December 16, 2020

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

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

«Full\_school\_board\_name»

**RE: Invest in Student Success by Investing in the School Library**

The Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) is a recognized subject matter association, consisting of more than 1,000 front-line teacher-librarians and school library staff essential for delivering Ontario’s primary and secondary curriculum. This past summer, we shared with you the impact of school libraries and school library staff on student achievement. Now, as you plan for next year’s staffing allocations, we are urgently writing to you to ensure that students in your board continue to have access to critical school library programming and staff.

The COVID-19 pandemic and back-to-school planning for this emergency period have had a devastating impact on school libraries, staff and programming. Across Ontario, school library professionals have been re-assigned, library staff laid-off, and access to library spaces, books and resources closed to students.[[1]](#footnote-1)

We are deeply concerned with the short-and long-term consequences that these decisions have for students:

* Decades of evidence has demonstrated the relationship between academic achievement and access to a school library.[[2]](#footnote-2) Early research on the impact of the pandemic shows that younger students have fallen up to eight months behind in reading achievement.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* The closing of school libraries perpetuates inequality. Children from racialized or marginalized communities, those living in poverty or with little access to books are the most affected.
* School libraries help reduce barriers to student achievement. Families with fewer resources rely on school libraries to help their children succeed as students.
* School library professionals are instrumental for building research and information literacy skills to prepare students for college and university.
* Books and library spaces are a source of reassurance and comfort, and contribute to children’s better mental health and participation in school.

Where school library professionals remain in schools, they have continued to support students and learning throughout the pandemic. They have also taken on a strong leadership role 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.

We are continuing to advocate at the provincial level to protect school library funding. In a written response, the Minister of Education, Minister Lecce noted:

“... I wanted to state how important school libraries and library staff are to the education sector in Ontario. As Minister, I will always stand up to protect these important services. Because of this important role that school libraries and librarians provide, I have consistently advocated as Minister of Education to ensure that funding for library staffing continues to be provided through the Grants for Student Needs funding model."

Boards have an important role to play in maintaining a viable and sustainable school library program. The Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding formula includes allocations specifically for your school library staff. Yet over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of students across Ontario have lost access to school libraries and the critical resources they provide. Experience tells us that when school libraries close, they often never reopen.

As you enter this critical planning stage for the 2021-22 school year, we urge you to protect funding for the school library program at your schools. 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](https://accessola.com/osla-council/)

cc. **«regional\_representative»** «OSLA\_Councillor» «Region»

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1. Ontario Library Association. (2020). [Ontario School Libraries in the 2020-21 School Year: A Survey of Ontario School Boards](https://accessola.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2020-11-23-Findings-Ontario-School-Libraries-20-21-FINAL.pdf). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Haycock, K. (2011). [Connecting British Columbia (Canada) school libraries and student achievement: A comparison of higher and lower performing schools with similar overall funding](https://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1025&context=slis_pub&httpsredir=1&referer=). School Libraries Worldwide, 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Aplohonso, C. (2020, November 26). [School shutdowns have put children up to eight months behind in reading, research indicates](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-school-shutdowns-have-put-children-up-to-eight-months-behind-in/). *Globe and Mail* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)