

Libraries

2017

This report is an excerpt from People for Education's Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2017.

Today's school libraries are more than a place where students go to borrow books. Libraries are often described as "learning commons" for the school, where resources are shared in physical and virtual spaces, allowing students to collaborate.¹ The idea behind the library-as-learning commons model is that students develop a variety of skills and competencies, including literacy, inquiry, and problem-solving, while engaging in collaborative and empowering learning experiences.²

Changes in staffing in Ontario school libraries

In 2017, only 52% of elementary schools reported having a full- or part-time teacher-librarian. This is an all-time low in the 20-year history of the People for Education Annual Survey, down from 80% in 1998.

In 2017:

- 11% of elementary schools have a full-time teacher-librarian and 41% have a part-time teacher-librarian.
- 68% of secondary schools have a teacher-librarian on staff: 55% full-time and 13% part-time.

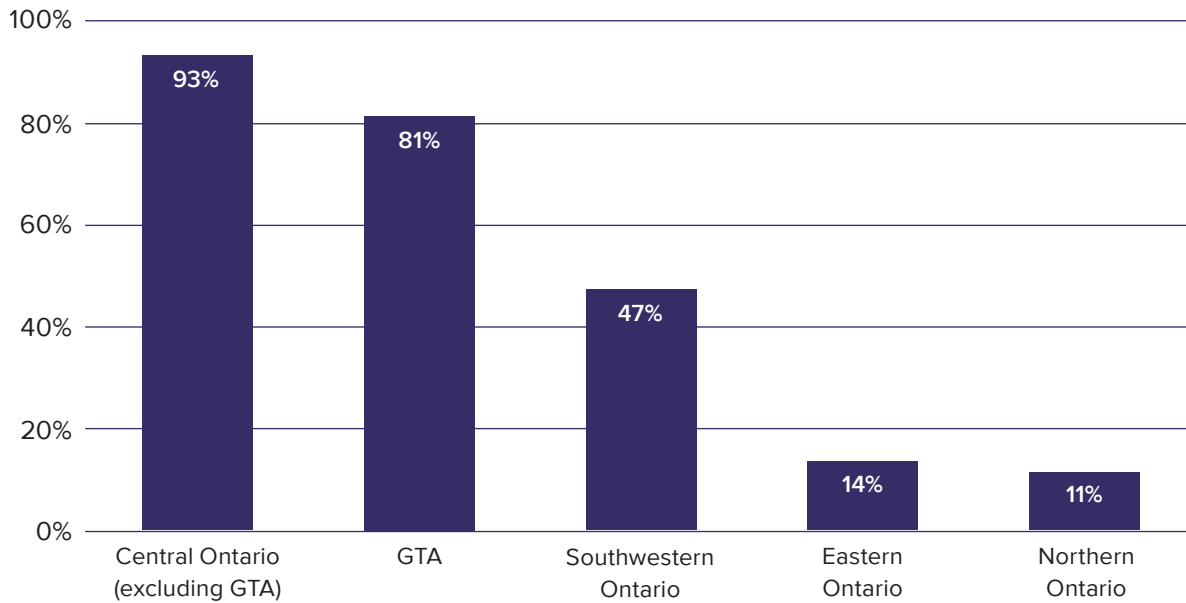
In its report, *Achieving Information Literacy: Standards for School Libraries*, the Canadian School Library Association recommends a ratio of approximately one teacher-librarian to 567 students.³ In 2017, in schools with teacher-librarians, the average ratio per school is one teacher-librarian to 770 students in elementary schools, and one to 905 in secondary schools.

In 2017:

- 52% of elementary schools had at least one teacher-librarian, either full- or part-time, a decline from 60% in 2008, and an all-time low in the 20-year history of the People for Education Annual Survey.
- 68% of secondary schools report a teacher-librarian and only 55% have a full-time teacher-librarian.
- 81% of elementary schools in the GTA have a teacher-librarian, compared to 14% of schools in eastern Ontario and 11% in northern Ontario.

Figure 1

Percentage of elementary schools with full- or part-time teacher–librarians, by region



Regional inequities

Across Ontario, there are substantial regional variations in access to teacher–librarians. While 81% of elementary schools in the GTA have a teacher–librarian, only 14% in eastern Ontario and 11% in northern Ontario (see Figure 1) report having one.

Funding

Currently, there is no provincial policy or program guideline to ensure that all schools have fully functioning libraries. The Ontario curriculum, while confirming the importance of school library programs, contains the disclaimer “where available” in its references to teacher–librarians.⁴

Library funding is provided to school boards on a per pupil basis. Boards receive funding to cover the costs of one elementary teacher–librarian for every 763 elementary students and one secondary teacher–librarian for every 909 secondary students, but there is no requirement that boards use the funding on either teacher–librarians or other library staff.⁵ The Pupil Foundation Grant includes additional funds for library services, but boards can use these funds on other initiatives such as classroom computers, classroom teachers, textbooks, etc.

