THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE
TO INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM

Best Practices for Policy, Programs, and Professional Judgment

Intellectual freedom in the school library refers to the practice of providing access to a broad range of ideas and information so students can read, explore, and learn within an educational setting. This guide is designed to support school librarians in understanding and applying professional best practices related to intellectual freedom through clear policies, consistent procedures, and thoughtful library programming. The focus of this guide is educational and practical, emphasizing the role of the school librarian as an instructional partner and information professional.

1. Collection Development as the Foundation

A strong collection development process is essential to supporting intellectual freedom in the school library. Decisions about materials should be guided by written policy, professional standards, and educational goals.

Best practices include:

- Maintaining a current, written collection development policy approved at the school or district level.
- Using established selection criteria, such as relevance to curriculum, age appropriateness, accuracy, and instructional value.
- Consulting professional review sources and reputable selection tools.
- Building a collection that supports classroom instruction, independent reading, and student inquiry.

- Regularly reviewing and evaluating materials to ensure they remain accurate, relevant, and appropriate.

A clear collection development policy provides transparency and consistency in decision-making and serves as a reference point for explaining selection practices.

2. Access to Library Materials

Providing access to library materials is a key operational responsibility of the school library program. Materials selected for student use should be accessible in ways that support learning and exploration.

Best practices include:
- Organizing materials to support independent discovery and use.
- Applying circulation and access procedures consistently.
- Avoiding unnecessary restrictions that limit access to materials intended for student use.
- Ensuring students understand how to locate and use library resources appropriately.

Access decisions should align with the educational purpose of the library and support student growth as readers and learners.

3. Instruction and Information Literacy

Intellectual freedom in the school library is closely connected to instruction. School librarians support students by teaching them how to engage thoughtfully with information.

Best practices include:
- Teaching students how to evaluate sources for accuracy, relevance, and reliability.
- Supporting inquiry-based learning and research processes.
- Encouraging responsible and ethical use of information.
- Collaborating with classroom teachers to integrate library resources into instruction.

Through instruction, students learn to navigate information, ask questions, and develop critical thinking skills within an educational framework.

4. Policies and Procedures for Concerns or Reconsideration

Clear, established procedures for addressing concerns about library materials are an important component of professional library practice.

Best practices include:

- Maintaining a written reconsideration or review process.
- Following district-approved procedures consistently and respectfully.
- Documenting concerns and responses.
- Relying on the collection development policy when addressing questions or concerns.

Established procedures help ensure that concerns are addressed in a transparent and consistent manner, grounded in policy rather than individual decision-making.

5. Professional Responsibilities of the School Librarian

Supporting intellectual freedom is part of the broader professional responsibilities of the school librarian.

Best practices include:

- Staying informed about current professional standards and guidelines.
- Participating in ongoing professional learning.
- Collaborating with administrators, teachers, and staff.
- Communicating clearly about library policies, procedures, and instructional goals.

Professional judgment, informed by policy and standards, guides effective library practice.

6. A Purposeful and Balanced Library Program

A well-designed school library program balances instructional needs, student interests, and educational priorities.

Best practices include:

- Supporting both academic study and independent reading.
- Using data and reflection to guide collection and program decisions.
- Reviewing library practices regularly to ensure alignment with school goals.

By maintaining clear policies, consistent practices, and an instructional focus, school librarians create a library program that supports learning while upholding professional standards.