

SOFTLINK INTERNATIONAL



SUBMISSION TO THE
INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

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INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL LIBRARIES AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

SOFTLINK INTERNATIONAL

Softlink International is a longstanding supplier to schools in Australia, providing leading-edge Library Management Systems for school libraries. Established in 1983, Softlink is an Australian company with a global footprint encompassing 108 countries, with more than 10,000 clients. Softlink's library management solutions are used in more than 40% of Australian school libraries. Softlink's head office is in Brisbane, Queensland, with regional offices in Oxford (UK), Seattle (USA), and Auckland (NZ).

Softlink strives to support student literacy development along with learning and education improvements. Softlink's systems are powerful tools for students, librarians and teachers allowing key interaction between students, the library and parents. This is accomplished through core web based applications as well as full library management and administrative functions.

Drawing on experience from around the world, Softlink is a strong supporter of school libraries and teacher librarians in Australia.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From Softlink's experience, there are widespread inconsistencies in the funding of school libraries and the provision of suitable professionals to work within them. These differences result from inconsistent priorities and policies for school libraries across all levels of education providers. This position is somewhat surprising given the evidence that appropriate funding and resourcing of school libraries has a positive impact on a number of key educational outcomes, including literacy outcomes, for students.

Softlink's 2010 survey validates its long held position that school libraries should be more adequately and consistently funded and given greater access to appropriately trained teacher librarians.

Softlink wishes to make 3 recommendations to the Inquiry:

1. That an Australia wide study be commissioned to identify and quantify the relationship between library funding, access to teacher librarians and literacy outcomes;
2. That a mechanism be established by which the funding and allocation of teacher librarian resources to school libraries is monitored and reported so as to allow consistent policies on school libraries to be developed and adopted across major education providers in Australia;
3. That school libraries that have received Federal Government funding be reviewed for adequate ongoing annual budgets to ensure the library is adequately resourced.

SOFTLINK'S SURVEY OF SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

In preparing this submission, Softlink conducted a survey and invited responses from 6,000 schools across Australia. Data has been compiled from these responses and has been used to illustrate key points in this submission.

Softlink analysed responses equating to approximately 5% of all Australian schools. The trends and results of the survey provide indicative data relationships, which are referred to through this submission. For a more comprehensive description of the survey methodology, please refer to Appendix A.

LITERACY AND THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

It is clear that the role of the school library remains central to education and literacy. This has been understood for some time. For example, the Management Committee reporting on the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey concluded that:

“Schools differ markedly in average levels of literacy achievement. There appear to be a number of factors associated with higher levels of literacy achievement in schools. Students in schools where teachers make greater use of the school library with their classes tend to have higher levels of literacy achievement.”

The evidence in the 1996 study clearly linked a well-utilised library with improved literacy outcomes. This study found that library use was more likely to predict literacy outcomes than the gender of the student, the frequency of homework, or the experience of the teacher. These correlations proved to be even stronger in the early years of education. It is worthy of note, that on the same scale, the level of library usage was on a par with socio-economic factors in predicting literacy outcomes.

Softlink’s 2010 survey reveals a positive correlation between higher NAPLAN literacy scores and two key library resourcing indicators. It was found that:

- There was a significant positive correlation between the annual school library budget and NAPLAN Reading Literacy results for the school;
- There was a significant positive correlation between the number of school librarians employed in the school library and NAPLAN Reading Literacy results for the school;
- Both the budget and librarian correlations strengthen as students progressed from grade 3 through to grade 9;

Therefore, schools that invested in their libraries by allocating larger budgets and more school librarian resources appeared to achieve higher literacy results.

It is clear that those responding to Softlink’s survey agree with the importance of school libraries in educating children.

- When asked to respond to the statement, “Investing in school libraries and school librarians will improve literacy outcomes for students”, 99 % either agreed or strongly agreed.
- When asked to respond to the statement, “School libraries and school librarians contribute to improved educational and community outcomes.” 99% either agreed or strongly agreed.

Softlink maintains that the role of the school library remains central to education and literacy.

SCHOOL LIBRARY FUNDING AND DEVELOPMENT

SCHOOL LIBRARY BUDGET TRENDS

It is apparent that many Australian school libraries are allocated low annual budgets without appropriate access to qualified teacher librarians, and run the risk of being underfunded or understaffed. Softlink has observed this trend over a number of years.

Referring to the survey responses, there appears to be a clear inconsistency between annual school library budgets across education providers. From the survey it appears:

- Government secondary schools receive annual budget funding equivalent to 80% of funding for all other types of schools.
- Government primary schools receive an average of 84% of funding of all other types of schools.
- There are funding inconsistencies between the states for comparable school libraries.

This same data also suggests that where student populations are similar in size, primary school libraries are generally funded one third less than secondary schools. Softlink argues that this funding inconsistency may put at risk the development of Australia's primary school children.

