



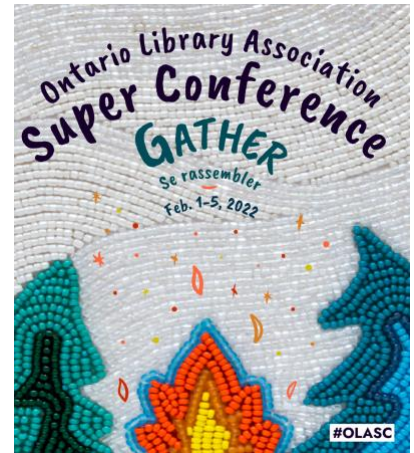
## Save School Libraries Coalition

[linktr.ee/saveschoollibraries](https://linktr.ee/saveschoollibraries)

### Voices for School Libraries

Anita Brooks Kirkland, Maria Martella, Sarah Roberts, Rick Wilks  
OLA Super Conference 2022

### Advocacy Resources



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#### Save School Libraries

- [About](#) the Save School Libraries coalition
- [SSL letter](#) to the Council of Directors of Education and Ontario Principals' Council, April 2021
- [SSL letter](#) to Ontario Minister of Education, October 2020
- [Read Into This Podcast Episode 68](#): Beth Lyons speaks to Maria Martella and Margie Wolfe, founding members of the SSL coalition
- [Letters of concern](#) from SSL coalition member organizations



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#### Ontario Library Association / Ontario School Library Association's School Library Advocacy



∴ ontario school library association

- [OSLA Council](#)
- [COVID-19 School Library Brief for School Boards In Ontario](#) (Updated November 2020)
- [Ontario School Libraries in the 2020-21 School Year: A Survey of Ontario School Boards](#)
- OSLA Correspondence with Ontario Directors Education and School Board Trustee Chairs
  - Including Library Learning Commons in 2021-22 Return to School Protocols (August 2021), in [English](#) and in [French](#)
  - School Libraries & the 2021-22 Grants for Student Needs (May 2021), in [English](#) and in [French](#)
  - Invest in Student Success by Investing in the School Library (December 2020), in [English](#) and in [French](#)

**ONTARIO SCHOOL LIBRARY IMPACT PROJECT**

**MEASURING THE INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS GAP**

School and academic library professionals in Ontario have observed significant gaps in the information literacy skills of high school students transitioning to post-secondary education. With the increasing reliance on e-learning and online resources, ensuring that all students have well-developed, practical information literacy skills is critical to their college and university success and career transition.

To better understand these gaps and how to address them, the Ontario Library Association (OLA) initiated the Ontario School Library Impact Project (OSLIP) to investigate the impact of school libraries on the information literacy skills and abilities of students entering post-secondary education in Ontario.

**SCHOOL LIBRARIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Thirty years of international research has established that the active presence and participation of qualified library staff make a positive and significant difference in student academic achievement.

However, hundreds of thousands of students across Ontario have lost access to school libraries and school library staff over the past two decades, along with the critical resources they provide. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this troubling trend and has put this critical resource at immediate risk for nearly every student in Ontario.

School libraries are critical to successful online learning, ensuring students achieve curriculum objectives, and curating the digital and print resources students need to succeed. With the continuing shift to e-learning and digital resources, school library professionals and resources are more essential than ever to long-term student success.

**WHAT IS INFORMATION LITERACY?**

Information literacy refers to multiple competencies that allow students to find, critically assess, process and create information.

This research was designed to examine the 12 key information literacy skills as defined by the Ontario Model of Discovery and Inquiry.

T. James, K. C. & Kuehl, D. E. (2019). [The school libraries matter: What gaps of research tell us. The Public Librarian](#), 30(7), 15-20.  
\*See page 23 of [Document for Learning for the Ontario Model of Discovery and Inquiry](#)

[Ontario School Library Impact Project](#)

**School Library Funding in Ontario**

The Ministry of Education recognizes the vital importance of staffed school libraries to student success, and provides all boards with funding for school library staff through the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). The GSN delivers all school board funding, including individual funding for school library staff through both the Pupil Foundation Grant and the School Foundation Grant.

