

Improving Ontario's Education Funding Formula: Protecting Ontario's School Libraries and Taxpayer Dollars



Rose, Grade 12

Markham

York Catholic District School
Board

Rose is involved in an online research co-op course, working on a research project in molecular biology and virology, with online mentorship from a university professor.

Rose's favourite parts of the school library are the technology and resources available to the student body. She uses the computers to access the school library's many online databases and scientific/academic journals.

Research skills are critically important for students finishing high school, whether they pursue college or university education or go on to learn a trade or technical skill. School libraries with trained staff provide a training ground for the researchers of tomorrow.

Executive Summary

For generations, **school libraries have been at the core** of Ontario's schools, with a **proven impact** on student achievement and standardized test scores.ⁱ

However, over the past 20 years, students all across Ontario **have been steadily losing access to school libraries and library-based resources.**ⁱⁱ School boards are not required to spend funds allocated by the Ministry of Education for school libraries and teacher-librarians on these critical learning resources.

The Ministry of Education recognizes the vital importance of school libraries and teacher-librarians to student success and has a **well-established per-student funding formula** that determines the amount of money that is to be invested in this important priority. Because school boards are not required to spend the funds as intended by the ministry formula, some boards have made board-wide decisions to use funds meant for school libraries on other priorities, stop hiring teacher-librarians or close their school libraries altogether. The resulting decline in funding for libraries and teacher-librarians is having **far-reaching impacts on student performance and outcomes**, including math and science grades, EQAO test scores, literacy & research skills, digital literacy, and post-secondary readiness. The results are dramatic: alongside the slow decline in board-level support for school libraries, the percentage of Ontario students who enjoy reading has **fallen from 76% in 1997 to only 47% in 2018.**ⁱⁱⁱ

The Ministry of Education can **restore transparency** and reinforce the critical role school libraries play in supporting Ontario's student achievement – without any new spending – **by mandating, rather than recommending** – that annual funds currently allocated for school libraries and teacher-librarians are spent on these important priorities.

Background

A school library is more than just books. School libraries are constantly evolving to offer programming that supports **future-oriented learning; science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) skill, literacy, and research skills**. Students with a well-resourced and staffed school library have access to:

- **Coding** and **robotics** equipment and programming;
- Quality, **age- and curriculum- appropriate** books and learning resources;
- Interactive programming and resources that **complements the curriculum**; and
- A dedicated space **for independent and collaborative learning** outside of the classroom.

When it comes to student achievement, Wikipedia and Google alone are not a substitute for a properly-resourced and staffed school library. **A teacher-librarian is an Ontario Certified Teacher**, who independently completes additional qualifications in librarianship. Teacher-librarians ensure that students have access to the tools to build the skills they need to be successful in their future - whether pursuing college or university education or learning a trade or technical skill. They also help all teachers in the school by developing effective, in-depth learning strategies and programming to help deliver on student performance and curriculum objectives.

Teacher-librarians wear many hats:

- **Supporting students to become independent learners**, with instruction on accessing a wide-range of learning resources;
- **Co-planning, co-teaching, and co-assessing** with teacher partners, from full-day kindergarten to Grade 12;
- **Supporting the implementation of new curriculum** and teaching strategies across the school; and
- Acting as a **mentor and coach for staff and students** alike to **integrate technology** in teaching and learning.



Elisabeth, Teacher-Librarian

Richmond Hill

York Catholic District School Board

The school library and teacher librarians support teachers and students in everything that they do.

Elisabeth, the teacher-librarian at Father Frederick McGinn Catholic and Notre Dame Elementary Schools is working closely with classroom teachers to **increase the impact of new technologies on learning** in the classroom.

Elisabeth has been a true **technology mentor** in the school, organizing lunch and learn sessions for classroom teachers to introduce new technologies that can be incorporated in the classroom.

She is also co-teaching classes, for instance, supporting this class with **hands-on-learning** related to their electricity unit. For their final lesson, the class **wired small robots** and offset them to create these “scribble bots” (pictured above).

