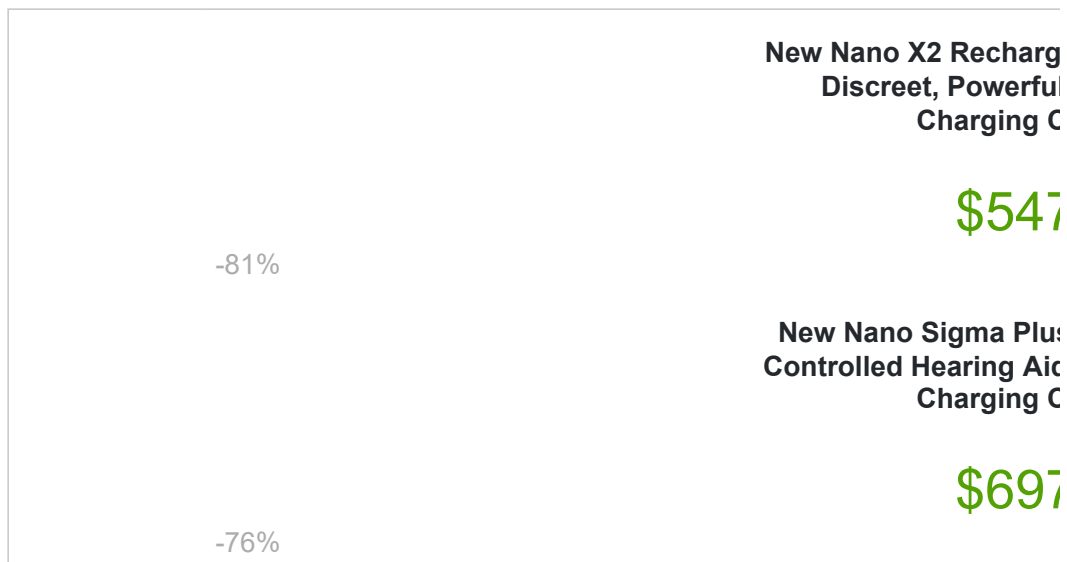


How are libraries tackling book challenges?

• March 15, 2022, 9:56 AM





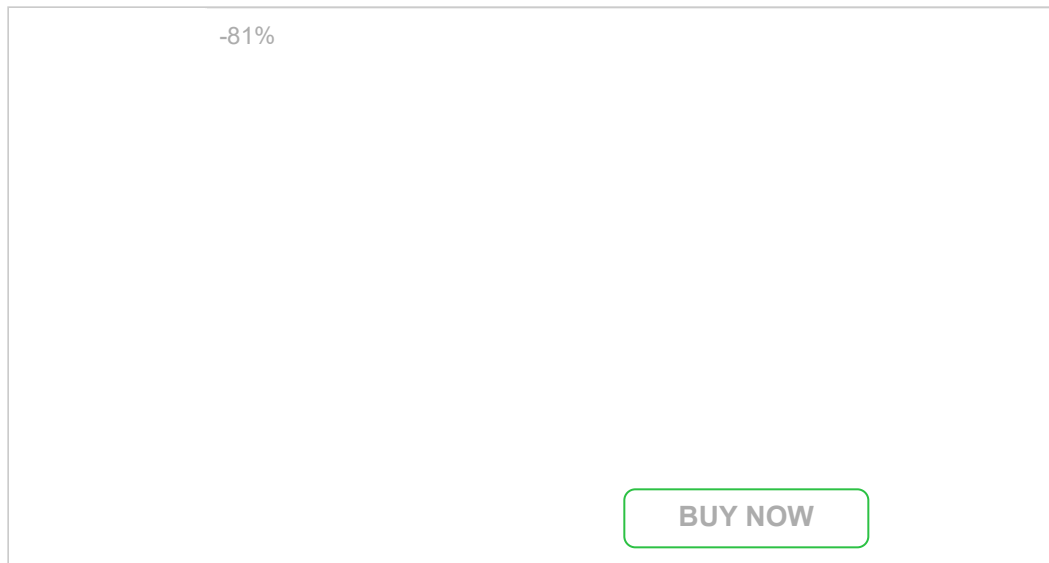
After more than a decade as a school librarian, Jessica Gilchrist faced a new challenge last year: someone wanted to pull a book out of her district’s library. It was hard to figure out how to react on my own.

