

## **April 6, 2006 - Press Conference on the “School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario” Research Study**

### *Introductory Comments from Michael Rosettis*

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the press. As President of the Ontario School Library Association, I am extremely pleased to be a participant in this morning's event. I would like to begin with a brief account of the history behind the study that is being shared today. For some time now, the Ontario Library Association and the OSLA have advocated the importance of qualified staff in school libraries in Ontario. We have long known that teacher-librarians contribute significantly to student literacy and student achievement. Where is the empirical evidence? There are numerous international studies, notably in the United States and Australia, which show the positive relationship between school library staffing, well-chosen collections, and student achievement. However, Canadian school authorities want Canadian evidence.

The Ontario Library Association entered into dialogue with potential partners who could help make such a study a reality. Last year, People for Education indicated that they were working with Dr. Donald Klinger and Dr. Lyn Shulha of Queen's University on a study that could very well provide the basis for the independent research that OLA was seeking. The Ontario Library Association Board of Directors made the decision to commission the study proposed by People for Education and Queen's University. Although the OLA provided the financing for this research, it has had no part in the actual research itself.

The research is not a direct study of school libraries. It is a study of the viewable impact of school libraries on EQAO test results and the achievement of students. While this may open more questions for research, it has the potential to catch the attention of the Ministry of Education in ways we could not anticipate going into the study.

### *Follow-up to the Study: Comments on the Implications from Michael Rosettis*

What does this Canadian research mean for teacher-librarians and school libraries? This research confirms what Teacher-Librarians have intuitively known for years: that a well-staffed, well-stocked, and well funded school library makes a significant difference in student achievement. School libraries positively influence student success. Dr. Klinger and Dr. Shulha's research emphasizes the need for school libraries. The very fact that there are noticeable results in this study is significant, and it is a clear sign that more Canadian research needs to be conducted. The study uses data from a wide selection of schools across Ontario, in both rural and urban areas, and it has important implications for our province. Certainly, it has national implications as well.

The study demonstrates that school libraries and teacher-librarians have a valuable role to play in our Ministry of Education's "Drive to 75", and onward toward 85, to improve student achievement on EQAO test scores. Teacher-librarians contribute significantly to positive student attitude toward reading, up to an 8% difference! In return, this influences student achievement. In the 2001 Programme for International Student Assessment study, Canada was one of the nations where the effect on student attitude was the greatest. Teacher-librarians are trained to instruct students in developing skills such as: using print and digital resources effectively, the inquiry and research process, and the development of critical thinking skills. Teacher-librarians specialize in promoting the learning of Information Literacy Skills so that our students can thrive in an information age.

In the reading enjoyment component of this study, it is clear that teacher-librarians make the difference. Teacher-librarians contribute to student success in the classroom, and in areas such as Boys' Literacy, English Language Learners, and Differentiated Instruction. If all school libraries were adequately staffed and sufficiently funded, just imagine the impact that this would have on student achievement!

The Ministry of Education, and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, have demonstrated supportiveness for school libraries. The past two years have both featured an investment in school library resources, and recognition of "the critical role that school libraries play in improving student achievement" (Dr. Avis Glaze). However, school library programs in Ontario are lacking a current Ministry resource document, and presently rely on the 1982 document, Partners in Action. OSLA has been stressing the need for a revised document for years. We must see Ministry action in this area. An additional issue is that even with the recent Investment in School Libraries, Kindergarten to Grade 12 grant, consistent implementation between Ontario school boards has been problematic.

In May 2005, Minister of Education, Gerard Kennedy stated that "Libraries play an essential role in stimulating students to improve their own achievement and foster a love of reading and learning" (May 26, 2005). The Ministry of Education must take immediate steps to ensure that our school libraries are well-staffed and well-funded. If our province does not act soon, the damage will be irreversible. People for Education data clearly shows that each year, Ontario school library staffing continues to steadily decline. If Ministry funding for school libraries is allowed to continue to be used for general school staffing, as is the case in some boards, school libraries are surely on their way to demise. If funding for school library resources is directed to other needs at the school level, a deteriorating library collection will definitely be unable to adequately address student's literacy needs. Thus, significant changes need to be made to the staffing and funding models for Ontario school libraries. Funds must be designated or "sweatered" for both teacher-librarian staffing, and school library resources. This essential change is necessary to ensure that excellent library programs are delivered, programs that will continue contributing to increased student achievement in Ontario schools.

School libraries are obviously a valuable resource for our government. This is a government that has strongly taken the lead on student literacy. With the significant evidence provided by this study, our government now needs to fully recognize the link between school libraries and student success. The time for change, and the time for action, is now!

A copy of this research study will be forwarded to the Minister of Education. OSLA and the Ontario Library Association would like to take this opportunity to invite discussion of this study with the Minister of Education, at her earliest convenience.

Thank you.