Intellectual Freedom: Meeting the Challenge

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What is Intellectual Freedom?
"Intellectual freedom is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored." ~American Library AssociationGuidelines for Meeting the Challenge

The MSLA Intellectual Freedom committee recommends the following proactive guidelines for establishing and maintaining a strong library program and collection. The ideas that follow will also help the librarian build allies and deflect potential challenges should they arise.

Materials Selection Policy, approved by the School Committee
- including Reconsideration Policy and form
- including Collection Development Statement Collection Development

- Use reviews to make decisions for purchases; some recommended core review sources:
- School Library Journal
- Booklist
- The Horn Book
- Professional knowledge and experience
- Examine new materials as they arrive

Library Climate
- Welcoming atmosphere
- Provide service for Students, Faculty, Administration, School Committee, Parents, Community Members

Outreach
- Back to School Night
- Welcome Volunteers to work in your library

- Library web site and brochures
- Professional Development for staff
- PTO presentations

Connections
- Join professional organizations and listservs: MSLA, AASL, LM_NET
- Stay informed about Intellectual Freedom groups and issues
- ALA - Office for Intellectual Freedom
- Be aware of pro-censorship organizations

IF a challenge comes… Don’t assume that an objection or criticism is the beginning of a challenge
- Try to resolve the concern informally
- Review the material that is of concern
- Look at it from the complainant’s perspective, as well as your own

Steps to follow to respond to a challenge
It is important to know and follow the formal steps in your district’s Selection Policy. If your district does not have a Selection Policy in place, look at one from a similar community, or look at the ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom’s “Workbook for Selection Policy Writing ”

After the formal challenge is made

1. Provide the complainant with handouts as specified in the Selection Policy. For ex:

- the reconsideration form

- reconsideration procedure
- Library Bill of Rights)

2. Inform your principal and your library director immediately
- Respect your district’s chain of command
- Develop a procedural strategy with your principal 3. Keep detailed written records

4. An objective third party should be present during any discussion of the challenge

5. Notify the MSLA Executive Director, Kathy Lowe klowe@maschoolibraries.org

6. Consult with other library teachers (locally or electronically)
- Do not assume confidentiality, especially with e-mail 7. Contact allies
- Faculty members
- Parents
- Community members

Keep in mind: the “target” is the material, NOT the librarian. Further Resources from the American Library Association

AASL Intellectual Freedom Brochure

Coping With Challenges and Censorship in Schools
Contain strategies and topics specifically for school libraries

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA)
Summary of the legislation and guidelines for schools and libraries