However, because the bulk of this funding is not enveloped, hundreds of thousands of Ontario students have lost access to school libraries and school library staff over the past two decades, along with the critical resources they provide. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this troubling trend and has put this critical resource at immediate risk for Ontario students.

Thirty years of international research has established that the active presence and participation of qualified library staff make a significant positive difference in student academic achievement. School libraries are critical to successful online learning, ensuring students achieve curriculum objectives, and curating the digital and print resources students need to succeed.

**Pupil Foundation Grant - School Library Staff**

The Ministry provides separate funding for library materials through the Pupil Foundation Grant. Library materials are not part of the allocation for the textbooks and learning materials and additional educational software licensing.

**Provincial School Library Funding**

The Pupil Foundation Grant is \$12.8 million. The School Foundation Grant is \$24.9 million. Total is \$37.7 million.

**Example: School Library Funding at an Average Ontario School Board**

An average Ontario School Board with 40 elementary schools, 1020 elementary school students and 140 secondary school students, the school library staff allocation is \$14 million.

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[Information Brief: Explaining School Library Funding in Ontario \(October 2021\)](#)

**ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION**

UPDATED NOVEMBER 2019

**ADVOCACY TOOLKIT**



**PREPARED BY**  
ONTARIO LIBRARY ASSOCIATION'S ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

[Ontario Library Association Advocacy Toolkit](#)

**Parents: Ask your school principal or school board trustee about your child's school library**

- 1 Does my child still have access to school library resources and to a qualified school library professional? How?
- 2 Is a qualified school library professional responsible for selecting the books in my child's school library?
- 3 What is your plan for the school library next year?

**Three questions to ask about your child's school library.**



**Canadian School Libraries**

[Canadian School Libraries Statement on the Role of School Libraries During the Pandemic](#)

[Énoncé sur le rôle des bibliothèques scolaires en temps de pandémie](#)

[Leverage Your LLC: Pandemic Partner for Learning](#)

[School Libraries: What the Research Says](#)

[Advocacy Articles from CSL Journal](#)

**Leverage Your LLC**  
Pandemic Partner for Learning

**LEVERAGE THE LLC FOR DIVERSE LEARNING RESOURCES**

- ENGAGE READERS**: Book choices to engage every reader, in multiple formats, in print and online.
- INSPIRE INQUIRY**: Rich print and online resource collections to inform research and inspire inquiry.
- PHYSICAL & VIRTUAL MAKERSPACES**: Resources and ideas to spark inquiry, creativity, and design thinking.
- CURATED RESOURCES FROM THE WEB**: Selected for reliability, authority, and relevance to learning.

**LEVERAGE THE LLC FOR PARTICIPATORY LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS**

- EXTEND YOUR VIRTUAL CLASSROOM**: Enhance learning opportunities. Connect the library to your virtual classroom.
- FLEXIBLE LEARNING SPACES**: Use the library to accommodate multi-modal learning.
- PARTICIPATORY VIRTUAL SPACES**: Online reading, virtual book clubs, author visits and read-alouds, and virtual making.
- DIVERSITY AND WELL BEING**: School library programs support equity and inclusion and the well-being of every student.

**LEVERAGE THE LLC FOR ACTIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

- BORROW BOOKS**: Establish protocols for safe borrowing. Borrow eBooks.
- INSPIRE CREATIVITY**: Provocations in the virtual makerspace connect design thinking to inquiry learning.
- USE THE VIRTUAL LIBRARY**: Use this virtual hub for finding resources, learning supports, and collaborative activities.
- INTEGRATE TECHNOLOGY**: Make videos, create podcasts, share amazing presentations. The library can help.

**LEVERAGE THE LLC FOR EXPERT INSTRUCTION & GUIDANCE**

- RESOURCE CURATION**: Expert resource selection to support specific needs.
- PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**: Your teacher-librarian can facilitate PD to meet evolving needs.
- CO-PLANNING & CO-TEACHING**: Partner with your teacher-librarian to plan, teach, and assess learning.
- ONLINE ETHICS & SAFETY**: Your school librarian can provide copyright advice and digital citizenship instruction.