Hands-on-learning helps not only to **get students excited and engaged** in what they are learning, but also **reinforces the curriculum** and **enhances learning**.

Only 52% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian – either full- or part-time – down from 80% only 20 years ago.

How are School Libraries Funded?

Funding for School Libraries comes from the Ministry of Education's **Pupil Foundation Grant**. The Ministry has an established funding formula that recommends a ratio of 1 elementary teacher-librarian per 763 elementary pupils, and 1 teacher-librarian per 909 secondary pupils.

Funding for teacher-librarians is based strictly on the number of students enrolled in the school, and the ratio currently used by the Ministry is designed to be **consistent with the concept of efficient price**. In fact, Ontario's funding formula is already **very cost-effective**, well above the ratio of one teacher-librarian to 567 students recommended by the Canadian School Library Association.^{iv}

However, because the funding received from the Ministry is not currently prescribed ("sweatered"), many school boards are not allocating the funding to teacher-librarians and school libraries as set out in the Ministry's funding formula.^v



A Growing Crisis in School Libraries

Because of insufficient transparency and accountability for money allocated by the Ministry of Education for school libraries and teacher-librarians, **students across Ontario are losing access to libraries and library-based resources, especially in rural schools.**

For example, in 2017 only 52% of elementary schools had a teacher-librarian – either full- or part-time – down from 80% only 20 years ago. **The situation in Northern Ontario is especially dire: only 11% of elementary schools have these specialized staff.**^{vi}

Because resource allocation is determined at the board-level, some boards have made board-wide decisions to go so far as to no longer hire Teacher-Librarians in their elementary schools, in direct contradiction of Ministry of Education recommendations, and despite protests by students and parents alike.

The result: students – even students within the same community – **have access to radically different supports:**

Schools with a School Library and Teacher-Librarian	Schools without a School Library or Teacher-Librarians
E.g. Greater Essex County District School Board	E.g. Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ 24/7 access to age- and curriculum-appropriate books and learning resources;✓ Safe and supervised access to and instruction on technology, online tools and digital spaces;✓ Integrated, school-wide approach to digital mentorship, supporting students in each and every classroom;✓ Access to up-to-date resources for College, University, and career readiness;✓ A flexible, on-demand space for learning outside of the classroom, including individual study areas, collaborative workspaces or performance spaces; and✓ A supportive, school-wide culture of independent learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ No expert oversight over school’s books and learning resources purchasing, leading to inappropriate and out of date resources for students and teachers;✗ Less access to e-resources✗ Limited training on research skills;✗ Piecemeal access to technology, with no supervision or instruction on the use of digital spaces; and✗ No dedicated space for learning outside the classroom.

Some school boards, like Ottawa Catholic District School Board and Near North District School Board, no longer hire teacher-librarians at their elementary schools.

"We found that school boards' reporting as required under transfer payment agreements was often incomplete..."

*"...all three [school] boards we tested for compliance with **transfer payments for the Library Staff program** had failed to report in their annual reports, as required, the number of staff hired."*

*"Further, in all cases where the school board failed to provide the full required reporting, the boards received funding in the following year for the same program."
(Auditor General of Ontario, 2017 Annual Report, p. 463)*

Transparency & Accountability

School libraries are a recognized priority, described by the Ministry of Education as "...**key elements of a classroom education that are required by, and generally common to, all students.**" (Pg. 23, Ministry of Education Funding Technical Paper 2017-2018).^{vii} Tried, tested and proven over generations, school libraries are core to the school and student success.

As noted in the **2017 Auditor General's annual report**, school boards are frequently failing to report to the Ministry of Education how funds allocated to school libraries are being spent.^{viii} The ongoing cuts to teacher-librarians show that across the province, this funding is not being spent where it should be and where the Ministry has intended. **We estimate that as much as half of funds - up to \$100 million annually - earmarked by the Ministry of Education for teacher-librarians are being otherwise allocated by school boards.**

Because of the lack of transparency, this core resource of the school is already under significant threat - and far worse in many parts of the province, particularly rural and northern schools. The result is a patchwork of investment approaches by school boards across Ontario, with students in some schools increasingly falling behind their peers in other school boards with robust school library programs.

