



South Central Kansas Library System

Freedom to Read
Survey Responses from
Public, Academic and School
Libraries

September 30, 2022



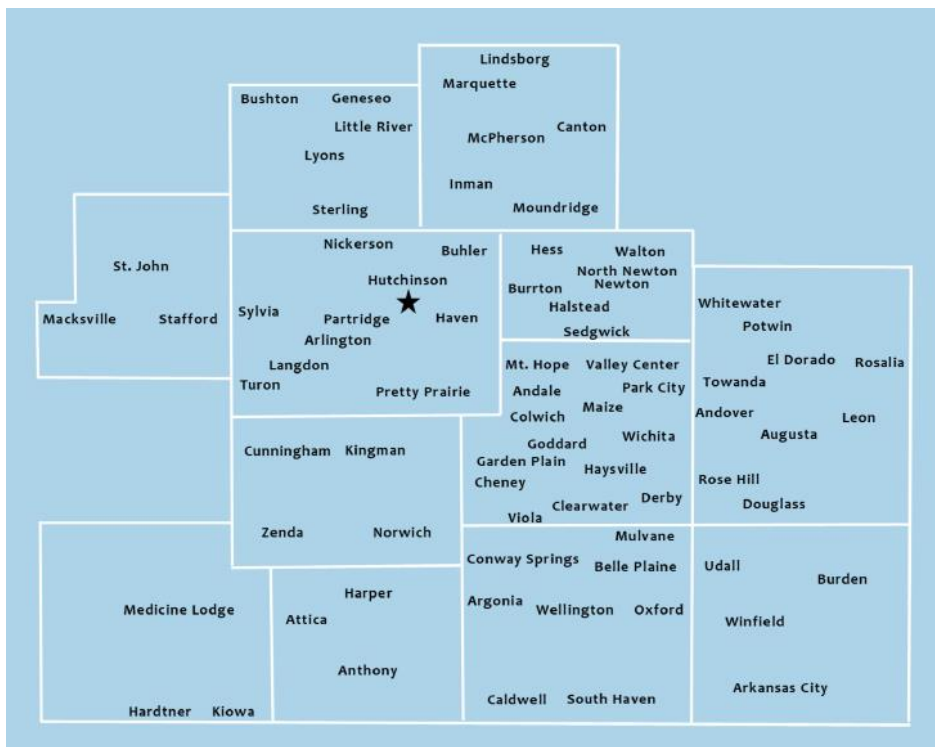
South Central Kansas Library System Freedom to Read Survey Responses from Public, Academic and School Libraries September 30, 2022

Introduction

Shared experiences and knowledge make a difference in our responses supporting the Freedom to Read. The Freedom to Read may be broadly defined as the right of individuals within the law to read and listen to the ideas of others and the right of libraries within the law to provide resources and programs to meet their community's needs.

The South Central Kansas Library System conducted a survey of 142 public, academic and school library members during July 13 to September 2, 2022. The survey was divided into four sections: **Informal Complaints**, **Formal Complaints**, **Your Perspectives**, and **Resources and Support**.

Sixty-two responses from 45 public, academic and school libraries are presented. This report provides a compilation of perspectives and experiences as well as identifies support that member libraries deem valuable. SCKLS will use the survey results to develop needs-based and customized resources to support and strengthen the Freedom to Read in member libraries.





Public, Academic and School Libraries Respondents

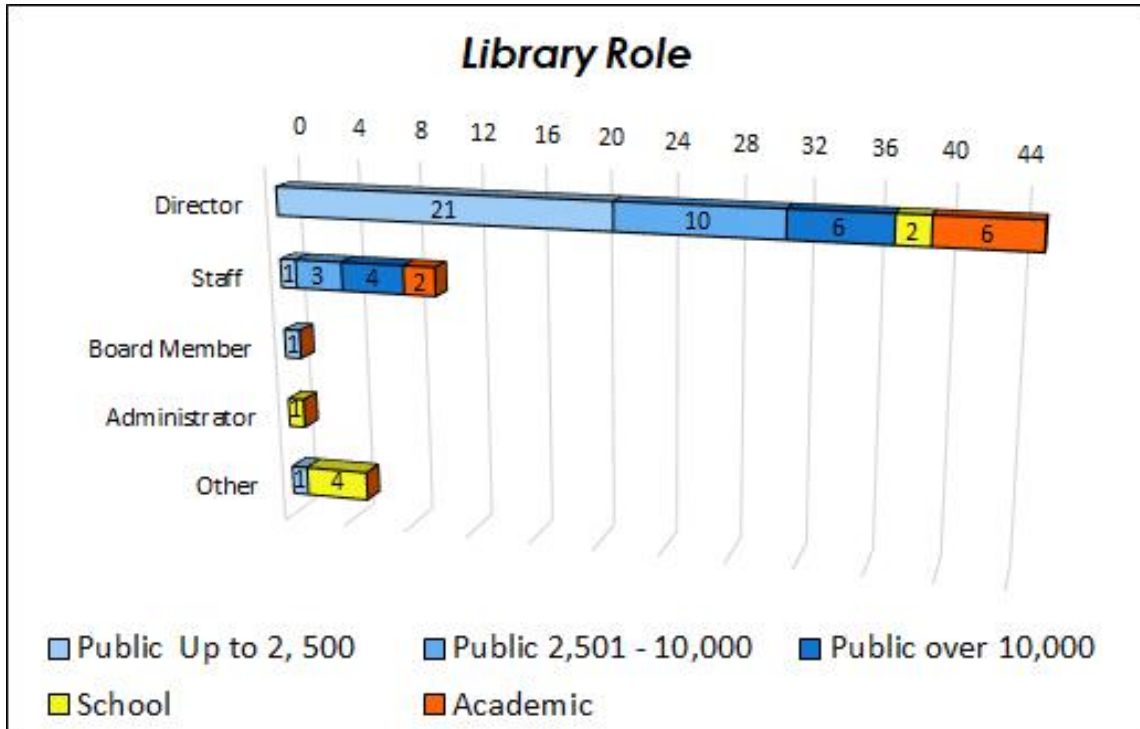
Andover Public Library
Anthony Public Library
Arkansas City Public Library
Arlington City Library
Belle Plaine Public Library
Bradford Memorial Library – El Dorado
Briner Library - Central Christian College
Buhler Public Library
Burrton Public Library
Butler Community College Libraries & Archives
Canton Township Carnegie Library
Cheney Public Library
Clearwater Public Library
Conway Springs City Library
Cottonwood Elementary Library - Andover USD 385
Cunningham Public Library
Douglass High School Library – Douglass USD 396
Garfield Elementary – Augusta USD 402
Goddard Public Library
Hardtner Public Library
Haysville Community Library
Hutchinson Public Library
Inman Public Library
John F. Kennedy Library - Hutchinson Community College
Kingman Carnegie Library
Lincoln Library, Medicine Lodge
Lindsborg Community Library
Macksville City Library
Marquette Community Library
Miller Library - McPherson College
Moundridge Public Library
Mulvane Public Library
Newton High School Library – Newton USD 373
Newton Public Library
Potwin Public Library
Pretty Prairie Public Library
Sylvia Public Library
Towanda Public Library
Udall Public Library
Walton Community Library
Whitewater Memorial Library
Wichita Public Library
Winfield Public Library
WSU Tech
Zenda Public Library



Part 1. Informal Complaints

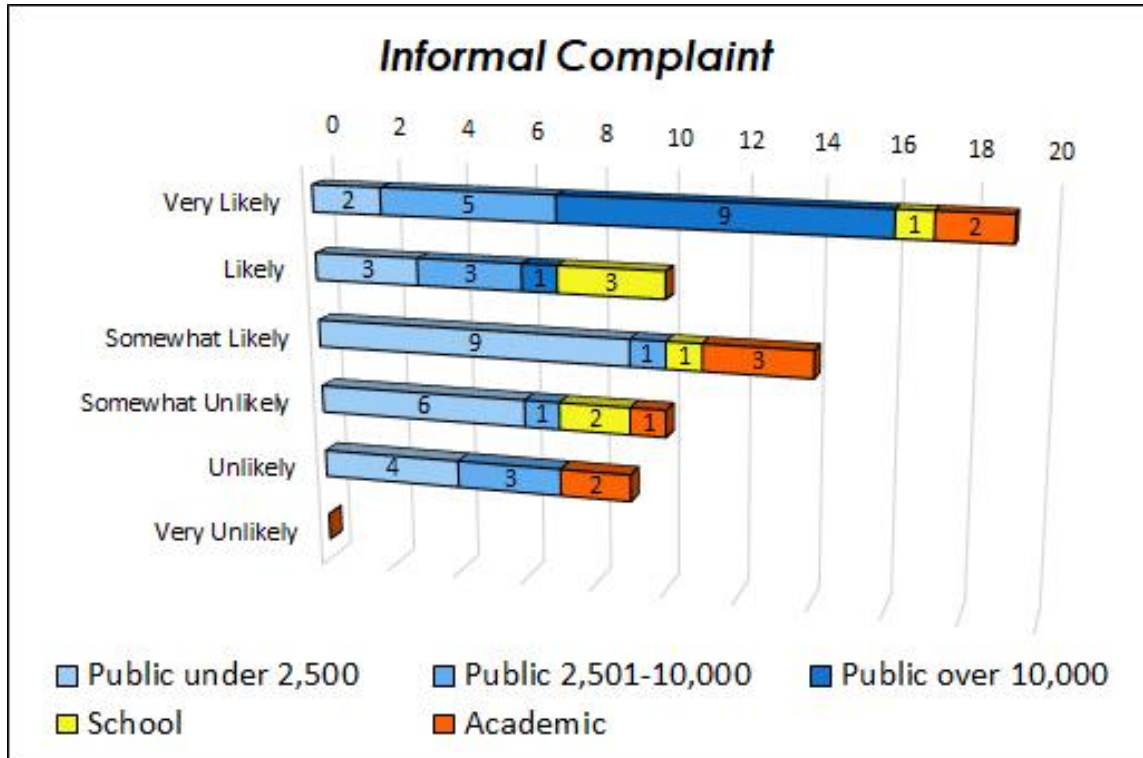
An informal complaint is defined as comments made or concerns raised by a library user about a book, resource, display or program.

