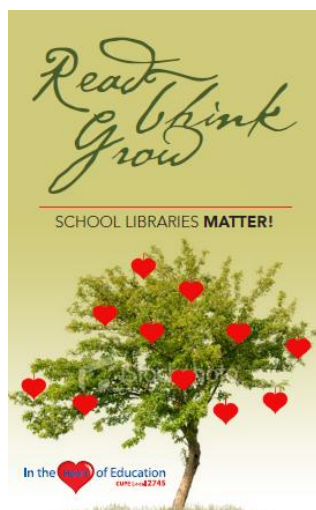


“What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it thinks about education.” -Howard Howe “There are man

“The school library belongs to everyone as an integral part of our schools, and a fundamental right of all children in Canada”

National Symposium on Information, Literacy and the School Library

BRIEF SCHOOL LIBRARIES



2012

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School Libraries

In the 21st century, school libraries are still a vital part of the New Brunswick education system. School libraries are relevant today as they were in the past and will be in the future. We hear time and time again that strong reading skills are at the basis of all learning that is why school libraries are extremely relevant.

Unfortunately, it is with unspeakable sadness that provincial governments across our great country are limiting or eliminating funding to school libraries. New Brunswick is no exception. Funding for our school libraries has been on the decline, especially for new material and allocated hours for human resources.

Our school libraries have seen its operating hours cut back, its school library workers cut back and even funding for new books has been cut back, eliminated or diverted elsewhere. Students should have unlimited access to the school libraries during school hours, books of all genres should be available as well as the newest technologies. A school library is a priceless resource for our youth and for those who will continue on to post secondary education.

Our members from Local 2745 are the only staff working in the school libraries and they provide direct quality services to students of all ages.

It would be tragic to deprive students of the full resources they need to succeed. A key element for learners of all ages is a fully functioning, well staffed and well stocked school library that plays a major role in the prescription for student success at all grade levels.

Who We Are and What We Do

In New Brunswick, approximately 200 school library workers are proud CUPE members of Local 2745. CUPE represents school library workers across the country with more than 3,700 members. Our experience in libraries extends beyond the school walls: CUPE represents more than 21,000 library workers nationally in municipal libraries, schools, universities, and non-educational institutions such as hospitals.

New Brunswick school library workers excel in administrative, educational and technical duties at all school levels. Our members provide coordination of programs in libraries, organize and supervise circulation services as well as other administrative duties. School library workers meet the needs of students and teachers by consulting with them and providing much needed material.

Our members provide orientation for students with research as well as guiding teachers in their needs for materials found in school libraries. They assist children with special needs by making sure the proper materials are ordered. For example, if a student is visually impaired, the school library worker will order books with a bigger print, or taped books or even books available in

Braille. Regardless of what a student may need to have a fulfilling experience in the school library, our members are there to make sure this happens.

School library workers not only assist students and teachers, they are also responsible for the contents of collections worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. They order, classify and catalogue material. They remove collection material that is outdated or beyond repair, order books, periodicals, newspapers, videos, audios and other documentation.

School library workers around the province are more than capable of evolving with any new programs, documentation and technology when given the opportunity and training. Working with students of all levels and abilities from K-12 is an integral part of their jobs. Our members provide direct services as well as the infrastructure and human resources necessary to allow all students to succeed in the education system.

We are an essential and vital part of the team responsible for the future of these students in an inclusive environment. We also provide collateral for our school libraries by organizing Scholastic Book fairs where 50% of the sales go into funding to buy books for the libraries. These fairs also encourage and support at-home reading. We work hard to create an environment where children can learn and be ready for the future.

Our members are proud to be the school library staff who provides quality public services for students and other educational staff.

Our Concerns and Our Recommendations

It is very unfortunate that our school library workers’ quality of service has not been recognized by some school districts and the government of New Brunswick. Instead of supporting this important position in our educational system, our positions have been cut and our libraries depleted. We have many concerns but we will only highlight four major concerns among others in the following pages.

We believe that our recommendations to achieve fiscally responsible solutions should be seen as front line workers doing the work every day. We have a true understanding of what is achievable and we are sharing our insight of what does work and what does not.

1. Funding

The base funding formula for school libraries is done at the Education department level which allocates 1 full time employee (at 36.25 hours/week) for every one thousand students per school district. Funding for school library books is calculated to be as little as \$9 per student. However, funding for school libraries is not done in a transparent manner; instead it is left to each individual school district and, in some cases, individual schools. At

this point, they then decide how to allocate the money designated for school libraries, if the moneys are at all spent in the school libraries.

Our members believe a consistent and standardized approach should be done province-wide for all funding allocation of school libraries. This could be done in the form of a policy with clear guidelines. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development would have to play an important role in the design of this policy including the capacity to verify that the funding is spent where it should be. The Department could also develop strict regulations to monitor dedicated funding allocated for school libraries to ensure this funding is truly used in school libraries.

We recommend that a well thought out provincial policy is needed to regulate and standardize funding for school libraries. The Department of Education would allocate funding directly to school libraries through this process.

2. Utilization of Space

Our members are aware of utilization of space in school libraries but also in the entire schools they serve. We’ve also heard from the Government of New Brunswick’s Minister of Education that a number of schools are underutilized. We believe that combining the available space for a variety of programs would be more beneficial for all groups and would keep our school libraries relevant.

