



:. ontario school library association

January 20, 2020

Clerk of the Committee
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
Room B-304, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

Sent by email: comm-financeaffairs@ola.org

RE: Pre-Budget Consultations 2020 – Enhancing Accountability and Transparency to Protect Ontario's School Libraries

As you embark on the Pre-Budget Consultations ahead of Ontario's 2020 provincial budget, the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) appreciates the opportunity to bring your attention to an increasingly urgent issue impacting school libraries across the province.

OSLA's more than 1,300 members are front-line educators working in school libraries. They are essential for delivering Ontario's primary and secondary curriculum, making sure students have the digital and critical thinking skills they need to succeed in college, university or a career in the skilled trades.

Access to a properly staffed school library, no matter where you live in the province, is a proven, essential component of student success. School libraries foster students' love of reading, which research has shown has a positive impact on success in science and math, literacy scores, and students' social and civic engagement. Schools with trained library staff see better outcomes on the Grade 3 and 6 EQAO assessments.¹

Over the past two decades, hundreds of thousands of students across Ontario have lost access to school libraries and the critical resources they provide. The changes announced last spring to Ontario's class sizes further amplified this trend, as several school boards opted to close school libraries and repurpose trained teacher-librarians in anticipation of managing the expanded class sizes. For instance, this spring:

- Toronto District School Board announced a reduction in school library staffing, resulting in closure of the library throughout the instructional day or during lunch at 26 schools.
- Upper Canada District School Board reduced 160 staff positions, including 22 Learning Commons positions, with no contingency plan to keep the Learning Commons open and

¹ People for Education & Queen's University Faculty of Education. [School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario](#). Toronto: Ontario Library Association, 2006.

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staffed. This has in turn led to a significant decrease in library usage between September – December of last year, when these changes came into effect:

- Book circulation is down – a 49.5% decrease at the elementary level, and a 66.9% decrease at the secondary level.
 - Use of research databases has also fallen – a 47% decrease in use of elementary-focused databases, and a 96% decrease of secondary-focused databases.
- Halton District School Board has reduced secondary school library staffing by 50%, leading to largely unstaffed libraries and significantly less instruction for students in effective research techniques and basic skills, as well as the use of online databases and e-learning resources.

Despite the Ministry of Education’s updated direction on this matter, we’ve seen no reversal of this accelerating decline at the local level.

Ontario provides the overwhelming majority of annual operating funding to school boards through the Grants for Student Needs, or GSN. Despite a well-established, provincial per-student funding formula for school libraries through the Pupil Foundation Grant, school boards are not required to spend the funds as intended by the ministry formula. Funds earmarked for school libraries are used to fund other priorities, directly leading to fewer library staff as well as the closing of school libraries altogether. We estimate that as much as half of funds - up to \$100 million annually - for school libraries is being otherwise used by school boards to address shortfalls or other local priorities.

We have written to the Minister of Education to bring this urgent matter to his attention, and strongly urge the Ministry of Education to enhance the accountability and transparency of this provincial investment by mandating that the annual funds currently allocated by the Ministry of Education to school boards for school libraries and library staff are spent on these priorities. Enhancing transparency and accountability from school boards for the use of these allocated funds will protect and restore access for all Ontario students – no matter where they live. This can be achieved while respecting the independence of school boards and ensuring sufficient local flexibility on how best to apply this funding.

We are enclosing a copy of the September 2019 issue of our organization’s magazine, The Teaching Librarian. The feature article of this issue looks at the state of Ontario’s school libraries. It illustrates the current reality of declining school libraries, especially in Northern, Southwestern and Eastern Ontario. Even as the issue was going to print, another school board made the decision to eliminate nearly all library staff. Since publication, more boards have reduced school library learning commons programs. We are concerned that this is and will continue to have a substantial impact on achieving the province’s objectives for student success.

OSLA continues its work to ensure Ontario students receive a world-class education. As you embark on the process of developing Ontario’s next budget and look ahead to the next iteration



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of the GSN, it is crucial that accountability and transparency for existing provincial investments in school libraries are implemented. This will ensure that our students have the best chance of success, no matter where they live or what path they pursue.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Brown

OSLA President and on behalf of [2019 OSLA Council Members](#)

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