

## News To Use: Strong School Libraries, Part 1: Book Challenges June 4, 2022

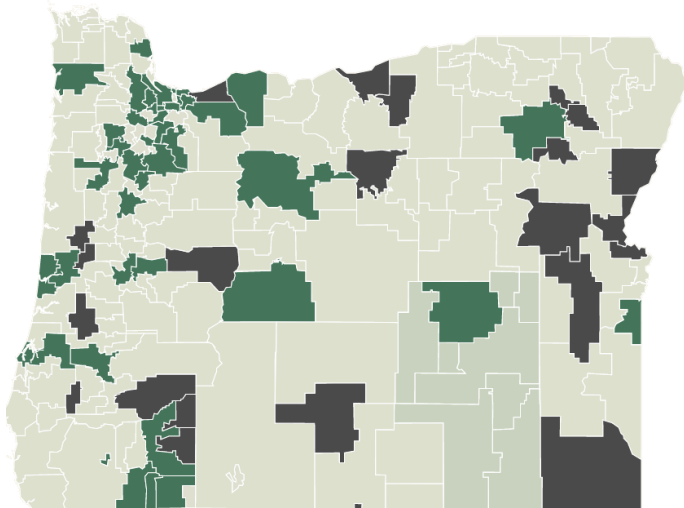
[News to Use](#) is a series of messages from the Oregon Library Association's Library Development and Legislation Committee (LDLC) about policy and advocacy topics of interest to the Oregon library community.

Over the next few months, we will be providing information about the condition of Oregon's school libraries and suggesting advocacy activities for members of the broader Oregon library community. This first installment tackles the issue of book challenges.

### What's Happening?

Schools across the country are facing unprecedented numbers of challenges to books that draw attention to the voices of underrepresented groups, including those that explore LGBTQ+ and students of color experiences. Research by PEN America has found that 41 percent of books banned in the US in the last nine months have featured protagonists of color, while 31 percent included LGBTQ+ topics or LGBTQ+ characters, with 7 percent of this latter figure featuring trans characters and topics. Campaigns funded by national groups are encouraging local parents to draw attention to specific books deemed "pornographic" or "controversial" and ask for their removal from school libraries.

Schools without teacher librarians or certified school library staff are particularly vulnerable to book challenges. Seeking to avoid controversy, some school administrators may remove books without sufficient knowledge of standard policies for book selection and reconsideration processes.

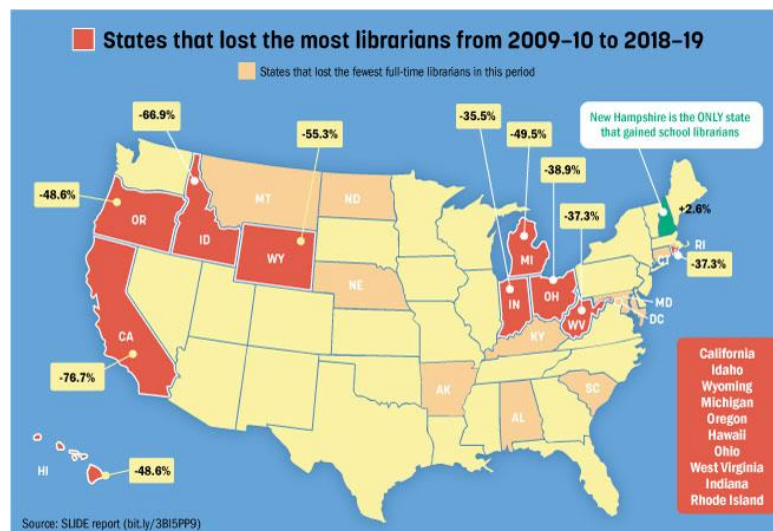


In Oregon, [75% of school districts are without professionally trained / licensed librarians](#).

(Green indicates school districts with librarian FTE, 2020-21. Dark gray areas indicate no data available. Source: [SLIDE Study](#))

Also, Oregon is among the [10 states with the greatest losses of teacher librarians](#) in the last decade.

(Source: [School Libraries 2021: Advocacy is a Necessary Part of the Job for School Librarians](#), *School Library Journal*, November 2021. )



### Why Should You Care?

While it is important to address parental concerns, removing books from school library collections without following adequate reconsideration procedures can lead to inhibited access for students who really benefit from reading books that reflect their lived experiences. As emphasized in the [Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee's Toolkit](#), the key for any library when facing book challenges is preparation. It is important to have policies in place that help guide the selection of materials for the library collection, including a procedure to follow when a complaint is filed. The presence of teacher librarians helps assure strong school district policies are already in place and established procedures are followed.

### What can I do?

Ask questions about your local school district's policies related to library book selection and reconsideration. Are they on the district's website? Have they been updated in the last 5 years? If not, talk to administrators, parent groups, and teachers about how certified school library staff can help create strong library collections and policies to help mitigate the impact of book challenges.

Seek out the library staff at your local school or school district and give them your support. Find out if there are professionally trained, licensed librarians in their school libraries. Ask them if they have experience with book challenges and if they have the resources and support they need to address them. Help them connect to resources, such as those included in the [Intellectual Freedom 101 webinar](#) provided by the State Library and the Oregon Association of School Libraries (OASL).

### Want to learn more or get more involved?

[Guidance to School Districts: Addressing Challenged Materials in K-12 Education](#) (Oregon Department of Education)

[School Libraries Are Essential](#) and [Advocate for School Libraries](#) (ALA's I Love Libraries campaign)

[State of School Libraries in Oregon: Challenges and Successes](#) (article by Jen Maurer, [OLA Quarterly, Vol. 26 No. 2 \(2020\)](#))

[OASL's Advocacy Toolkit](#) is a fantastic place to learn more about how to advocate for strong school libraries. If you would like to get involved, please reach out to members of the OASL Advocacy Committee at [oasl-advocacy@googlegroups.com](mailto:oasl-advocacy@googlegroups.com).