[WWW.CANADIANSCHOOLLIBRARIES.CA/LEVERAGE-YOUR-LLC](http://WWW.CANADIANSCHOOLLIBRARIES.CA/LEVERAGE-YOUR-LLC)

[CSL Research Archive](#): “Made in Canada” scholarly and practitioner research into school library learning commons practice in Canada, including all papers presented at TMC symposiums.



[CSL Journal](#)

[Leading Learning](#)

[L'Apprentissage en tête](#)

[CSL Research Archive](#)



**The 7<sup>th</sup> Treasure Mountain Canada Research Symposium and Think Tank is coming!**

**Mark your calendar and plan to participate.**

**TMC7 2022 Theme: Post-Pandemic Library Learning Commons – From Crisis to Intervention  
October 21 – 22, 2022**

[Learn more about TMC7 2022](#)

[TMC7 Call for Papers](#)





OLA Super Conference 2022  
**Voices for School Libraries**  
TRANSCRIPT

Saturday February 5, 2022

1:15 – 2:00 pm

## Introductions:

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** Welcome, everyone! My name is Anita Brooks Kirkland, and I am the Chair of Canadian School Libraries. Over the many years that I have been involved in advocacy for school libraries, I have come to understand the importance of broader community support. Imagine my delight when, in the dark days of 2020, with libraries closing and staff reassigned, I was invited to join a new coalition of organizations – new voices for school libraries. In today’s session, members of that coalition will share their ideas and tell you about the work of the coalition so far. In all hope this conversation with the panelists, but also with your participation in the Q&A and chat, will inspire advocacy strategies moving forward for all of us, in our own growing circles of influence.

I’ll start by asking each of the panelists who they are, and why they are participating in the Save School Libraries Coalition, starting with its founder, Maria Martella.

**Maria Martella:** My name is Maria Martella, and I am the owner of Tinlids, a wholesaler of children and teen books for schools and libraries across Canada. We are also the official wholesaler for the Forest of Reading program. I’m participating in SSL because I care about all children having access to the best resources for helping them become readers and achieve academic success. And that means having access to a well-stocked school library and a library professional.

When many library staff were re-assigned to classrooms, and libraries were closed, I was hearing from customers were reaching out to say they were worried about their libraries and what would happen next. Across Ontario there was a real mixed bag of approaches from the various school boards. I called a few publishers to talk about what we could do as a group. We needed to let the decision makers know that this is not okay. We have businesses that depend on school libraries, but we are also in this book industry because we care about education and literacy. This felt like an equity issue and a slippery slope. We were worried about the cuts becoming permanent, and causing further erosion to an already serious situation for school libraries.

Many families can’t afford to buy books and not all parents can even find time to go to the public library. There are already many barriers for under-privileged families. Cuts to school libraries hurt these families especially. I worry that a whole generation of kids is growing up without a professional who can guide them towards the stories they need.

About the Save School Libraries Coalition – Our goal is to have representation in communities across the country, but right now we are starting with Ontario. Current members SAVE SCHOOL LIBRARY COALITION includes:

- Canadian School Libraries
- Booksellers
- OSLA/ OLA /
- Association of Canadian Publishers
- Ontario Book Publishers
- Canadian Children’s Book Centre

- CANSCAIP – Canadian Society of Children’s Authors, illustrators and performers
- IBBY CANADA– International Board on Books for Young People
- African heritage Educator’s Network
- Writers’ Union of Canada

**Rick Wilks:** I’m Rick Wilks. It’s a pleasure to be here – I wish it were in person, but hello to everybody. I’m the co-founder of Annick Press Ltd, and I’m currently the co-publisher at Annick. But I also want to mention that I am also the co-founder of the National Reading Campaign, an organization that was established to advocate for Canada to become a reading society, where everyone has an equal opportunity to become, enjoy, and remain lifelong readers and the importance of that. So there are some interesting intersections between my philosophy at Annick and what I bring from the National Reading Campaign. They’re both rooted in a very strong passionate belief I have about the power of reading both to change lives on a community level and a personal level, and to build confidence. So I, through the company and through the National Reading Campaign – I would say I’m about promoting reading, which is critical thinking, breaking through the isolation, providing joy. And what I want to do is link all of that to the importance of the school library system.

