



## Students Need School Libraries

24 August 2022

Hon Jason Clare MP Minister for Education  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

### Urgent support needed for School Library Workforce

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Minister for Education and for your proactive steps to work with the states and territories to address the pressing challenges that include teacher demand, supply and retention. The national School Library Coalition writes today to draw your attention to the critical shortage of trained teacher librarians and paraprofessional library staff in Australian schools and seeks your support to arrest the decline and increase the number of qualified staff in school libraries.

The School Library Coalition represents the national and state-based associations representing school library professionals and paraprofessionals in Australia. The Coalition was formed to pursue the shared goal that, “All students in Australia should have equitable access to quality school library services delivered by qualified school library staff”, and supports the *Students Need School Libraries* campaign.<sup>1</sup>

To increase student and teacher wellbeing and educational outcomes, the School Library Coalition requests that you and your state and territory colleagues, act with urgency to:

- Support teachers and library staff to obtain library qualifications and access training;
- Guarantee resourcing for school libraries and school library staff; and
- Fund a national census of school libraries and staffing to identify areas of need and support workforce planning.

Teacher librarians hold dual expertise and qualifications as both teachers and information specialists. They work with students, teachers and school management to provide whole-school leadership in literacy programs that foster and embed a reading culture and information literacy

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<sup>1</sup> Students Need School Libraries. (2020). *Students Need School Libraries campaign*. <https://studentsneedschoollibraries.org.au/>

within a school community.<sup>2</sup> Despite the well-documented benefits for students and educational outcomes, however, the number of qualified teacher librarians, librarians and library technicians in schools is at a critical level. Exacerbating an already dire situation, the demographic profile of teacher librarians is of an older, female-dominated workforce; a substantial proportion of which is expected to retire within the next decade.

Qualified teacher librarians leading school libraries provide the vital connection between the Australian Curriculum's general capabilities, state and territory education departments' focus areas, and the classroom teacher. A strong body of national<sup>3</sup> and international<sup>4</sup> research highlights the positive impact of school libraries managed by qualified staff on student achievement. For example, the recent Australian Council for Educational Research's (ACER) *School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census* indicated that students' reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation outcomes at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 were positively associated with the qualification level of the person managing the library. The study concluded that students in schools with a qualified teacher librarian can have up to two months' learning gain when compared to students in schools where no qualified person managed the library.<sup>5</sup>

Teachers also benefit from having a well-resourced school library managed by qualified staff who undertake essential activities such as resourcing the curriculum, teaching information literacy, promoting reading and maintaining a supportive and nurturing environment to support reading and literacy development, assisting teachers and students to locate and critically evaluate information and synthesise their findings into new knowledge, and collaboratively working with teachers to design and implement inquiry-based learning programs. School libraries are also essential to ensure equity of access to information in an increasingly digital world, attendance to diversity and inclusion, and student wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> In the absence of well-resourced school libraries with qualified staff, these essential activities either do not occur or fall on the shoulders of already overburdened classroom teachers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Australian Education Union (SA Branch). (2021). *School Library Staffing Policy*. [https://www.aeusa.asn.au/Web/Policies/School\\_library\\_staffing.aspx](https://www.aeusa.asn.au/Web/Policies/School_library_staffing.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> Hughes, H. (2013). School libraries and teacher-librarians: Evidence of their contribution to student literacy and learning. *Curriculum and Leadership Journal*, 11(12), 1-5.  
Lonsdale, M. (2003). *Impact of school libraries on student achievement: A review of the research (Report for the Australian School Library Association)*. Melbourne, Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). [https://research.acer.edu.au/tli\\_misc/23](https://research.acer.edu.au/tli_misc/23)  
Softlink. (2016). Softlink Australian School Library Survey: A five-year review. *Access*, 30(2), 26-32. <https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=134081305399604;res=IELHSS>

<sup>4</sup> Scholastic Library Publishing. (2016). *School libraries work! A compendium of research supporting the effectiveness of school libraries* (2016 ed.). <http://www.scholastic.com/SLW2016>

<sup>5</sup> Dix, K., Felgate, R., Ahmed, S., Carslake, T., & Sniedze-Gregory, S. (2020). *School libraries in South Australia 2019 Census*. Australian Council for Educational Research. <https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-583-6>

<sup>6</sup> Dearnaley, M. (2020). A snapshot of a school library during COVID-19. *Access*, 34(2), 22–25.  
Merga, M. K. (2022). *School libraries supporting literacy and wellbeing*. London, Facet Publishing.  
Raffaele, D. (2021). Cultivating the 'Third Place' in school libraries to support student wellbeing. *Synergy*, 19(1). <https://slav.vic.edu.au/index.php/Synergy/article/view/489>

<sup>7</sup> Garrison, K., & FitzGerald, L. (2019). 'It trains your Brain': Student reflections on using the Guided Inquiry Design Process. *Synergy*, 15(2). <https://slav.vic.edu.au/index.php/Synergy/article/view/v15220179>  
Lance, K. C. & Kachel, D. E. (2018). Why school librarians matter: What years of research tell us. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 99(7), 15-20.

Despite the positive findings of the previously mentioned ACER census in SA, the study also found that only 23% of schools had a qualified teacher librarian managing the school library and more than 50% of school libraries were managed by someone with no library qualifications. Larger, wealthier metropolitan schools were most likely to have qualified library staff. Currently, no other data exist to provide an accurate snapshot of school libraries and staffing across the country. Anecdotal evidence from other states and territories, however, points to a situation similar to that in South Australia. By conducting a national census to identify areas of need and support regarding school libraries, the School Library Coalition, education departments, and training organisations will be better prepared for workforce planning in school libraries.

The Coalition respectfully requests a seat at the table when discussing teacher workloads to ensure that teacher librarians are included in the staffing quota for schools and to ensure appropriate training for all school library personnel. These targets can be achieved by supporting teachers and library staff to obtain library qualifications, as seen by ACT Labor Government's policy on *Supporting Teachers to Become Teacher Librarians*, and in the provision of staffing mandates, such as that for NSW public schools, that require a teacher librarian in every school.<sup>8</sup> There is also a need to guarantee resourcing for school libraries and school library staff to ensure students are able to actively engage in the curriculum and gain a high level of achievement in their learning.

In the lead up to the Jobs and Skills Summit hosted by Treasury on the 1st-2nd of September, 2022, we appreciate the opportunity to bring these issues to your attention and would be happy to supply you with any further information or advice that supports your work to ensure a strong school library workforce in the future.

Yours sincerely

School Library Coalition



<sup>8</sup> ACT Government. (2021). *Supporting Teachers to become Teacher Librarians*.  
[https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open\\_government/inform/act\\_government\\_media\\_releases/yvette-berry-mla-media-releases/2021/supporting-teachers-to-become-qualified-teacher-librarians](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/act_government_media_releases/yvette-berry-mla-media-releases/2021/supporting-teachers-to-become-qualified-teacher-librarians)  
Teach NSW, NSW Government. (2022). *Explore teaching as a career. Specialist teachers: Teacher librarians*.  
<https://education.nsw.gov.au/teach-nsw/explore-teaching/types-of-teachers/specialist-teachers/teacher-librarian>