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# Our Children

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**Saving  
School  
Libraries**

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**Rethinking  
School  
Discipline**

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**Teachers,  
Parents &  
Common Core**



# Celebrate Teachers!

**National PTA Honors** Four National Teacher of the Year Finalists

# STANDING UP FOR SCHOOL LIBRARIES

By Barbara Stripling

Trusted resource  
under siege by  
budget cuts, testing  
restraints



**Students at Sanislo Elementary School library in Seattle, Wa.,** participate in 2013 School Library Month (April) activities (Photo credit: David Rosen / West Seattle Herald).

When parents send their children to school, they form a bond of trust with teachers and administrators that their sons and daughters will learn what they need to succeed. Sometimes it is hard for parents to feel confident that the schools are preparing their children well because the educational system seems to be caught in a vortex of change.

One area of the school that remains a place of trust and opportunity is the school library. Research conducted by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center has shown that a librarian is one of the most trusted public servants. School librarians build trust by making a promise that they will empower young people to pursue a lifetime of reading, discovery, learning and creating. To fulfill that promise, school librarians create effective library programs that impact the learning of every child in the school and foster a school-wide culture of literacy and inquiry.

School librarians, and school libraries, however, are in peril. Across the country, budget and testing pressures have led to decisions to eliminate or de-professionalize them. It is time for parents to demand their children's right to a thriving and effective school library.

In schools with a library program, parents should expect to see a culture of literacy, characterized by school librarians providing individualized reading guidance, developing high-quality collections that match the students and curriculum of the school, and nurturing a love of reading. Today's school librarians also teach critical new literacy skills to enable young people to evaluate and make sense of text presented in all formats, and to be producers and communicators of ideas, not just consumers of information.



School librarians nourish a culture of inquiry by teaching students the essential critical-thinking and information skills to be independent and lifelong learners. Young people learn through inquiry — asking good questions, investigating and drawing conclusions based on the evidence they find. They need the skills to discriminate between accurate and inaccurate information, decide when information is presented from a biased point of view, discover the most authoritative sources among the millions of sites on the internet and participate in the electronic environment both responsibly and safely.

School librarians help students and teachers use the latest technology tools effectively for personal and academic learning, communication, production and collaboration. Through the school library, use of technology becomes a natural and school-wide part of the teaching and learning process.

Parents should expect the school library to foster their children's social and emotional

growth. Because the library is a safe space of discovery and collaboration, young people develop personal dispositions of self-confidence, perseverance and grit, as well as social qualities like the ability to work in a team and respect for the perspectives of others. Finally, school libraries offer liberating experiences of imagination and creation. Students see characters in their minds as they listen to stories. Young people imagine their own stories or create expressions of their learning to share with others.

Now is the time for parents and community members to stand together and demand the right of every young person to a dynamic school library staffed by a certified school librarian. Parents, teachers and administrators can show their support for school libraries by signing the American Library Association's Declaration for the Right to Libraries at <http://tinyurl.com/right2libs>.

Barbara Stripling is the president of the American Library Association.