

LIBRARIES

A Report from People for Education

I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.¹

Every year, People for Education conducts an Annual School Survey. Distributed to all of Ontario's 4,900 publicly funded elementary and secondary schools, the survey asks principals for information on resources and programs in the school and about the school's connection with its community.

In 2012, 1018 schools responded to the survey. This report is an excerpt from the **2012 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools**.

STRONG LIBRARIES BUILD STRONG READERS

Libraries have a vital role to play in the life of a school and in students' development as learners.

By offering a wide choice of reading materials and allowing students to choose for themselves, school libraries can contribute significantly to students' comprehension and motivation to read.² Libraries can also play a key role in developing students' capacity to find, evaluate, organize and transform vast amounts of information—vital skills in the increasingly unfiltered and collaborative digital universe.³

DECLINES IN LIBRARY STAFFING

While almost all schools in Ontario have libraries (99% of elementary, and 98% of secondary schools), the percentage of schools with teacher-librarians has declined significantly over the past decade. In elementary schools, only 56% of schools have teacher-librarians (compared to 80% in 1998), and the vast majority work part-time. In secondary schools, which are larger, 68% have teacher-librarians (compared to 78% in 2001), 19% of them part-time. For the last four years, the percentage of schools with teacher-librarians has held steady in both elementary and secondary schools.

QUICK FACTS FOR 2011/12

- 56% of Ontario elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 80% in 1998.
- In elementary schools with teacher-librarians, most work half-time.
- 68% of Ontario secondary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 78% in 2001.
- 98% of elementary schools in the GTA have a teacher-librarian, compared to 11% of schools in Northern Ontario and 25% in Eastern Ontario.

REGIONAL INEQUITIES

Across Ontario, there is wide variation in the staffing of libraries. For example, teacher-librarians in Eastern and Northern Ontario elementary schools have less than half the full-time equivalent hours of those in the GTA. This is partly because the schools are smaller, but may also reflect differing philosophies about the use of school libraries.

This is not an ideal situation, because when the secretary is in the library, I am responsible for the office. And because I'm the principal of two schools, this makes things very complicated.

Elementary school principal, CSDC de Nouvel-Ontario

Many principals talked about the vital role that teacher-librarians play. Several also had praise for the work of the library technicians and educational assistants in their libraries (35% of elementary schools have only library technicians).

[The library] was used more often, more effectively when we had someone here more often. Cuts have affected use and I am considering putting all of the books into classrooms and doing away with the library with such limited hours. This would be a disservice to the students.

Elementary school principal, Northeastern CDSB

In contrast to small Northern schools, which are less likely to have library staff, larger schools in South-Central Ontario report that “there are over 1,000 students using the ‘exceptionally well-run’ library every day,”⁴ or, “the library is an incredibly important place for students to connect to literacy and curriculum areas. The teacher-librarian uses her expertise to support many areas including literacy, technology, research skills, etc.”⁵

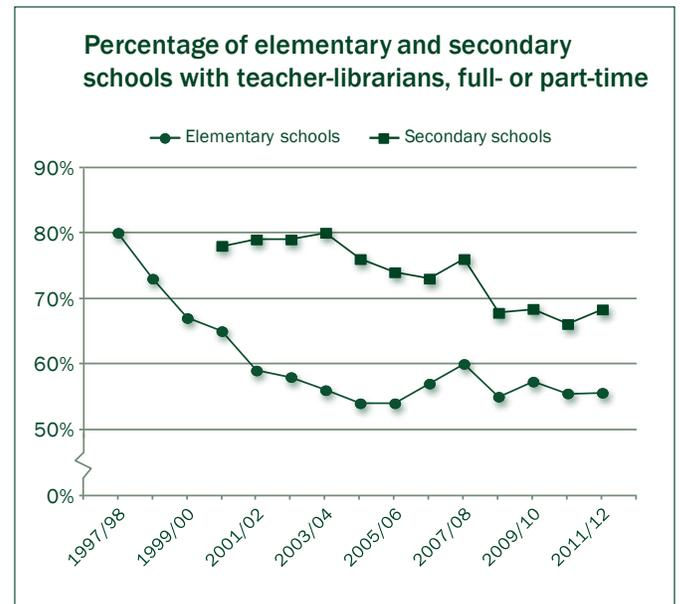
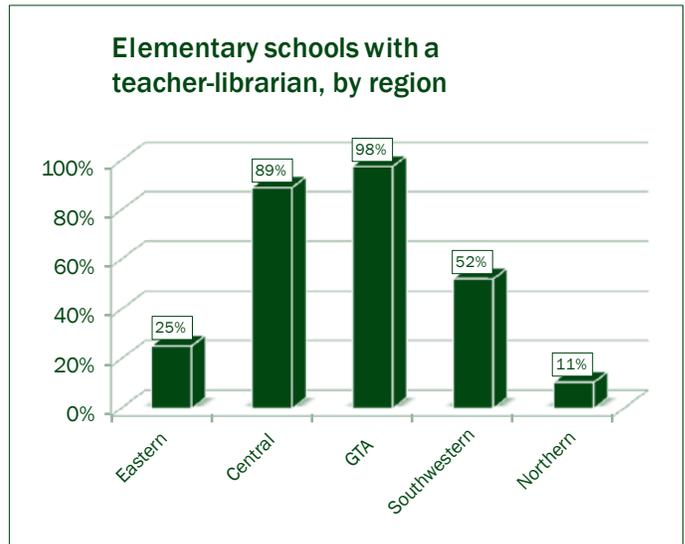
RESPONDING TO TECHNOLOGY

