

# Building Bridges

## Your Child's School Library: What you should know

By Georgia Phillips, co-founder of The Hub: Campaign for Quality School Libraries in Australia

A quality school library is kid friendly and student focused.

The school library is not just a storehouse run by a loans assistant, but a vital learning centre, operating under the guidance of a *dual-trained teacher-librarian\**, in partnership with classroom teachers.

Learning today means more than memorizing facts. It means learning to learn for a lifetime. Savvy parents and educators know that the school library is key to teaching students not just to read but to practice the skills they need to seek, evaluate and use information throughout their lives. In fact, research shows those students from schools with professionally staffed, fully equipped libraries score higher on literacy and achievement tests.

### Does your child's school library measure up?

- Is there a qualified teacher librarian? Is there adequate support staff?
- Does your child have access to the school library anytime during the day that he/she needs to use its resources? Does the library offer remote access from home via computer?
- Is the school library budget adequate to provide a full range of both print and electronic resources?
- Is the library central to the school's literacy program?
- Are school administrators knowledgeable and supportive of the school library?
- Does the school provide ongoing training to support teachers and staff in learning about new technologies and integration of information skills?
- Are teachers encouraged to work with the teacher librarian to extend learning opportunities?
- Is there a process for ongoing evaluation of the school library?

Children cannot be educated to live and work in the 21st century using resources from the 1970s. Let your principal and school parent group and/or school board know of your concerns. Work with your principal to ensure support for the school library program.

Get to know your teacher librarian. Ask what the needs are and how you can help. Offer to volunteer your time.

Foster the love of reading by promoting reading at home and by regularly visiting your local public library. Read together with your child. Research shows that children who are read to in the home do better in school.

### KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

#### Key Finding #1:

"A school library program that is adequately staffed, resourced, and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socioeconomic or educational levels of the community." [School Libraries Work!](#) Scholastic, 2008.

#### Key Finding #2:

"Children who attend schools with school libraries with better collections and superior staffing do better on tests of reading." S. Krashen. "What do we know about libraries and reading achievement?" *Book Report*, 2002

#### Key Finding #3:

"Students learn more and produce better research products following planned, integrated information skills instruction by the teacher and teacher librarian together." K. Haycock. "What works: Integrated information skills instruction: *Teacher Librarian* 25, no. 2:39, 1997

#### Key Finding #4:

"Free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability and writing style." M.Lonsdale. [Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement](#). ACER, 2003.

#### Key Finding #5:

Australian research has shown that the school library plays a critical role in supporting student learning. L. Hay. "Student learning through Australian school libraries" [Synergy](#), 2005,2006.

Support legislators who support libraries and education. Let them know you think the two go together and should be a high priority.

### **Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians in Australian Schools**

Unfortunately, in Australia, over the past 15 years, principal autonomy in staffing, along with inadequate budgets, has led to the decline of qualified teacher librarians (TLs) in Victoria, Tasmania, and the ACT. 50% of Tasmanian schools and ACT primary schools now have no TLs. In Victoria this could now be as high as 87% of metropolitan primary schools. TLs are not required in WA primary schools. In Queensland TLs may not be placed in the library. Seven state high school libraries on the Gold Coast now do not have TLs. In South Australia 28% of primary libraries have no TLs. In the NT only 5% of schools have qualified teacher librarians. NSW is the only state still staffing trained teacher librarians in every school, but in primary schools they are generally used for teacher relief time, diminishing their leadership and teaching potential. It's possible that there are also dozens of schools in NSW where retiring TLs have not been replaced, or trials under the National Partnership Agreement has traded a TL for another position.

In March 2010, Julia Gillard initiated a House Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians. The committee's report <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ee/schoollibraries/report.htm> has now been published. After 382 submissions and hearings in every state and territory, the cross party House Committee on Education and Training has come to grips with the complex issue of declining numbers of qualified teacher librarians in our state schools.

The loss of tertiary training programs, inadequate staffing budgets, lack of national standards, ignorance of international research linking well-staffed and well-supported school libraries with student literacy and learning and the loss of state school advisory services and their corporate knowledge are just some of the causes identified in the hearings.

11 recommendations have been made. The government has until the end of August 2011 to respond. Ask your federal member to facilitate this. Ask your state member to address the issues. Every Australian student deserves a quality school library with a qualified teacher librarian.

Further information for Parents at The Hub: Campaign for Quality School Libraries in Australia.  
<http://hubinfo.wordpress.com>

Sources: AASL Advocacy Toolkit <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/toolkits/whatparentsshould.cfm>, K. C. Lance & D. V. Loertscher (2003) *Powering achievement: School library media programs make a difference: The evidence* 2nd ed. Hi Willow, Ontario School Library Association (n.d.) "How school library programs equal success for your child" and Wisconsin Department of Education (2006) Your child's school library media center.

*\*A teacher-librarian holds a recognised teaching qualification AND qualifications in librarianship, with curriculum and pedagogy knowledge combined with library and information management knowledge.*