

# SCHOOL LIBRARIES = STUDENT SUCCESS

The role of school libraries and school library professionals



Access to a properly staffed school library is a proven ingredient for student success and achieving Ontario's curriculum objectives for literacy, research and other critical skills. Schools with libraries and trained library professionals see better outcomes on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments<sup>1</sup>.

## What is a school library?

The school library, also known as the Library Learning Commons (LLC), supports and enhances teaching and learning for the entire school community. A school library program enables students to develop a love for reading for both learning and pleasure, develop literacy and critical thinking skills, and obtain access to resources for all subject areas. School library professionals collaborate and partner with classroom and content-area teachers to achieve and exceed curricular goals. At its core, **the school library is an open and accessible information and technological space that supports, extends, and individualizes a school's curriculum**, enhancing students' ability to grow personally, socially, culturally, and academically.

## Who are school library professionals?

School library professionals include teacher-librarians, library technicians, and librarians with a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) degree. School library professionals complete qualifications in librarianship and have specialized skills in selecting quality, age- and curriculum- appropriate books and resources and developing programming for students.

## Why should a school library professional select the materials for my child's school library?

School library professionals have **specialized skills in selecting library materials** for the students of all ages and reading abilities.

- **Classroom Learning:** School library professionals work with classroom educators to ensure that classes have the learning resources needed to support the curriculum.
- **Love of Reading:** They also help to foster a life-long love of reading, getting to know the interests of individual students and tailoring their collection to reflect what the students want to read.
- **Anti-Oppression:** School library professionals curate the school library collection using anti-racist, anti-bias and anti-oppressive frameworks to ensure the inclusion of appropriate and diverse representation for their unique school community.

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

## How does the school library differ from the public library?

While public libraries are mandated to serve all Ontarians, school libraries are mandated to serve the school community. This means that the school library programming and collections are specifically designed to support the curriculum and learning goals of the school.

Ontario students can benefit from accessing their local public library's collections and from participating in the children's and teen's programming available at their local branch. However, students do not all have equal access to the public library. Geographic barriers, access to transportation, and availability of parents to visit the library all impact students' ability to access resources at the public library.

**Having a staffed, well-resourced library in each school ensures that all students, regardless of barriers, have equitable access to the books and resources they need to support their learning and growth.**

## When students lose access to a school library, what are the consequences?

- **School libraries help reduce barriers to access. The closing of school libraries perpetuates inequality.** Families with fewer resources rely on school libraries to help their children succeed as students. Low income and racialized children are disproportionately impacted.
- Studies have demonstrated the **relationship between academic achievement and access to a school library**. Improving literacy and reading skills boosts test scores in all subjects.
- School library professionals are instrumental in **building research and information literacy skills** to prepare students for the workforce, 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.

## What is the impact of restricting or banning age-appropriate books?

All young people deserve to not only see themselves reflected in the books they read, but to also be exposed to the worldviews and lived experiences of others, particularly those of marginalized groups. **Reading a diverse selection of books offers an opportunity for young people to broaden their understanding of the world**, building empathy and compassion, and preparing them to become proactive members of society.

In attempting to restrict access, or outright ban, literary or artistic images, ideas, and/or information, school boards inevitably create an unsafe environment by erasing the history and lived experiences of others. Such censorship also ultimately undermines the bridge of understanding being built among children of diverse backgrounds and identities, depriving them of the opportunity to learn how to navigate differences and develop critical awareness of their environments.