**Sarah Roberts:** My name is Sarah Roberts, and I am Advocacy and Research Officer at The Ontario Library Association. All of the advocacy work at OLA is driven by our members. The Ontario School Library Association Council and the OLA Advocacy committee are the resident experts on all things school library, who are constantly working to highlight key issues as they arise, define our advocacy priorities, and articulate the impact of a great school library program on students and the wider school community.

My role at OLA, alongside our executive director and our government relations firm is to support the advocacy driven by members. We do this through school library research, government submissions, meeting with government to educate on school library issues, and by developing tools for our members to use when advocating locally.

We also do this by working with allied school library groups, like TALCO (The Association of Library Consultants and Coordinators of Ontario) and of course the Save School Libraries Coalition.

### **The Issues:**

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** Sarah, as OLA’s advocacy and research officer, could you summarize the state of school libraries prior to the pandemic, and then tell us about the issues that emerged almost immediately in the first lockdown?

**Sarah Roberts:** There is a lot of already know.

- There is over thirty years of international research that established that the active presence and participation of qualified library staff make a huge difference in student academic achievement\*.
- But over the past two decades, we’ve seen a steady decline in investments in school libraries and school library staffing.
- Access to school libraries and qualified school library professionals is inconsistent across the province:
  - o Some school boards have really robust school library programs, with full time staff and the time to really collaborate with classroom teachers to make the school library learning commons the centre of the school
  - o On the other side... Some school boards have disbanded their school libraries entirely, leaving students without these critical resources

- We also hear of schools where the library is only available to students part-time – so while there is great programming and resources available, students might only have access for a half-day a week.
- We know thanks to research by People for Education, who have tracked this over time, that students in Northern and rural Ontario are particularly likely to have little or no access to a school library at their school.
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated this troubling trend.
- Looking back on the past 2 years school library staff have been integral to supporting teachers and students in adapting to the constant changes brought on by the pandemic,
- We've also seen many boards that closed school library spaces, reassigned school library staff.

We did a survey in November of 2020, we found that at 64% of school boards reported the secondary school staff had been either reduced or eliminated. The same was true of 37% of elementary schools.

- The school library was sometimes used for classroom space, for storage, for a modified staff room.
- Staff were being reassigned as classroom teachers, to allow for smaller class sizes or to administrative roles.
- Many schools stopped lending materials all together. We heard stories of books being wrapped up in saran wrap.
- While we've heard anecdotally that at many boards, school library staff are back, we know this isn't true everywhere.
- We'd love to hear from people in the chat: what's the situation now in your school board? Is your school library still closed? Is staffing still reduced? Has it rebounded to pre-pandemic levels?

## Importance of School Libraries:

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** We who work in the school library world have our own understanding of the importance of what we do. I'm interested in the perspectives of our allies in this regard. I'll start with Rick. From your perspective, why are school libraries worth saving?

**Rick Wilks:** I've got lots to say about this! I'll give you the Reader's Digest version. I look forward to getting into some of this. Let me say very briefly a few words from a publisher's perspective, why access to books and libraries is so important. We're a pretty marginal business. We do it because we're editorially driven and we're passionate, but it's critical that we have access to an audience and that the audience has access to our books. And when school libraries are in trouble, we're all in trouble. This is a major piece of the ecosystem which is really, really important. The issues of access and equity are really critical. I want to say that when I say publishers, I'm also in this instance speaking for writers, because if the publishers don't have access, the writers don't have access. And again, the most important element of getting our books before people are libraries.

I want to add a word too about Canadian voices, because as Canadian independent publishers we're the ones who bring these voices and tell these stories from home. Again, libraries are really, really critical for making all those linkages.

I want to delve off into the importance of reading and how we see this having a huge social impact. It's really interesting because I've reflected on the issues around the importance of reading for decades. But in the last decade or so, there's been so much new research that has really quantified stuff that I think we intuitively knew for years and years and years. In a nutshell, and I'm really over-simplifying, reading for pleasure is the ticket to a successful life. We know that reading impacts every aspect of our lives, so reading well and critically – you can

tether it to the success of a democracy, the economy, daily lives, mental health, the equity issue. I'm just going to summarize – I'd love to go into more detail, but kids who read do better academically – we know that. They also exhibit higher levels of empathy, enhanced critical thinking, and a better understanding of the other, something that is really critical today. Think about what happens when you read. It helps students interpret implicit meaning, and an author's point of view, it's your personal connection to your own ideas and your own experiences that develop out of that experience of reading. So deep reading is about inquiry, meaning-making, and it's all really critical. Without books and without access to libraries, there's a direct interference with personal growth and the development of agency – the ability to make meaning out of one's world, which lays the foundation for the future and feelings of self-worth.

