

Transformative Advocacy

The Teacher-Librarian's Role in Elevating the Library Learning Commons (LLC) to the Heart of School Leadership Strategies

By Cynthia Duncalfe, Teacher-Librarian, December 13, 2024

Modern education in K-12 schools requires dynamic learning environments in physical and virtual spaces where students can engage in inquiry, creativity, and collaboration. Although the Library Learning Commons (LLC) is uniquely positioned to meet this need, it is often overlooked due to outdated perceptions and a traditional library mentality where the librarian is hushing students, whose primary role is to assist them in signing out books. The purpose of this inquiry is to explore how transformative advocacy can position the Teacher-Librarian (TL) and the Library Learning Commons (LLC) as integral components to student achievement, equity, and achieving school-wide goals.

This inquiry underscores the importance of advocacy in demonstrating the LLC's value to stakeholders, particularly school leaders. By linking the LLC's goals to school-wide goals and shifting the perception of the LLC from a transactional entity to a participatory learning hub, TLs can secure essential support for staffing, resources, and policy changes. As Canadian School Libraries (2023) notes, "strong leadership for the learning commons is vital to ensure sustainability and attainment of school, district and provincial/territorial student learning goals and outcomes."

For advocacy efforts to be truly transformative, TLs must clearly understand the role of the LLC within their school and possess a deep conviction in their philosophy, mission and vision as a TL. Additionally, it is essential for TLs to recognize how these elements intersect with the schools they serve and how they influence everyday operations.

I. The Role of the Learning Commons in K-12 Schools

The Library Learning Commons (LLC) is a dynamic, collaborative space for resource sharing, digital literacy, and student engagement, a central hub for teaching, learning, and leadership within the school.

"All schools in Canada need to be able to develop and support excellent school libraries responsive to the diverse needs of learners today and into the future. This means that all schools large and small, urban and rural, public and private, brick and mortar or virtual, need to provide access to teaching expertise in the library as well as best resources, technologies and physical and virtual learning spaces to support learner needs as they evolve. The transitioning of the school library to school Library Learning Commons establishes the vision and structure to address these evolving needs and encourages continuous growth" (Canadian Library Association (CLA), 2014).

The school where I work as a curriculum consultant and teacher-librarian is an Independent Provincial Online Learning School in British Columbia, Canada. Our LLC faces the unique challenge of serving a relatively small hybrid school plus a sizeable online student body. A significant function of our LLC is to provide our students with advanced booking and shipping of resources of all shapes and sizes. For us, the challenge is to ensure leadership understands

all of the essential functions of the LLC and the roles of the LLC team, including literacy and research instruction, co-teaching support for our educators, and participatory learning experiences for our community.

It is natural for school leaders to see the LLC as a “transactional” entity, a place primarily for students to get resources, but we are so much more than that. The learning commons is central to all school functions and facilitates effective instructional design, directly impacting student learning. "Students leverage the power of technology in the LLC to solve problems, create, read, respond and interact with others to build knowledge collaboratively, both locally and globally" (Canadian School Libraries, 2020b).

The Learning Commons also facilitates collaboration in which everyone is a participant. A collaborative and participatory culture impacts student learning. “Interactivity and collaborative development put students and colleagues into making and creating modes; it reflects the school’s culture of collaboration” (Ekdahl & Zubke, 2017, p. 14).

II. The Role of Teacher-Librarians in K-12 Schools

Teacher-librarians are integral in creating learning experiences that integrate research and inquiry skills with subject-area content, helping enrich the curriculum and ensuring students engage with high-quality, diverse resources. With the increasing use of technology in education, TLs play a crucial role in helping students become responsible digital citizens. An engaged TL directly impacts student learning in these ways and many more ways.

"The mere presence of a librarian is associated with better student outcomes, but what librarians do also has positive effects. Multiple studies have found that test scores tend to be higher in schools where librarians spend more time:

- Instructing students, both with classroom teachers and independently;
- Planning collaboratively with classroom teachers;
- Providing professional development to teachers;
- Meeting regularly with the principal;
- Serving on key school leadership committees;
- Facilitating the use of technology by students and teachers;
- Providing technology support to teachers, and
- Providing reading incentive programs" (Lance, 2018).