1. What is your Library Role?





2. In the next 1 – 3 years, do you think your library will have an *Informal Complaint* about a book, resource, display or program?



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- We have a few older patrons who sometimes have a difficult time with the idea that everyone who reads have different likes and dislikes. They have very strong beliefs of what words, characters, and activities should not be in books! I am thankful that a one-on-one conversation concerning freedom always seems to settle them down and has them looking at the larger picture!
- One never knows what conservative faction may arise.
- I've had a couple people tell me we should request "certain books" not be sent to us through the [SCKLS] Rotating Collection. I've had quite a few patrons tell me they decided to not continue reading certain books because of the language or topic.
- The Whitewater Library has received 1 informal complaint in the last 30 years. Yes, we have been very fortunate!



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less: (Continued)

- People here tend to not complain. If it is something they won't read they just leave it alone.
- Certain individuals have already made comments when they see a topic/title they do not like.
- New books have a higher percent of non-traditional relationships than books did in the past. We have a very high concentration of extremely conservative patrons that are likely to object to some of these books.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- I have a strong desire to add more LGBTQ material to our collection. I have been slowly adding a few items and they are mixed in on the shelves. We have content for those that needed it, but I haven't brought attention to them as this is a current topic in libraries.
- We have roughly 1 person per week make a comment about a book that shouldn't be on the shelf.
- In our community, we often have parents or grandparents make comments about whether certain materials are appropriate or they will ask us about whether we would allow them to restrict their child's check outs.
- We have averaged one or two a year in the past, so I expect that trend to continue.
- I had a formal complaint (form was filled) for our Pride month display in June, and informal complaints are much more common.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- It has not been at all uncommon for us to receive the occasional complaint, most frequently about nonfiction works on contemporary affairs, of bias in our selection process. So, it seems -- especially given the prevailing political environment --that we are quite likely to experience it again.
- There are enough people angry about enough things that it will happen. It's not really a question for us. In fact, I had a phone message about our email "new item" service just the other day because two of the new items had a "bad word" in the titles.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater: (Continued)

- I wouldn't say we get informal complaints "frequently," but they do happen a few times per year. I would say that the great majority of these complaints are just patrons who want to express their opinion about a book. They have no intent of following up with a formal request to restrict or ban.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

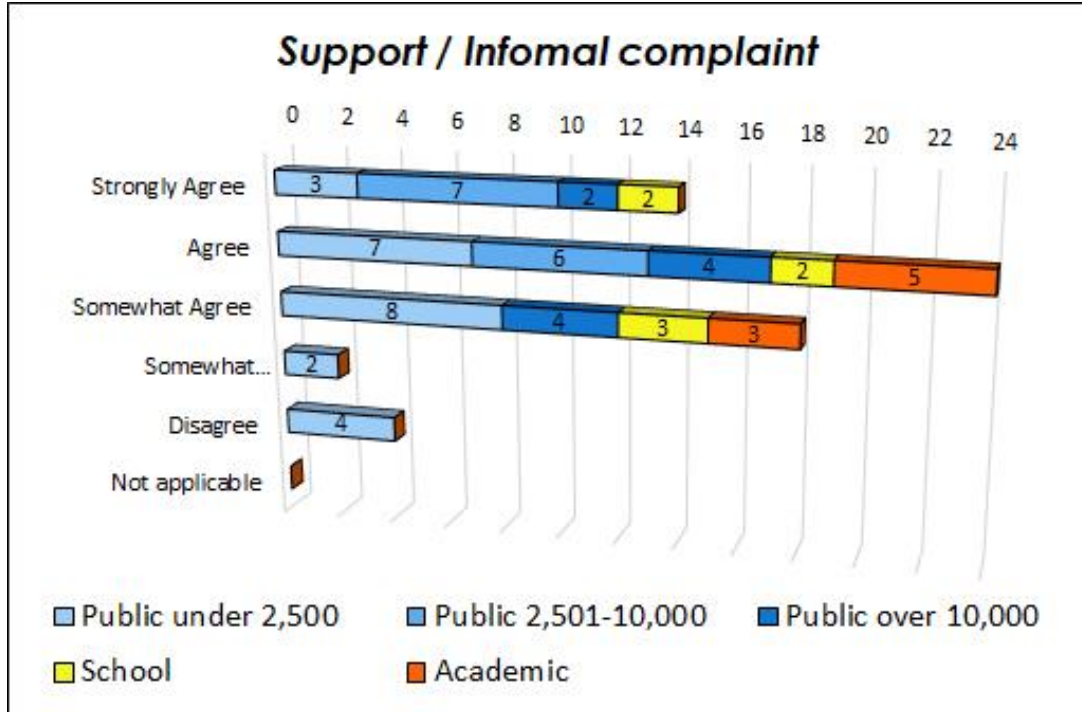
- We are a small academic library and I'm not sure we've had any informal complaints in the past five years. However, with the increase in political polarization and how some subjects become flash points, I'm not ruling it out.
- Mounting displays about topics like Juneteenth inevitably invites comments phrased as questions about why we would choose to celebrate "this" and not "that".

Comments from School Libraries:

- It's already happening. A few community members (who may or may not be parents) have raised a fuss, and our Board responded by requiring ALL books taught in English classes at the high school to be re-approved. This includes books that have been taught for decades. Have not had informal complaints in a long time, but anticipate more with the current cultural climate.
- Everyone has an opinion and I'm sure there will be books patrons will complain about.



3. I have the resources and *Support* in place and available to address an *Informal Complaint* about a book, resource, display or program.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- We have a written policy.
- We practice open communication and our patrons know that. They can talk with us concerning any area or issue in our library and we will do our very best to alleviate those concerns. No matter what items or materials are requested, we do our utmost to fulfill their request!
- Those who complained were satisfied with the response that the best course of action, if they come across a book they find offensive, is to simply quit reading it and bring it back to the library. I sometimes put "remark" cards in books that are checked out.
- Sometimes people don't really want to challenge, they just want to vent. I let them do that.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less: (Continued)

- We don't have a process in place to handle such complaints but it's certainly something that needs considered.
- I will take their comments under advisement. Staff will report comments to me. May result in moving a book to a less prominent or accessible place, removing it, or no action at all.
- I know the steps to take with a formal or informal complaint.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- We have a system in place, but it could be updated and changed.
- I have the board backing me with my beliefs that NO book should be taken off because of someone's personal belief.
- My library board recently adopted a challenged materials procedure, so I feel much more prepared to address complaints.
- SCKLS is a great resource and support!
- My director supports staff whenever there is a challenge, and we have a policy in place that we can reference whenever a patron complains about a material.
- We try to respond to any complaint on a case by case basis.
- For informal complaints, I feel like patience is needed to hear the complaint and knowledge of my own policies.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- Our library's mission statement, policy handbook, constant celebration of banned books and the freedom to read, coupled with what I believe to be a supportive board, all provide substantial resources and support to respond to an informal complaint.
- We went through a challenge a few years ago.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater: (Continued)

- We have a fairly confident staff, a policy to fall back on should the complaint become formal, and I'm not particularly afraid to let patrons know they can simply choose not to check out / read / let their family access the objectionable "thing".

Comments from Academic Libraries:

