost savings and greater equity of access for students and Ontarians.

Consortial purchasing of e-resources is coordinated as follows:

Public Libraries: Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS) currently negotiates pricing at the provincial level for public library access to e-resources to reduce costs and to maintain a level of access to digital content for all Ontarians.

Schools: the Ontario Software Acquisition Program Advisory Committee (OSAPAC) assesses provincial priorities in the areas of required software titles recommended by teachers in support of learning and recommends to the Ministry of Education province-wide licenses.

As a recent example, the following four databases are purchased separately by both public libraries via SOLS and for the Ministry of Education via OSAPAC for each sector:

- [ Career Cruising
- [ BookFlix
- [ Naxos Music Library
- [ Britannica Online (in schools it is Britannica School)

In addition, 30 of the larger school boards (20% of school boards in Ontario) are participating in a separate consortial purchasing arrangement coordinated with SOLS by The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario (TALCO) to offer an additional suite of core resources also purchased by some public libraries to leverage negotiations and to get a better cost. The remaining school boards are unable to offer these resources.

These resources/vendor products are:

- [ Teen Health and Wellness and various science and literacy databases (Rosen)
- [ PebbleGo, EduCan Media
- [ Gale (via Nelson Educational); various suites and individual products
- [ EBSCO; various suites and educational products.

Purchasing at the provincial (versus board) level will result in considerable savings and ensure equitable access for students across the province.

### **Recommendation:**

1. It is recommended that OSAPAC and SOLS receive a funding envelope to develop a purchasing strategy including assessment and analysis, and a means of coordinated planning and purchasing in order to leverage negotiation, costs, and access across both public libraries and schools for resources, and to investigate further opportunities for licensing and cost reduction.
2. We request that the purchase of common databases be funded via one funding envelope for both sectors at the provincial level for all schools and public libraries to reduce cost.

### **The context for consortial e-purchasing in Ontario:**

For more than 10 years, and until December 2015, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport has provided various levels of funding to support consortial purchasing of e-resources for public libraries. Public Library staff report that most of these e-resources have been excellent support for student homework, but that there is a demand for these resources in the classroom and in the school library. In addition, and as noted above, Southern Ontario Library Service (SOLS), an agency of the Ministry of Tourism Culture

and Sport, agreed to coordinate purchasing and negotiations in conjunction with The Association of Library Consultants of Ontario (TALCO) for 30 school boards for a common set of e-resources (the resources noted above), to help reduce costs.

Unfortunately, December 31, 2015, marked the end of additional Ministry funds for public library access (\$2 million annually) to many e-resources. This represents a loss of over \$2 million in a time when we should be doubling down on digital content strategies and reducing inequities between urban/suburban centres and rural/town/remote public libraries and school boards who do not share the economies of scale for digital delivery.

Further, **college and university library staff report that there is an expectation that students be familiar with using e-resources** such as Gale and EBSCO information products upon entry to post-secondary education. Currently, 80% of Ontario's students who did not have access at their school to these types of e-products, now no longer have access at their public library.

With funding and staffing in decline in school libraries in Ontario, public libraries are doing a lot to support learning and homework. A nominal investment resulting in a cross-ministry strategy (Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport and Ministry of Education) to support e-resources will provide ubiquitous access and provide a level of opportunity for all of Ontario's students, particularly for smaller and more rural communities. We estimate the overall cost savings realized by a provincial strategy will be up to 35% if a common set of resources are collaboratively purchased for both sectors.

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