III. The What and Why of Advocacy

Advocacy provides information and education to decision-makers regarding the critical role of the LLC and teacher-librarians in helping schools achieve their objectives. It is a way to ensure the required funding to hire full-time teacher-librarians, sufficient library technicians, and support staff to assist with administrative duties so TLs can focus on their specialized roles. Sufficient funding also ensures that collections and facilities are kept up-to-date. “Advocacy is a planned, sustained effort to develop understanding and support incrementally, over time. Advocacy is related to but different from promotion and marketing. School library advocacy is about developing understanding and support from key decision-makers; it is about raising awareness and increasing knowledge; and it takes time and planning” (International Federation of Library Associations, 2015).

Advocacy means cultivating partnerships with teachers, considering our shared goals and outcomes, and determining how to work together to achieve these things. When we partner with teachers in their work, they will learn by experience the difference it makes to have a qualified TL in their corner.

Richard Beaudry (2017), highlights several vital reasons why teacher-librarians need to consider advocacy:

- Decreased funding results in fewer FTE teacher-librarians. Full-time positions are necessary for teacher-librarians to go beyond administrative tasks and prep-time coverage and engage in teacher collaboration and student projects. Downgrading the role of the TL to administrative tasks makes it easy for school leaders to replace them with administrators.
- Sufficient funding is necessary for libraries to add new books and remove outdated ones.
- Full-time positions are necessary for teacher-librarians to teach students essential research and literacy skills and offer programs that address the inquiry-based BC Curriculum.

IV. The Role of the Teacher-Librarian as an Advocate

We do not need to be apologetic about what we are doing or shy away from informing people about the role of the LLC and TL in the school, but rather be intentional about sharing these things. “We must be able to effectively articulate how the library program will help the school succeed in its goals for student success” (Canadian School Libraries, 2023, p. 20).

Teacher-librarians must advocate for how their philosophy and mission align with the organization’s goals. Kachel (2016), says, “In too many schools, the work of the school librarian is not seen as solving anyone else’s problems or addressing school initiatives.” Building collaborative and authentic relationships with teachers, staff, and leadership is essential to establishing influence and efficacy, which is crucial for advancing the school library program. “In the context of our profession, influence is the school librarian’s effect on potential library advocates that inspires them to support the mission and vision of the school library program. Influence is realized when others naturally follow your lead and suggestions because you have built trust through communication and collaboration. School librarians are in a perfect middle space in their schools to cultivate such influence” (Kachel, 2016).

V. The Learning Commons Team and School Leadership: Advancing the Learning Community to Achieve School Goals Together

The most recent update of *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* (Canadian School Libraries, 2024), includes ideas collected from the “TMC7 Leading Learning Challenge” facilitated by Anita Brooks at Treasure Mountain Canada 7 (Canadian School Libraries, 2022), summit and “Think Tank” in New Westminster, British Columbia where I had the pleasure of sitting in the room and making my contribution.

The *Leading Learning* standard, “Advancing the Learning Community to Achieve School Goals,” is engaging and challenging. It is about improving student achievement through the LLC. The roles of the LLC leadership team, support staff, teachers, school community, administrators, principals, and school districts are well-defined in the explored themes. The

importance of collaboration between the LLC team and these groups is evident and identifies the key to leading into the future as strong leadership. “Strong leadership for the learning commons is vital to ensure sustainability and attainment of school, district and provincial/territorial student learning goals and outcomes” (Canadian School Libraries, 2020a). We understand this standard through the following themes and growth indicators:

Leading in Planning for School Improvement: Leading into the future means the LLC team is active in the development stage of school goals and that LLC leaders have a seat at the table with school leaders.

Leading Action for School and Board Improvement: This theme is about the LLC team leading school and district initiatives in an intentional way. Development in this theme begins with the LLC team addressing student needs in collaboration with teachers and moves towards modelling a collaborative approach to achieving goals.

Leading Action for Collaborative Professional Development and Growth: The LLC team leads in this area by first personally participating in ProD opportunities. The teacher-librarian leads into the future by becoming a facilitator of professional development opportunities and implementing best practices in the LLC.

Principal Collaborative Role: This theme explores working with school principals to achieve school initiatives, starting with the principal supporting the LLC's work and encouraging teachers to collaborate with LLC staff. Principles are leading into the future when they become ambassadors for the LLC.

Teacher-Librarian Collaborative Role: The role of the TL includes assessing how the school community uses LLC. Developing proficiency in using surveys is helpful in the beginning stages, and the ability to create and evaluate reports is a key to TLs using collaborative, site-based research as a basis for decision-making regarding the operational needs of the LC.