We've talked a lot about the equity issue here, and it's huge. It's huge at Annick Press and it's huge in the world we live in. We know that a lack of access perpetuates inequality and barriers. We know that the marginalized, the economically poor are much less better off when access is impeded. And this has all been exacerbated by the pandemic – quite heavily. I saw a study quite recently from the University of Alberta that said that the youngest cohort, Grades 1 to 3, have fallen behind an average of six to eight months in their reading during the pandemic, and the recovery from that and the time taken is really an open and somewhat disturbing question.

The person who's done amazing work in this area who I want to quote is Dr. Stephen Krashen, who is the Emeritus professor of education at the University of Southern California. He's great, and he talks about how weak research and library information skills lead to lesser educational opportunities, and in fact lifelong opportunities suffering. He does so much interesting work about reading and marginalized groups in society, and how it can lift kids out of poverty – not exclusively, but it's a critical tool in the toolbox, and address social inequity. I'll read one or two sentences from a paper that he wrote. He said, "The results of some recent studies have suggested that access to books, either at the home or the school library, can mitigate or balance the effects of poverty." Pretty strong stuff! "The positive impact of access to books on reading achievement is about as large as the negative impact of poverty." So we know that now! It's been quantified. So we must ensure that students don't carry the burden of lack of access for the rest of their lives. Libraries are the passport to reading, and they are absolutely essential to the education and betterment of life. So the one place, very often, where students have access to books and resources, supported by a professional staff.

So as a publisher this is Ground Zero, right? It's really, really essential stuff. Other studies that I've looked at, and I'm sure people are familiar with this, show that schools with a successful library with credentialed librarians is related to reading ability. School library quality is related to reading achievement. So my whole point here is that reading must become a national priority, and that starts with schools. I was recently looking at a study from PISA in France, and to cut right to their bottom line, they concluded several of their studies with, "Liking to read is a critically important measure of future success." So we need a public conversation about these issues – about the importance of books, and how we wish to stimulate that conversation – that's certainly my commitment. And I have to close with a great quote from Isaac Asimov in his autobiography. He wrote, "When I read about the way in which library funds are being cut and cut, I can only think that society has found one more way to destroy itself." Pressing words, you know, and a lot of wisdom there. So that's it – it was too quick a survey, but you know, that's life according to me.

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** Quite quick, but very powerful, and making all of us in school libraries feel very heart-warmed by your comments, Rick. We appreciate that. Maria, I was hoping you could comment on some of the things you've been noticing as the pandemic has transpired, about working with schools.

**Maria Martella:** It's hard to support schools and help build a thoughtful library collection that reflects the needs of that community without a professional in the library. It makes my job ten times harder.

I had great mentors who taught me how to be a bookseller. But my biggest learning comes from teacher-librarians and other professional library people who I've listened to and shared good books with, and who have a passion for books and create a community of readers. It's not the same when the customer - a teacher or principal for example - people who have taken over the library for a time - doesn't come from a school library background. They may have a passion for books, which of course helps, but nothing can replace the symbiotic relationship between a bookseller and a library professional - someone who chose to be in that position. They are the person who understands individual student literacy needs but also the needs of all students in their school community. They are important for the survival and growth of the school library.

It's quite a noticeable shift when that happens, because suddenly I have to do more research on curriculum, more research on a community - I will actually look up a neighbourhood to look at the demographics. I have to really dig deeply to figure out if I'm providing them is right for this community. We all know that - the person that understands - they'll call kids by name - they'll understand what one kid needs as well as the entire community. They know the parents, they know the teachers, they know what's in their collection - I'm not trying to guess, look up what I sold them last year. They run clubs, they promote books, they share things on social media that make me want to be a teacher. They're professionals. Publishers are professionals, authors, writers, booksellers, we are all professionals. Why are we not seeing the professionals in the school libraries? It just makes perfect sense. Anybody who's a book lover can tell you stories about a person or the people in their lives who helped them find the most exciting books and stories in a time when they really needed them.