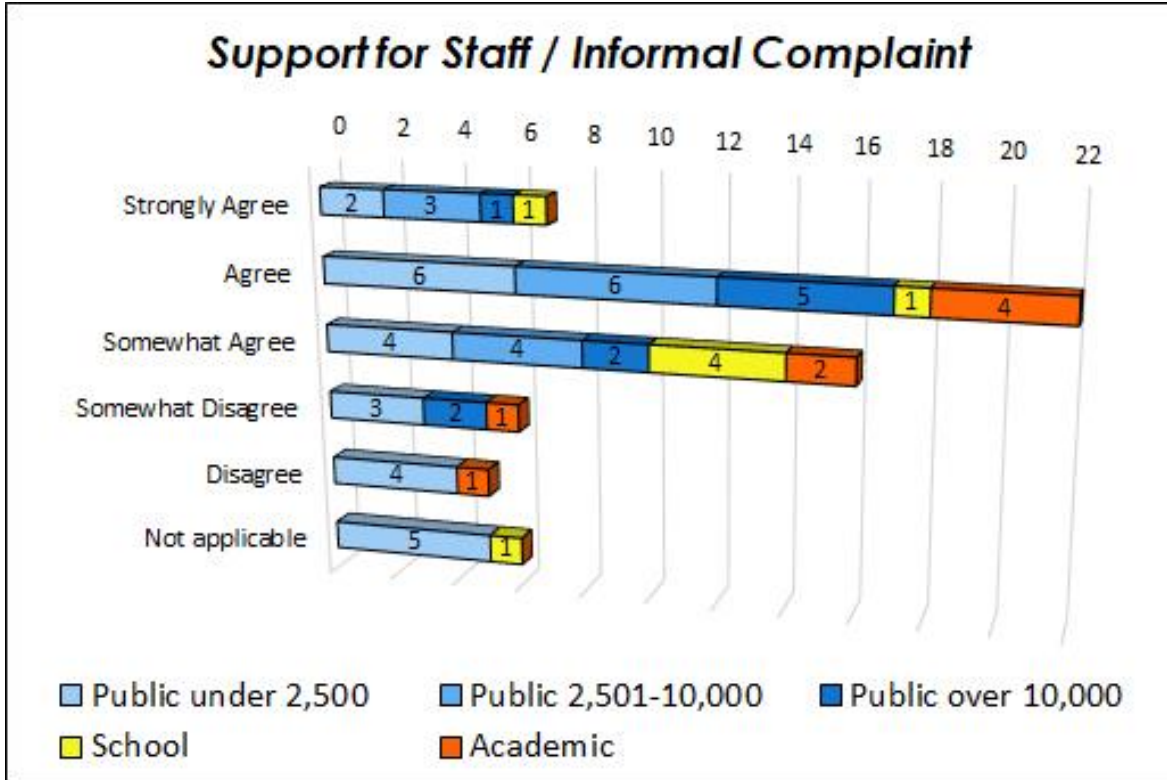
- We have information in our library policy and procedure manual, but I would like to update it.
- We have a very simple policy/procedure regarding informal complaints and I feel supported by my supervisors and institution. However, I have never been through an informal complaint, so I'm not really sure what to expect.

Comments from School Libraries:

- Yes, if the complaint ever gets to me. The problem is that administrators and Board members in this "post-Covid" world are quick to "solve" the problems themselves. They refuse to require parents/patrons to speak directly with the teacher or librarian and instead dole out "solutions" without consulting the experienced educator.
- Our district library book policy is very clear and easy to obtain.



4. My library Staff/co-workers have the resources and Support in place and available to address an *Informal Complaint* about a book, display or program.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- Probably need to work on this.
- One of our greatest strengths is that our staff and board are all basically on the same page. Although our discussions range from A to Z, in the end we all agree on the best way to take care of our patrons and services, including the complaints.
- If staff members are unsure how to handle an informal complaint, they send the complainer to the Director.
- This has not come up.
- Could always use more guidance-- especially hearing what other libraries are doing.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less: (Continued)

- I am the staff.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- I would refer to our policy manual, the board of Directors, and SCKLS.
- We periodically go over this at our employee meetings
- My library staff/co-workers need more training and confidence built in following/enforcing our newly formalized procedure for addressing complaints.
- We have a policy in place and our director is willing to address any concerns as well.
- With staff turnover, I feel like it is a process to keep them prepped for general complaints.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- Training part-time staff to talk about the library's philosophy around challenges and intellectual freedom is somewhat difficult. We ask part-time staff to hand off questions like that to a supervisor.
- This will be part of the discussion at an upcoming staff training day, but I feel like I'm "winging it" as far as developing the training for that day.

Comments from Academic Libraries

- They would let me know of the complaint, and I would have to deal with it.
- My employees are all work-study students, and I don't necessarily think it's fair to ask them to negotiate that kind of complaint. They're simply asked to refer complaints to me.
- I believe that our staff would be very capable of handling an informal complaint, or in the case of student assistants they know who to direct those complaints to. I only hesitate because none of us have been through an informal complaint process.

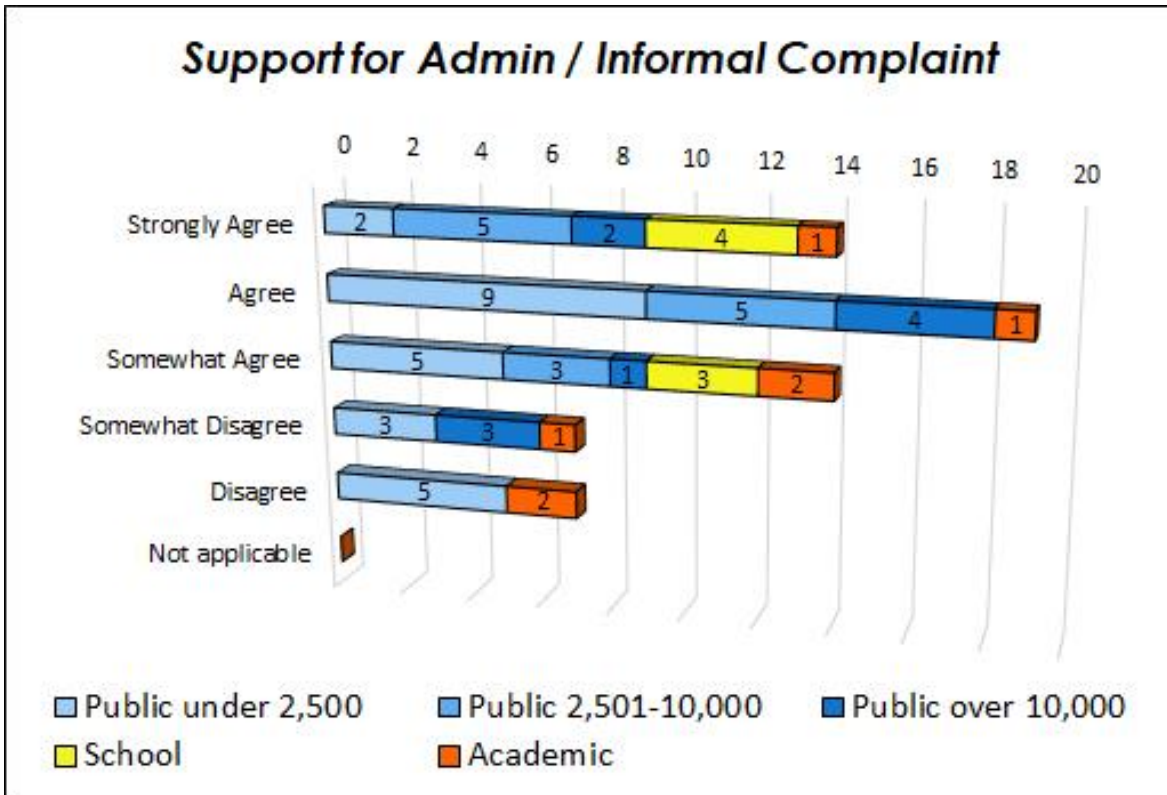


Comments from School Libraries:

- None



5. My public library board members/school or college Administrators have the resources and Support in place and available to address an *Informal Complaint* about a book, resource, display or program.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- When we get to a crossroads and need detailed directions, we email Paul Hawkins.
- It hasn't come up.
- Would like to see what other libraries do, as well.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- My board would depend on me. Another issue talked about at board meetings
- Again, with Board turnover (mostly due to terms ending or moves) it is a process to keep them prepped and aware of the policies in place. Whenever we are faced with a challenge, the Board, as a whole, seeks out a solution.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- The board is not directly involved with informal complaints, but we do ensure that they're aware.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

- I don't really know what the reaction would be from administration if they received an informal complaint. They would most likely hear complaints from another staff member.
- I think that if a complaint were submitted to administrators or the Board of Trustees instead of to the library, it would simply be funneled down to me.

Comments from School Libraries:

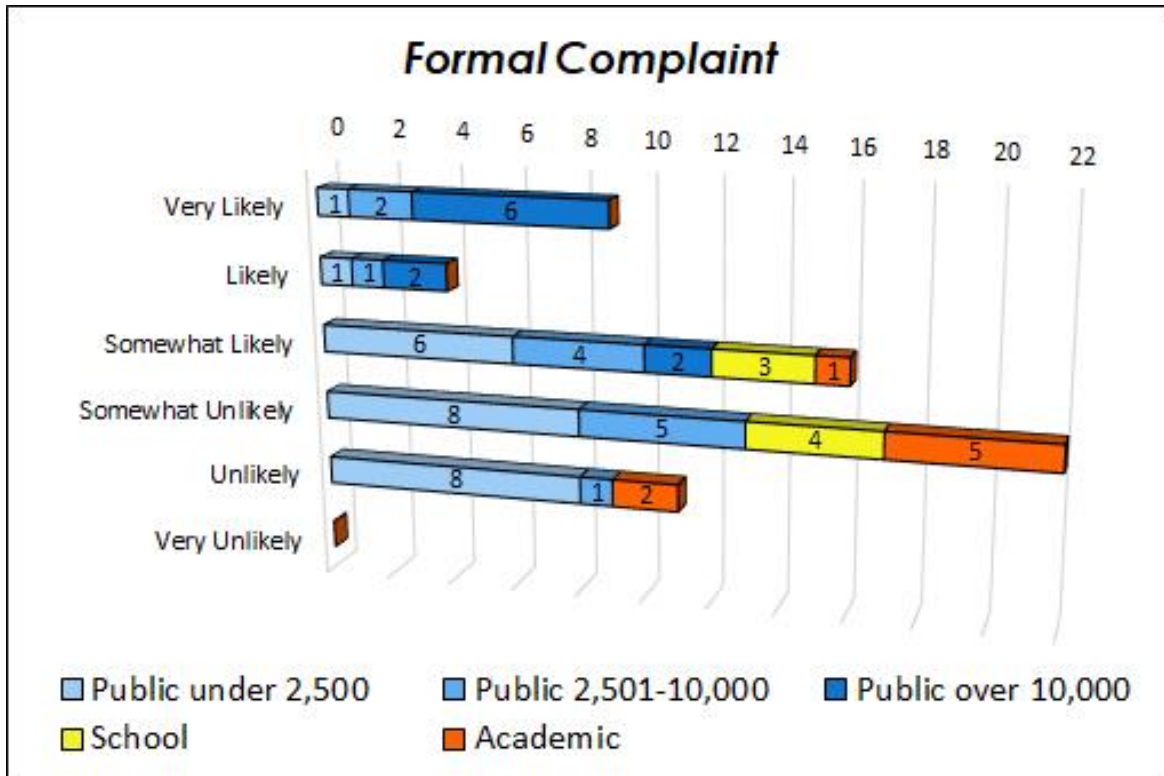
- None



Part 2. Formal Complaints

A Formal Complaint occurs when a library user requests that a book, resource, display or program be removed or restricted.