Teacher Collaborative Role: This theme explores the role of teachers working collaboratively with the LLC staff and teacher-librarian to meet learners' literacy and information needs. This role starts with teachers advocating for the LLC and moves towards teacher co-planning inquiry lessons with the teacher-librarian.

LLC Support Staff Collaborative Role: This theme explores the role of LLC support staff in implementing the LLC vision. Emerging skills of support staff include managing facilities, collections, databases, and subscriptions, moving towards implementing collection development procedures and analyzing circulation reports.

District Administration and District LLC Program Leader Collaborative Role: This theme concerns collaboration between district administration and library consultants to build LLC capacity, beginning with developing effective learning environments and moving towards ensuring all personnel use the LLC and work with education leaders (district, provincial, national) to build LLC capacity.

My big takeaway from researching this standard is the importance of collaboration with teachers, LLC staff, leaders, and administrators of all levels. If the LLC is going to be successful in leading into the future, all stakeholders will need to work together to achieve school goals. The TL and LLC must be central to these efforts and supported by adequate resources. “Excellent school library programs are built on the solid foundations of consistent

policy and appropriate funding. Essential frameworks such as professional staffing and appropriate infrastructure assure equity of access to quality learning environments, diverse resources, expert instruction and rich learning experiences” (Canadian School Libraries, 2023).

How to plan and fund LLC resources and even facilities is generally understood, as a per-student ratio can often quantify this. However, Tls may need to advocate for an adequate and fully staffed LLC team to fulfill its mission. LLC professionals include teacher-librarians (certified teachers with additional qualifications in teacher-librarianship) and library technicians with “formal training in cataloguing, library information systems, library operations, and resource management” (Canadian School Libraries, 2023). Support staff in the LLC include library clerks who “have no formal library or education qualifications. Responsibilities are restricted to the operational routines of the school library such as charging, discharging, shelving and repairing loaned materials, handling overdues and associated records, and processing materials. It is incumbent on school districts to provide training in these functions, and the library clerk should always work under professional supervision” (Canadian School Libraries, 2023).

According to the BCTF Bargaining Proposal, effective July 1, 2021, the minimum elementary and middle/secondary ratios call for one teacher-librarian for every 600 students. For our school of 5500 students, that would mean having nine qualified teacher-librarians in place. These Tls should be supported by library technicians (preferably) or, at the very least, trained staff. “The ultimate goal of the Library Learning Commons is improved student achievement through the refining of instruction for essential literacy, research and inquiry and communication skills. As such, it is also a key to building opportunities for student learning and innovation to be demonstrated, shared and showcased. Forming a team to lead the learning commons is an effective way to intentionally plan for and assess the success of the goals of [virtual and physical] learning space[s]” (Canadian School Libraries, 2020a).

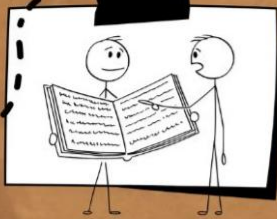
Collaborating with school leadership to enhance the learning community and achieve school-wide goals requires a clear understanding of the growth indicators related to these objectives and recognizing the staffing needs essential to create an effective LLC team.

VI. Conclusion

The Library Learning Commons (LLC) is a transformative space that fosters inquiry, creativity, and collaboration, supporting student success and school-wide goals. Advocacy is essential for shifting outdated perceptions of the LLC from a transactional resource center to a participatory learning hub. Teacher-librarians (TLs) play a critical role in this transformation by forging partnerships with teachers, administrators, and decision-makers to align the LLC's vision with school priorities and goals. Through advocacy, TLs can secure funding, staffing, and policy support necessary for sustained growth and impact. The LLC's collaborative nature strengthens relationships across the school community, creating a shared investment in student learning. By leading professional development, co-teaching, and supporting curriculum initiatives, TLs become indispensable contributors to school leadership strategies.

Teacher-librarians should take every opportunity to highlight the value of the Learning Commons, foster relationships with school leaders, and advocate for the necessary resources for students thriving through this essential educational hub.

