Ontario's School Libraries
Collaboration, Support, and Student Achievement

The School Library as Learning Commons

The school library program leads the learning commons approach for the school. This approach extends beyond the central, safe, and welcoming space of the library. Teacher-Librarians are responsible for co-teaching, centrally managing resources that support school curriculum, leading the information technology skills strategy, and ensuring students have the critical thinking skills needed to be contributing citizens of Ontario in employment and/or post-secondary education.

What is a Teacher-Librarian?

An Ontario Certified Teacher who has obtained additional teaching qualifications in Librarianship.

What is a Learning Commons?

- A flexible and responsive approach to helping schools focus on learning collaboratively. It expands the learning experience, taking students and educators into virtual spaces beyond the walls of a school.
- A vibrant, whole-school approach, presenting exciting opportunities for collaboration among teachers, teacher-librarians and students, and supported by library technicians.
- An opportunity for the exploration of ideas and concepts, encouraging inquiry, imagination, discovery and creativity through the connection of learners to information, to each other and to communities around the world.

Physical and Virtual Space

The Learning Commons seeks to expand and integrate the real and virtual choices learners have to share their experiences. Safe, inclusive and welcoming environments throughout a school are imperative to meet the diverse abilities and learning styles of individuals, teams and groups. Virtual learning spaces increase this potential.

Leveraging the Teacher-Librarian & the School Library Program

The Teacher-Librarian and Co-Teaching

- Co-plans, co-teaches, co-assesses with teaching partners, from full-day kindergarten to Grade 12.
- Supports implementation of new curriculum and teaching strategies.
- A literacy partner/technology leader in each school.

Reading Engagement

- The Teacher-Librarian has expertise to select resources that engage students as readers.
- Facilitates programs that promote the enjoyment of reading, such as the Forest of Reading.®

The School Library & Information Technology Skills

- A Teacher-Librarian becomes a technology mentor and coach for all staff and students.
- Provides equitable access to technology.

The Library as a Safe & Welcoming Space

- Welcomes, recognizes and supports diversity in each school.
- Open and flexible multipurpose learning space that promotes curiosity and creativity.

Collaborative & Consortial Purchasing of Resources at the Provincial Level

- Provides equitable access to authoritative digital resources to support inquiry learning.

Barriers to Optimizing the School Library & the Teacher-Librarian

- There are currently large inequities in school library staffing models across Ontario.
- There is not a designated department, portfolio or staff contact for school libraries at the Ministry of Education.
- There is a lack of policy or program guidelines from the Ministry of Education about school libraries.
- School Districts have been given discretion to use staff funding for staffing models that do not include a Teacher-Librarian.
- There is a lack of awareness at both local and provincial level of the potential of effective school library programs.
- Pre-service teachers receive little to no exposure about the role of effective school libraries and school library programs.

Did you know?

Less than 56% of elementary schools have a Teacher-Librarian on staff— and most (80%) work part-time. Even in secondary schools — where libraries are larger, and where students tend to be engaged in more complex research and more wide-ranging learning — less than 66% of schools have a Teacher-Librarian working full or part-time; a number that has been falling fairly steadily from a high of 78%. in 2001.[1]

The Need

- Establish equitable staffing models across the province for school libraries that include Teacher-Librarians and library support staff.
- Identify a contact at the Ministry of Education with a school library portfolio.
- Integrate the school library program and Teacher-Librarians in Ministry resources/ documents and consultations.
- Provide provincial leadership in leveraging resources strategically (for example, consortial purchasing of digital resources).
- Promote and communicate the standards demonstrating best practice at the Ministry level. For example, ensuring that an open and flexible library staffing model is not interpreted as preparation coverage for other teachers.
- A strategy for ensuring that school libraries are accessible to all students throughout the school day.
- Training about effective school library programs in Principal Qualification courses.
- Integrate school library education into teacher training.

School Libraries Make a Difference!

Schools with professionally-trained school library staff have reading achievement scores that are approximately 5.5 percentile points higher than average in Grade 6 EQAO results.

Schools without trained library staff tend to have lower achievement on Grade 3 and 6 EQAO reading tests, both in terms of average achievement and attaining level 3 or higher.[2]

References:

1. http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/libraries.pdf
2. https://www.accessola.org/web/Documents/OLA/Divisions/OSLA/SchoolLibrariesStudentAchievementOntario.pdf (page 2)