It is important to get back to basics, and ensure that the allocated funds are delivered to support the critical role school libraries play in supporting Ontario's student achievement.

Accountability does not mean that "one size fits all." Local needs and conditions vary widely across Ontario. It is important that local school boards and teacher-librarians continue to have flexibility in how they adapt their school library programming and make the needed investments. It is essential, however, that boards are mandated to spend annual funding allocated by the Ministry of Education for school libraries and teacher-librarians on its intended purposed and in a way that is transparent, effective and accountable.

Value for Money

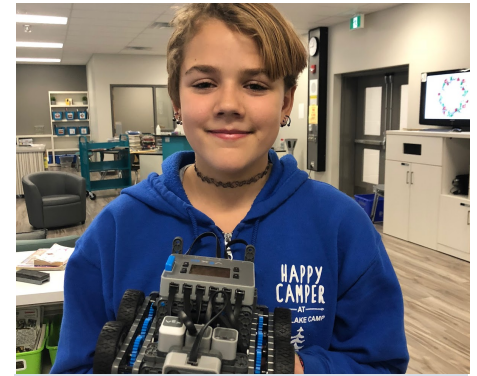
It's a fact, not a theory: access to libraries and teacher-librarians has a **demonstrable impact on the learning outcomes** of students across Ontario.

The library has always been the heart of the school, **and teacher-librarians are the only educator who maintains regular, curriculum-focused contact with each and every student in the school.** At the elementary level, that's over 750 students to each teacher-librarian. In secondary schools, it's over 900 students per teacher-librarian.

Teacher-librarians work closely with classroom teachers to ensure they have access to **quality, curriculum- and student achievement-focused resources** – in diverse formats to serve all learners. They maintain a dedicated **space for quiet work or group study**, where students can find the expert advice they need from a qualified teacher-librarian to achieve excellence.

It's no wonder that school libraries have a multiplier effect on student achievement, supporting support students in developing:

- literacy skills and a love of reading;
- math, science and technology skills;
- critical information capability;
- research proficiency;
- and much more.



Charlie, Grade 6

Oshawa

Durham District School Board

At Village Union Public School, Charlie is part of the robotics and coding club run through the school library by the teacher-librarian.

Learning to program robotics and code is more than just fun. Coding helps students to apply the math and writing skills they are learning in the classroom in a real-world context, and robotics helps students to develop the practical high-tech skills of today's and tomorrow's hands-on jobs.

Charlie and many students are already very interested in focusing on programming and tech in high school and beyond!

Outcomes

The existing shortfall in funding for libraries and teacher-librarians is having **far-reaching impacts on student performance and outcomes**, from early literacy to post-secondary readiness.

Access to a properly staffed school library, no matter where you live in the province, is **a proven, essential component of student success**.

Student Achievement

Trained library staff and access to properly resourced school libraries foster students' love of reading, which research has shown has a positive impact on **success in science and math**, literacy scores, and students' social and civic engagement.^{ix}

EQAO Scores

Schools with trained library staff see **better outcomes on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments**.^x

Conversely, the steep decline in the percentage of Ontario children who report that they enjoy reading – from 76% in 1997 to 47% in 2018 – closely aligns with the declining presence of teacher-librarians in Ontario schools over the same period.^{xi}

College Readiness

College and university librarians are increasingly reporting significant differences in information literacy skills between students graduating from secondary schools with resourced school libraries and teacher-librarians, and those without. School libraries have an important role to play in preparing students to succeed in post-secondary, with teacher-librarians providing the first formal introduction students receive to library databases, search skills, critical information assessment.^{xii} These are critical skills that students need to hit the ground running, regardless of whether they're attending university, college or learning a trade.