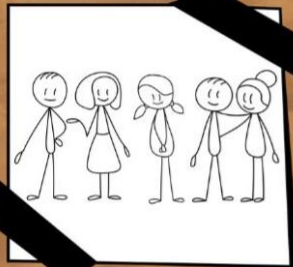
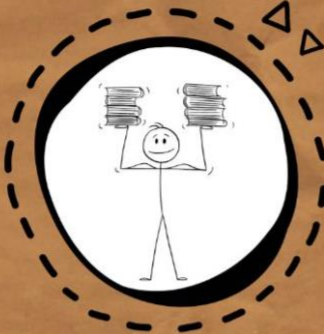
ROLE OF THE TEACHER LIBRARIAN



The Teacher Librarian ...

OVERSEES THE MANAGEMENT OF THE LIBRARY LEARNING COMMONS

- Develops short and long-term plans and budgets to achieve goals
- Develops and implements policies for collection development and analyzes circulation reports
- Leads the LC Team in library administration duties
- Manages and promotes facilities, collections, databases, and subscriptions

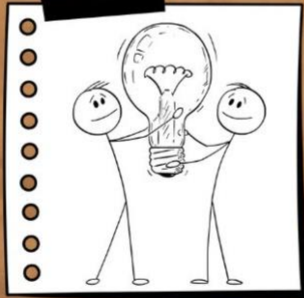


CULTIVATES A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

- Creates a safe and welcoming environment for learners
- Engages students in reading and learning through various events, contests, and incentives
- Designs flexible, inviting, and cooperative learning environments
- Models inclusivity

IS A CHAMPION OF COLLABORATION

- Partners with families and students to foster a love of reading
- Facilitates collaborative engagement with staff, teachers, administrators, principals, and district leaders
- Instructional partner – co-plans, teaches, and assesses student learning



FOSTERS LITERACIES TO EMPOWER LIFE-LONG LEARNERS

- Student literacy
- Research and inquiry
- Communication skills
- Media literacy and digital citizenship



IS A SCHOOL LEADER

- Partners with school leadership to achieve school goals
- Builds and shares professional knowledge
- Leads professional development opportunities
- Innovation and technology leader



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MISSION & VISION

BY CYNTHIA DUNCALFE

MY MISSION AS A TEACHER LIBRARIAN

I am an information specialist and instructional design collaborator, committed to empowering students to become critical thinkers, enthusiastic readers, skilled researchers, and confident creators.

INFORMATION SPECIALIST

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN
COLLABORATOR

EMPOWERING STUDENTS
TO BECOME:

CRITICAL THINKERS

ENTHUSIASTIC
READERS

SKILLED
RESEARCHERS

CONFIDENT
CREATORS

THE VISION OF A LEARNING COMMONS

The Library Learning Commons aims to create a collaborative and participatory learning environment through engaging physical and virtual spaces that empower students to become knowledge creators.

WHO? THE LIBRARY
LEARNING COMMONS

WHAT? AIMS TO CREATE A
COLLABORATIVE AND
PARTICIPATORY LEARNING
ENVIRONMENT

HOW? THROUGH ENGAGING
PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL
SPACES

WHY? TO EMPOWER
STUDENTS TO BECOME
KNOWLEDGE CREATORS.

FOUR WAYS THE PRINCIPAL AND TL PARTNER TO PROVIDE INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

MAXIMIZING STUDENT LEARNING TOGETHER

- TL has a seat at the table with the principal and other school leaders in starting, developing and implementing initiatives that maximize student learning and educational opportunities



FACILITATING CONNECTIONS BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS



- The principal and TL decide together LLC objectives, and the principal brings other department leads to the table to help ensure these objectives are met
- The TL and the principal co-author articles for the school newsletter and/or internal staff development

INVESTING IN OUR PARTNERSHIP

- Principal and TL meet together monthly to consider the LLC's role in achieving school-wide goals
- TL and the principal partner together to plan school-wide challenges and initiatives such as the Read-a-Thon



LEADING TOGETHER IN TEACHER DEVELOPMENT



- The principal considers what teachers need to facilitate inquiry-based learning and to use educational technology in effective ways, and directs them to the TL for coaching and professional development.

