# **Ensuring Student Success Through Access to School Libraries – OSLA**

# July 15, 2020

«Full\_Name\_Director\_of\_Education», Director of Education

«Board\_Chairperson\_\_Name», «Chair\_person\_\_president»

«Full\_school\_board\_name»

**RE: Ensuring Student Success Through Access to School Libraries**

The Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) membership consists of more than 1,000 members who are front-line educators and school library staff essential for delivering Ontario’s primary and secondary curriculum. This includes making sure students have the digital and critical thinking skills they need to succeed in college, university or a career in the skilled trades.

We are contacting you at this critical time, as the «Full\_school\_board\_name» plans alternative scenarios for the 2020-21 school year, to share important information with you about school libraries and school library staff.

During the school closures due to COVID-19, school library staff have continued to demonstrate the value they bring to their boards. [According to an OSLA survey](http://www.accessola.org/WEB/Documents/Advocacy/2020-06-15%20-%20OSLA%20M%20Ed%20Slide%20deck%20-%20Ontario%20School%20Libraries%20Response%20to%20COVID-19%20copy.pdf), school library staff are providing leadership in the following essential functions:

* The curation of digital learning resources,
* Support of students, parents, and teachers in using distance learning technology,
* Sharing virtual programming options with students and teachers,
* Co-teaching classes and supporting curriculum linkages, and
* Moving in-person programming such as read alouds, book clubs and maker activities online.

While the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding formula also includes allocations specifically for your school library staff, over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of students across Ontario have lost access to school libraries and the critical resources they provide. In the past year, we have witnessed many school boards, faced with difficult decisions related to anticipated increases in class sizes, take steps to further limit student access to these foundational in-school supports. This has included re-assigning hundreds of skilled teacher-librarians into non-library roles, limiting school library hours of operation, or shutting libraries altogether.

In a recent issue of our organization’s magazine, [*The Teaching Librarian*](http://www.accessola.org/web/Documents/OLA/News/Teaching-Librarian/TingL-27-1.pdf), the feature article of this issue looks at the state of Ontario’s school libraries. It illustrates the current reality of declining school libraries, especially in Northern, Southwestern and Eastern Ontario. Even as the issue was going to print, another school board made the decision to eliminate nearly all library staff. Since publication, more boards have reduced school library learning commons programs. We are concerned that this is and will continue to have a substantial impact on student success and post-secondary preparedness.

We understand in planning for the return to school, boards are being asked to plan for multiple possible scenarios, including contingencies to offer at home, on-line learning. While the school library space may look different next year, school library staff are and will be integral to a successful adjustment.

Prior to the pandemic, school library staff were already leaders in supporting online learning, co-teaching classes, supporting curriculum linkages and curating library digital and print resources. According to a [2020 Report](https://peopleforeducation.ca/our-work/technology-in-schools-a-tool-and-a-strategy/?utm_source=E-Newsletter&utm_campaign=b35354ecc3-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2020_03_31_09_01_COPY_02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_422aeb3dbd-b35354ecc3-18826721), in 43% of schools, students working on e-learning during the school day work primarily in the school library, and teacher-librarians were supporting students with their online learning. During the pandemic, school library staff have continued in these critical roles as well as providing strong leadership in supporting students, teachers and parents navigate and use distance learning technology. These functions are more essential than ever and must be maintained in our schools.

As you enter this critical planning stage for the 2020-21 school year, OSLA is committed to working with you to develop a tailored, board-specific approach to maintain and restore critical student access to school libraries and library staff. Together, we can enhance accountability and transparency by ensuring that these investments reflect the Ministry of Education’s recommended funding formula for school libraries. We believe that this can be achieved while respecting the independence of school boards and ensuring sufficient local flexibility on how best to apply this funding.

OSLA shares your commitment to ensuring that Ontario students receive a world-class education. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and members of your team in the coming weeks to discuss this important issue, share best practices, and identify a path forward to ensure that students in «Full\_school\_board\_name»will have access to this critical learning resource.

Yours sincerely,

**Maureen McGrath**

OSLA President and on behalf of [2020 OSLA Council Members](http://www.accessola.org/web/OLA/OSLA/About_OSLA/Council/OLA/OSLA/Council.aspx?hkey=d88d41a7-ca48-41e2-8480-d02c468a2be9)

cc.

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