

January 14, 2020
Ontario Human Rights Commission
180 Dundas Street West, 9th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2G5

Re: OHRC launches Right to Read public inquiry

Dear Ms. Mandhane,

On behalf of the Ontario Library Association (OLA), Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) and Canadian School Libraries (CSL), we are writing to congratulate you on the Right to Read public inquiry.

We are particularly interested in your inquiry as reading, and specifically a love of reading is foundational to the work of all types of libraries, but especially school libraries.

Learning to read as an outcome in Ontario's public education system is paramount. Literacy and a love of reading have been linked to improved academic performance, including increased success in science and math¹. Research shows that reading for fun also enhances students' personal development, increases social and civic engagement, and increases empathy and higher rates of life satisfaction.²

While we recognize that there is complexity to the reasons why students are encountering barriers to learning to read, we would like to identify a potential area of concern as it pertains to your inquiry.

¹ Bussiere, P., F. Cartwright, et al. (2001). [Measuring up: The performance of Canada's youth in reading, mathematics, and science](#). Statistics Canada.; Howard, V. (2011). [The importance of pleasure reading in the lives of young teens: Self-identification, self-construction and self-awareness](#). *Journal Of Librarianship & Information Science*, 43(1), 46-55.

² Community Literacy of Ontario. (2013). [Painting a picture of literacy](#); Howard, V. (2011). [The importance of pleasure reading in the lives of young teens: Self-identification, self-construction and self-awareness](#). *Journal Of Librarianship & Information Science*, 43(1), 46-55.

Teacher-Librarians and school library staff provide support and expertise to the entire school. In this role, they are able to gauge reading abilities, interests and capabilities of the student population and can work in tandem with other staff with expertise in literacy and reading ability. In addition, research shows that schools with trained library staff see better outcomes on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments.³

One concern we have is the declining rate of staffing in school libraries over the past two decades. As of 2019, only 54% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian – either full- or part-time – down from 80% only 20 years ago. The situation in Northern Ontario is especially dire: only 13% of elementary schools have these specialized staff.⁴ The decline in properly staffed and funded school library learning commons also affects the development of a healthy, vibrant library collection geared to the needs of staff and students. Further, Ontario has seen a steep decline in the percentage of Ontario children who report that they enjoy reading – from 76% in 1997 to 47% in 2018. This decrease closely aligns with the declining presence of teacher-librarians in Ontario schools over the same period.⁵

Where there are staffed school libraries, we see positive impacts in supporting reading engagement for students who have a print disability. For example, OLA coordinates the Forest of Reading, Canada's largest reading program of its kind with more than 250,000 young readers participating annually primarily through their school library program. The Forest of Reading is accessible to students who have reading disabilities. Nominated titles are available in alternative formats. In 2019 almost 2,000 requests were made from schools to AERO/CELA for accessible formats of Forest of Reading nominated titles. This represents a 36% increase in requests over the past 3 years.

As advocates for school libraries and cultivating a love of reading, we are invested in ensuring that all students have access to the resources they need to develop the literacy skills that are crucial to personal development and lifelong success.

Canadian School Libraries is hosting [Treasure Mountain Canada](#), a school library research symposium held every two years, Saturday February 1, at the Intercontinental Hotel, 225 Front Street West. More than 60 educators and school staff from across Canada will be in attendance. Accessibility will be a sub-theme. We would welcome attendance from you and/or your team at this event to discuss further the role of school

³ People for Education & Queen's University Faculty of Education. [School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario](#). Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 2006

⁴ People for Education. [Connecting to success: Technology in Ontario Schools - People for Education - 2019](#). Toronto: People for Education, 2019.

⁵ 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.

libraries in supporting a culture of reading. Please contact Shelagh Paterson, executive director, OLA if you are interested. spaterson@accessola.com.

In addition, we look forward to the results of the inquiry.

Sincerely,



Jennifer Brown

President Ontario School Library Association



Anita Brooks Kirkland,

Chair, Canadian School Libraries

About our organizations:

Founded in 1900, the **Ontario Library Association** (OLA) is the oldest continually operating non-profit library association in Canada. With more than 5,000 members, the OLA is the largest library association in the country. We offer opportunities for learning, networking, and providing input into public policy. The **Ontario School Library Association** is a division of OLA consisting of 1,000 members who work in Ontario's school libraries.

Contact: Shelagh Paterson
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Ontario Library Association
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Canadian School Libraries is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to professional research and development in the field of the school library learning commons in Canada. CSL connects school library practitioners and educators across Canada in the collaborative pursuit of delivering exemplary practices reflective of current professional school library learning commons standards.