



CANADIAN SCHOOL LIBRARIES

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Statement on the Role of School Libraries During the Pandemic

As the 2020-21 school year commences, publicly-funded school districts across Canada are under extreme pressure to provide equitable access to quality educational experiences for all students, including options for in-school and remote online learning. Recognizing that there are very difficult choices to make under these circumstances, Canadian School Libraries (CSL) is extremely concerned that some districts have chosen to reassign school library staff, restrict access to library resources, and in some cases completely close the library and shut down associated programs and services.

This range of responses amplifies existing inequities in access to quality library programs across the country and across jurisdictions. Restrictions associated with the pandemic have made access to reading resources extremely challenging. School districts are making massive shifts to online learning and face huge challenges in providing quality learning resources in that environment. Educators strive to provide meaningful learning experiences for their students despite these challenges, but with reduced access to the very people who could help them, teacher-librarians and all school library professionals.

Readers and Reading

Supporting readers and reading literacy are at the core of the mission of school libraries. With sudden school closures in March 2020, students have had little or no access to library books for almost six months. With schools reopening, many of their libraries are implementing safe borrowing procedures so that students can read again. However, in many schools the libraries are closed. Students who are enrolled in online learning have no access to books in print. Central library services in many school districts provide eBook collections, but dramatically increased demand means increasing wait times for students. When schools closed in the spring school library professionals leapt into action, finding and sharing access to online books, read-alouds, book clubs, and other resources designed to engage readers. They also provided copyright advice to their educator colleagues so that these resources were shared ethically. In this new school year, that expertise is no longer available in many schools.

Inquiry Learning

Inquiry learning is embedded across the curriculum. True inquiry learning requires access to a full range of information sources. School libraries provide access to professionally selected and curated print and online resources, with collections developed to support the differentiated needs of all learners. Library staff help educators connect their students to these resources and learn how to use them. Teacher-librarians extend this support by collaborating with their teaching colleagues to fully integrate research and inquiry skills into learning through co-teaching. Helping

students to think critically about the information they are consuming and the ethics of information use have never been as important as they are during these uncertain times. This is the expertise of school library professionals.

Virtual Learning and Virtual Resources

Teaching and learning has made a dramatic shift to online contexts, even for students who are attending the physical school. School libraries provide access to quality subscription eResources and eBook collections. Funding for these resources is essential to support all learners. School library professional expertise is essential in connecting teachers and students with these resources and addressing differentiated needs through curation and instruction in associated research skills. During the move to remote online learning in the spring, teacher-librarians across the country created sophisticated virtual library learning commons, designed to spark inquiry and provide access to virtual library collections and curated selections from the wider web. One point of access served the entire learning community, with all of its diverse needs, and connecting to families as they supported their children who were learning at home.

Recommendations

Given the essential services that school libraries provide, CSL recommends that:

1. All ministries of education and school districts ensure that school library staffing is not subject to drastic cuts or reassignments because of the pandemic crisis.
2. School districts and schools establish and implement safe borrowing procedures for all students attending school and also for those enrolled in online learning.
3. Library resource funding be maintained, so that students and teachers continue to have access to the most current resources for inquiry, research, and for pleasure reading. Increased funding to provide equitable access to eBook collections and eResources (i.e., subscription online databases) is also recommended, so that all students have access to quality reading and information sources.

Quality school library programs have never been more essential. We cannot afford to sacrifice the library's unique contribution to student success and well-being during this period of emergency measures, nor can we risk the future by weakening this essential resource in the shorter term.

Please refer to our online resource, [Leverage Your LLC: Pandemic Partner for Learning](#) for specific ideas for getting the most out of the library program during this emergency.

A large body of Canadian and international research demonstrates the connection between school library programs and student success. [Find out more about the research.](#)

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