



March 17, 2022

Chief Commissioner Patricia DeGuire
Ontario Human Rights Commission
180 Dundas Street West, 9th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2G5

Sent by email to: patricia.deguire@ohrc.on.ca

Chief Commissioner DeGuire:

RE: Response to OHRC “Right to Read” Inquiry Report & Contribution of School Libraries

On behalf of the Ontario Library Association (OLA), Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) and Canadian School Libraries (CSL), we are writing in response to the recent release of the Right to Read public inquiry report.

In 2020, OLA, OSLA and CSL welcomed the opportunity to provide our feedback as part of the public inquiry process, including correspondence with the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) and Chief Commissioner Renu Mandhane (attached).

OLA, OSLA and CSL fully agree with the recommendations contained in the public inquiry report as presented. We are nonetheless deeply disappointed with the omission of any reference or recommendation related to the critical role that school libraries, teacher-librarians and library staff fulfill in supporting student literacy across Ontario.

School libraries are not only a resource for those students who are able to read. They are pivotal to ensuring that all students are able to build the literacy skills they need to succeed in their education. As we shared during the public inquiry process, 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.¹

Ensuring that the important role of school libraries and trained library staff to student literacy is more vital than ever. Over the past 20 years, students all across Ontario have been steadily losing access to school libraries and library-based resources. 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. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened the situation, with students throughout Ontario losing access to in-school library resources and many teacher-librarians still re-assigned to other duties. While the Ministry of Education committed to introduce new accountability measures pertaining to library funding in the 2021-22 Grants for Student Needs, these have yet to be implemented.

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. The impact of the pandemic and extended virtual learning on student literacy is unprecedented, and will require a comprehensive, multi-year effort to ensure that Ontario’s students are able to get back on track. We strongly encourage the OHRC, in the context of its recently released public inquiry report, to identify and recognize the importance of school libraries as a critical component of ensuring student literacy.

We request a meeting with the appropriate representatives from OHRC on this matter, and to discuss opportunities on how we can work together to ensure that the important conclusions of the public inquiry are achieved.

Sincerely,



Beth Lyons, president

Ontario School Library Association



Anita Brooks Kirkland, chair

Canadian School Libraries

cc. Yael Ginsler, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

Attachment: [2020 Response to the Public Inquiry on the Right to Read](#)

¹ People for Education & Queen’s University Faculty of Education. School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario. Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 2006



∴ ontario library association



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 4,000 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.

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.

Contact:

Shelagh Paterson, Executive Director
Ontario Library Association
2080 Danforth Ave, Toronto, ON M4C 1J9
1.877.340.1730
spaterson@accessola.com