The inconsistencies apparent in the survey results reflect Softlink's experiences over many years. The lack of guidance and policy across Australia's education providers has meant that the funding decisions for school libraries are generally left to local administrators and principals, some of whom do not appreciate the central role the school library plays in their mission.

To this end, to enable and assist in the understanding of these trends on an ongoing basis, Softlink recommends a monitoring mechanism be implemented. This should monitor school library budget funding, school size, and library staffing levels for schools Australia wide. This mechanism should provide core supporting information on an ongoing basis to assist policy formulation.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

19% of schools responding to the Softlink survey had received federal government funding for the school's library. There is a concern, however, whether the full benefit of the funding allocated to schools for the building of new libraries will be realised. There is a risk that these new libraries will not have sufficient supporting resources such as qualified teacher librarians, student resources and library management facilities.

- Of the schools that have received over \$150,000 in funding for the school library, 22% of these receive annual budgets of less than \$5,000, with 56% operating on annual budgets of less than \$10,000.

Softlink recommends that school libraries that have received Federal Government funding be reviewed for adequate ongoing annual budgets to ensure the school library is adequately resourced.

"We will have a new federally funded library by the end of 2010 but are finding our staffing and funding for resources being eroded at the same time."

One Response to Softlink's 2010 Library Survey

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS AND TEACHER LIBRARIANS

With the recent focus on, and the overall importance of student literacy, the availability of suitably qualified teacher librarians to guide students through their development in the library is imperative. Qualified teacher librarians play a key role within the schooling system, and in the development of literacy and information literacy of the student population. Their unique skills provide students with valuable learning resources within the school library. As noted by Spence, The highest value schools can receive from teacher librarians is when the teacher librarian actively works together with teachers and the school on or for the benefit of student education, literacy, school policy development, and developing learning activities for students (Spence, 2002).

Softlink's survey suggests a trend developing in which the resources of librarians and libraries are not being prioritised by school administrators. Accordingly this removes the focus and value within the school from the library and hence the school librarian.

FACTORS AFFECTING SCHOOL TEACHER LIBRARIAN RECRUITMENT

Further exacerbating the issues highlighted above, according to the Australian School Libraries Research Project (Combes, B. 2008), the aging teacher librarian population is beginning to reach a critical point, where nearly 90% of teacher librarians are over the age of 40, and 55% are aged over 55. This situation has the potential to very quickly place an increased strain on the recruitment of suitably trained teacher librarians. This is also highlighted when combined with the decreased availability of Teacher Librarian training programs around the country.

Softlink's survey suggests that students in Queensland secondary schools have on average access to 1 full time equivalent (FTE) school librarian, while other states appear to have a range of between 1.2 - 1.6 FTE School Librarians per school. In line with this statement, it does appear that access to teacher librarians appears to be easier in some states than others.

"The training of teacher librarians for the future is very important, as many of the brilliant and trained teacher librarians are nearing retirement age. The Education Department has done nothing to make sure that there will be suitable replacements"

One Response to Softlink's 2010 Library Survey

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES, SCHOOL LIBRARIANS AND THE SCHOOL LIBRARY

Digital technologies within the school environment assist and complement school libraries and school librarians, but should not be seen as a threat to, or replacement for them. The future of these technologies within the school library will increase greatly as time progresses; perhaps most notably in the short term will be the increase of E-Books, through the use of Digital Rights Management (DRM), enabling the time based loaning of e-books. Digital Learning Spaces and student 'portals' will also penetrate the schooling system, as is already the case in the United Kingdom where all schools are required to have Virtual Learning Platforms for student access.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ASSISTING LITERACY AND EDUCATION

There are many technologies which assist literacy and education in coordination with the library. Software which acts as a learning platform to educate students and adjusts in difficulty based on student progress is already in use, and is quite effective. From a monitoring viewpoint, there are also systems such as 'Literacy GPS', an application which develops reading age levels for library resources and is able to gauge changes in student reading literacy levels, based on student library usage. These applications work in coordination with the library, and assist in gaining an understanding on how school libraries can work with new technologies moving forward to improve student literacy.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES ASSISTING LIBRARIANS AND SCHOOL LIBRARIES

The tendency for online library access to occur away from the library and at home is now commonplace, and will become more so as time progresses. Ensuring schools have a suitably resourced library management system which makes such web access possible for students when away from the library should be investigated. The demand and requirement for 'anywhere' web access to information resources such as the school library catalogue has become expected, and does greatly increase the perceived value of the school library.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

It is apparent that there are widespread inconsistencies throughout Australia in the funding of school libraries, and the provision of suitable professionals to work within them. These differences result from inconsistent priorities and policies for school libraries across all levels of education providers and in all states. This position is somewhat surprising given the evidence that appropriate funding and resourcing of school libraries has a positive impact on literacy outcomes for students.

It is Softlink's long held position that school libraries should be more adequately and consistently funded and given greater access to appropriately trained teacher librarians.

