

Ontario's Public Schools 2008

Provincial funding for library resources is provided, for the most part, in the grant for textbooks and learning materials, though for the last three years, some additional funding for libraries has been added in announcements outside regular funding.

Ninety-five per cent of elementary schools spent less than \$25 per student on library collections – far below the standard set by the Ontario School Library Association.

Reading enjoyment continues to decline

According to student surveys administered by the EQAO, the percentage of grade 3 students who say they “like to read” has declined from 68% in 2002, to 58% in 2007. In grade 6, that decline is from 55% in 2002, to 47% in 2007. A study conducted by the British government found that students who enjoy

reading are much more likely to be “high achievers,” and a Queen’s University–People for Education study has shown that the presence of a teacher-librarian in a school has a direct and positive impact on the percentage of students who report they like to read.

Regional inequities

There is a wide range in spending and staffing for school libraries across the province. In Central Ontario and the GTA where schools are on average the biggest, nearly all schools have at least a part-time teacher-librarian and many have full-time staff. These two regions also had the highest spending on library resources including books, other print materials and software.

Research demonstrates benefits

The province currently spends approximately \$76 million on Literacy and Numeracy initiatives, but none of that funding is targeted at school libraries. There is a growing body of research regarding the important role school libraries play in student learning. In one 2007 study, researchers found that even taking into account the effects of socio-economic status, in schools with “better-stocked, better-staffed and better-funded” school libraries, student achievement on standardized tests was higher. Ongoing Canadian research has also found that in schools with exemplary libraries, the teacher-librarian co-ordinates the curriculum needs for all the teachers in the school.

The Ministry of Education is currently working with the Ontario School Library Association to develop policy for school libraries. □

People for education is a registered charity working to support public education in Ontario’s English, French and Catholic schools.

The full report is available at www.peopleforeducation.com

Reading and libraries

- ◆ EQAO surveys show that since 2002, there has been a 15% decline in the percentage of students in grade 6 who say they “like to read.”
- ◆ Students in schools with teacher-librarians are more likely to report they like to read.
- ◆ Only 60% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, most of them part-time, compared to 80% in 1997/98.
- ◆ Just over half of secondary schools have a full-time teacher-librarian.
- ◆ Parents fundraise for school libraries in 51% of Ontario elementary schools.

what schools told us...

“It has been the same for many years now. Ever since we lost Teacher-Librarians to run the library program, Technicians are merely keeping circulation and cataloguing going.”

– An elementary school in Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

“We have a slight decrease in time when the library is open and staffed. It makes a difference because without supervision, students cannot access the library at any time.”

– An elementary school in Thames Valley District School Board

“Our school library is housed in the community library on the military base. The library is open evenings and weekends. Presently the military base staff look after the library.”

– An elementary school in Conseil des écoles l’est de publiques de l’Ontario