Rapid and expanding use of technology and information resources is having an impact on schools and school libraries, but how they respond varies. There are well-documented concerns that classroom teachers need additional support to keep up with and effectively use new technology and information resources.⁶ Many libraries have changed to a “learning commons” model,⁷ with computer labs and/or smart boards and new seating arrangements so that students, teachers and teacher-librarians can work collaboratively.

Our library is a vibrant “hub” for the school—we have Library Live, many computers and a Library Advisory Committee (students and staff). Our Department Chair has a passion for the [Ontario Association of School Libraries’] White Pine Award program, as well as school community technology expertise. Our library is most welcoming, invitational, and vibrant with students’ voices and a focus on success.

Secondary school principal, Simcoe County DSB

Some schools, however, report that home and classroom computer use, coupled with the wide availability of information on the Internet, has resulted in much less emphasis on the library. As one principal wrote, “the library is no longer the hub of learning.”



SHARING SPACE AND RESOURCES

With pressures on library resources and staffing, many schools report that their libraries are changing to expand the services they provide, and the delivery of those services. Computer labs located in libraries are seen as an advantage by many principals, but as creating problems of noise and distraction by others. Some students may use libraries to take courses online. This year, on average, 3.4% of students per secondary school earn credits through e-learning.

Several schools report sharing books, technology and staff time between boards, with one commenting that their library is “shared between the French school, Catholic school and public school during the morning and open to the public every afternoon.”⁸ A handful of schools report regular “community nights,” when the library is open to families and the general public in the evening. Going beyond the school, some report sharing a librarian with the public library, or supplementing classroom libraries with monthly visits to a public library within walking distance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School libraries can act as vibrant hubs for reading, information-gathering, technology and cross-curricular cooperation.

People for Education recommends that:

- the province explicitly recognize the value of school libraries and implement policy to support libraries as “learning commons” in all schools.
- the province support a leadership role for teacher-librarians, to work with classroom teachers to support cross-curricular cooperation, and develop school-wide information literacy programs.
- the province support information and technology education in faculties of education and through ongoing professional development for all teachers.

NOTES

- 1 Jorge Luis Borges
- 2 Guthrie, J.T. & Humenick, N.M. (2004). Motivating students to read: Evidence for classroom practices that increase motivation and achievement. In McCardle, P. & Chabra, V. (eds.). *The voice of evidence in reading research*, pp. 329-354. Baltimore: Paul Brookes.
- 3 Internationally, see, e.g., Ananiadou, K. & Claro, M. (2009). *21st century competencies and skills for new millennium learners in OECD countries* (OECD Education Working Paper no. 41). Paris: OECD. Retrieved from http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/21st-century-skills-and-competences-for-new-millennium-learners-in-oecd-countries_218525261154.

Provincially, see, e.g., Educational Quality and Accountability Office. (2011, January). Preparing students for the world beyond the classroom: Linking EQAO assessments to 21st century skills. *EQAO Research Bulletin*, 7. Retrieved from http://www.eqao.com/Research/pdf/E/ResearchBulletin7_en.pdf; Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. (2010). *Essential employability skills*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Retrieved from <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/audiences/colleges/progstan/essential.html>.
- 4 Secondary school principal, Hamilton-Wentworth CDSB.
- 5 Elementary school principal, Durham DSB.
- 6 Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. (2010). *Inspired by technology, driven by pedagogy: A systemic approach to technology-based school innovations*. Paris: OECD.
- 7 According to the Ontario Library Association, a learning commons (based in a library) is a whole-school, cross-curricular approach that emphasizes collaboration between teachers, learners and teacher-librarians and that emphasizes the use of new technologies, information and communication skills to support students' "learning how to learn" in a networked environment. See Ontario School Library Association. (2010) *Together for Learning: School libraries and the emergence of a learning commons*. Retrieved from http://www.accessola.com/data/6/rec_docs/677_OLATogetherforLearning.pdf.
- 8 Superior-Greenstone DSB.



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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