6. In the next 1 – 3 years, do you think your library will have a *Formal Complaint* to remove or restrict a book, resource, display or program?



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- A look at current events suggests that anything is possible!
- We don't currently have a formal complaint process in place but tensions are high everywhere and I believe it's somewhat likely.
- We do not have any challenges on record at the library, not to say it couldn't happen but it just hasn't in 55 years.
- We try to purchase items that our community will use. With a limited budget, that limits our purchases enough. We will use ILL to get a book we might not choose for our shelves for those who request it.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- The majority of our patrons and community members know my stance on restricting materials in the library. I can see someone choosing not to let their child check out from here given that we provide ALL materials to patrons but I don't see them coming forward.
- Yes. We had formal complaints to remove materials within the past year. The first of these was the catalyst for the library board to formalize an approved procedure in order to be better prepared in future incidents.
- Formal complaints seem to happen less often. We have recently had a complaint about one of our displays, and we utilized our policies, along with collecting examples from other local libraries that had similar displays.
- I feel like most of the informal complaints I have personally dealt with, have not been willing to take the steps to issue a formal complaint.
- Again, we just had a formal complaint. However, my Board did vote to maintain the display as scheduled/needed.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- It is in the atmosphere today.
- We average about one formal complaint per year now.
- This is currently an issue in our schools and I anticipate will eventually spill over to our library.
- So far, we've had a supportive community.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

- We have not had a formal complaint in 20 years.
- I think it would be unusual, but not completely unexpected.
- It's hard to tell, but my impression is that being a college academic library insulates us somewhat from formal complaints. May need to revisit policy with the board.

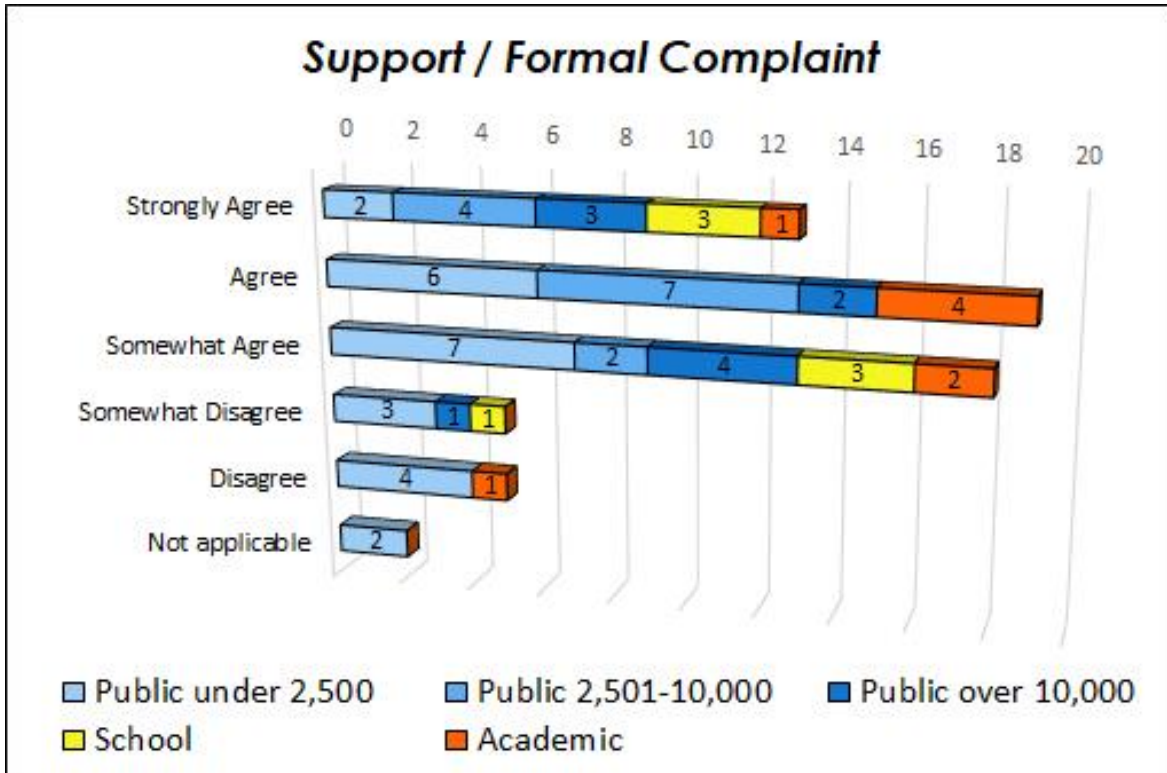


Comments from School Libraries:

- I say unlikely because the administration and Board of Education are scared to have to actually vote on banning or not banning a book. Therefore, they are ignoring their own BOE policy and instituting new busywork to keep teachers running and afraid and to prevent any actual decisions crossing their desks.
- The process we use to formally complain requires patrons to read the entire book and fill out paperwork. Many just want to complain and something be done about it. Holding them accountable for reading all of it and in context often changes the challenge.



7. I have the resources and *Support* in place and available to address a *Formal Complaint* to remove or restrict a book, resource, display or program.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- We will seek counsel if a formal complaint is made.
- We don't have a formal complaint process in place but if someone filed a complaint I would need to consult with our Board & with SCKLS.
- Would like to see examples of others forms, procedures.
- I would feel out the forms necessary. Present it to the board and call SCKLS for help.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- In my time working at the library, I have never had anyone willing to take the steps to issue a formal complaint. I have listened to informal complaints and responded to those, and I feel like if there was a formal complaint, I could respond to it.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000: (Continued)

- I had most of what I needed. My Board always wants to know what other Kansas libraries are doing, so I did reach out to the listserv asking if other libraries had similar displays. I received quite a few responses back. Note: As a member of the Kansas Library Association Board, I am probably more aware of the resources. Also, I knew if the situation was a bit more heated that I could have requested a formal letter of support from KLA to add weight to my argument.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- May need to revisit policy with the board.
- Again, I am reasonably confident in our situation. The primary question concerns how aggressively violent that "formal complaint" might be.
- Formal policy with a process for review in place that includes staff and potentially the board. The board has final say.
- I am in the beginning stages of redoing our collection development policy, including reconsideration policies. We have policies in place but they are not particularly thorough.
- It's impossible to read every book we purchase for our collections, and sometimes book reviews aren't always useful.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

- I have a process in the library policies manual.
- Again, I want to update our policies.
- We recently reviewed and updated our Reconsideration Policy and Procedure and form for clarity and efficiency. It also now includes steps to register the complaint with ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom and Kansas Library Association [and SCKLS] and request assistance, if needed. Hopefully we'll never have to test it out!
- We do have a collection development policy and a somewhat anemic challenge policy. Updating and expanding the challenge policy is on the to-do list.



Comments from School Libraries:

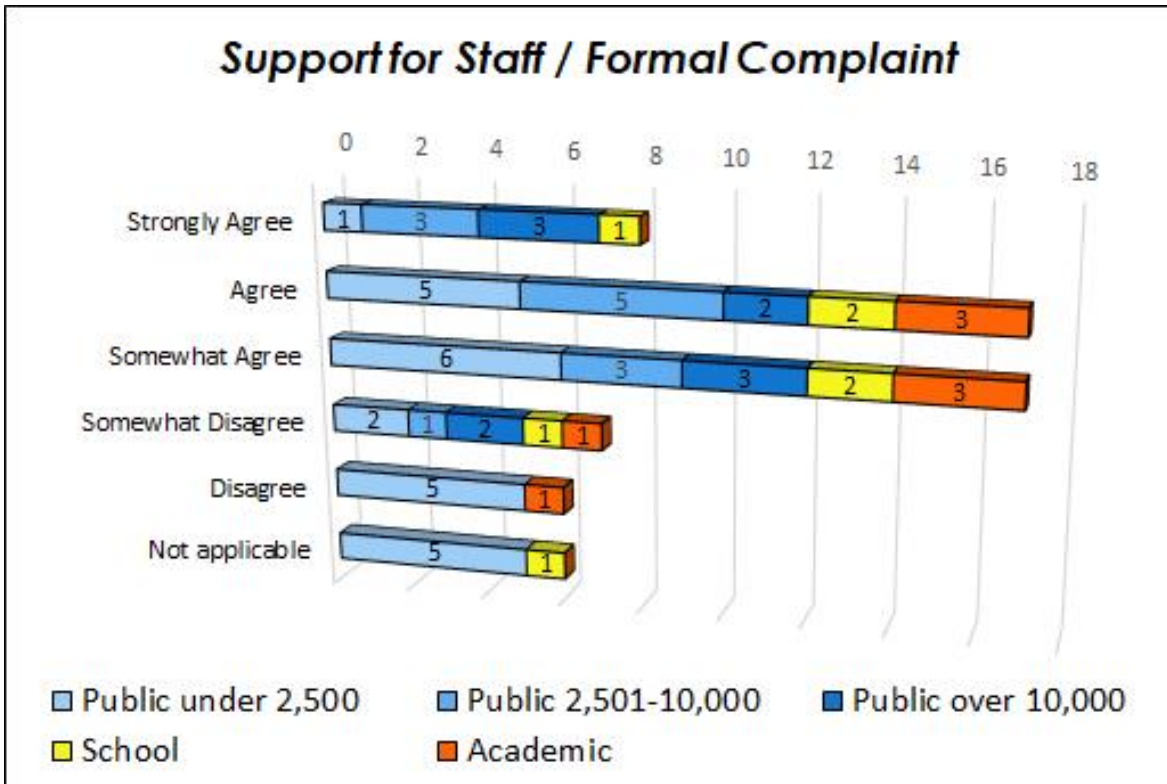
- We have a district policy, but when the librarians in the district asked to "review" it with the BOE, we were basically told not to bring it up. (don't give people ideas???) And then they adopted whatever policy KASB [Kansas Association of School Boards] sent their way regarding complaints.

