

GUEST OPINION

Guest Opinion: Only you can prevent school library losses[Lisa Layera Brunkan](#)Special to The Spokesman-Review
December 7, 2007

Everybody has seen the bumper stickers proclaiming the importance of education funding so schools aren't funded through bake sales. We need to hold one to get three moms to Olympia. But, since a bake sale isn't practical, we're selling t-shirts instead.

Why are we trying to get to Olympia? To ask our legislators to do something to stop the fiscal hemorrhage happening in our school libraries. Around the state the lights in school libraries have dimmed, the doors are being closed and you might find an aide or part-time librarian staffing it if you're lucky. Although some districts still have strong school library programs, the number of schools with full-time librarians and adequate funding is shrinking rapidly.

Three moms from Spokane launched a petition in mid-November to find out if people in Washington cared about this issue. Nearly 2,000 people, from Bellevue to Pomeroy, have signed the petition and offered wrenching testimony about the cuts adversely affecting their communities. The gap between the information-rich and the information-poor will continue to widen unless we fund our school library systems. Around the state, kids are being denied equal access to the full range of skills necessary to succeed in college, work and life.

If you care about test scores, research says this issue matters. If you are building a work force, this issue matters. If you believe in equal-opportunity education, this issue matters.

Read what people are saying by visiting the coalition website at <http://fundourfuturewashington.org> and clicking on the "Our Voices" tab. While you're there, exercise some due diligence and visit the "Research" tab for a sample of studies that provide abundant evidence that students read more and perform better on state achievement tests at schools with certified teacher librarians. What research can't quantify is how the library and the librarian have always been the heart of a school.

You can do something. Like the security guard who helped me locate legislators' offices in the capitol building when he came up and said, "You look lost. How can I help?" Like the Kinko's staff in Tumwater that busted their chops to help us prepare documents for the task force reviewing definitions of basic education. Like the legislative aides who pulled us aside and suggested we submit a supplemental budget request for immediate funding. We hope you will be the next to write us and ask what you can do to help.

When I sat down to write this, I found that a nationally recognized literacy expert in Seattle had left a message in my inbox to let me know she'd fired off word about this issue to 50 colleagues around the state, and that she's working on assembling a team of parents, teachers and business people to go to Olympia. Others have stepped in to provide pro bono legal and accounting advice to help us make our coalition a non-profit legislative advocate, quietly reminding us that we can't fund this effort out of our own pockets indefinitely.

Column guidelines

To submit a guest column about a local or regional issue, or to request guidelines, please do so by e-mail to editor@spokesman.com or by conventional mail to:

Guest Columns

Spokesman-Review
Opinion page

999 W. Riverside Ave.

Spokane, WA 99201.

An interested citizen who grew up in a rural community and who now works in the capital acknowledges that he "wouldn't be here if it weren't for libraries and librarians." He echoes what so many citizens, and many of our state leaders know ... strong school libraries are essential:

"Libraries are today's modern study halls, with availability of advanced technology for students to expand their horizons – they are a safe place to learn.

"Libraries provide opportunities to grow, explore, see and read materials and historical American documents."

What he didn't know is that the library program in a close-by rural community is languishing: the elementary library is staffed 3.5 hours a week by an aide who received six hours of training when she was given the position; and the high school library is staffed one period a day by an aide, and part of another two periods by the same aide after she is finished with her locker room duties.

It's not just Eastern Washington; we're getting similar reports of reductions from Seattle, Bellevue, Olympia, Tacoma and Federal Way. The list is long. As a community we are called to take a stand, get our hands dirty and take action. If you want to go to Olympia with us, we can find you an open seat.