

June 11, 2024

Hon. Todd Smith
Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave,
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Sent by email: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Dear Minister Smith,

RE: Congratulations & Meeting Request: Working Together to Strengthen Ontario's School Libraries

On behalf of the Ontario Library Association (OLA) and the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA), we would like to extend our sincerest congratulations on your appointment as Ontario's Minister of Education. We look forward to building a strong working relationship and continuing our constructive partnership with the Ministry of Education to protect and maintain student and teacher access to school libraries and school library professionals as critical curriculum-supporting resources.

Over the last five years, OLA and OSLA have engaged closely with the Ministry of Education to ensure that school library funding is maintained and protected. In 2021, this work resulted in the introduction of accountability measures that required school boards to report on how they were funding school libraries in accordance with the provincial formula as outlined in the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). This [per-student funding formula](#) funds school boards for a teacher-librarian at a ratio of 1 to 763 students (elementary) and 1 to 909 students (secondary), accompanied by approximately \$14 in library resources for every student. For the first time in decades, the Ontario Government acted to confront the steady erosion of access to school libraries and library-based resources across the province. These new accountability measures recognized the contribution of school libraries and library staff in fulfilling Ontario's curriculum objectives and ensuring that existing provincial funding was used for its intended purpose.

Unfortunately, the Ministry's recent introduction of the Core Education Funding model eliminated previously protected funding for school library staff, as well as the recently implemented

accountability and reporting requirements. The OLA and OSLA have brought this critical concern to the attention of the Ministry (see Appendix), and we look forward to re-engaging this important conversation with you in your new role as Minister of Education.

We are requesting a meeting with you and your office at your earliest convenience to discuss the critical role of school libraries and school library professionals in student success and the urgent need to protect these essential school resources. We will follow up with your office directly to coordinate a meeting soon.

Sincerely,



Michelle Arbuckle
Executive Director,
Ontario Library Association
www.accessola.com
marbuckle@accessola.com



Wendy Burch Jones
President,
Ontario School Library Association

Founded in 1900, the **Ontario Library Association** (OLA) is the oldest continually operating non-profit library association in Canada. With more than 3,500 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** (OSLA) is a division of OLA consisting of 1,000 members who work in Ontario's school libraries.

Appendix

May 8, 2024

Hon. Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education
Ministry of Education
438 University Avenue, 5th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2A5

Sent by email to: minister.edu@ontario.ca

Minister Lecce:

RE: Core Education Funding Model and the Impact on School Libraries

On behalf of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA), we are writing to you to express our significant concern with the recently announced Core Education Funding model and its' impact on school libraries, library staff and the critical contributions they make to curriculum delivery and student success. We share the concern of our school library members across Ontario that these changes will directly lead to further reductions in school library access, make it easier for school boards to reduce or eliminate these vital learning resources, while undoing positive progress towards accountability for school library funding introduced under your leadership.

Under the Core Education Funding model announced last month, the new fund structure eliminates the protected funding envelope for school library staff (Supplemental Library Staffing component) previously included in the Grants for Student Needs. Funding for school library staff and resources is now included in the Learning Resources Fund, which covers non-classroom staff and non-staffing classroom costs, including learning materials and classroom equipment. Teacher Librarians, previously considered critical to student success, have been separated from other teaching staff and put in the same funding category as Chromebooks and crayons.

Protecting provincial funding allocated to school boards for school libraries and library staff is more critical than ever. Over the past two decades, 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. In the past few years, this has accelerated as several of Ontario's largest school boards have



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made dramatic reductions to school libraries and library staff, affecting hundreds of thousands of students. Other school boards in both urban and rural communities have eliminated them altogether.

As you are aware, the Ministry of Education maintains a per-student funding formula for school libraries, whereby school boards are funded for a Teacher Librarian at a ratio of 1 to 763 students (elementary) and 1 to 909 students (secondary), accompanied by approximately \$14 in library resources for every student. However, most of this formula-based funding allocation was not enveloped for this critical curriculum-supporting use. The now-eliminated Supplemental Library Staffing funds acted as a critical baseline for school libraries across the province. It was the only provincial funding explicitly allocated for school libraries at the school board-level, and the strongest demonstration of the Ministry of Education's commitment to the importance of school libraries and library staff.

As Minister of Education, it was under your leadership that the Ministry of Education took the first steps to restore accountability and recognize the critical importance of school libraries to student success and achievement. School libraries and Teacher Librarians were specifically recognized in the updated 2023 Language Curriculum as critical to “help build and transform students’ knowledge in order to support lifelong learning in our information and knowledge-based society.”

Most importantly, it was the introduction of new accountability measures that offered the potential to restore stability to Ontario's school libraries. Beginning for the 2021-22 academic year, the Ministry of Education required school boards to report on how provincial funding is used to meet the provincial expectations for school library investments and required multi-year plans from school boards underinvesting in school libraries and library staff to bring that level of investment up to provincial expectations. The results for the first year of reporting were sobering: at least 1 out of 3 of school boards reported spending less than the provincial per-student funding formula for school libraries and library staff.

The Core Education Funding model also eliminates this additional accountability and reporting requirement going forward. Without either accountability or enveloped funding for these critical positions, school boards will continue to cut school library funding when faced with budget shortfalls or competing interests. Rather than provide parents and families with greater transparency in how their tax dollars are serving students, the new model will facilitate and accelerate deep cuts to school libraries, with serious repercussions on student success, well-being, and post-secondary preparedness.

OSLA urgently requests the Ministry of Education restore and enhance school board accountability for how provincial funds allocated for school libraries and library staff are used, and to accurately reflect the Ministry's recognition of their importance for supporting student achievement, through the following immediate actions:



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1. Revise the Core Education Funding model to reflect and respect the critical contribution to student success performed by Teacher Librarians by establishing a defined sub-allocation for all school libraries and staffing funding within the Learning Resources Fund;
2. Update the Core Education Funding Model to fully protect (envelope) these allocations for library staff and resources to ensure their integral contribution to student learning;
3. Restore the accountability framework implemented for school libraries and improve its effectiveness by implementing the recommended enhancements submitted by OSLA to the Ministry of Education in Fall 2023;

Through the implementation of these three recommendations, students and parents will be assured that school libraries and library staff will continue to have access to this critical learning resource – no matter where they live in Ontario. OSLA will continue to work with the Ministry of Education on addressing these important considerations for student success, and we anticipate further direction on next steps to address this critical gap prior to any further implementation of the Core Education Funding Model.

Yours truly,

Wendy Burch Jones
President
Ontario School Library Association

Jenn Angle
Vice President
Ontario School Library Association

Johanna Gibson-Lawler
Past-President
Ontario School Library Association