

# AEU School Libraries Campaign

Dear Principal Member,

School libraries have the potential to be the vibrant hub of every school but this relies heavily on whether the school library program is well-resourced, appropriately staffed with a mix of professional and support staff and adequately funded. Unfortunately, for many schools, this is not the situation.

In recent decades, school libraries and the programs, services and facilities they provided for staff and students have been eroded by economic rationalism, a slide that became a landslide in 1991 with the impact of CRESAP. A huge reduction in teacher numbers and funding levels meant that schools faced difficult budgetary choices. Funding levels for school libraries were amongst the hardest hit, failing to keep up with inflation and the spiralling cost of resources.

Staffing levels were also compromised post-CRESAP, as high school teacher-librarians were placed on the teaching staff quota and required to compete with classroom teachers for positions on staff. This and other significant factors, such as the closure of the University of Tasmania's Graduate Diploma of Librarianship course for over a decade, have contributed to a serious reduction in the numbers of qualified teacher librarians.

Currently there is a wide disparity in the budgets allocated to school libraries that is completely dependent on the priority given it within individual schools. This has not only produced huge inequity between the public and the private schools - the Independent and the Catholic Schools generally having better staffing, resources and facilities than the public schools - but also inequity within the public schools. It is a major focus of this campaign to redress this imbalance that exists between the public and the private sectors and within the public sector, to ensure that all students have fair and equitable access to quality school libraries with qualified staffing to guide and support their learning.

As recently as 2003, the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) conducted a review of National and International research from 1990 to 2002. In this study, Lonsdale identified the positive impact of school library programs on student achievement, whether those achievements were measured as test scores, reading scores, literacy or learning more generally.

1. A strong library program that is adequately staffed, resourced and funded can lead to higher student achievement regardless of the socio-economic or educational levels of the adults in the community;
2. a strong computer network connecting the library's resources to the classrooms and laboratories has an impact on student achievement;
3. the quality of the collection has an impact on student learning;
4. test scores are higher when there is higher usage of the school library;
5. collaborative relationships between classroom teachers and school librarians have a significant impact on learning, particularly in relation to the planning of instructional units, resource collection development, and the provision of professional development for teachers;
6. a print-rich environment leads to more reading, and free voluntary reading is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary growth, spelling and grammatical ability, and writing style;
7. integrating information literacy into the curriculum can improve students' mastery of both content and information seeking skills;
8. libraries can make a positive difference to students' self-esteem, confidence, independence and sense of responsibility in regard to their own learning. <sup>1</sup>

In the light of these findings, the AEU Council has called for a sustained campaign through school communities to ensure that schools gain additional funding to provide the best library and information management for students and teachers.

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Impending changes to the post-year ten sector provide teachers and the community with an excellent opportunity to negotiate for best practice in resourcing the new educational structures as they are currently being developed.

We look forward to working with you and the AEU members in your school or college towards these ends.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L Wright." The signature is written in a cursive style with a period at the end.

Leanne Wright  
AEU Tasmanian Branch President

<sup>1</sup> Lonsdale, M. 2003,  
*Impact of School Libraries on Student Achievement: A Review of the Research*,  
Camberwell, Vic., ACER, p. 1