

THEN AND NOW – Impact of Underfunding on Public School Libraries Fact sheet

What teacher-librarians told us about how funding shortages affect school libraries:

This section lists the main points described by teacher-librarians about changes in school libraries as a result of ongoing cutbacks to library budgets. This list is based on key points emerging from the qualitative analysis conducted for the B.C. Teachers' Librarian Association on the learning and working conditions in school libraries. A Fact Sheet documenting cuts to library budgets and staff as well as research on the educational benefits of fully funding school libraries is included at the end of the document.

Then

- Teacher-librarians collaborating with teachers on class projects
- Students having full access to the library and a teacher- librarian.
- Library support staff to help maintain the library and interact with students.
- Lots of students checking out books on a regular basis.
- Current library collection.
- Vibrant learning space.
- Nurturing and cozy place for students to enjoy reading.
- The heart of the school.
- Full of student activity.
- Reading clubs, homework clubs, and other library-based programs.
- The school library as a social safety net for children.

Now

- “Have and have not schools” - conditions vary greatly depending on fund-raising resources outside of the school budget allocation to the library, and whether the principal views the library as a priority.
- The disappearing teacher-librarian – full-time teacher-librarian positions whittled away - jobs are fragmented.
- Limited student access to the library (library is either closed, or open with no librarian available for students on some or all of the time)
- Little time to teach research skills, or do the programs that promote literacy.
- Limited or no collaboration with classroom teachers
- Outdated book collections
- Lower circulation of books as students have less access to library.
- Less support staff to process books, or assist with library programs.
- Empty libraries – quiet, stagnant space.
- Loss of or losing a safe nurturing space for children.
- No money to keep up with technology or maintain a current book collection.
- Reference and regular book collection several years out of date.
- Boxes of books waiting to be processed, for schools with enough funds to purchase books due to lack of library support staff.
- Limited computer access, computers that are not working.
- Dependent on PAC or other sources for meeting basic needs of the library.
- Children and teachers feel less connected to the library.
- Erosion of the library as a nurturing place to learn for young students.

CUTTING SCHOOL LIBRARIES - THE WRONG WAY TO IMPROVE STUDENT LITERACY.

DID YOU KNOW?

Library budgets have fallen dramatically: Between 2001-02 and 2007-08, library budget allocation per FTE student fell from \$14.80 to \$13.30 in secondary schools, and \$12.83 to \$12.39 in elementary schools, according to the B.C. Teacher-Librarians' Association (BCTLA) most recent survey¹. This is less than half the amount recommended by the Canadian School Library Association's² (2003) standards for achieving student literacy.

Teacher-librarians positions decreased significantly: In 2001, the Liberal government removed protection of specialist teaching positions from the collective agreement. Between 2001-02 and 2007-08, almost 200 FTE teacher-librarian positions were eliminated³. Diminishing FTE assignments means teacher-librarians have less time to interact with students, collaborate with teachers or teach research and literacy skills. Eliminating teacher-librarians goes against sound educational research. Dr. Haycock's⁴ comprehensive review of current research revealed that the educational performance of students is higher in schools with a full-time teacher-librarian who engages in classroom collaboration, teaches literacy skills and is involved in technology programs.

Library support positions undermined: Library assistants and clerical workers provide invaluable support to the school library, by processing library books, working at the circulation desk, and assisting with library programs. Increasingly, the time of the teacher-librarians goes to maintaining the library, reducing the time for professional activities that increase student literacy.

Students have less access to the library: Less library staff means many school libraries now close for part or most of the week. Students lose access to a unique place that nurtures a love of reading and builds a sense of connection to the school. An Ontario study⁵ of elementary school libraries found that the presence of a teacher-librarian was strongly linked to increased reading enjoyment, which in turn improved student performance. Dr. Haycock also cited research showing that having a school library open all day, staffed with a teacher-librarian, improves educational outcomes for students.

School library collections are greatly out-dated: As a result of on-going budget cutbacks, school libraries are less able to purchase new books or technology. In the BCTLA survey, many schools reported having outdated book collections and inadequate computer resources. Over time this can have an adverse effect on literacy. Dr. Haycock's literature review revealed that students in school libraries with higher spending on books and other materials scored higher on reading tests.

Growing inequities between schools districts – "Have" and "Have not" Schools: School-based budgeting often means library budgets are cut to maintain other core positions, leaving school libraries increasingly dependent on local fund-raising. This creates major inequities within and between school districts. Many school libraries in the province are operating with minimal budgets and little or no fund-raising. In contrast, schools in high income communities have the capacity to raise considerable sums of money. As reading scores are correlated with access to library resources, this off-loading of costs to the community widens the literacy gap between economically advantaged students and those who live in less well-off communities.

Working conditions eroded for library staff: Ongoing budget cutbacks erode the working conditions of teacher-librarians and library support staff as they earn less overall income, accrue smaller pensions and work unpaid overtime to try to keep up with work demands. Some teacher-librarians work in one or more part-time assignments to make up a full-time job with little security as to what the next year will bring.

¹ British Columbia Teacher Librarians' Association. (Forthcoming). *27th Annual Report - Working and learning conditions survey. Summer 2008.*

² Canadian School Library Association and the Association for School-Libraries in Canada. (2003). *Achieving information literacy: Standards for school libraries.*

³ Hawkey, C. (2007). *Teacher-Librarians in British Columbia: 1997-98 to 2006-07.* BC Teachers' Federation Research Report. Updated to 2007-08 with Form 1530 data, Ministry of Education.

⁴ Haycock, K. (2003). *The crisis in Canada's school libraries: The case for reform and re-investment.* Toronto: Association of Canadian Publishers.

⁵ Ontario Library Association. (2006). *School libraries and student achievement in Ontario.*