Good Morning,

This is an open letter to all politicians in Western Australia, schools and parents from the Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA).

You may not be aware that one of the final stages in the devolution of Education in this state has now occurred. All resourcing and support for Govt schools and their libraries has now been devolved to the school level - DET used to provide some centralised support, but this is no longer the case. DET is also trying to shift responsibility for managing libraries, selecting resources and caring for students to unqualified personnel - level 1/2 Library Officers and Library Technicians (Professional Institute of Learning, Department of Education). These library personnel are being asked ot take on professional duties such as teaching and supervision and the duty of care for students, plus the management duties of a qualified Teacher Librarian.

WASLA wants to alert all politicians about the changes currently occurring, largely by stealth since there has been no announcement as far as the Association is aware.

What does this mean for schools and education in WA?

* For teachers and students the newly built school libraries are not staffed by Teacher Librarians (TLs), and school library resources that do not reflect best selection criteria to meet the needs of all students and are relevant to the curriculum (particularly the Australian curricum that has some particular resource requirements). The school library provides a wide range of resources across all reading, cognitive levels and formats to support learning across all curriculum areas and for all children in the school
* The gap between the Independent and Government schools has now widened considerably - the Independent schools have much better staffing models than government schools. We now have a 2-tiered education system in WA - one for the 'haves' and one for the 'have-nots'.
* There will be no one in schools whose role is to teach, support and maintain literacy and information literacy skills - our 15 YOs have some of the lowest literacy NAPLAN scores in Australia. Adult literacy levels in Australia also rank below other countries (Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, 2006). Over 40 years of international research including the OECD PISA Report in 2002 indicate that professionally staffed libraries make a significant difference to academic achievement and literacy levels, even overcoming economic disadvantage. The Australian Government's own research indicates that higher levels of student English literacy achievement are associated with use of the library. 2012 is the National Year of Reading - who will be actioning this initiative in WA Govt schools?
* The Federal Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher Librarians has just been released and is ongoing. NSW has already legislated for a TL in every school. At the Federal Government Inquiry session held in Perth last year DET's response was to shift responsibility back to the school level. So education in WA is moving forward according to an outdated devolution agenda first set during the Burke tenure of government in the 1980s.
* With the demise of DET section CMIS Evaluation there is no resource support for WA schools. This will impact signficantly on smaller rural/remote area schools which do not have trained personnel or in some cases libraries that are so poorly resourced that curriculum programs are not supported at all (Australian School Library Research project, 2008). For teachers in these schools the lack of support has significant ramifications and will impact even further on the attrition rate of new teachers (up to 30%).

Devolution of Education as first promulgated by the Burke Government was always part of the era of economic rationalism and the tranistion of an essential public service (Education) to a business model. Since staffing is now also controlled at the school level, the demise of libraries and an Information Specialist (TL) in schools is almost complete - this at a time when information access and the skills to be able to manage and use information are major issues for students entering tertiary study and the workforce. Information overload is the single greatest issue for people trying to cope in today's society.

WASLA would like the politicians of WA to respond to the general public and explain why we have a 2-tiered education system in WA, why education in WA appears to be out-of-step with other Australian states and current Federal Government initiatives, and why the State Government is not taking action to ensure equal opportunties in Education for all children across WA.

Yours sincerely

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