



:: ontario school library association

July 31, 2020

School Library Staff: Essential to Supporting Students Adapt and Succeed in the Unprecedented 2020-21 School Year

The Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) membership consists of more than 1,300 members who are front-line educators and school library professionals necessary for delivering Ontario's primary and secondary curriculum. This includes making sure students have the digital and critical thinking skills they need to succeed in college, university, or a career in the skilled trades. As school boards plan for the 2020-21 school year, school library staff will be essential to supporting students adapt and succeed to a new normal.

We recognize that a return to school will create new challenges for school boards and educators to adjust in response to the pandemic. The school library learning commons, led by school library professionals, transcends the physical library space. With a school-wide perspective and experience as curriculum and technology leaders, school library professional staff are integral to this successful adjustment.

Throughout the COVID-19 shutdown, school library professionals have already demonstrated the impact they have on students. School libraries and school library professionals have been at the epicentre of this shift to emergency distance learning, providing essential technology leadership and curriculum support to staff and students. School library professionals have worked overtime, making sure that curriculum-supporting learning continued. According to [an OSLA survey](#), school libraries and library professionals are delivering support for educators every day by:

- The curation of digital learning resources;
- Support of students, parents, caregivers, and teachers in using distance learning technology;
- Sharing virtual programming options with students and teachers;
- Co-teaching classes and supporting curriculum linkages; and
- Moving in-person programming such as read alouds, book clubs, and maker activities online.

The pandemic has also revealed weaknesses and significant gaps in e-learning and remote education. A number of school boards surveyed reported having no access to e-resources. Ontario needs a strategy to develop, curate, and fund key research and learning resources for all school boards, similar to those implemented by Alberta and Saskatchewan. With expertise in

evaluating learning resources, school library professionals have been leading e-learning and already play the role of supporting the research and learning needs of students and teachers.

School library professionals will be supporting students through this difficult transition year by:

- Curating and delivering book bins connected to curriculum inquiries and independent reading to classes/cohorts. The school library can use the same protocols set in place by public libraries to disinfect and quarantine books between users.
- Continuing to support curriculum by curating quality educational resources and leading inquiry projects.
- Providing guidance, support, and resources for educators in implementing the new Math Curriculum. School library professionals have been leading the way in introducing and teaching students how to code and can provide leadership in connecting coding to Math.
- Continuing to act as a central resource facilitating access to materials in alternative formats for students with special education needs and English Language Learners.
- Supporting student mental health and wellness by ensuring current and appropriate books are available. As the July 29, 2020 Toronto Sick Kids report states: "It can be anticipated that some children and youth may experience increased stress and anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic or to the implementation of risk mitigation strategies in their school environment.". Reading, reflecting, and talking about stories can help students process this new reality.
- Ensuring students have equitable access to a diverse selection of books to support curriculum goals.
- Running student clubs by providing a risk-mitigated space (according to local public health guidelines).

As students and educators adjust to a new normal the school library, with the leadership of school library professionals, has always and should continue to be a safe space for students. Now is not the time to reduce the availability of the school library and library programming. We urge school boards to protect these critical library services for students. OSLA looks forward to working with school boards to continue to strengthen school libraries and ensure the impact of school library professionals as they support students through these unprecedented times.

Sincerely,



Maureen McGrath

OSLA President and on behalf of [2020 OSLA Council Members](#)

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Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)
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