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Learning Commons Newsletter

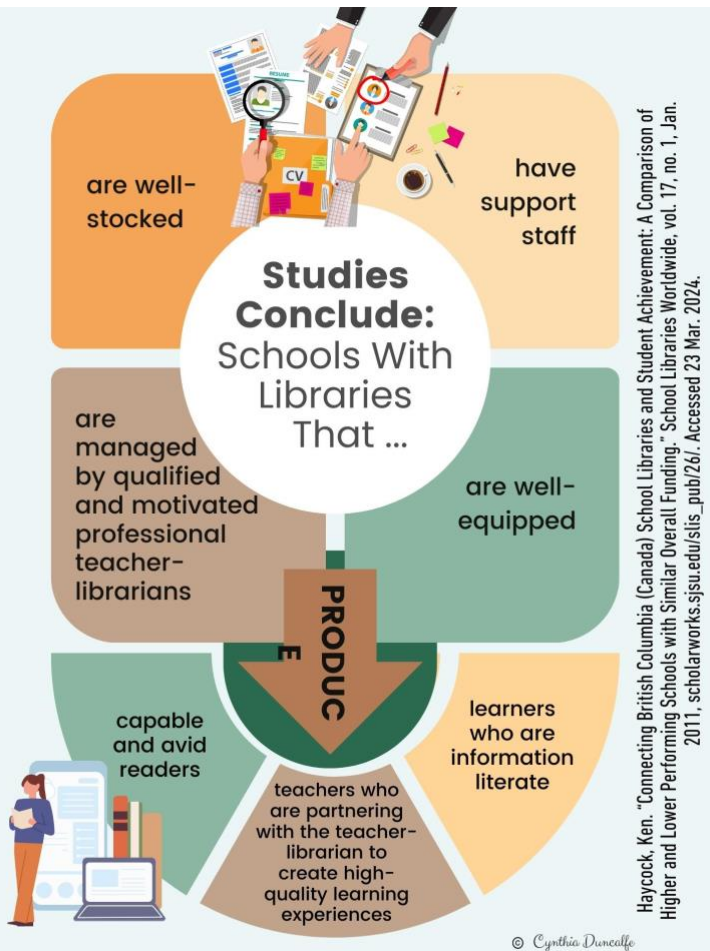
How Does the Learning Commons Advance our Learning Community?

Recent studies confirm "the findings of over 40 years of research ... about the positive impact of qualified teacher-librarians and school libraries on children and adolescents ... and "all have concluded that schools with well-stocked, well-equipped school libraries, managed by qualified and motivated professional teacher-librarians working with support staff produce a) capable and avid readers; b) learners who are information literate, and c) teachers who are partnering with the teacher-librarian to create high-quality learning experiences." (Haycock)

"Several library impact studies suggest test scores tend to be higher where administrators, teachers, and librarians themselves think of the school librarian as a school leader; as a teacher, co-teacher, and in-service professional development provider; as a curriculum designer, instructional resources manager, and reading motivator; and as a technology teacher, troubleshooter, and source of instructional support" (Lance & Schwarz)

"When schools have high-quality library programs and librarians who share their expertise with the entire school community, student achievement gets a boost." (Lance and Kachel)

Lance, Keith Curry, and Debra E. Kachel. "Why School Librarians Matter: What Years of Research Tell Us." Kappanonline.org. Kappan, 26 Mar. 2018. kappanonline.org/lance-kachel-school-librarians-matter-years-research/. Accessed 23 Mar. 2024.
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The Teacher Librarian: Your Collaborative Teaching Partner

Did you know your Teacher-Librarian is your professional partner in planning lessons and teaching your students?

I can help you teach your students digital citizen skills and integrate multiple literacies and a variety of diverse resources into your lessons

- Evaluate and curate websites
- teach students how to use our subscription and databases

I can provide personalized professional learning in various and technologies

Gizmos
 Canva
 explora An EBSCO Experience
 read&write by Google Chrome

I can work with you to co-plan, co-teach and co-assess a variety of high-quality learning experiences and units of instruction in face-to-face and virtual learning environments

- Design-thinking projects
- Inquiry projects

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School Librarians Transform Learning

School librarians ensure their students have the best chance to succeed.

"The internet makes doing research easier—easier to do well and easier to do poorly."¹

Increasing amounts of information demand students acquire the skills to select, evaluate, and use information appropriately and effectively.¹¹

"Your school librarian can help you co-plan and co-teach lessons that focus on the evaluation of sources and information, providing your students with the discernible eye they'll need to survive in college and the workplace."¹²

— Kimberly Shearer,
2012 Kentucky Teacher of the Year

STUDENTS

Equate research with Googling

Use search engines instead of more traditional sources

Lack the ability to judge the quality of online information¹¹¹

Today's Digital Technologies Teachers Report:

83% information available online is overwhelming for most students V

60% digital technologies make it harder for students to find and use credible sources of information VI

71% digital technologies discourage students from finding and using a wide range of sources

TEACHERS

Self-described "tech savvy" teachers are more likely (65%) to use media and technology in the classroom "a lot" than teachers who are "comfortable" (33%) or "uncomfortable" (12%) with it.¹¹¹

School librarians are enabling and empowering teachers' skills with digital content.