A study is now underway, led by Dr. Mary Cavanagh (University of Ottawa) and Dr. Diane Oberg (University of Alberta) - Canada's foremost researchers in the field - to measure the impact of school libraries on post-secondary readiness in the Ontario context.

Digital Resources

As leaders on digital content, teacher librarians and library staff promote digital literacy and digital citizenship by acting as **technology mentors and coaches for all staff and students**.

Mandating the allocation of adequate funding for school libraries will provide students across the province with the library resources they need to collectively achieve the outcomes expected from Ontario's significant investments in education and post-secondary education and performance.

College and university librarians see the difference

Catie Sahadath, an experienced librarian from the University of Ottawa, sees firsthand the impact of teacher-librarians and school libraries on post-secondary preparedness.

Students who have had instruction from trained school library staff demonstrate a higher level of applied research skills, both online and traditional, "...representing an important advantage as students enter post-secondary."

By contrast, many students who didn't have access to these critical learning resources face an uphill climb: **"We frequently see intelligent students struggle with these very basic skills, and the time it takes them to catch up can stop them from achieving their full potential."**

OUR RECOMMENDATION

Require that funds *currently allocated* for school libraries and teacher-librarians are used for their intended purpose.

The Ministry of Education can recognize the critical role school libraries play in supporting Ontario's student achievement by:

- **Mandating that the annual funds currently allocated by the Ministry of Education for school libraries and teacher-librarians are spent on these priorities ("sweatering").**
- **Enhancing transparency** and requiring school boards to be **accountable for using these allocated funds** for their intended purpose. This will ensure that millions in annual funding committed by the province for school libraries across Ontario is applied, **without committing any new money.**
- Ensuring that **all Ontario students** – no matter where they live – will have **access to the tools and technology to build the skills they need to for future success.**

We know that school libraries have a demonstrable impact on student achievement. The Ontario Library Association (OLA), alongside the Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario (TALCO), the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) and other school library and teacher-librarian partners, will work with the Ministry of Education and school boards to set clear benchmarks and outcomes metrics.

These will assess performance and curriculum alignment, drive the uptake of best practices, and assess the impact of school libraries on student achievement. Metrics will be informed by demonstrated best practices, innovative use of technology, and evidence from across Canada, North America and the world, and will minimize red tape so teacher-librarians can focus on enhancing student achievement rather than administrative paperwork. We can build on what we know through an advisory group leveraging the expertise of teacher-librarians, principals, school board representatives and parents.

ⁱ People for Education & Queen's University Faculty of Education. [School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario](#). Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 2006.

ⁱⁱ People for Education. [Libraries](#). Toronto: People for Education, 2017.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ministry of Children & Youth Services. Gearing Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario Middle Years Children Thrive. Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2017. & People for Education. [Reading for Joy](#). Toronto: People for Education, 2011.

^{iv} Canadian Association for School Libraries, [Achieving Information Literacy – Standards for School Library Programs in Canada](#). Ottawa: Canadian Association for School Libraries, 2003.

^v People for Education. [Libraries](#). Toronto: People for Education, 2017.

^{vi} People for Education. [Libraries](#). Toronto: People for Education, 2017.

^{vii} Pg. 23, Ministry of Education. [Education Funding Technical Paper 2017-2018](#). Government of Ontario, 2017.

^{viii} Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. Annual Report 2017. Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2017.

^{ix} People for Education, [Reading for Joy, 2011](#). Toronto: People for Education, 2011.

^x People for Education & Queen's University Faculty of Education. [School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario](#). Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 2006.

^{xi} Ministry of Children & Youth Services. Gearing Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario Middle Years Children Thrive. Toronto: Government of Ontario, 2017. & People for Education. [Reading for Joy](#). Toronto: People for Education, 2011.

^{xii} Foote, C. (2016). Building success beyond high school with career- and college-ready literacies. *Knowledge Quest* 44(5).