Everybody has a special story about a librarian like that, and I really feel that collection development has to be a thoughtful and slower process, and we just shove it on someone and say here, here's this much money - I won't say how much because sometimes it's pathetic and sometimes it's great - and say go and buy books in an hour, or you have to make a decision. I get a phone call and the person that I'm talking to has no clue what's in their library. It's frustrating! The money should be well-spent. It's not about what I can get you in a minute, it's about what I think you need, and what you think you really need for your students. I find it very unsettling when schools are spending money on these choices for libraries when the funding has been decreased and cut so many times. I just find my job so much easier when I'm dealing with a dedicated library professional. I feel that that passion has to be there.

People choose to be in the library, and I think that's an important point. They're not just put into the library because there's no one else to do it, they actually want to be in the library and they want to provide the best resources. The person is very important. You can have a library and have a great collection, and it just sits there. I've been in those libraries where someone will actually open the door with a key and bring me into the library, and the books aren't shelved properly or there are so many books missing - it's sad, you know! Luckily, I have a lot of books at home, so my kids - my son came home one day and said we have better books at home than in the school library. It broke my heart, but I'm lucky, because I do have a lot of books, but many, many families are not fortunate enough to be able to buy books and own their own books. So I feel it's very important.

## **Advocacy Successes During Pandemic:**

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** In times like these, it is easy to be discouraged. But there have been some significant advocacy successes over the past two years. Maria, could you tell us about some of the advocacy successes we've had from the Save School Libraries coalition during the pandemic?

**Maria Martella:** Save School Libraries undertook several actions, including:

- letter to the Globe and Mail
- social media kit \_ Kate Edwards from ACP (Association of Canadian publishers)



- cheat sheet for educators and public use – Sarah and Meredith (OLA) – parents sometimes don't know what to ask their principals
- letter to Minister Lecce (Grants for student needs – accountability measures for reporting
- Letter to Council of Ontario Directors of Education -and Ontario Principal's Council
- We did get a response from Minister Lecce and there was an announcement about accountability measures and reporting requirements in the GSN to make sure that budgets were spent on school libraries
- Participated in Canadian School Library day
- Podcast with Beth Lyons on *Read Into This*

I think that was all.

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** We had a really good response from the Ontario Principal's Council as well.

**Maria Martella:** That's right, we did. They said they were not going to continue keeping libraries closed and that they would put librarians and library staff back after COVID. That was a good response as well.

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** I'm going to move on to Sarah, because the OLA and OSLA have been doing significant advocacy over the course of the pandemic. could you tell us about the OLA and OSLA's advocacy approach?

**Sarah Roberts:** We have, for the past 4 year being working with Counsel Public Affairs, a government relations firms who have provided incredible guidance to all our advocacy efforts.

With our government relations we really work to build relationships with government, with the principal that this is a marathon – not a sprint.

- At the end of the day: we need decision makers to work with us, not against us.
- So... we look engage, rather than fight with government, working to align ourselves as much as possible with their priorities – which should not be difficult – libraries are a non-partisan issue.
- We have been working consistently to build the relationship with the Ministry of Education staff, and have been meeting a few times a year to discuss issues related to school libraries.
- This can be challenging and one of the things that we've found is that the Ministry of Education portfolio is very large and there is always going to be bigger priorities for the staff there. We really have to keep persistent to get those links.
- In addition to meeting with Ministry staff, we also engage with the Government of Ontario through consultation:
  - The annual pre-budget submission (which happens each year in January)
  - consultations on the Grants for Student Needs.
- The majority of funding for schools in Ontario comes through the provincial 'Grant for Student Needs' or the "GSN"
  - Through the GSN, the Ministry provides funding on a per capita basis for just about everything a school needs: classroom teachers, administration, technology and school library staffing.
  - Through the GSN, every school and school board received funding that is specifically allocated for school library staff
  - However, only a very small percentage of that funding is "enveloped."
  - This means that locally school boards can take this money that is allocated for school library staffing and instead spend it on other priorities, either cutting school library staff or foregoing the school library all together.

