



:. ontario library association

Leona Dombrowsky
Minister of Education
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May 19, 2011

Dear Minister Dombrowsky

I am writing on behalf of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) and the Ontario Library Association (OLA) in response to the current situation with school libraries in Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. We believe that Windsor-Essex Catholic is representative of the “perfect storm” facing school libraries in Ontario. The ministry has recognized the key role of school libraries in recent ministry documents. Documents state, “The school library program plays a key role in the development of information literacy and research skills.” (See Science gr. 1-8, 2007, pg 42; Language gr. 1-8, 2006, pg 30 English 9-12, 2007, pg 34-35) However the lack of a Ministry document clearly outlining standards and best practices for school libraries facilities, resources, staffing, program, and training leaves school boards and local school administrators with no clear direction in how to create library programs to prepare students for the 21st century.

This current situation provides an opportunity for the Ministry to create clear criteria for library programs, the skill set required of library staff and library resources. The Ministry has provided funding for elementary school libraries through the Library Investment Project (2008, 2009); and through OPE grants for additional elementary teacher-librarian staffing continued into 2011. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat provided funds for a school library visioning document *Together for Learning*, published by the OSLA in 2010 <http://www.togetherforlearning.ca/>. And yet there is no Ministry policy document to guide school boards throughout the province. OSLA would value the opportunity to work with the ministry, teacher federations and other stakeholders to fill the current vacuum in Ministry of Education policy for school libraries.

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We recognize the challenges of declining student enrollment. However, budget decisions to cancel programs have direct impact on academic achievement. This will have longer-term costs for the students throughout the province. School boards and administrators need clear policy guidelines to help them make wise use of taxpayer dollars. Providing funding through the textbook line does not in any way guarantee that students will be supported by strong school library programs. To the contrary, it leaves Boards to make difficult decisions with inadequate information.

In today's rapidly changing online environment, students and teachers require support in using electronic and print resources, focusing inquiry tasks, developing critical thinking skills and ethical practices. Students accessing e-learning as well as in face-to-face learning environments need support in navigating an overwhelming information landscape. Eliminating library staffing and resources in less populated boards will disadvantage students compared to Boards who provide these supports. In the absence of a criteria for excellence in school libraries the ministry runs the very real risk of wasting tax payers dollars.

In September 2007, Dalton McGuinty, Premiere, Ontario, announced an investment of \$120 million – \$80 million ear marked for books for elementary school libraries, and \$40 million for librarians over the next four years. To date only \$25 million of the promised \$80 million has been released for books and e-resources. In March 2010, an announcement was sent stating that funding was suspended for 2010/11. We are inquiring into the status of the remaining funding that still needs to be released.

We also strongly recommend that the Ministry of Education continue the funding for e-resources such as the suite of educational databases currently provided by Knowledge Ontario to schools across the province.

We have attached a brief on the importance of school libraries for your consideration and welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss this further.

Regards,



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