In conclusion, Softlink's recommendations are:

1. That an Australia wide study be commissioned to identify and quantify the relationship between library funding, access to teacher librarians and literacy outcomes;
2. That a mechanism be established by which the funding and allocation of teacher librarian resources to school libraries is monitored and reported so as to allow consistent policies on school libraries to be developed and adopted across major education providers in Australia;
3. That school libraries which have received Federal Government funding be reviewed for adequate ongoing annual budgets to ensure the library is adequately resourced.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Research Methodology & Results

APPENDIX B - Summary of Survey Comments

REFERENCES

Spence, Sue (2002). Survey highlights major problems with library staffing. AEU Journal, SA Branch, December 2002. Retrieved from <http://www.slasa.asn.au/Advocacy/docs/aeusurveyarticle.pdf>

Combes, B. (2008). Australian School Libraries Research Project: A snapshot of Australian school libraries, Report 1. *Australian School Library Research Project*, ASLA, ALIA & ECU. Retrieved from <http://www.chs.ecu.edu.au/portals/ASLRP/publications.php>

Management Committee for the National School English Literacy Survey 1997, *Mapping Literacy Achievement: Results of the 1996 National School English Literacy Survey*, (G Harrington, Chair), Dept. of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Camberwell, Victoria.

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

NAPLAN:	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
Virtual Learning Platforms:	Software system designed to support teaching and learning in an educational setting.
Digital Rights Management:	‘Access control’ technologies that can be used by hardware manufacturers, publishers, copyright holders and individuals to impose limitations on the usage of digital content and devices

APPENDIX A - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SURVEY RESULTS

NATURE OF SOFTLINK'S SURVEY

Softlink sent requests to approximately 6,000 schools in Australia requesting their participation in an online survey directly related to the Inquiry into School Libraries and Teach Librarians in Australia's public and private schools. Softlink received 511 completed responses to this survey, equating to responses from approximately 5% of all Australian Schools.

OBJECTIVE

The objective for this survey was to gather data for school libraries and school librarians, so as to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and sentiments of school libraries and school librarians within Australia. To this end, Softlink's target survey participants were teachers, librarians, or administration staff of Australian Schools.

SURVEY

The Survey consisted of 18 questions, divided into the following 3 sections:

1. You and Your School (Contact and School Information)
2. Your School's Library (Information about School Library Usage)
3. The role of your School Library (attitudes surrounding school library issues)

QUESTIONS ASKED OF RESPONDENTS

Participants in this survey were asked to complete a number of questions. These included the following:

Question	Options for Answering Question
State	Australian States
Type of School	Government; Catholic; or Independent
Year Levels Catered for	Primary & Secondary, Primary, Secondary
Number of Students	Less than 100, 100-300, 300-600, 600-1000, 1000-1500, 1500-2000, 2000+
How many school librarians does your school employ? (In full time equivalents)	Free text response
What is your school's annual library budget?	Less than 5000, 5000-10,000, 10000-15,000, 15,000-20,000, 20,000+, Don't know
Has your school library had access to Federal Government funding within the last 18 months?	No, yes-less than \$50,000, Yes- \$50,000 - \$150,000, Yes \$150,000 – 4250,000, yes- \$250,000+
Recent Federal Government policies and funding have had an impact on our school library and its activities.	Strongly Agree 1; Agree 2; Unsure 3; Disagree 4; or Strongly Disagree 5;
School libraries and school librarians contribute to improved educational and community outcomes.	Strongly Agree 1; Agree 2; Unsure 3; Disagree 4; or Strongly Disagree 5;
Investing in school libraries and school librarians will improve literacy outcomes for students.	Strongly Agree 1; Agree 2; Unsure 3; Disagree 4; or Strongly Disagree 5;
Recruitment of suitably qualified school librarians has proven difficult for our school.	Strongly Agree 1; Agree 2; Unsure 3; Disagree 4; or Strongly Disagree 5;
Our school library partners with, and receives support from, the local community.	Strongly Agree 1; Agree 2; Unsure 3; Disagree 4; or Strongly Disagree 5;
Our school library partners with, and receives support, from other institutions.	Strongly Agree 1; Agree 2; Unsure 3; Disagree 4; or Strongly Disagree 5;
Digital technologies will continue to greatly enhance and support the roles of school libraries and librarians within the school.	Strongly Agree 1; Agree 2; Unsure 3; Disagree 4; or Strongly Disagree 5;

DATA ANALYSIS

Softlink recognises that there are statistical and methodological limitations on the information that can be drawn from this survey data. These limitations are the result of a number of factors:

1. A relatively short time frame for contributions extending over the Easter school holiday period;
2. The limited resources available for conducting this survey;
3. The statistical limitations inherent in sampling Softlink's corporate contact database.

Notwithstanding these limitations, Softlink considers that there is significant value in the information gained through the survey.

