

President's Report

The mission of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA) is to further the development of school library programs and teacher-librarianship, and to strengthen and unify the voice of teacher-librarians as curriculum leaders in Ontario.

Teacher-Librarians and Library Technicians work as a Team

The OSLA supports the need for both teacher-librarians and library technicians who work as partners to provide highly effective school library services. The library technicians are necessary to allow teacher-librarians to take full advantage of their professional skills to teach, collaborate and help teachers develop curriculum. Library technicians are trained professionals who know how to organize school libraries and catalogue collections as well as help in the physical organization of a library.

School Boards are making cuts to either, or both, teacher-librarians and technicians at a time where funding to school boards is actually increasing. Last April the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board (WECDSB) tried to eliminate school libraries until the Ministry of Education stepped in and forced them to look at cuts rather than closings. Both school boards where I live in Peterborough have made cuts to school library programs over the last year.

The OSLA is very concerned with what is happening to school library programs around the province. Please email me at roger@oslacouncil.org if you have any concerns, especially if there are any new cuts made. The OSLA will try to contact administrators who do not see the value of school libraries programs to discuss the matter further.

Many Administrators Have a Misunderstanding of the Value of School Libraries

Administrators and much of the general public have a misunderstanding of libraries. Search “library” in YouTube and the top search results show the library as a warehouse where books are checked in or out and the librarian is shushing patrons. With this view, many administrators see the value of

school libraries diminishing as the world moves quickly towards technological resources such as on-line databases, video, net books, tablet technology, wireless and ebooks. This was clearly shown when top administrators at WECDSB said last spring that they could eliminate school libraries and replace them with “Internet Hubs.” The Windsor board is not alone in this type of view; across the province administrators are looking at a wide range of possible school library cuts.

Get the message out

I think teacher-librarians and library technicians need to be strong advocates for their libraries.

The message has to get out that school libraries are not book depositories, but vibrant learning centres that are the hub of learning in the school. The library is the place where students can explore new ideas, develop a love of reading (by having reading material they actually like to read), collaborate and create. With the help and guidance of qualified library staff, students can learn how to do research, be safe on the Internet and use new technologies.

The job of the teacher-librarian is to be an educational leader by using their expertise in literacy, curriculum development and technology to support students in their learning and to collaborate with teachers as partners to help them better prepare lessons and support their students.

Advocacy

Dr. Ross Todd (noted world expert on school libraries) suggests that teacher-librarians use “evidence-based practice” to demonstrate how effective school libraries can be. This evidence can then be used to help convince administrators of the real value of school libraries and their staff.

From a paper he published in 2008 titled “A Question of Evidence” he explains that evidence-based practice in school libraries is “an approach that promotes the collection, interpretation, and integration of valid, important and applicable user-reported, librarian-observed, and research-derived evidence.”