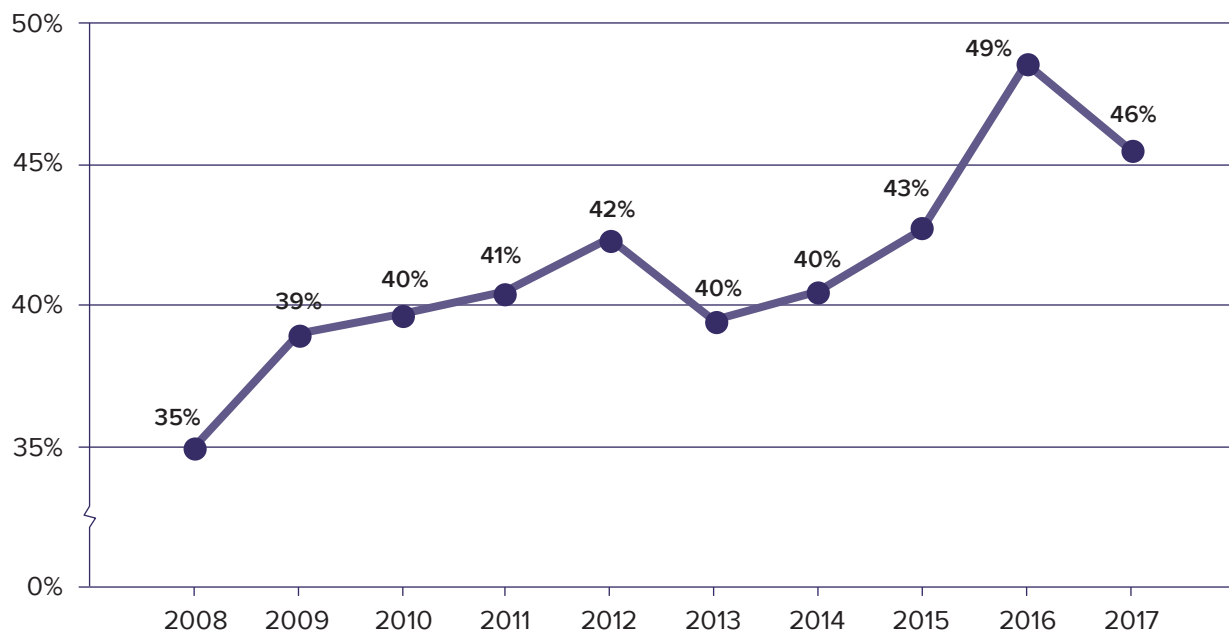
In 2016/17, the government allocated funding in the Learning Opportunities Grant to support elementary school libraries. Under this grant, boards receive \$50,000 per school board plus \$1,665 per elementary school to fund teacher–librarians and/or library technicians.⁶ This funding is enveloped—it can only be used for additional library staff, not for other expenditures such as the purchase of equipment or textbooks.

Library technicians in elementary schools

Forty-six percent of elementary schools have library technicians. Over the past ten years, the percentage of elementary schools with library technicians has been increasing (see Figure 2). Hiring library technicians rather than teacher–librarians may allow a school board to increase their library workforce. In the Ottawa CDSB, for example, elementary school libraries are now staffed with library technicians instead of teacher–librarians. Ottawa CDSB still employs teacher–librarians in its secondary schools.

Figure 2

Percentage of elementary schools with library technicians



Proven impact of school libraries

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) found that in all countries surveyed, children who enjoyed reading performed significantly better on reading assessments than those who did not. On average, students who read daily for enjoyment score the equivalent of one-and-a-half years of schooling better than those who do not.⁷

A 2011 study by Queen’s University and People for Education, found that in schools with teacher–librarians, students were more likely to report that they “liked to read.”⁸ The study also found a significant relationship between students’ scores on reading and writing tests and the presence of either a teacher–librarian or a library technician.

These results echo the findings of many international reports. Forty years of research from Europe, U.S., and Australia indicates that well-staffed, well-stocked, and well-used school libraries are correlated with increases in student achievement.⁹ This is especially pertinent as EQAO has recorded a decline in self-reported reading enjoyment for elementary school students from 2012/13 to 2015/16.¹⁰

Notes

1. Canadian Library Association, *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Library Association, 2014), 4-7; Ontario School Library Association, *Together for Learning: School Libraries and the Emergence of the Learning Commons* (Toronto, ON: Ontario School Library Association, 2010), 3-5.
2. Canadian Library Association, *Leading Learning*, 10.
3. Marlene Asselin, Jennifer L. Branch, and Dianne Oberg, *Achieving Information Literacy: Standards for School Library Programs in Canada* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Association for School Libraries, 2003), 22.
4. Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum: Social Studies (Grades 1-6), History and Geography (Grades 7 and 8)* (Toronto, ON: Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2013).
5. People for Education, *Reading for Joy* (Toronto, ON: People for Education, 2011).
6. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2016-17*.
7. “Do students today read for pleasure?” *PISA in Focus* (OECD, September 2011).
8. People for Education, *Reading for Joy*.
9. Dianne Oberg, *Ignoring the Evidence: Another Decade of Decline for School Libraries* (Toronto, ON: Canadian Education Association, 2015).
10. EQAO, *Contextual Information* (Toronto, ON: EQAO, 2016), 10-11.