PROFILE OF SCHOOLS RESPONDING TO SURVEY

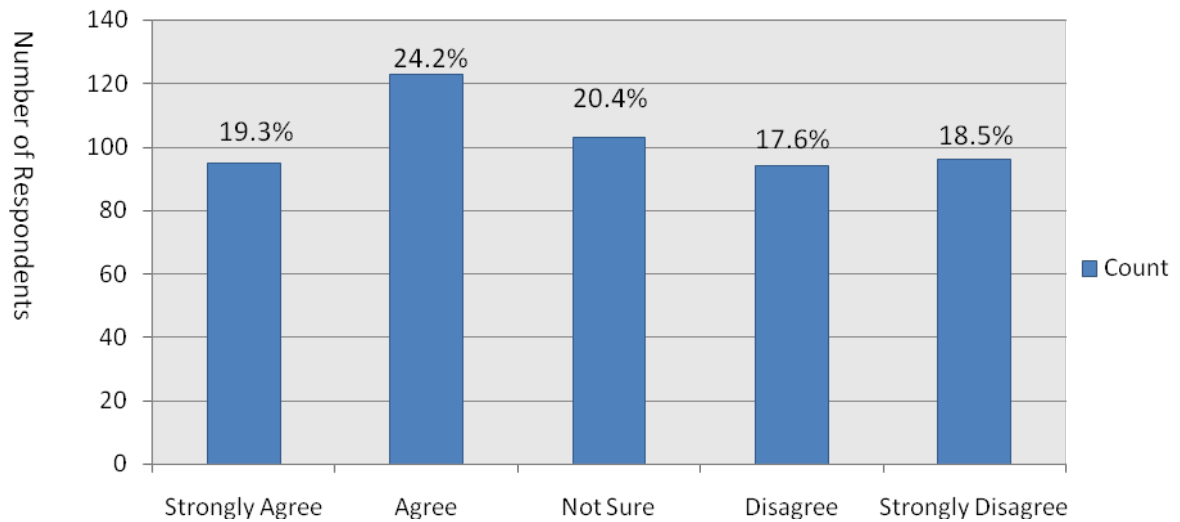
	Government	Catholic	Independent	Total
Primary	194	41	17	252
Secondary	112	31	8	151
Primary & Secondary	36	10	62	108
Total	342	82	87	511

RESULTS SUMMARY

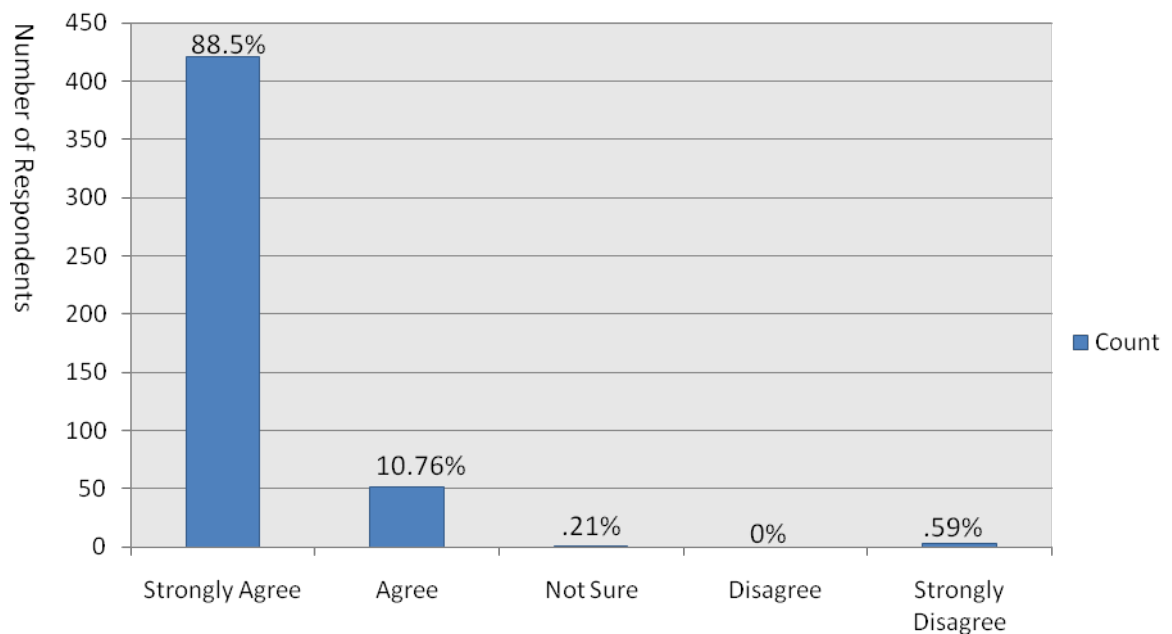
RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS OF OPINION – TERMS OF REFERENCE

For each of these questions, respondents were asked to provide a ranged response. Possible answers were: *Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.*