Note: KASB Public Commentary Guide:

https://files.gabbart.com/2391/public_commentary_guide_final.pdf



8. My library Staff/co-workers have the resources and Support in place and available to address a *Formal Complaint* to remove or restrict a book, resource, display or program.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- A formal complaint will be addressed by the Board.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- My staff may not be aware of all of the resources and support, but they know that they can come to me with any questions.
- Also, I try to involve them and make them aware of challenges, the process, and the outcome. My library staff/co-workers do not have confidence in enforcing our newly approved challenged materials procedure. Additional training is needed.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- Will need to provide staff training.
- Again, it's impossible to read every book we purchase for our collections, and sometimes book reviews aren't always useful.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

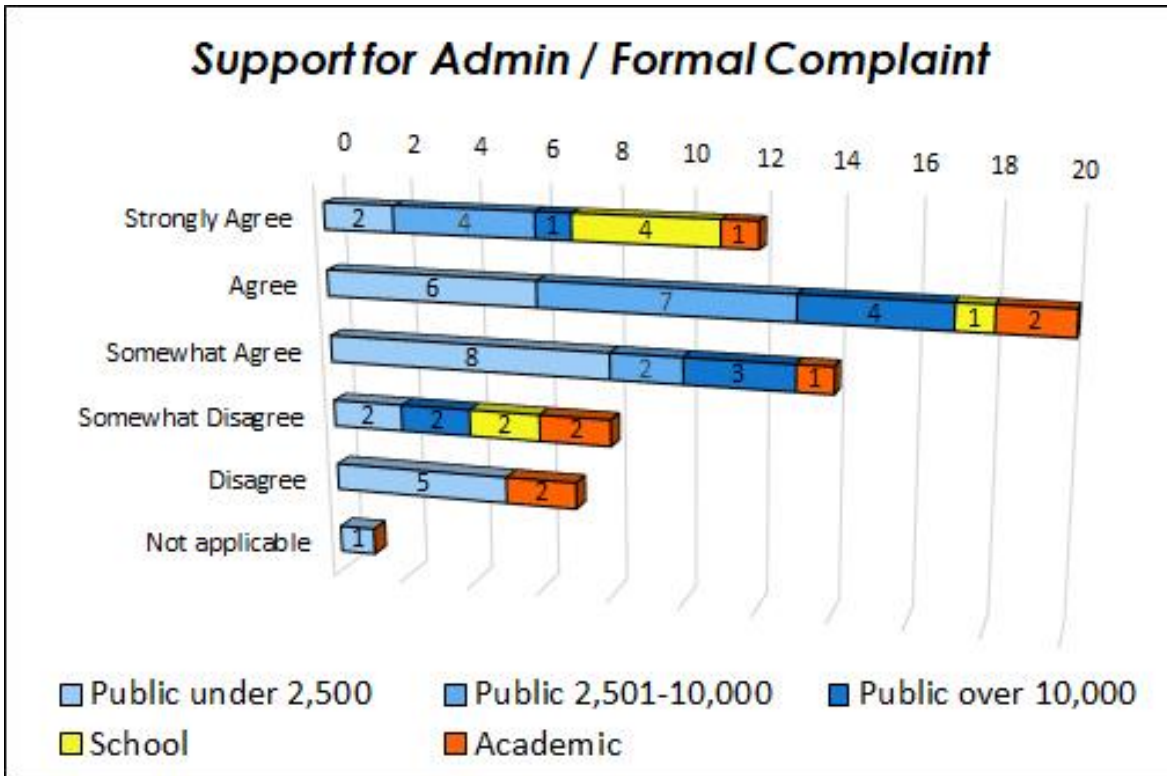
- Again, they would notify me about the complaint, and I would start the formal process of accessing the complaint.
- They are aware of the policy and the reconsideration process, but none of us have ever been through one.
- My employees are all work-study students, and I don't necessarily think it's fair to ask them to negotiate that kind of complaint. They're simply asked to refer complaints to me.

Comments from School Libraries:

- None



9. My library board members/school or college *Administrators* have the resources and *Support* in place and available to address a *Formal Complaint* to remove or restrict a book, resource, display or program.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- Our Board is amazing! They approach every challenge with confidence and have achieved positive results every time. A formal complaint would be not any different!
- We provide the board with the information they need to help make the decision.
- We have a policy and protocol in place for materials, not for programming.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- The Board is definitely familiar with our collection policy, and they have voiced feeling supported by the resources that I bring to the table.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- May need to review policy, consider a review of Freedom to Read principles.
- I think they do, but these things rarely reach their level, so I'm sure there would be some unfamiliarity and hesitancy should a complaint be appealed to them.
- Again, we do have policies in place, but they need to be expanded and updated.
- They would need thorough reviews of challenged materials. If one book was challenged, it might be feasible to expect board members to read the book for themselves. But if multiple books are challenged, it's not realistic.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

- The process in place includes going to my administrator if the person making the complaint is not satisfied with the decisions and actions of the library director. I would imagine it would just get passed along to the library.
- I have no idea what resources administration would refer to if they were presented with a challenge.

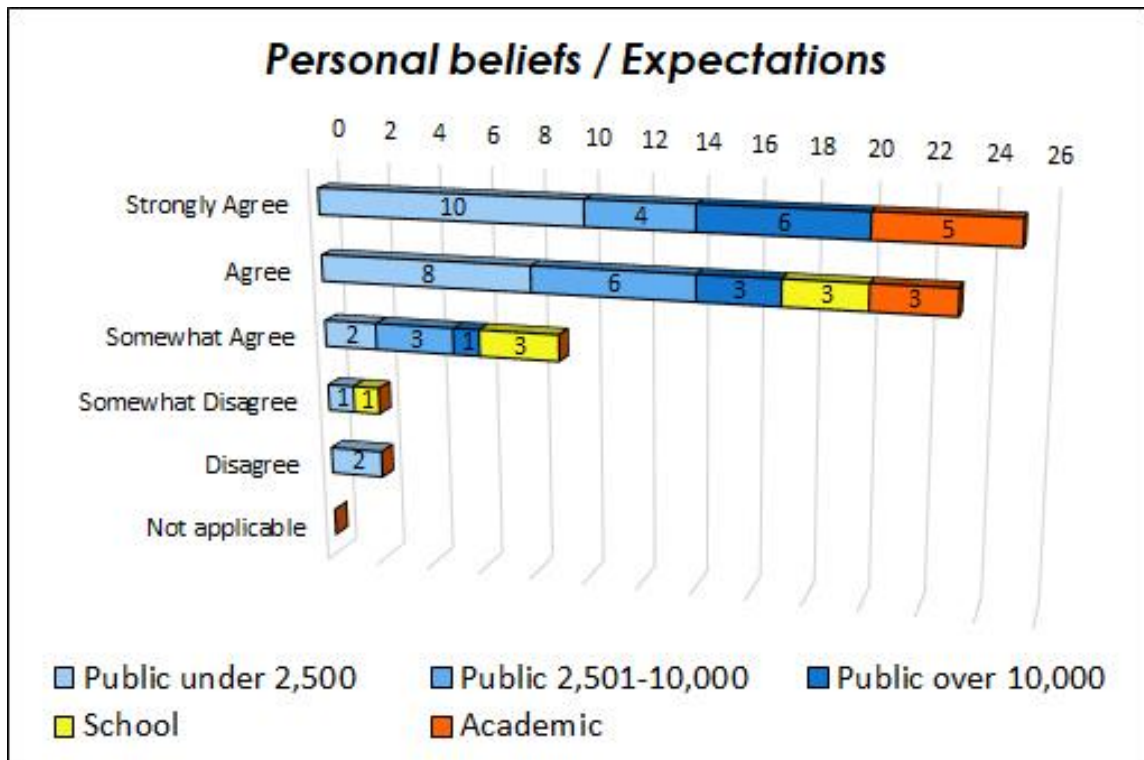
Comments from School Libraries:

- None



Part 3. Your Perspectives

10. I do not feel any conflict between my *Personal beliefs* and *Expectations* to offer books, resources, displays or programs to meet the information needs of everyone in my community.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- I would not read many of the books that I order for the library because of lack of time and the need to prioritize my recreation time. I order primarily for the majority of my readers. Shelf space is limited; I am thankful for ILL which gives us the opportunity to provide for those with more varied interests, without taking up needed space.
- Collection Development is a difficult line to straddle when operating within a fairly liberal bedroom community set within a religious, conservative, rural area.
- We are an older mostly conservative community.
- I don't have to agree with an author to purchase their book and make it available in the library.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less: (Continued)

- I have a little trouble buying LGBT material.
- I will get a book through ILL for any adult who asks for it.
- My beliefs do guide my actions in some ways... for example, someone put in the book drop a donation of books about Satanic rituals and explicit topics... these did NOT go on our shelves. Someone else donated a book about COVID 19 that was rife with misinformation and fear tactics to get people to avoid the shots... that also did NOT make it on our shelves.
- I haven't had to censor any books or resources in our Library.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- I believe patrons can read WHATEVER they choose to read and that choice is 100% supported in this library.
- I do generally shy away from controversial displays and programs (Pride displays, drag queen storytimes, etc.). While I have no issues with offering these displays and programs on a personal level (they do not conflict with my beliefs), I do feel that the community would lash out, and the library would be at the center of controversy. It feels safer to "quietly" support marginalized community members through our collection offerings, making sure everyone feels represented in our materials. And we make a point to attend cultural events in the community, as well. I think this practice has been one of the reasons why we haven't received any formal complaints, but on a personal level, it sometimes feels like I'm not being a good "ally" and I'm not giving enough support.
- I do at times feel personal conflict with providing all requested items. However, I reconcile this within myself by reminding myself (and other community members) that it is not the job of the library to parent children & youth: parents are responsible for their child's information intake.
- In regards to resources for adults, I reconcile any personal conflict by doing my best to provide multiple points of view on topics (especially if political or controversial) and freely providing ILL access to any/all items that are not part of our library collection.
- I feel as though we have a diverse range of materials available for our patrons, and I feel comfortable with the materials that we have.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000: (Continued)

- There are times when I feel conflicted, but I do it anyway, knowing that there are many different people and different views in the community and access to information is important to everyone.
- I am not above admitting that sometimes it is hard to purchase books that I consider misinformation due to the author or topic. They are generally political books, but despite this I try to offer balance for the community. I am grateful to be part of the sharing consortium, so that even if I don't have every political book that comes out that patrons can still search and hold them in the catalog.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- Well, it IS quite painful to display a pro-Trump book.
- I'm an old public librarian. Once we start pulling books / displays / etc. off the shelf because they offend someone's sensibilities, we won't be able to stop. The goal of a public library and a collection development librarian should be to have something to offend everyone.
- I do generally shy away from controversial displays and programs (Pride displays, drag queen storytimes, etc.). While I have no issues with offering these displays and programs on a personal level (they do not conflict with my beliefs), I do feel that the community would lash out, and the library would be at the center of controversy. It feels safer to "quietly" support marginalized community members through our collection offerings, making sure everyone feels represented in our materials. And we make a point to attend cultural events in the community, as well. I think this practice has been one of the reasons why we haven't received any formal complaints, but on a personal level, it sometimes feels like I'm not being a good "ally" and I'm not giving enough support.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

- Our community is aware of the college's conservative perspective. This library does provide resources that address both sides of societal issues.
- In the past, I would've marked "strongly agree." However, the proliferation of "both sides-ism" and the expectation that libraries should provide materials containing factually incorrect information on topics like climate change and gender identity makes this harder to agree with.

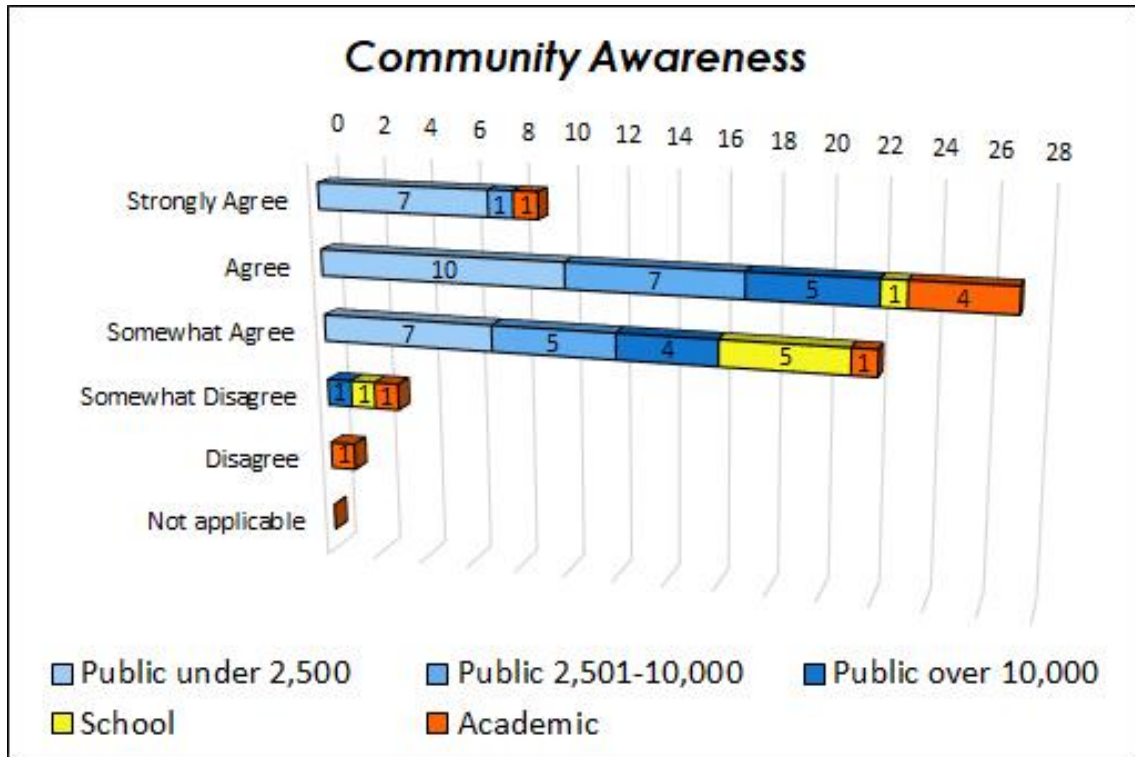


Comments from School Libraries:

- At the elementary level, I feel there are topics (sexuality?) that I don't necessarily address in purchasing
- I'm more bothered by the fact that only one side is being listened to by administration and Board of Education members.
- We try to give many perspectives for research purposes.



11. *My Community* has a general Awareness of the library's role in providing books, resources, displays or programs to meet the information needs of everyone in the community.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- We are a small town library with newspaper coverage, Facebook presence, and a whole lot of word of mouth!
- Some people are aware our Library is back stronger than ever. Others we are trying to inform them that their local Library is available resource once again.
- Most do. Some don't.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- Sometimes some patrons only think about how the library serves them and they don't consider how the programs or resources we provide serve diverse groups of people.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000: (Continued)

- We live in a time where even the recommendation from a doctor can be questioned, so it is safe to say that not all members of the community value or understand the library's role.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- Frequent library users, by and large, understand the library's role. However, I think that people who are disengaged from the library do not understand it. The number of people who call and ask whether it's free to use the library tells me that a lot of people are very uninformed about public libraries.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- I really don't know.
- It's very hard these days to avoid tribalism in the community. In addition, I don't think we (speaking as a public librarian) do a robust enough job of raising awareness that public libraries are here for all, not just the largest group.
- I think there is a good contingency of our citizens that understand this. I think there's another group that doesn't or just doesn't care.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

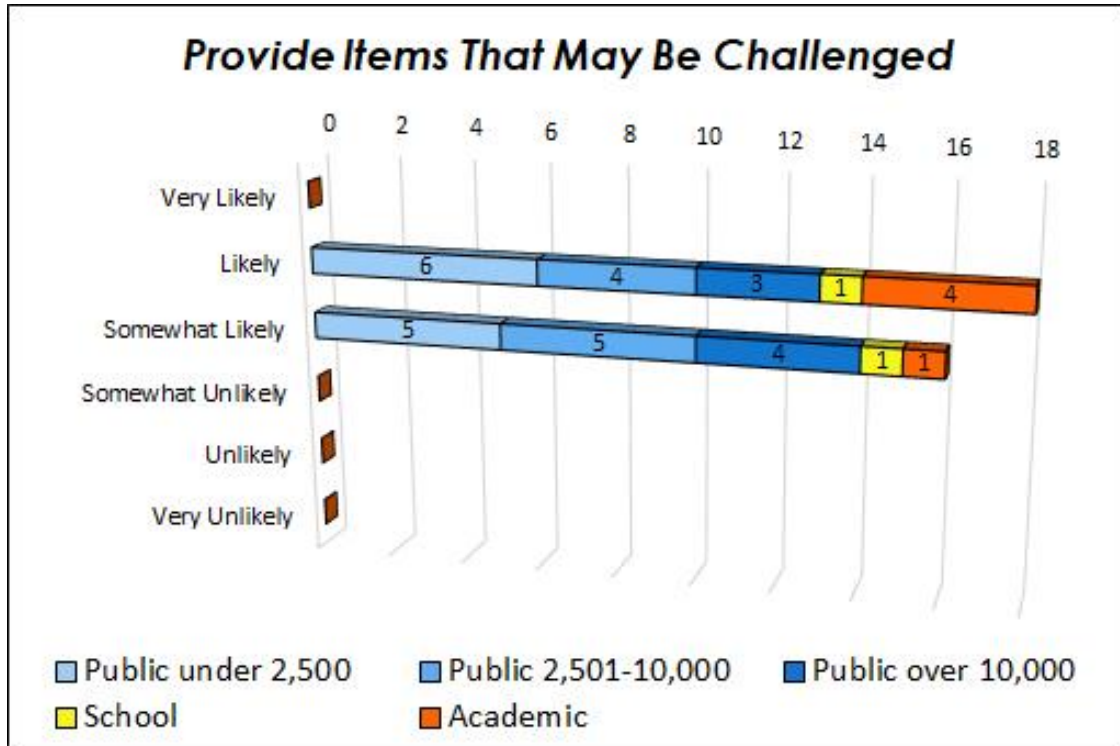
- None

Comments from School Libraries:

