

## ***The Top Ten Reasons (Excuses) that Prevent School Library Advocacy***

The amount of funding that a library receives directly influences the quality of its services. In these difficult economic times, many worthwhile programs are vying for attention and dollars from the federal government. The stimulus money does provide an opportunity for public and school libraries to get increased federal funding, but as we learned at the ALA National Library Legislative Day briefing on May 11, we must do our part to ensure that school libraries are on the radars of our elected officials.

### **10. Everyone knows the services and benefits of school libraries.**

Maybe-maybe not. It is our responsibility to ensure that our representatives at both the state and federal levels know what research has proven about school libraries. "When staffed by qualified professionals trained to collaborate with teachers and engage students meaningfully with information that matters in the real world, school libraries become sophisticated 21st-century learning environments that offer equal opportunities for achievement to all students, regardless of the socio-economic or education levels of the community." (School Libraries Work!, 2008). Media coordinators are the ones who will see that we have competent students equipped with 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills.

### **9. Someone else will do it.**

Who? If we do not promote our services and programs, no one will. Can we really depend on others in the school system to communicate to our elected officials about the value that we add to the education of our students? We have to let them know that our programs help to develop the love of reading, information literacy skills, technology skills, and collaboration.

### **8. I don't know how.**

Oh, yes you do! You can read and you can think. To get started check out these resources:

ALA National Library Legislative Day at

<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/wo/washevents/nlld/nlld2009.cfm#agen>

AASL Advocacy Toolkit at <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/aasl/aaslissues/toolkits/aasladvocacy.cfm>

Advocacy Section from IMPACT at <http://www.ncwiseowl.org/impact/TOC.htm>

School Library Advocacy Toolkit from New York State at <http://www.crbsls.org/slsa/>

Library Promotion Resources at <http://www.sldirectory.com/libsf/resf/promote.html>

School Library Advocacy at <http://teacherlibrarian.ning.com/group/schoollibraryadvocacy>

### **7. I don't know who to contact.**

What did we do without the Internet? The contact information for those in office is right at our fingertips. To find US Senators and Representatives go to <http://www.usa.gov/Contact/Elected.shtml> . For North Carolina representation, go to <http://www.ncleg.net/GIS/RandR07/Home.html> .

### **6. I don't have enough time.**

We are all very busy. No one has enough time. You can pledge to take 10 minutes a week for advocacy. Use that time to send an email to your state senator, invite an elected official to visit your library, write a letter to your US Congressman, or to begin to plan a promotional brochure. I am sure you have other great ideas. Schedule a few minutes each week to get started.

### **5. I am not a political person.**

At times, we are all disillusioned with politics and politicians and with good reason, but we cannot let that prevent us from participating in our local, state, and national politics. At the very least, we must vote for candidates with a record of support for libraries and education. We all need to contact our elected officials and ask for their support for school libraries and express our opinion on bills that affect school libraries.

### **4. I don't know the issues.**

Again, consult the resources listed in number 8 above. Another resource is EdTechActionNetwork (ETAN) which provides a forum for educators and others to engage in the political process. NCSLMA officers such as President Deb Christensen provide leadership on current issues and actions that we need to take on behalf of school libraries.

### **3. I am not a leader.**

If you are a school media coordinator, you are a leader. Indeed, "the **2009 SLJ Leadership Summit** will explore the powerful relationship between school librarians and 21st century skills, including information and communications skills; critical thinking; interpersonal and collaborative skills; global awareness; and financial, business and civic literacy." (see <http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/info/CA6638408.html>) It is up to us to ensure that both staff and students know how to use the new tools for new literacies. It is up to us to tell others, legislators included, how crucial our profession is in this increasingly complicated digital world.

### **2. Everybody loves libraries; nobody wants to fund them.**

In general, Americans love their libraries. Seldom will you hear anyone say that they don't like libraries. But most of the time, libraries do not tend to provoke a lot of passion. Students visit school libraries 1.5 billion times a year. School libraries have become sophisticated 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning environments with access for all to a broad range of resources in a variety of formats. We must be passionate about our profession and what it provides to our patrons. We must ask and ask again that our legislators support programs like Library Services and Technology Act, Improving Literacy Through School Libraries, the SKILLS Act, and E-Rate which provide us with vital funding.

### **1. I can't make a difference.**

You know better. Have you heard of Rosa Parks, Paul Rusesbagina, or Oskar Schindler? Ok-we might not ever make the difference these significant individuals did, but we can communicate and be heard. Each of us is only one, but together we can influence policy and laws that influence libraries.

Our profession supports every staff member and student in the school. A recent article in the New York Times entitled, *In the Web Age, Library Job Gets Update* by Motoko Rich, says this, "School librarians... have transformed into multi-faceted information specialists who guide students through the flood of digital information that confronts them on a daily basis." Our expertise is essential to graduate students with the digital literacy, communication, collaborative, and problem-solving skills that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century requires. It is imperative that each of us is a strong advocate for excellent school library media programs-our students and staff deserve no less.

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