NOTES

¹ Purcell, Kristin, et al., 2012. How Teens Do Research in the Digital World. Pew Internet and American Life Project. www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2012/P12_TeacherSurveys.pdf

¹¹ Purcell, Kristin, et al., 2012. How Teachers Are Using Technology at Home and in Their Classrooms. Pew Internet and American Life Project. www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2012/P12_TeacherSurveys.pdf

¹¹¹ U.S. Search Engine Rankings. www.copysense.com/Insight/Market-Rankings/ComScore-Rankings-June-2014-US-Search-Engine-Rankings

¹¹¹¹ Purcell, Kristin, et al., 2013. How Teachers Are Using Technology at Home and in Their Classrooms. Purcell, Kristin, et al., 2013. How Teachers Are Using Technology at Home and in Their Classrooms. Purcell, Kristin, et al., 2013. How Teachers Are Using Technology at Home and in Their Classrooms. Purcell, Kristin, et al., 2012. How Teens Do Research in the Digital World.

Sources students are "very likely" to use in a research assignment.

- 42% Their peers
- 16% A librarian
- 18% Print or electronic textbooks
- 75% Wikipedia
- 52% YouTube/social media
- 17% Online databases
- 25% News sites of major news organizations¹¹¹
- 94% Google

Number of Google searches per month: **12.050 BILLION**

- 73% of teachers believe educational technology has the potential to "respond to a variety of learning styles" X
- 49% of teachers report that students' access to technology at home is one of the "biggest barriers to incorporating technology into their teaching" because the students are "often not digitally literate enough" XI
- 56% of teachers of the lowest-income students say that a lack of resources among students to access digital technologies is a "major challenge" to incorporating more digital tools into their teaching XII

SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

85% answer questions about technology tools

66% participate with teachers in professional learning communities

33% train teachers how to locate and evaluate digital content.¹¹¹

School libraries provide equitable physical and intellectual access to the resources and tools required for learning in a warm, stimulating, and safe environment. X III



AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

TRANSFORMING LEARNING

The AASL infographic School Librarians Transform Learning is part of the digital supplement to the Sept/Oct 2014 issue of ALA's American Libraries magazine. Members of the media and public are permitted to repost the PDF infographic, provided no alterations are made and that the posting is for educational, noncommercial purposes only. www.ala.org/aasl/digital-supplement/2014/American-Association-of-School-Librarians. All rights reserved.



READING IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS

KIDS WHO READ INDEPENDENTLY AT SCHOOL...

ARE MORE LIKELY TO



Find reading important

Enjoy reading

Read more frequently

EVERY CHILD DESERVES A SCHOOL LIBRARY

97%

OF PARENTS OF
KIDS AGES 0-17
AGREE

Every child
deserves a
school library



TIME SPENT ON INDEPENDENT READING AT SCHOOL

65%

OF KIDS AGES 6-17

Have the chance to
read independently
during the school day



KIDS WANT MORE TIME FOR INDEPENDENT READING

68%

OF KIDS AGES 6-17 SAY

I wish we would do this
more often

OR

It's one of my favourite
parts of the school day



HELP KIDS FIND BOOKS THEY LOVE

WHERE TO GET THE BEST BOOK IDEAS



Encourage kids to talk to peers about
books! Kids look to friends, siblings or
cousins for ideas.

50%

Ask teachers and school librarians!
Kids look to them for book ideas.

49%

Engage kids around books at home!
Parents or other adult family members
can be a good source for book ideas.

39%

Try out the school book club and book
fair with younger readers. Kids ages
6-11 discover new reads this way.

32%

SUMMER READING IS IMPORTANT AND FUN

BE A READING ROLE MODEL

Parents are kids' #1 source of
encouragement to read books for fun

82%

Followed by teachers &
school librarians

69%



Kids & Family Reading Report™: Canadian Edition
#KFRR | scholastic.ca/readingreport



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