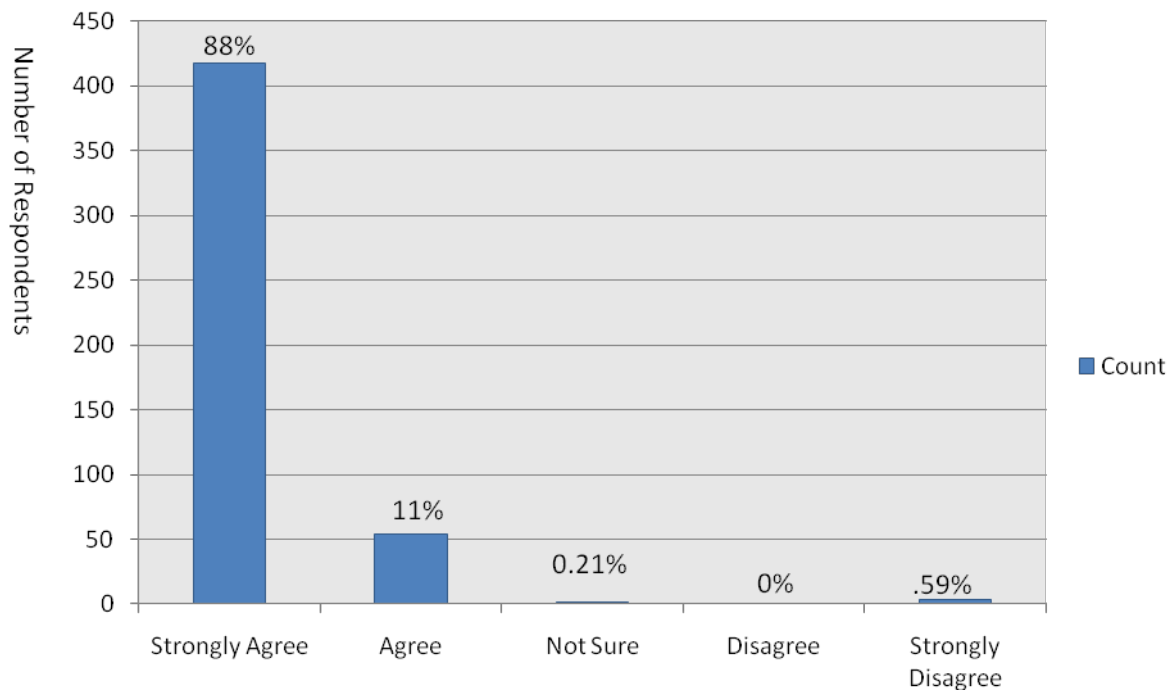
Recent Federal Government policies & funding have had an impact on our school library & its activities



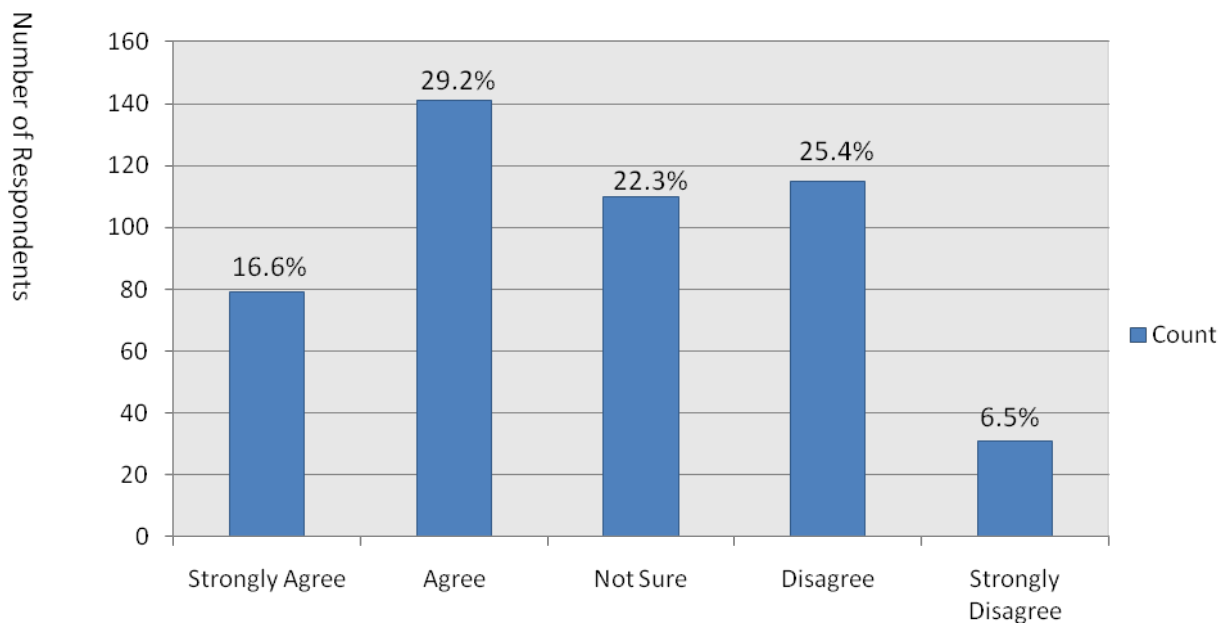
School libraries & School librarians contribute to improved educational & community outcomes



