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As we see it

# Literacy survey reveals folly of the library cuts

■ **LEARNING:** Californians have an obligation to make sure new generations have a chance to learn

**I**N THE wake of Librarian Anne Turner's proposal to close 90 percent of Santa Cruz County's library system because of state budget cuts, the reaction has been swift and predictable.

But, because there is little reason to believe the Board of Supervisors will commit political suicide and accept Turner's cuts, it would be easy to dismiss the letters from people demanding that their local libraries be kept open.

There is, however, a valuable nugget of information to be gleaned from public's response to the state's \$1 million theft: A lot of Santa Cruz County residents rely on public libraries for information and reading material.

What makes that especially welcome news is that it comes at a time when a survey has discovered that nearly half the nation's 191 million citizens are not proficient enough in English to conduct their daily activities without problems.

The study was released last week by the Education Department, which tested a sampling of 26,000 Americans to determine their ability to write a letter, read a map, figure a billing error, understand a newspaper and decipher a bus schedule.

The results revealed a wide literacy gap in America: More people

than ever before say they read "well" or "very well," but there is a fast-growing segment of people who are being left behind.

In Santa Cruz County, where census figures reveal a highly literate population, the survey results should not be dismissed. California is shortchanging its public schools and its libraries.

The long-term implications of such public policy and parental abrogation of their responsibilities to make sure their children are educated is an even less well-educated population.

The children who will take this country into the next millennium cannot learn in public schools that use outmoded educational concepts in overcrowded classrooms. They cannot broaden their horizons in a state that suggests libraries are near the bottom of budget priorities.

Just ask Vrinda Murphy, an 8-year-old Santa Cruz resident who wrote a letter to the Sentinel about the possibility her library would be closed:

“**C**LOSING the library really isn't fair to all the kids and adults in Santa Cruz. Because the school kids go there to get books that help them with their homework and it is a nice place to study because it is very quiet and calm. It is really nice.”

Investing wisely in our public schools and our libraries is the best way to ensure that youngsters like Vrinda won't have to plead for a place to learn about their world.