School libraries should be designed as spaces that cater to multiuse not only for library staff but all staff in the school. And, most importantly, it should be designed for students. Keeping students in mind, a number of school libraries across Canada are redesigning themselves as the hub of their schools. In these non traditional libraries, students will find designated areas for reading, for socializing, for collaborative studying surrounded by books and multimedia technology. Adjusting a space for these kinds of needs can be done with minimum funding and minimum floor space. (See Appendix A)

School libraries could even be extended to after school programs, not for profit youth groups, daycare groups and even some community groups. Proper criteria would need to be established for outside groups to ensure the safety and security of students and visitors.

School libraries are spaces that can also be used by internal groups such as one-on-one teaching with special needs students, school speech therapist, or other services simply needing space to accommodate one or more students. Library time/period could also be added to the education curriculum to provide hands-on experiences for students of all ages. The younger students could learn how a library functions while the older students could learn how to navigate the library system when they need to research. These tools can be lifelong lessons for all students.

We also believe there are potential efficiencies in combining municipal and school libraries with extended hours and more full-time staff in the school building only if there is no municipal library. In smaller rural communities, combining services under one roof could be efficient and effective. The New Brunswick public library system provides access to a provincial collection of more than 1.8 million items. The available services are in line with the services provided by our members in school libraries and should remain in the school setting.

Communities that do not have an existing public library would then be able to experience the benefits of a school library enriching the lives of all their residents. The school library would not only be the hub of the school but the community as a whole. We must underline the importance of combined services between municipal and school libraries stay in the school, more so in communities where there are no other libraries.

We also recommend that school libraries be utilized by other internal groups (i.e. speech therapy, tutor, etc) and community groups. They would be able to take full advantage of resources found in our school libraries including the professional assistance of library staff.

3. The Importance of our Members in Schools

Our members are there to help, to guide and to support students and staff navigate through the resources available in our school libraries. Many studies have found clear links between library staffing and student success; we know our members are vital to this winning combination.

Our members want to contribute to student success. For many who work as library support staff, facilitating student success helps make up for a job that is often under-appreciated. It helps compensate for the irregular hours, the low annual salary, and job insecurity. Like all support staff in our schools, our library members understand the importance of the roles they play in the system, even when it is not apparent to others.

Now, more than ever, those roles need strengthening and support. The provincial government needs to articulate a policy for school libraries taking into account student success; and, reverse the decline in the number of school library workers, reverse the reduction of school library hours and reverse the reduction of funding available for resources both physical and human.

Other provinces like Alberta, have commissioned task forces to take a closer look at school libraries and their relevance. We believe our school libraries deserve a closer examination to build towards a future with an implementation plan that addresses the broader spectrum of its full capabilities. School libraries are centres for learning, reading and have available technologies accessible for students and staff.

We recommend that the government conduct a study or provide a task force to take a closer look at the importance of our members and their work in school libraries.

4. Direct Services to Students

We can't assume that all our students come from backgrounds that permit nightly reading sessions with parents. Our schools contain students who come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Some come from families where single parents work at their children's bedtime. Some families can't afford to buy books to read at home. Some students do not get support and encouragement from their families to succeed in school. It is clear that these students will be left behind if our schools do not continue to provide excellent reading and literacy resources and opportunities for challenged students to succeed.

It is at this point that our members provide a direct service to students of all ages and all socio-economic backgrounds. Our school library workers are the key to a successful learning experience. Our skilled workers are able to identify the appropriate books for the age level or the right subject matter to help students and other educational staff in their search.

The importance of trained library staff on student achievement should underline the important services our members provide. Even in this information age, students do not simply access better technology to succeed; they need the tools to navigate the information highway. Up-to-date technology is part of the formula for student success: trained library support staff is another crucial component.

Our members can teach valuable lessons in finding the way through an information environment that often feels like a new world especially for younger students. Students will not always be in front of a computer screen to surf the net. Our members can help students explore the questions that will lead them towards the tools needed to accomplish a class project or find the appropriate book to read. Students will develop critical thinking abilities through researching in books. They will develop a wide range of skills while gaining a love for reading and the written words. The skills students learn at the school library level will be important throughout their entire academic journey.

We provide quality direct services to students in the school library environment with literacy and technological questions. We also provide other school staff with direct services regarding any inquiries or additional help they may need. How would these important services be delivered without our qualified school library workers?

Conclusion

Our members are a crucial part of the overall education team for students of all ages to achieve success. Learning to read and enjoy reading is a good thing for students of all ages. Navigating through the world of school libraries should be a positive and fruitful adventure for students. Our school library workers provide direct quality services to help students and staff find exactly what they need to find. This is the key to lifelong learning.

We are ready to collaborate with this government to establish a policy for the funding formula of school libraries. We will cooperate to share our front line workers’ suggestion to find effective and efficient ways to make our school libraries a key component of our schools in New Brunswick. We want to participate in the government’s Education Renewal Review and find solutions together.

We are ready to find efficient ways of utilizing our school library spaces with community groups and other internal educational groups. We will cooperate in the study of the feasibility to change our school libraries to 21st century learning spaces.

We have proof that New Brunswickers want to see school libraries remain open in schools. New Brunswickers fought back cuts from previous governments because school libraries are vital to every student’s academic success.

Most of all, we are proud public servants working in school libraries offering a quality public service to students of all ages.

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