“I didn’t have a procedure,” said Gilchrist, who works at Bedford High School.

When she reached out to the New Hampshire School Library Media Association for help, she learned that no one was serving as its intellectual freedom chair—which would normally be the main contact monitoring issues related to book challenges. She also learned that other school librarians in New Hampshire were going through a similar situation.

“I wasn’t the only one in the state going through a challenge,” Gilchrist said. “It was popping up all over the place.”





Gilchrist stepped in to fill the NHSLMA's intellectual freedom role, and now she's trying to use what she learned through her book Challenge. **Help other librarians** If someone in their community challenges a book in their library, they feel more prepared.

Organized efforts to ban books in schools or public libraries are not new, but they are happening more frequently across the country. The past year has seen a dramatic increase in parents, activists and school board officials challenging books in schools. **According to the American Library Association,**

Many of the books being targeted are written by authors of color and those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Gilchrist said that his job as a librarian is to present books with different perspectives. He also said that it is important to protect students' access to different types of books as it is a way to safely learn from the experiences of others.

"That's how we build empathy," she said. "That's how we see how the other person lives."

Rick Gunley: First, Jessica, can you give us some more context on this movement of book challenges and school libraries? Are these coming from parents primarily with a child in school or from someone else in the community?

Jessica Gilchrist: They're coming from everywhere. They are not necessarily the parents whose children are in the particular school where the book is being challenged. They are usually members of a community but not necessarily a child in that particular school. But there are lists of books that are being challenged across the country that can be easily accessed online, and many of those particular books are being questioned in schools across the state.

Ganley: I know that many of the books being targeted are written by authors of color and those belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. I know that books often include characters you know, are navigating or are familiar with how they identify themselves in the world. How have you noticed the impact of these books on your students?

Gilchrist: I think it's my job as a librarian to offer books that are windows into other people's lives as well. This is how we build empathy. This is how we see how the other person lives. This is how we gain experience safely through literature. And maybe it's more than a window. Maybe they can relate to it and then befriend someone they see in a different type of literature. It is my role to offer, and to promote and respect equality and inclusivity for all.

Ganley: You are now serving as the intellectual freedom president for the New Hampshire School Library Media Association. What did you want to do to get into that kind of



a protocol. Now there is a review process in my district, so there is a district level process. But as far as I defend a student's First Amendment rights and their freedom to read, I don't necessarily have a checklist. And when I went to the State Association, the Intellectual Freedom Chair seat was open and I was not the only one going through a challenge in the state. This thing was emerging everywhere. So I reached out to the president of the association and I said, we need someone right now, and I'm ready to do that if it's helpful to the association. So it kind of fell into my lap by default, but it really helped me settle down and get my head straight when I was going through my book challenge. Because I documented everything I was going through and I put it on a checklist, and then I was able to share all that information with other librarians in the state who were going through the exact same thing.

Ganley: What are these concrete steps that you recommend to other librarians who are tackling the challenge?

Gilchrist: So some of it is preventive measures. Like, you haven't tackled a book challenge yet, but you should do these things to prepare yourself, as if ever you are faced with a book challenge, like collecting data, being transparent, To know what the First Amendment rights of minors are, familiarize yourself with the New Hampshire privacy law for minors. So there are many things that we should do in preparation if ever there is a book challenge. But then if you encounter someone, who does the ACLU contact? Who is contacted in the Office of Intellectual Freedom?

Ganley: I'm thinking of broader topics here as well, what is the role of school libraries in a functioning democracy, and what does free access to books mean?

of the parent, or the teacher, or any other student If they don't, it doesn't mean they can remove everyone's access to the building. And that's really the crux of how we're protected by the First Amendment and within that non-public forum part of the First Amendment.

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