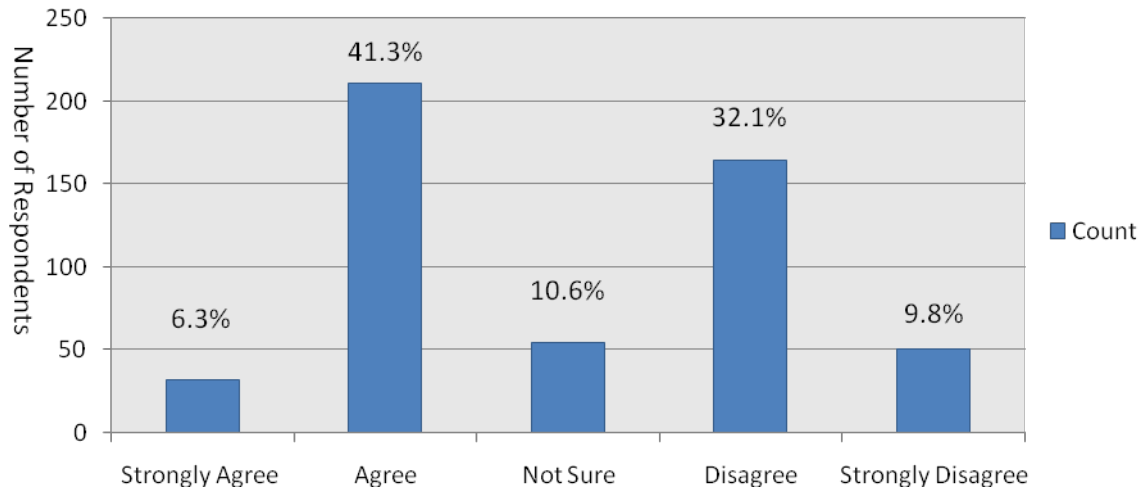
Investing in school libraries & school librarians will improve literacy outcomes for students.



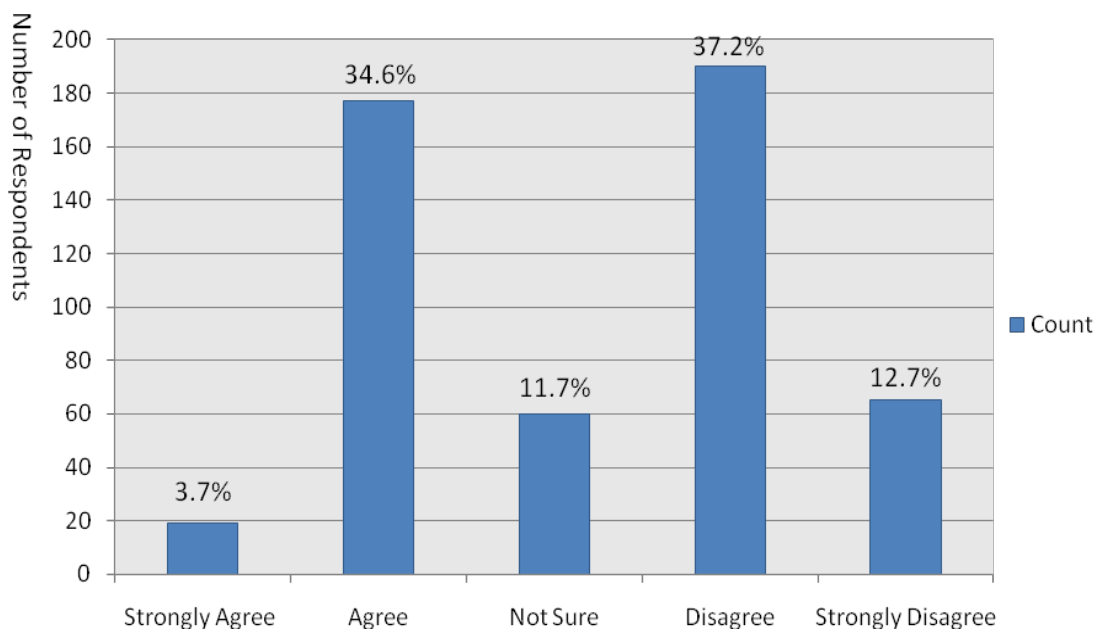
Recruitment of suitably qualified school librarians has proven difficult for our school



