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Organized Campaigns to Remove Books from Schools and Libraries

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Organized Campaigns to Remove Books from Schools and Libraries

The Office for Intellectual Freedom monitors challenges to materials in schools and libraries that occur each year. We define a challenge as a formal, written complaint requesting that material be restricted or removed from a library or school. We maintain a database that keeps track of the books and materials that are being challenged, where the challenges are occurring, and the reasons for the challenges.

In the past decade, we are observing more organized and more sophisticated efforts to remove books from schools and libraries. Several Internet-based groups and organizations exist that believe that educational institutions, and even the public library, should support particular values and causes by denying a forum to competing values and causes, thereby limiting access to ideas, opinion, and information.

These groups make use of websites, blogs, and other Internet tools to identify so-called bad books and encourage and assist individuals who want to remove books from schools and libraries. One such group is Parents Against Bad Books in Schools, or PABBIS. PABBIS has campaigned for years now to remove books from the Fairfax County schools in Virginia. It maintains a website with lists of so-called bad books, and provides limited excerpts of those books to help other groups organize their own efforts to challenge books.

Another active group is Parents and Friends of Ex-Gays & Gays, or PFOX, whose website asks: "Tired of seeing only gay affirming books in your public library or your child's school library? You can change this! Ask your county, school, or city library to order books on unwanted same-sex attractions, the origins of homosexuality, and other ex-gay books." While there's certainly nothing wrong with requesting that your library consider particular books for purchase, we're also seeing this group advocating for the removal or restriction of books they see as pro-homosexual.

Another Internet-based organization is SafeLibraries, which argues that libraries are dangerous places for children unless the library censors access to so-called "bad books" and the Internet. Operated by a single individual, this organization identifies library controversies and provides assistance to the individuals challenging books in the community's library. Most often, SafeLibraries helps the individual mount a public campaign aimed at removing books from libraries and requiring the use of Internet filters. [In full disclosure, SafeLibraries, as a matter of policy, opposes the professional standards developed by ALA and based on librarians' professional ethics and the First Amendment.]

Several other Internet-based library censorship advocates exist across the country, including Family-Friendly Libraries, Library Patrons of Montgomery County, TX, CLASS-KC (Citizens for Literary Standards In Schools of Kansas City), Grassroots

American Values, Pure Pioneers, and Know Your Library. These groups appear to share information and tactics. For example, Know Your Library, based in St. Louis County, MO, mounted a campaign to label young adult materials in the St. Louis County Public Library as sexually explicit and remove young adult materials to the adult collection over a year ago.