

November 2023

OLA on School Boards Banning & Restricting Books

The Ontario Library Association (OLA) is deeply concerned by the growing number of attempts to restrict access to books by some school boards. This trend is particularly alarming as books that reflect 2SLGBTQIA+ perspectives, or featuring racialized characters and those with diverse gender identities, are disproportionately targeted by such censorship. As Canada's largest library association, we stand in solidarity with our members in defending the fundamental right of children to read and access information. We also stand with 2SLGBTQIA+, Indigenous, racialized and all other underrepresented people who have had their voices and stories suppressed throughout Canadian history and beyond.

It is the position of OLA that all young people deserve to not only see *themselves* reflected in the books they read, but to also be exposed to the worldviews and lived experiences of *others*, particularly those of marginalized and equity-deserving groups. Reading a diverse selection of books offers an opportunity for young people to broaden their understanding of the world, building empathy and compassion, and preparing them to become proactive members of society.

In attempting to restrict access, or outright ban, literary or artistic images, ideas, and/or information, under the guise of "protecting" children, school boards inevitably create an unsafe environment by erasing the history and lived experiences of others. Such censorship also ultimately undermines the bridge of understanding being built among children of diverse backgrounds and identities, depriving them of the opportunity to learn how to navigate differences and develop critical awareness of their environments.

The OLA denounces any attempt to ban or restrict age-appropriate books on the grounds that they do not align with the personal beliefs and biases of school board members. These actions not only contravene the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion upheld by provincial and federal law, but also often contradict the inclusivity policies set forth by school boards themselves, as well as teacher federations. In these challenging times, it has become crucial for children, especially those from 2SLGBTQIA+ and other minority communities, to have access to stories that celebrate and affirm them. We urge all school boards to critically rethink their policies and procedures around banning and restricting access to books.

Approved unanimously by OLA Board on November 13, 2023

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