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ONTARIO SCHOOL LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

President's Report



AN OPEN LETTER TO THE HON. GERARD

Dear Minister Kennedy,

Congratulations on the election of your government and on your appointment as Minister of Education. We in the Ontario school library community appreciate the fact that you already understand some of the serious issues affecting your portfolio from your previous role as Education Critic. We also appreciate that you have indicated your willingness to listen to the concerns of parent and teacher groups in finding solutions to problems in our public education system.

School libraries are a core component of education and have been described as the heart of a school. Indeed the school library's function is of increasing importance with the introduction of a new curriculum which stresses research and analytical skills, and with the growing emphasis on improving student literacy skills. However, because of staffing cuts and cuts to resource budgets since the 1997 introduction of the "Student Focussed Funding Formula", there has been a marked deterioration in the ability of school libraries to fulfill their functions. School libraries in Ontario are in a state of crisis.

There is a growing body of research which concludes that school libraries which are profes-

sionally staffed and have appropriate print and electronic collections have a direct, measurable, significant, positive impact on student achievement. In the United States, policy makers have recognized the significance of these research findings and are increasing support for school libraries. In Ontario, as a response to continuing mediocre provincial scores on EQAO reading and writing tests, the previous government has poured millions of dollars into various targeted literacy initiatives (such as the Early Years Reading Strategy, Middle Years Literacy, Students at Risk in grades 7-12). Yet school libraries have been ignored in these initiatives, as has collaboration between teacher-librarians and classroom teachers in delivering effective literacy programs. As well, although these initiatives have provided funding for literacy resources, there has been no targeted provincial funding in these initiatives for school library resources. Policy makers must surely be aware of the research on the positive impact of school libraries on student literacy. Has the omission of school libraries been deliberate?

What needs to be done to address the crisis?

1. The Ministry of Education needs to develop a new provincial