- When school boards spend this money outside the school library they are perfectly within their rights to do so – there is no format accountability to spend allocated funds in a particular way.
- Here, our main Ontario government “ask” has remained the same for several years:
  - Update the GSN funding formula ensure that funding for school libraries is protected
  - This year, we saw a very promising “Win” on this front.

The ministry updated the language of the GSN with some accountability measures to ensure that school boards are spending funding for school libraries on the school library.

- **"Library Staffing:** New this year, the ministry is introducing requirements to enhance reporting for library staff funding. This additional reporting is intended to provide the ministry with greater insight into how school boards are funding libraries and related supports.
  - The enveloping provisions of the Library Staff Allocation in the School Foundation Grant remain in effect.
  - School boards that are not fully utilizing the funding provided for library staffing through the Pupil Foundation Grant, along with the existing enveloping provision of the Library Staff Allocation, will be asked for a multi-year plan highlighting their vision and next steps to address any underspending in this area."
- The inclusion of this language really reflects the persistent advocacy of OSLA and our members.
  - The GSN states now that schools that do not spend the funds allocated on the school library will be asked to submit a “multi-year plan highlighting their vision and next steps to address any underspending”
  - This reporting requirement is not the same as the funding being “enveloped” – but the inclusion of this language and reporting requirement are really significant wins for us and can be used to as we continue our advocacy efforts.
  - We’re still awaiting details on what this reporting requirement will look like and who will have access to the information, so will be continuing to engage with the Ministry of Education to learn more.

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** Thanks very much, Sarah. I’m going to suggest too to people from various school districts in Ontario. If you weren’t aware of that or you are not aware of what is happening in your school district, you now have the information to ask the questions locally, and I strongly encourage you to do that. And also, in the chat, we’re not sure what’s happening in your school district – you may have more information. Please feel free to tell us, because it’s so hard to tell. I know OLA and OSLA have done surveys in the past and have information about the state of school libraries, but with the ground shifting under our feet it is useful to hear from all of you.

## School Library Success Stories During Pandemic:

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** So you can see that we have had some significant advocacy successes during the pandemic, and I hope that that is encouraging to everybody, but I also want to talk about program successes, and I get to talk at this point. I want to look at some library success stories during the pandemic, and there have been many! Out of crisis comes innovation. Because of my work with Canadian School Libraries, I am privileged to have a bit of a birds-eye view of school library trends. What I have found most striking is how school library professionals have stepped up and overcome seemingly overwhelming challenges and found creative ways to effectively support their schools’ students, teachers, and families.

This is so important. Wishing for what once was is not an effective advocacy strategy. Demonstrating our unique value and being responsive and innovative moves the program forward and builds communities of support.

We saw this immediately when schools shut down in March 2020 with a dramatic shift to the virtual library platform, and schools relying on library professionals to provide emergency resource access and copyright advice.

But you went way beyond that. CSL's Leading Learning committee has done an analysis of emerging trends as they add exemplars of Leading Learning standards in action. Six significant trends have emerged:

- Dramatic increase in the development of the virtual LLC. The virtual library has moved from being a static website to being an interactive learning space.
- A focus on the importance of digital literacy skills and global competencies
- Continued growth in diversity awareness and associated tangible actions, such as collection development with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and creating safe and welcoming learning spaces.
- Attention to how the library supports wellness for both staff and students
- Expanding student engagement in making and doing in the physical and in the virtual space
- Outreach to the school community to inspire reading and learning

These trends are so very positive, and set the stage for continued growth of the post-pandemic school library learning commons program. Just have a look at the current edition of OSLA's *The Teaching Librarian* for stories of innovations to keep! And I'll also put in a plug for Canadian School Libraries Journal, where our editions over the course of the pandemic are full of these stories of innovation over the course of the pandemic.

## Advocacy Strategies for Moving Forward: Emerging from the Pandemic

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** So where are we going with all of this? If you've ever heard me talk about advocacy, then you've likely heard me say that it's a shared responsibility. It's not something that we should just leave for the leaders. We are all responsible for advocacy, within our own spheres of influence. Daunting? Don't worry, the Ontario Library Association has your back. I'd like to ask Sarah to tell you about some resources that OLA and OSLA have worked on to help all of us with advocacy strategies.

