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31 August, 2008

Hon. Colin Barnett MLA
Leader of the Opposition,
Suite 12,
589 Stirling Highway,
COTTESLOE WA 6011

Dear Sir,

The Western Australian School Library Association is delighted to see your commitment to the educational outcomes of all students in Western Australia as detailed in the article in The Sunday Times on 24 August.

Our members would greatly appreciate a response from you on the recent articles in The West Australian by Bethany Hiatt, on 20 and 23 August, 2008. On 23 August it was reported that schools have teens who cannot read and the article raised the need to trial computerised reading programs in an effort to increase teenage literacy. However, on 20 August the report stated that one of the solutions to the current teacher shortages is to remove teacher librarians from the library and replace them with non-teaching staff. The reading and information literacy programmes developed and implemented by teacher librarians throughout this state, contribute significantly to increased literacy standards for Western Australian students.

In addition, with the Federal government initiative of ensuring funding for computers in national secondary schools to provide a 21st century education system, it is imperative that qualified teacher librarians be available in all schools. Western Australian teachers need the support that collaboration with qualified teacher librarians brings in assisting students to develop quality on-line research and presentation skills that are implicit in the use of these computers. At present it is not mandatory in schools to have qualified teacher librarians. However, it has been shown in the past through independent surveys that having a well-resourced school library staffed by qualified teacher librarians has a positive impact on student learning.

We urge your party to support the employment of teacher librarians in the foundation staffing of any new schools in Western Australia and indeed to ensure that qualified teacher librarians are employed in all schools.

Our members would like your undertaking that should you be elected, we can expect:

- Recognition of the significant role of school libraries and teacher librarians in Literacy and other Education initiatives.
- Inclusion of statements supporting the significant role of school libraries and teacher librarians in Education policy.
- State funded research into the impact of Australian school libraries on the literacy skills and academic achievement of students at all levels and across all sectors.
- Development and validation of standards for school library facilities and staffing.

In this election year, we look forward to hearing how your policies and programs will address the issues raised for schools libraries and teacher librarians. We ask that you give due consideration to all areas of education and the crucial role of school libraries and qualified, quality staff to assist students with their life long learning at every level of their education.

The President and committee of WASLA would be pleased to discuss with you the improved student outcomes that can be achieved with the employment of qualified teacher librarians in all schools in Western Australia.

Yours faithfully,

Jenny Dickman
President

cc Hon. A.J. Carpenter, Premier.
Mr. R. Fry, President, WACSSO