



21 October 2024

Committee Secretary
Senate Education and Employment Committees
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Dear Committee Secretary,

Better and Fairer Schools (Funding and Reform) Bill 2024 [Provisions]

The Australian Coalition for School Libraries (ACSL) provides a united and professional voice to advocate for Australian school libraries in the interests of improved learning and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people. The members of ACSL are the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), Queensland School Library Association (QSLA); School Library Association of New South Wales (SLANSW); School Library Association of South Australia (SLASA); School Library Association of Victoria (SLAV); Western Australian School Library Association (WASLA); and the Australian School Library Association (ASLA).

ACSL strongly believes that all students in Australia should have the resources they need for their schooling. Currently, in Australia, there is substantial inequity in the provision of school library services, tied to inadequate school funding. Equitable provision of this most effective school resource should be central to the practical reforms needed to help students 'catch up, keep up and finish school'¹.

Australian and international evidence shows us that access to a school library run by qualified staff not only improves student literacy and numeracy outcomes² but that school libraries are also essential supports for teachers and

¹ The Hon Jason Clare MP, 'Albanese Government introduces legislation to increase funding for public schools', *Ministers' Media Centre: Ministers of the Education Portfolio*.
<https://ministers.education.gov.au/clare/albanese-government-introduces-legislation-increase-funding-public-schools>

² House Standing Committee on Education and Employment. (2011). *Inquiry into school libraries and teacher librarians in Australian schools*.
https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=ee/school-libraries/report.htm
https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/house_of_representatives_committees?url=ee/schoollibraries/report.htm

the wider school community. Having no, or an under-resourced, school library impedes whole-of-school literacy programs (including information, media and digital literacy) and curriculum resourcing as well as increasing the workload of teachers.

Despite the known impact of school libraries, there is currently no systematic data collection about the provision, resourcing or staffing of school libraries across Australia, so it is impossible for equity gaps to be identified and addressed. ACSL is aware that in Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory it has becoming increasingly rare to find a public school with a school library run by qualified staff, yet we are unable to refer to exact data to demonstrate the educational inequality this is creating between government and non-government schools.

There is a strong body of national research³ into the positive impacts, or conversely the negative impacts that a lack of access to, a strong school library has on students. This is supported by a wealth of international research⁴ yet we know that there has been a substantial decline in the staffing of school libraries over the past two decades. The *School Libraries in South Australia 2019 Census*⁵ showed that only 23% of all schools in South Australia now have a qualified teacher librarian.

Lack of targeted funding has led to school leaders having to make the unenviable decision to impact educational opportunities for students (and

³ ACT Government. (2019). *School libraries: The heart of 21st century learning*. https://www.education.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1435435/School-Libraries-The-Heart-of-21st-Century-Learning.pdf

Godfree, H., & Oddone, K. (2023). Teacher librarian as mentor: A vision for improving school outcomes. *Australian Educational Leader*, 45(1), 48–51. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.108171677371293>

Merga, M.K. (2019). *Librarians in schools as literacy educators: Advocates for reaching beyond the classroom*. Springer International Publishing AG. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21025-0_4

⁴ Lance, K.C. & Hofschire, L. (2012). *Change in school librarian staffing linked with change in CSAP reading performance, 2005 to 2011*. Library Research Service. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572250.pdf>

Lance, K.C. & Schwarz, B. (2012). *How Pennsylvania school libraries pay off: Investments in student achievement and academic standards*. RSL Research Group, Louisville, Colorado. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED543418.pdf>

Lance, K.C., Schwarz, B. & Rodney, M.J. (2014). *How libraries transform schools by contributing to student success: Evidence linking South Carolina school libraries and PASS & HSAP results*. South Carolina Association of School Libraries. <https://www.scasl.net/assets/phase%20i.pdf>

Sikora, J., Evans, M.D.R. & Kelley, J. (2019). Scholarly culture: How books in adolescence enhance adult literacy, numeracy and technology skills in 31 societies. *Social Science Research*, 77, 1-15

⁵ Dix, K., Felgate, R., Ahmed, S., Carslake, T., & Sniedze-Gregory, S. (2020). *School libraries in South Australia 2019 Census*. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). <https://doi.org/10.37517/978-1-74286-583-6>

support for teachers) by not resourcing a school library.⁶ The clear correlation between qualified school library staff, well-funded school libraries and positive student learning outcomes demonstrates how an investment in school libraries is one of the best investments in public education that the Australian Government could make.

To support better and fair schooling for all students, ACSL recommends that:

1. The Australian, state and territory governments provide adequate resources for schools and students.
2. The Australian Government develop a central register on the provision, resourcing and staffing of school libraries to provide a source of data to track equity in library provision, and the impact on student learning and wellbeing outcomes and school completion.
3. The Australian government commits to a target that every Australian public school student has access to a well-resourced school library run by qualified staff.

We would be happy to answer any questions from the committee and discuss the solution for truly better and fairer schools for Australia.

Questions to ACSL can be directed to education@alia.org.au.



⁶ Lance, K. C., Kachel, D. E., Breevoort, L., Gerrity, C., & Ellis, D. (2023). Voices of decision-makers: how district & school leaders decide about school librarian employment. SLIDE: The School Librarian Investigation—Decline or Evolution? <https://libSLIDE.org/publications/voices>