

Every Australian student deserves a quality school library with a qualified teacher librarian.

Georgia Phillips

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.

How 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 any concerns. Work with your principal to ensure support for the school library program.

Get to know your teacher librarian. Ask about the needs of the library facility and how you can help. Offer to volunteer your time if you can – a small helping hand can make a big impact.

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.

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

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.

In March 2010, Julia Gillard initiated a [House Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians](#). Publication of the committee's report has been interrupted by the election. After 382 submissions and hearings in every state and territory, the cross party House Committee on Education and Training chaired by Sharon Bird, MP, 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.

It is vitally important that the report be published. And that its recommendations be acted upon. After the election, ask your local federal and state member. Every Australian student deserves a quality school library with a qualified teacher librarian.

Georgia Phillips is convenor of The Hub: Campaign for quality school libraries in Australia

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](#).