

## **Open letter to the Minister of Education – Against cuts in school libraries**

Moncton  
May 21st, 2009

Hon. Kelly Lamrock  
Department of Education

Minister Lamrock,

We, the librarians of l'Université de Moncton, would like to add our voice to the reactions from around the province concerning recent budget cuts in education. In particular, we feel the need to express our views concerning the appalling and drastic cuts to library assistant positions (2.9 million in cuts affecting support staff positions) and to school library operating budgets (1.5 million). These decisions are not only decimating a library network that is already suffering from grossly inadequate funding, but also fueling the sad lack of recognition of the contribution and value libraries bring to the educational process.

And yet, the importance of school libraries' contributions to academic success and student development has long been ascertained. School libraries are well established partners in the promotion of reading and love of books. Library activities present students with the opportunity to get exposed to culture, history, and our heritage. They also constitute the ideal environment to develop critical thinking and intellectual stimulation, both fundamental elements in research and learning processes<sup>i</sup>. One cannot minimise the important role played by school library personnel in this regard. It is up to library personnel to develop balanced and adequate collections that will not only answer the educational needs of students, but also contribute to the development of student literacy.

As information specialists in a university setting, it is very plain to us that students graduating from high school do not possess the information literacy skills needed to succeed in an academic setting focused on scientific research. Students must have opportunities to develop proficiencies that will permit them to find, evaluate, and effectively use information, one of the biggest challenges facing the next generation of skilled workers and professionals.

During the last decade, governments in Canada, the United States, Europe, and South America have come to understand the importance of school libraries, and have chosen to invest in personnel training and development, as well as in the

improvement of infrastructures and collections<sup>ii</sup>. Your department, Mr Lamrock, is making an adverse and irresponsible decision. Must we remind you that you recently announced your intention to focus on "improving students' understanding and performance in literacy"<sup>iii</sup>? By slashing school library resources, you are depriving students of the best tools available to attain this objective of improved performance.

We firmly believe, Mr Lamrock, that New-Brunswick simply cannot afford to further reduce the resources of a school library system that is already on its knees. It is the province's role to ensure the development of school libraries, and this underappreciated resource is an essential part of ensuring students' academic success. Taxpayer dollars would be well spent reinforcing the school library system instead of reducing its role to no more than a poorly appointed book depository.

In order for your fellow citizens to take your commitment to building the best educational system in Canada seriously, your actions and decisions must lead to this end. It is most unfortunate that the recent cuts to education, particularly those being made to the school library network, are barriers to achieving your own objective, and demonstrate your lack of commitment in this matter.

Signed by the Université de Moncton librarians,

Héctor Alvarez  
Joë Bouchard  
Angèle Clavet-Légère  
Charlotte Dionne  
Georgette Landry  
Michèle LeBlanc  
Guy Lefrançois  
Jeanne Maddix  
Nathalie Richard  
Alain Roberge  
Victoria Volkanova

---

<sup>i</sup> On this topic, the following studies provide further details: 1- *Impact of School Library Services on Achievement and Learning*, School of Information and Media, Faculty of Management, The Robert Gordon University, 2002. 2- *The Crisis in Canada School Libraries. The Case for Reform and Reinvestment*. Association of Canadian Publishers. 2003. 3- *Briller parmi les meilleurs avec la bibliothèque scolaire*, Coalition en faveur des bibliothèques scolaires, 2004.

<sup>ii</sup> International guidelines, which New-Brunswick does not adhere to, have been established for school library development: *The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Guidelines 2002*. IFLA/UNESCO, 2002.

<sup>iii</sup> *NB3 to improve results in literacy, mathematics and science (anglophone sector)* [press release]. New-Brunswick Government. 2008.