**Sarah Roberts:** Maria already mentioned, to foster more on the ground advocacy, in March 2021 OSLA and the Save School Libraries Coalition also collaborated on the development of the local advocacy campaign "3 questions to ask about your child's school library". We put together a resources that both educates on the role of the school library and calls on parents to ask their child's school about the situation with the library.

For those not aware of the funding of school libraries... you are not alone. OSLA has communicated with and met with Directors of Education several times over the past years and one thing that we learned during those meetings was that most administrators did not understand where school library funding came from or even that dedicated funding exists. With OSLA, we developed a 1-page brief on school library funding to help explain that – even if there isn't a budget line for school libraries at your board – every single board has received funding for school libraries.

This one pager is now an advocacy resource that all our members can use to educate their decision makers locally.

Another resource that we have available is the research report: the Ontario School Library Impact Project. This was a 2-year study, led by school library staff and academic library staff. Our research leads were Dr. Mary

Cavanagh and Dr. Dianne Oberg, who designed a research study to look at the information literacy skills of 1<sup>st</sup> year post-secondary students to compare those who had a school library experience in high school and those who did not.

What we found was that while students rated themselves on information literacy skills similarly, those who had a school library in high school talked more about citation, research, assessment and had overall better experiences with the library at their post-secondary institution.

The results of this research were sent to contacts at the Ministry of Education and we were able to meet to discuss the implications. We also shared a summary of the research with the membership, and initiated a social media campaign highlighting the importance of school libraries in Ontario. This in turn can be shared with school administrations to support library advocacy.

OLA's Advocacy Toolkit also provides some general guidance on how to approach local advocacy. The crux of it really is relationship building –

- working with not against your administration
- aligning the school library with the priorities of your school and your board
- creating a school library learning commons that is integral to the success of your school

This is something that school library people are so good at and we only have to look at all those instances of school library staff stepping up throughout the pandemic to see this.

The last thing I'll also plug is that 2022 is an Elections Year here in Ontario, so it's a really important time to engage with your elected officials about the importance of your library.

You can go back and watch the session "Advocacy during an election year" that was held on Wednesday to learn more about how you can engage in the coming months

We're going to be developing some resources specifically for this time on how you engage with candidates during the election – yes candidates for MPP but also your local candidates for school board trustee. So stay tuned and stay connected for some of those resources.

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** That's terrific, Sarah. I think people are going to be very happy. We're going to have all of these links and resources in the Handouts section of the conference website.

## Call to Action

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** Thank you for the questions and ideas that you've shared throughout this session. We do have a couple more questions for you. Please share your ideas in the chat. We'll be saving your comments and having a close look at your ideas.

- What do you think the Save School Libraries coalition's next actions should be?
- What about the Ontario Library Association and the Ontario School Library Association?
- What should YOU be doing? What is your own call to action for school library advocacy?

## TMC7 2022

**Anita Brooks Kirkland:** As we conclude, I want to take a minute to announce that Canadian School Libraries is partnering with the British Columbia Teacher-Librarians' Association to host the seventh biennial Treasure Mountain Canada Research Symposium and Think Tank in late October 2022. These symposiums are designed to use input from Canadian school library professionals and academics to develop deeper understanding of the potential of the school library learning commons program. The theme for TMC7 is: **Post Pandemic Library Learning Commons - From Crisis to Invention.**

The symposium's sub-themes are the emerging trends that I mentioned earlier in this session. What new strategies have you tried over the course of the pandemic? What successes have you had, or how have you had to adjust along the way in the face of new challenges? How are you collecting evidence of your successes, and what does that evidence say? Your voice is so very important and we would love you to write up your story for TMC. We are very pleased to share information about TMC7 and the call for papers as one of the session handouts.

## Thank You!

Thank you everyone for participating in this session. Please be sure to download and use the handouts that we have provided to inspire and inform your own advocacy strategies.

I especially want to thank our panelists – Maria Martella, Rick Wilks, and Sarah Roberts – for being such strong voices for school libraries!

Thank you very much, everybody!