- None



12. I am more likely or less likely to purchase or *Provide Items*--books, resources, displays or programs--*That May Be Challenged*.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- As the library services at our schools dwindle, we are stepping up and seeking ways that we can better serve the students in our town. This will bring about numerous changes, and changes often cause some unrest and dissatisfaction.
- I'm rather stubborn and I'm likely to purchase books and read them to see for myself what is so bad about them. I like to make my own decisions about things and allow others to do the same.
- I can't thoroughly go through each book before buying it... However, I do try to stick to things my patrons will appreciate. Even when buying, for example, books about Presidents, I anticipate some will complain- but I try to buy 'both sides' to be representative of multiple views. (can't please everyone!)
- Unless it was specifically requested by a patron then yes I would buy it but I am not going to go out looking for things to cause a stir.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- More likely. Even if it is not checked out, it is on the shelf to let patrons know that if they choose to explore, we are here to support!
- Our library has a limited purchasing budget. If I anticipate a challenge, I am somewhat less likely to purchase. In these cases, I freely suggest interlibrary loan as an option for community members to have access to these materials.
- I provide materials based on merit and reviews. We have a lot of material in the library that has been formally challenges across the United States.
- I would select books that have strong book reviews and that have value to the various members of our community.
- Many times resources that fit these categories end up being weeded out early due to lack of circulation. I provide the information, but the library community determines how long the information or resources remain a part of the overall collection. Therefore, providing the resources has not been an issue for me. When it comes to programs, I want to choose programs that our library community will come to and be a part of. This may determine what types of programs I choose.
- I am being extremely thoughtful about my displays and purchases because I don't want the threat of a challenge to drive our offerings and services. I knew that our Pride display might be challenged, but it would be a disservice to those in both the LGBTQ and Mulvane community to not share the resources.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- I'm not personally; but what I hear from the staff who currently orders in this library; they are thinking about it and recognizing it. For example, feeling at odds with awards list that don't match perceived community values.
- I have tried to stick to starred reviews of potentially contentious books, like trans children. Starred reviews provide a lot of justification for adding the title.
- This is a constant battle though among staff to keep strong, build a balanced collection, and try to not worry about what might, possibly, maybe happen.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater: (Continued)

- We don't buy books that are "controversial" simply because they are controversial, but we do not "not" buy them if they are and we still think our patrons would like or use them. We have taken note of books being challenged in our schools and worked to make sure that we have them available here. Where we are probably more reserved is with displays and programs.
- I'm likely to provide books and resources but am more cautious about displays and programs.

Comments from Academic Libraries:

- While we might not purchase many fiction titles that are commonly challenged, we do purchase a lot of nonfiction materials that discuss those issues and subjects (especially LGBTQ+, racism, and reproductive rights) which are used in various displays.
- I try not to let the likelihood of a challenge be the deciding factor.

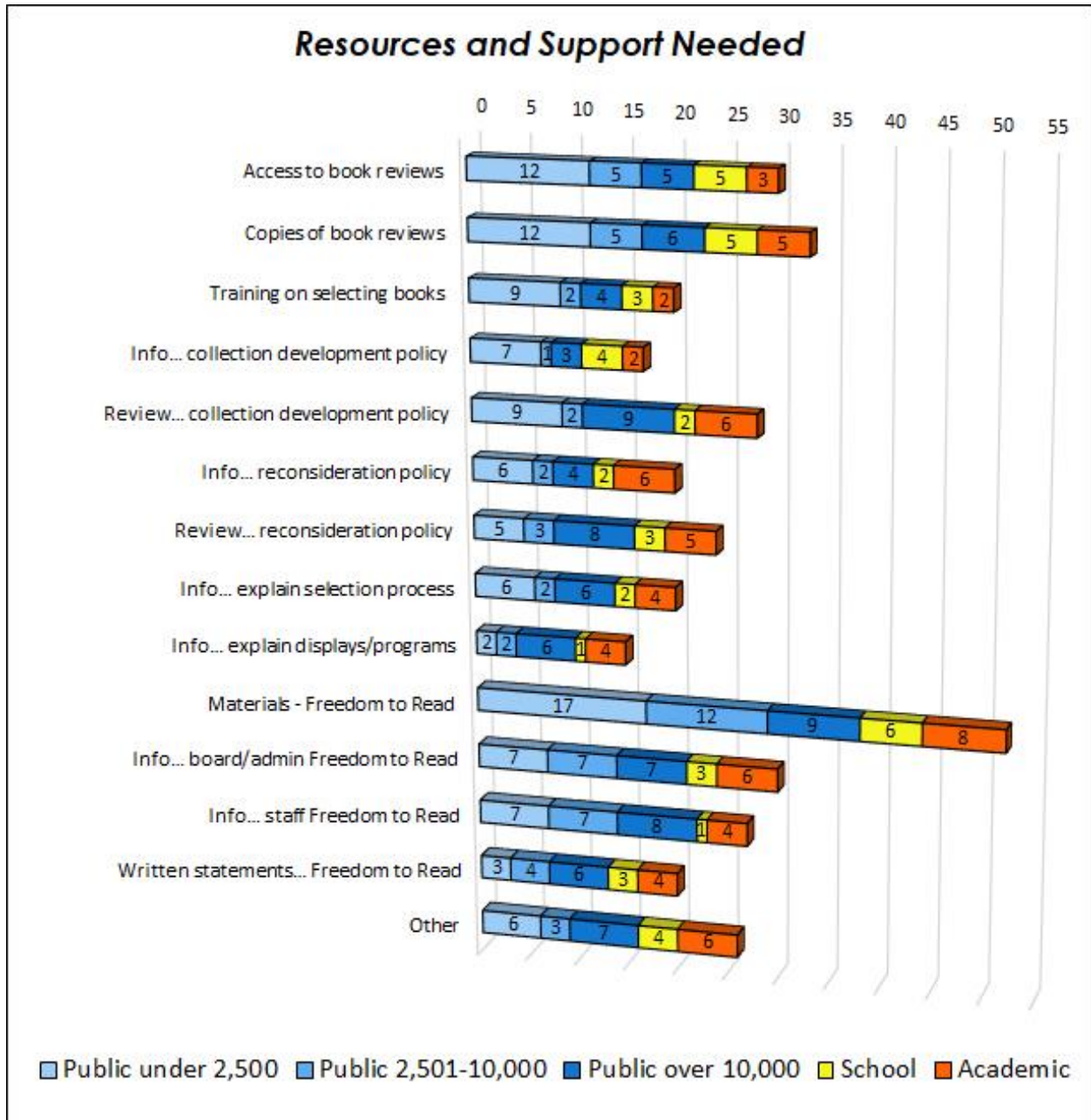
Comments from School Libraries:

- I try to provide a variety of content to patrons in hopes of giving a broad perspective as well as diverse representation.
- For now. :) Let's let this current craziness run its course. But I know I myself am being targeted, so I want to let this political craze die down before I bring attention to the library for any purchases I make.



Part 4. Resources and Support Needed

13. Please indicate any of the following Resources and Support that would be helpful for your library:





Other:

- Information about handling First Amendment Audits could be helpful. This has not happened here, but it would be good to be prepared. Note: See “Libraries and First Amendment ‘Auditors’”, <https://librarylandproject.org/stories-blog/2022/6/15/libraries-and-first-amendment-auditors> and “Uptick in First Amendment Audits” <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2022/01/03/uptick-in-first-amendment-audits-2/>
- I think I took training on how to develop a collection development policy but I've probably forgotten most of it.
- "Other" would be to make a list of documented challenges in the state and outcomes. Also, with some of the more controversial titles or topics a list of libraries with those titles or displays might be useful.
- I would love to have recorded videos (live webinars are hard for my part-time staff and Board) to share with my staff and Board that hit on the key points of a challenge and how to react to community members with complaints. Something short and concise that I could share every time we hired or had a new Board member.

Note:

- **Look for the forthcoming announcement of new SCKLS Freedom to Read Resources being developed based on your responses to this survey.**



14. Please share any complaints or challenges about your library's collection, resources, display or programs you have experienced in recent years. If you are willing, describe the steps your library took to address the complaints or challenges, the outcomes of any complaints or challenges and any recommendations or advice you have to offer other libraries.

Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less:

- Whether it is just from living in a rural area, or we are immensely fortunate to have awesome patrons, we have very few complaints. As I stated before, every patron who uses our services knows we will do our very best to fill every request. The most complaints we receive is concerning our nonfiction section. A previous director drastically weeded that section and removed many loved books. The people in this area value their history, and there are still comments about the weeded books being made years after the fact.
- I have had comments that certain books have too much sex.
- The Library Board President told me to take down a display of Bill O' Reilly (Killing Jesus, Killing Kennedy, Killing Crazy Horse, etc.) books because the books are poorly written and controversial due to the current political climate. Since she told me to immediately remove them, I did. But they are still in our collection.
- None, so far!
- None
- We have not had any complaints.
- "I've mentioned some above. We haven't had specific written complaints, yet, but that may change in an instant!"
- One patron (known for posting controversial flyers on the community bulletin board at the Post Office) has lamented about books and programs hosted at libraries in Ohio (where she is from), and she says she won't return to those libraries because of a 'certain book' on display. She's asked "'why'" certain books are displayed here (whether it's mandated by certain organizations/ or govt). I assured her that it's not mandated, just a preference, holiday topic, part of a theme or program, or random. If anyone complains, we think she'll be the first!"



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,500 or less: (Continued)

- Our board is currently working on developing our challenge policy. We had an informal challenge a week ago regarding a YA book that the patron felt was too racy for children. She wanted us to put a "Rated R" sticker on it so parents would be warned about the content. Last year we had a patron that objected to our children's Halloween display because she felt one of the book covers was too scary and, therefore, the book would be inappropriate for children. We've found that it is best not to get defensive and to try to open up a dialogue with the patrons. We offer explanations and rationales to our decisions and try to find solutions. In neither case did the patron want to file a formal complaint, but we do have a process in place now to handle that should it occur.
- We have very few LGBTQ+ and banned books in this library because it is a small conservative town, and have witnessed the books being hidden, taken without permission and probably destroyed, and vocal feedback of not wanting something like this in our town. We explain to them we have resources for everyone, and that it is information and information should be public for patrons. I would encourage other libraries to still put out controversial things, because good and credible information should always be public knowledge.
- We haven't had any informal/formal challenges since 2008. I'm cautious in the collections I display. I feel I must "read" the town. The "I have to live here," phrase comes to mind often--and even more so these days. The majority of people... (those who use the library and those who do not) recognize the value of the library and its purpose in serving all residents of this community and surrounding areas.

However, there are definitely some who would land on the "challenge" side over a number of items in our collection. I think (correctly or not) that because I'm always working with this thought in the back of my mind, we've avoided those situations. My husband tells me if it were to happen, (having read about and been shocked by) experiences in other small(ish) towns), I should turn in my key. Not sure that's the way I would go, but, wow!

I applaud the efforts of the 'champions of literacy' out there! That phrase has extra meaning these days.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000:

- So far, I haven't come across a complaint or challenge since taking the director position.
- We haven't had patrons take the steps to challenge a title in our library. We have had comments but again, I let them know that we do not choose what is in our library but support purchasing patron requests, regardless of what that is.

While not complaints, I have had patrons open discussions asking if we had certain books that have been challenged in other locations (Dr. Seuss books & "Not all Boys are Blue" have been the most recently mentioned). These conversations tend to be positive, whether or not we have had the items. Occasionally there have been suggestions to move books from Juvenile to Young Adult sections. Most patrons are not combative and do not continue past an initial comment or question.

In the last year, we received a formal complaint about providing "The Epoch Times" newspaper along with our local newspapers. This was further complicated by the subscription being provided by donation from another patron. At the time, the library board did not have an approved collection development policy or challenged materials procedure.

The newspaper was kept behind the desk while the complaint was in process. The "optimal" response was determined to provide a subscription to a national newspaper presenting the opposing / alternate political views, but that was not feasible due to budget restraints. The library board decided to place the newspaper in with the giveaway magazines in the front entry rather than with the newspapers within the library. Both a collection development policy and challenged materials procedure were created and approved in response to aid in future incidents.

A patron upset by the board's decision regarding "The Epoch Times" later made an angry complaint about the "News China" magazine being made available in the library and has not returned since that time. The staff member receiving the complaint did not have sufficient training to communicate & enforce the current procedure.

My recommendation would be proactive in having a policy/procedure in place to be able to communicate the intent of the library's collection & the appropriate methods for community members to challenge items.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 2,501 to 10,000: (Continued)

- We have mostly had informal complaints in recent years. I have not yet dealt with a formal complaint. If the complaint got to the point of being reconsidered by my board, I would be confident in their support for the community's freedom to read, but still want to have policies and statements to back up our decisions.
- We have not had any yet. We have had a patron challenge our Pride Month book display. The patron filed a formal complaint, so a committee was held to discuss the display and to decide if it should be taken down. The materials used by the committee included library policies, an explanation on the importance and value of the display, and examples of other libraries who had similar displays.
- Being in Youth Services, I receive informal complaints rather often about the content of various items. The worst offenders have been the graphic novels, but even picture books are implicated from time to time. I just explain our policy of providing access and information to our entire community. I encourage them to take an active role as a parent and be aware of the items they are checking out... either by prereading a book or monitoring their content through trustworthy reviews. I also explain that if they have book requests or recommendation, I am open to hearing and considering them. We deal with every complaint on a case by case basis. We offer the availability of filling out a formal complaint. Most of all, we just share our policy and let people know that their opinion has been heard. This has so far, always been enough.
- Sex is a Funny Word (book, 2019) and Pride Month book display (2022). Most of my Library Board members are people the library staff or Board has personally asked to filled out the application form for the City appointment. Each time someone leaves we look at the Board and try to brainstorm what skills or experience would bring value to the group. In the past two years, we were able to recruit two school district staff members (one a middle school teacher).
- They have been of great value in regards to challenges because they can speak on what is being seen in the schools. I believe these people were an important part of our recent challenge process, making it go much smoother. They talked about how large and prominent the Gay-Straight Student Alliance (GSA) was in the Mulvane Schools, and that our display was telling these patrons that we were a safe place. Again, the outcome was positive because the Board voted to maintain the display as scheduled/needed.



Comments from Public Libraries serving Communities of 10,001 and greater:

- All our complaints to date have been "informal" and dealt with informally. Generally speaking, it has been a revelation to those complaining from a given political perspective to share with them all the works we have from their perspective of which they were previously unaware. We haven't had much in the way of complaints in the broader cultural arena (beyond politics, I mean) and it's conceivable that we may have to modify our approach somewhat when we confront one.
- See "Transgender Children's Books in the Public Library" in the book [Intellectual Freedom Stories from a Shifting Landscape](#), Nye, ALA 2020. Note: Available for interlibrary loan from SCKLS Professional Collection Intellectual 025.213 NYE.
- None
- We recently conducted a diversity audit, and in that audit, we purchased the book, *Gender Queer*, which has been very controversial. Our reasoning was based on many positive reviews (negative reviews seemed prejudiced) and a general desire to be inclusive. It was in our collection for several months before staff physically reviewed the book to find some disturbing sexual acts depicted. While most staff wholeheartedly support the LGBTQ+ community, we unanimously felt that keeping the book in our collection was hypocritical. Words are one thing, images are another, and we certainly don't provide *Playboy* or *Playgirl* magazines. And if we have to filter our internet to block access to obscene visual depictions, why would we include books with these depictions? And, yet, we provide movies that are Rated R and depict sexual acts.

It all becomes very confusing. For those who objected to *Gender Queer* in particular (but also other challenged books), it would be useful to librarians to actually see/understand what is being objected to before we make purchases. But it feels like the majority of the library profession has fiercely defended this book, and many of us are confused as to why. And it makes us question our collection development procedures, because it makes us feel like the odd man out. Clearer guidance would be useful (especially from ALA), but sometimes it's difficult to know whether or not the guidance is biased.



Comments from Academic Libraries:

- A couple of students asked why we had certain books in the library. Most of them were outdated and about marriage & family from the 1960's. I, as library director, made the decision to delete them from our collection. No one has made a formal complaint in the 20 years I have worked in this library.

Comments from School Libraries:

- I was a full-time English teacher until this year when I switched to library plus one section of English.

Last year, as department chair, I worked with my department to add 23 new novels in the form of Literature Circles. The books are primarily about and by BIPOC [Black, Indigenous and people of color] authors/characters. A fellow English teacher or a school board member leaked the list to political groups in the community who wrote a letter to my principal, superintendent, and Board, asking that I be censured for bringing "dangerous books" into our school. This was the work of MULTIPLE teachers across grades 5-12. Yet I was targeted.

Our superintendent then led the charge to "reconsider" every book we teach in grades 9-12. We are required to resubmit the titles for consideration, using a form that goes through a committee selected by the assistant superintendent and then on to the Board for approval. Until the books have been re-approved, we aren't allowed to teach them. School started last Thursday. The first committee meeting isn't until September. English teachers don't know what they are allowed to teach without getting in trouble for not following a brand new policy that is duplicating the work we've already done for years.

- This is my second year in this position and as of yet, I've had no complaints or challenges.
- I have only completed one year in charge of the library and did not really have any complaints or challenges.
- I had a Juneteenth display up last month. Another staff member who was helping me film a video tour of the library thought we shouldn't emphasize the display because "people will ask why you don't have a display about . . ."--he named some intentionally ridiculous idea that I've forgotten. Based on other interactions with this staff member, I believe that he personally objected to the Juneteenth display, although he didn't frame it that way.



Prepared September 30, 2022

**Paul Hawkins, Director
Sharon Barnes, Technology Consultant
Stefanie Gostautas, Technology Projects Specialist
Katherine Williams, Library Support Specialist**

**South Central Kansas Library System
321 North Main Street
South Hutchinson, KS 67505
800-234-0529
www.sckls.info**