



**THE WRITERS'  
UNION OF CANADA**

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## **The Writers' Union of Canada Protests the Retreat from School Library Support in Ontario**

The Writers' Union of Canada is deeply concerned about the on-going erosion of support for librarians, and for libraries themselves, within the Ontario school system, as outlined in several recent reports.

News stories published in two national newspapers this week show that some Ontario school boards have opted to invest in digital records in their school libraries instead of librarians and books. In particular, on May 16, *The Toronto Star* reported the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board (WECDSB) had already laid off all but four library staff and had plans for the "dismantling of all its libraries."

In response to questions from *The Globe and Mail* also on May 16, a WECDSB official explained that the board had "to get past the old concept of what libraries used to be" and that the board preferred to focus its resources on internet research. To be accurate, the jobs the WECDSB have decided to cut are those of library technicians, who are not allowed to teach in the Ontario system. However, it was also reported that the WECDSB had already begun to disperse the schools' library inventories and to dismantle the library space inside its schools. In a statement on its website, the WECDSB maintains that they are not getting rid of all the books, but that "books and resources...will be culled," and that "a text rich environment" will be created in elementary classrooms by making books suitable for a range of reading levels readily available to students.

Of course students should have access to books in classrooms, with the help of well-trained teachers. But every student should also have access to a good school library, too, well-resourced and run by qualified library staff.

Students at one school in Windsor have already staged a pro-library demonstration and *Shaw* media reported on 18 May that the Ontario Minister of Education has encouraged the Windsor-Essex board to reconsider the decision and for parents in the region to demand they be heard. Indeed, a new study published this week by People for Education, an independent, parent-led advocacy group, shows that poorer areas of the province in the north, southwest and east lag far behind central Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area in providing access to teacher librarians in elementary schools.

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“Strong literacy skills must be the foundation to our approach to education, and the world of books – both print and electronic – must be recognized as the surest domain for building literacy,” said Alan Cumyn, Chair of The Writers’ Union of Canada. “No one acts as a better guide and mentor for exploring the world of books than a well-trained librarian who will oversee both the regular updating of the collection and help point students to what is useful and worthwhile – whether it was just released this week, or is thousands of years old.”

The Writers’ Union of Canada strongly urges the Ontario Ministry to review the WECDSB decision and to assist those schools interested in maintaining their libraries, library staffs and universal student access to books by Canadian and other authors.

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The Writers’ Union of Canada is our country’s national organization representing professional authors of books. Founded in 1973, the Union is dedicated to fostering writing in Canada, and promoting the rights, freedoms, and economic well-being of all writers.