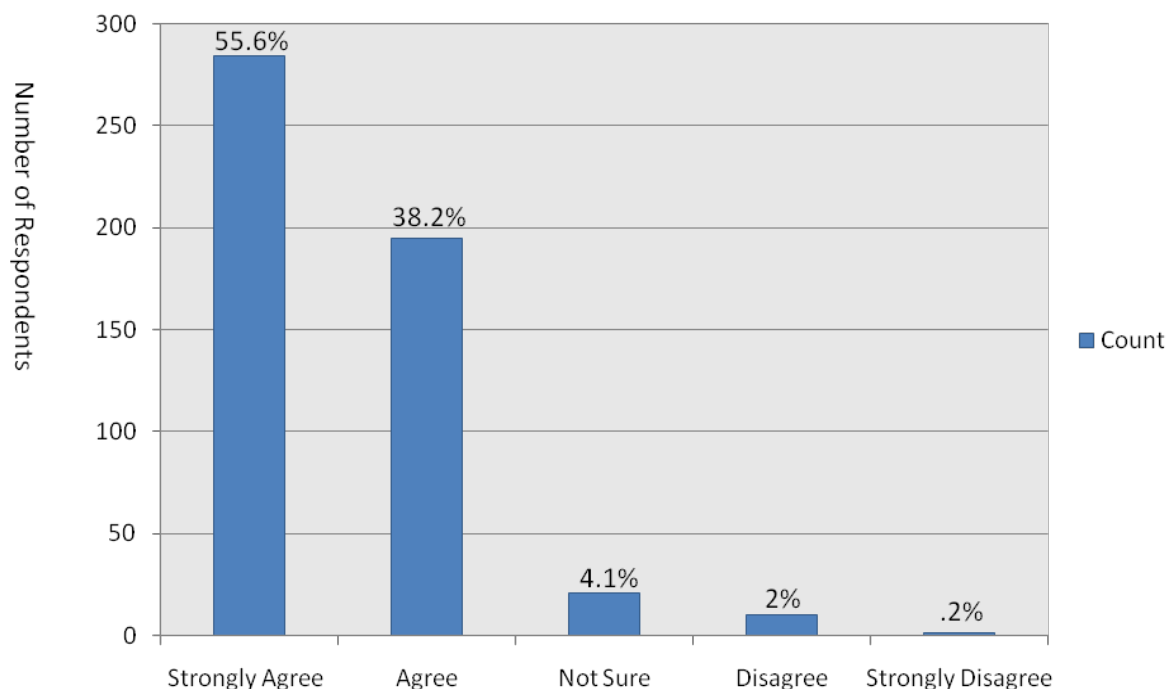
Our school library partners with & receives support from the local community



Our school library partners with & receives support from other institutions



Digital technologies will continue to greatly enhance & support the roles of school libraries & librarians within the school



ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL LIBRARY BUDGETS

AVERAGE BUDGET	Primary	Primary & Secondary	Secondary
Size of School:			
0-100 Students	3,200	10,000	-
100 – 300	4,900	7,100	9,200
300 – 600	8,500	12,100	14,000
600 – 1000	11,000	17,200	16,800
1000 – 1500	13,700	23,200	21,600
1500 – 2000	-	25,000	22,300
2000+	-	21,200	17,500
Type of School:			
Catholic	8,100	20,300	20,700
Government	7,500	10,200	16,700
Independent	9,800	17,700	20,000

Analysis of School Librarians Employed by School – Full Time Equivalents

AVERAGE NUMBER EMPLOYED	PRIMARY	PRIMARY & SECONDARY	SECONDARY
Size of School:			
0-100 Students	0.2	0.6	n/a
100 – 300	0.5	0.5	0.9
300 – 600	0.8	0.8	1.0
600 - 1000	0.9	1.3	1.1
1000 – 1500	0.6	2.5	1.5
1500 – 2000	1	2.5	1.9
2000+	n/a	5.1	2
Type of School:			
Catholic	0.7	1.5	1.4
Government	0.7	0.8	1.2
Independent	0.8	1.8	1.4

Analysis of Federal Government Initiatives compared with ongoing library budgets

Comparison of Answers to Questions:

1. Has your school library had access to Federal Government funding within the last 18 months?
2. What is your school's annual library budget?

Annual School Library budget

Federal Government Funding for School Libraries

	0 - \$5,000	\$5,000 - \$10,000	\$10,000+	Total
< \$50,000	7	12	8	27
\$50,000 - \$150,000	3	3	8	14
\$150,000 - \$250,000	2	1	2	5
> \$250,000	9	16	20	45
Total	21	32	38	91

Calculated Correlations between NAPLAN Results

Where a school had NAPLAN reading literacy results listed on the www.myschool.edu.au website, these results were correlated against the school's annual library budget and the number of school librarians employed by the school (in full time equivalents).

Calculated Correlation	Library Budget	Number of School Librarians Employed
Yr 3 Reading	.26	.22
Yr 5 Reading	.30	.24
Yr 7 Reading	.30	.31
Yr 9 Reading	.34	.34

Sample Size – Responses used in Correlation calculation	Sample Size
Yr 3 Reading	293
Yr 5 Reading	298
Yr 7 Reading	274
Yr 9 Reading	209

APPENDIX B - SUMMARY OF SURVEY COMMENTS

Of the 511 responses to the survey, 199 people also left additional comments to express their thoughts.

