

March 3, 2008

The Hon. Mark McGowan BA LLB MLA
Minister for Education & Training
21st Floor,
197 St. George's Terrace,
PERTH 6000

Dear Minister,

The Western Australian School Library Association is delighted to see your commitment to the educational outcomes of all students in Western Australia with the provision of 27 new schools in Western Australia, with another 39 still to come. We are also pleased to see the federal government's commitment to ensuring funding for national secondary school computers to provide a 21st century education system.

We seek to raise two important issues with you that are essential to the successful implementation of a digital education program. The first is the need for access to quality electronic resources. You will be aware that information on the Internet is of variable quality and reliability. Australian libraries, including school libraries, have together selected quality electronic resources covering general reference (including encyclopaedia), Australian news & business information and health information through a national consortium (<http://era.nla.gov.au/>). These products have been selected through a tender process and represent sources which all schools should have access to. At present only a small number of schools can afford these resources and we recommend that the digital education program consider purchase of these resources to support a quality outcome for students and teachers.

Secondly, Western Australian students need support from qualified teacher librarians to enable them to gain on-line research skills to use the computers which will be available through secondary schools. At present it is not mandatory in schools to have qualified teacher librarians. It has been shown in the past through independent surveys that having the school library staffed by qualified teacher librarians has a positive impact on student learning. The role of the teacher librarian has changed significantly in recent times, particularly where information communication technologies are concerned. Teacher librarians contribute significantly to student technology and information literacies.

We would urge you to ensure that teacher librarians are employed in the foundation staffing of each of the new schools being established by your government. The President and committee of WASLA would be pleased to discuss with you both the potential for qualified teacher librarians in all schools in Western Australia and the potential for access to quality information resources.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Jenny Dickman,
President