

School Libraries as Partners in Achieving Ontario's Back-to-Basics Priority

Ontario School Library Association 2026-27 Pre-Budget Submission

Access to a school library and teacher-librarians is a proven part of student success, leading to better outcomes on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments.

- Teacher-librarians serve as literacy leaders and provide support and expertise to the entire school. They work with classroom teachers to achieve literacy and curriculum objectives.
- Literacy and critical research skills are foundational to STEM and other core competencies. Library programs expand academic vocabulary and strengthen comprehension skills that transfer directly to all subject areas.
- STEM subjects rely on understanding graphs, tables, data sources, and evidence. Teacher-librarians explicitly teach how to interpret information, question claims, and evaluate sources – skills that support data literacy and mathematical reasoning.

Reading for pleasure is one of the strongest predictors of overall academic success, including math achievement. When school libraries cultivate reading engagement, students get sustained reading practice that supports all subject areas.

- The school library is also the one place in the school where students can find what truly interests them, sparking a love of reading. Developing literacy through enjoyable reading prepares students with skills they'll use in school and beyond.
- School libraries serve as an inclusive and equitable space for all learners, especially for those who may lack materials and books at home. For these students, the school library is essential.

As the Ontario government works to improve foundational skills in reading, writing, and math, renewed investment in school libraries is essential to achieving these goals.

- School libraries directly support the Ontario Ministry of Education's key priorities and goals, including its 'Back-to-Basics' initiative focused on strengthening foundational skills in reading, writing, and math.
- Research shows vocabulary and reading comprehension are needed to solve word problems in math; weaker literacy is a documented barrier to math learning. When literacy gaps widen early, math gaps widen with them.

Ontario's School Libraries and Student Literacy are At Risk

- Closure of school libraries and reductions/eliminations in library staff for 20+ years
- 1 out of 3 of school boards reported not meeting the Ministry's funding formula for school libraries and library staff in 2021-22
- Loss of enveloped funding & reporting measures via Core Education Funding
- 2024-25 EQAO results show slow progress in number of students meeting provincial standard for reading, writing & math

Many of Ontario's school boards – including several of its largest – have dramatically reduced school library resources and staffing. Some school boards have eliminated school libraries altogether.

- The introduction of the Core Education Funding model in 2024 has exacerbated these challenges by removing enveloped funding dedicated for school libraries and library staff, as well as eliminating reporting measures on how school boards are spending funds intended for school libraries, if at all.
- This is reflected in ongoing trends indicating that fewer and fewer Ontario students are meeting the provincial standard in reading and writing. Last year's Grade 3 and Grade 6 EQAO scores indicated slow progress in improving in reading, writing and math scores.
- Due to school board-level decisions, hundreds of thousands of students across Ontario have lost access to school libraries and the critical resources and support they provide. This has accelerated in the past number of years as several of Ontario's largest school boards have made dramatic reductions to school libraries and library staff; other school boards in both urban and rural communities have eliminated them altogether.
- According to reporting by school boards to the Ministry of Education, 1 in 3 school boards in Ontario self-reported not meeting the Ministry's funding formula for school libraries and library staff in the 2021-22 school year – a number that has likely increased since then.
- Ontario's Core Education Funding Model, introduced in April 2024, puts school libraries at further risk. The model:
 - Eliminated protected funding for school libraries and library staff.
 - Put library staff funding in the same category as materials like Chromebooks and crayons.
 - School boards are no longer required to report to the Ministry of Education on how or if they are funding school libraries – a requirement previously introduced by the Ontario Government in 2021

Recommended Priorities

Restore and enhance protection of provincial funding for school libraries and library staff under the Core Education Funding Model, as well as accountability for school boards about how these funds are used, in recognition of their importance for meeting Ontario's student literacy goals and supporting student achievement.

- Update the Core Education Funding Model to create a defined sub-allocation for all school libraries and staffing funding, consistent with the provincial per-student formula;
- Update the Funding Model to fully protect these allocations; and
- Restore the annual reporting and accountability requirements regarding school libraries for school boards and implement recommended enhancements previously submitted by the OSLA to the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Ontario School Library Association

The Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) is a division of the Ontario Library Association (OLA), the oldest and largest library association in Canada. The OSLA provides a common voice for school library professionals needs and interests through advocacy, leadership and continuing education. Over 1,300 elementary and secondary school teacher-librarians, library technicians and school board consultants are represented in OSLA.