2020 Vision

Kathryn Egawa, PhD, January 11, 2008
Charter Member, Washington Coalition for School Libraries and Information Technology

This year's class of kindergarteners will graduate in 2020. Washington's teaching force is preparing these students for jobs and technologies that don't yet exist and preparing them to solve problems that we can't yet identify. This is a daunting task and one that can only be achieved through great cooperation between educators, families and our communities. And your great responsibility, as the task force charged with redefining basic education in our state, is to establish funding for that work.

Together we are challenged to consider: What does it mean to be literate in the 21st century? What will it mean to live and succeed in a world we can't fully predict? Mike Eisenberg, Dean Emeritus of the Information School at the University of Washington proposes that our children will need to be more than literate. They will need to be fluent in reading, communicating, information processing and technology. All of these skills will be basic.

I would like to use my time today to share three more predictions about where we are headed and to argue that **the most basic of all educational resources is access to a full time teacher librarian, an information, problem solving curriculum, and a well resourced, technologically current library**.

First, we are living in a time of exponential change. Indeed, the world is changing so quickly that technical information is doubling every two years, and it is predicted that by the time the children born in 2007 are entering school, it will double every 72 hours. Moreover, by that same time a super computer's capacity will likely exceed that of the human brain.

Our students' lives will also be considerably different than the lives we have experienced. They will increasingly play roles within the global community, a concept that has evolved over several decades and is defined by Orion Kriegman as "a coherent, worldwide association of millions of people who call for priority to be placed on new values of quality of life, human solidarity, and environmental sustainability." Currently more of the world's citizens speak Chinese than any other language, and yet in ten short years it is predicted that the number one English speaking country in the world will be China. And India's college graduates, about three times the annual number of US college graduates, all speak English. They will be among our students' co-citizens, and indeed there are already students from China, Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, and the US who are collaborating on online projects everyday.

Second, it is also predicted that today's students will have 10-14 jobs by their 38th birthday, half of which may not even exist today. Universities now offer degrees in ecommerce, homeland security, organic agriculture, and nanotechnology—fields unheard of a short decade ago. Ebay, founded in 1996, posted 2006 earnings of over $6,000,000,000.

Learning how to learn, learning to invent, to adapt and be flexible, and learning to develop stamina and empathy will be far more important than any arbitrary content or job skill we might define today. A library information curriculum, implemented in classrooms

with the support of a teaching librarian, calls for the kinds of critical problem solving and creative thinking that are our best predictors of what students will need.

Third, changes in our language also reflect the technologies that are second nature to most of our students: web browser, iPod, blogger, wikispace, or websurfer. Seventy percent of four year olds already use computers, and 50% of 21 year olds have created web content. While student access to computers is greater in schools, access to computers at home tripled in the ten years from 1993-2003 alone.

Children spend a larger percentage of their computer use at home on personal interests, making it increasingly important in school that students are more than web surfers, but are "effective users of ideas and information." This is the mission of the only teaching professional directly dedicated to seeing that our children engage with and master these skills—the teacher librarian.

They fulfill this role in three ways: 1) as advocates for reading, 2) as teachers of information and technology skills, and 3) what Eisenberg terms the chief information officers (CIO) responsible for managing information systems, resources, and services.

This last role, says Eisenberg, is increasingly important in our schools. Information technology, resources, and systems are expensive. And, he's not talking about just in the physical library. He's talking about textbooks, networks, and online resources available to students, teachers, and parents 24/7. Who else is going to see that they are effectively used and efficiently managed?

Eisenberg asks us to consider a hypothetical choice: If your own child could learn only one thing this year: the Pythagorean theorem or how to find, evaluate, and use information—which would you choose? Well, of course we don't question the need for math teachers, but we have yet to define as "basic" the teacher librarians who teach our kids essential information and technology skills.

The solution, then, is to clearly define what we want for our kids—fluency in essential skills and successful use of the tools of the information age—and to invest in and hold responsible our teacher librarians and library programs to ensure that, in fact, our students develop them. Our coalition of citizens and educators propose these as basic education. Without teacher librarians, Washington students will be at a competitive disadvantage.

REFERENCES
Thanks to Littleton School District in Colorado, for the 2020 title, and to the work of Carl Fisch (The Fischbowl) and Scott McLeod (Dangerously Irrelevant) for their work with Shift Happens, http://shifthappens.wikispaces.com, and to Mike Eisenberg, charter member of the Washington Coalition for School Libraries and Information Technology, http://fundourfuturewashington.org.

Definition of global community, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_citizens_movement
Digest of Educational Statistics: Libraries and educational technology
http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d04/ch_7.asp
China #1 English speaking country, from Milken Conference and reported at /weblogg-ed.com/2006/more-musings-from-milken/
Graduates in India that speak English, Geoffrey Calvin, Fortune Magazine, July 25,2005,
http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/2005/07/25/8266603/index.htm
Job statistics, http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsoy.pdf and
ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/news.release/History/tenure.09212004.news

College majors, New College Majors: U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. http://www.doleta.gov/BRG/Indprof/biotech_profile.cfm
(New media: washingtonpost.com, February 23, 2005)
Ebay revenue, http://finance.google.com/finance?q=EBAY&client=news
Children's computer use, Kaiser Family Foundation Report, 2003, http://www.kaisernetwork.org/health_cast/uploaded_files/102803_kff_kids_press.pdf