A number of these additional comments are provided below.

1. School Libraries are winding down with classroom libraries taking over which results in a greater loss of resources without accountability.
2. I am about to go on leave ... It will be difficult to find a qualified replacement and two other schools cannot find a qualified T.L. because it has been made an unattractive choice by State Gov. policies and practices.
3. Funding for the Victorian Premier's Reading Challenge should have been made available to school libraries. More grants for special projects would be useful such as writers in residence. Training for teacher librarians needs to be provided at universities. Courses are limited these days. Recommendations for staffing and funding, space for school libraries should be updated. Learning for the future is the most recent accepted book. It is always difficult to argue for funding and staffing in school libraries. The schools who were lucky enough to receive funding for a new library should be required to operate the new library as a library. They should be required to provide qualified staff and an ongoing budget for resources.
4. At the moment I believe too much emphasis is being placed on technology in our school and not enough with library skills. Teachers do not seem to be aware that if we teach children research skills in the library this can only enhance their research skills on the internet. Also information on the web is not necessarily correct and if children are not taught this misinformation will continue to be passed on.
5. This library, like so many other school libraries, is especially under-staffed for the quantity of work put on it. Library staff pay is too low to attract and keep quality staff.
6. Abundant research indicates that a qualified teacher-librarian has significant impact on the learning of students.
7. I am a qualified teacher librarian, but am the principal of the school. I am probably the most passionate principal around when it come to school libraries, but we just do not have the money to employ a teacher librarian to work with (rather than provide time release for) staff. When I was in libraries I worked with all staff members to support all classroom programs. It devastates me that I cannot offer the same support to my teachers.
8. Schools with teacher-librarians (not school librarians) are in a more favourable position to support student learning as the 'teacher' part of the librarian is curriculum oriented, trained in classroom management, trained in resource management, and trained in teaching a variety of literacies - digital, reading, visual, perceptual and multi literacies. These abilities allow teacher-librarians to support classroom direction, foster student abilities and promote being literate on a number of levels. Skills and strategies in communication, lesson design and pedagogy, assessment and reporting and literacies enable the teacher-librarian to work effectively with teachers and students alike. Knowing the curriculum, student abilities and interests, system requirements and teacher direction is vital. Untrained staff do not have these skills and therefore student learning is not supported to its maximum.

9. All schools must have libraries with qualified teacher librarians running them to improve literacy levels within the community. Research shows that having a suitably qualified teacher librarian impacts on literacy levels within a school.
10. Schools at all levels are unable to staff libraries appropriately. A qualified teacher librarian shouldn't have to be counted as part of the teacher/ student ratio for staffing costs. It should be separate to the teacher funding pool and compulsory for all schools to have one, at least part-time.
11. A shortage of training institutions has meant fewer qualified and effective teacher-librarians. Therefore schools are employing library assistants, library technicians, librarians and teachers to fill the roles of specialist teacher-librarians. Delivery of services is reduced which leads to a lower profile in school communities and less funding and staff support.
12. I have been the teacher librarian at the school for many years. When I retire - probably in the next few years there will not be anyone to manage our huge collection & the new digital resources. Teacher aide hours have been slashed so severely that the library is simply "Closed" if I am absent.
13. Properly trained school librarians bring high levels of specialised skills, knowledge and interest in:
- learning for a fast paced digital and technologically moulded future - nurturing a life-long love of quality literature in all forms in students and teaching staff - guiding and teaching students to safely, critically and skilfully access digital and hard copy information - teaching students to use media in all forms to enhance their presentations, projects and research - sharing their expertise by providing quality professional development for teaching staff - to build a dynamic information collection which services the needs of the learning community
14. We will have new federally funded library by the end of 2010 but are finding our staffing and funding for resources being eroded at the same time.
15. Life in a school library today compared to 30 years ago - increasing demands (now teaching Web 2.0 and IT skills as well as traditional info literacy skills and wide reading promotion); decreased staff (was 3.4 TMs and 1.5 lib techs now 1.0 TM and 0.6 lib tech), decreased budget (was \$23,900 for 1200 kids, now \$16,800 for 1200 kids) although everything is a lot more expensive.
16. To spend huge amounts of money building a library at a school without a librarian seems to me to be putting the cart before the horse.
17. The Training of Teacher Librarians for the future is very important as many of the brilliant and trained teacher librarians are nearing retirement age and the Education department has done nothing to make sure that there will be suitable replacements.
18. The library is seriously underfunded. The school enrolment is increasing. We cannot maintain the collection and it is in a bad state of disrepair. Our circulation is in excess of 30 000 yearly and most of our books are worn to the point where they would be disposed of in a public library. Without an increase in funds we are unable to expand our collection to meet student needs. Resources continue to increase in price while demand for them increases and our budget decreases.
19. We have a BER funded library and cannot afford a librarian!