

January 2024

Welcome to Tuesday Topics, a monthly series covering topics with intellectual freedom implications for libraries of all types. Each message is prepared by a member of OLA's Intellectual Freedom Committee (IFC) or a guest writer. Questions can be directed to the author of the topic or to the IFC.



Intellectual
Freedom
Committee

Oregon Library Association

Parents Defending Schools and Libraries in the Pacific Northwest

It may not feel like it at times, but parents love libraries and support librarians. [96% of us](#) feel our kids are safe in libraries, and 92% of us trust librarians to curate those collections. We treasure the opportunity for our kids to explore the stacks, discover new books, and expand their hearts and minds. We despair when we see our libraries attacked, books banned, and viewpoints censored. We want to push back but rarely hear about a book challenge until it's too late and the damage is done. [Parents Defending Schools and Libraries](#) is working to change this.

Parents Defending Schools and Libraries ([PDSAL.org](https://pdsal.org)) is a 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to informing and organizing parents in the Pacific Northwest to resist censorship, support the freedom to read, and protect intellectual freedom at every stage of life. We provide the means for people to report when challenges occur in schools in their area. We then notify other parents in the area of the challenge and provide resources to enable them to effectively respond.

The voice of a parent can carry tremendous weight in decisions made about school library collections and classroom curricula. Unfortunately, this has usually been used to remove books rather than preserve them. Those issuing challenges are a very small, but very loud minority of parents. A majority of the school library challenges reviewed in the 2021-2022 school year [were filed](#) by just 11 people. If we can organize the overwhelming majority of parents who want inclusive and representative collections, educators and administrators will have the cover and support they need to resist the loud and angry few. The PDSAL web portal and notification system facilitates this organization.

PDSAL also works to promote transparency in the reconsideration process. We recently partnered with ACLU of Oregon to submit a Freedom of Information Act request to Canby School District to gain insight into the removal and reconsideration of books. In addition, PDSAL worked with EveryLibrary to sponsor a Fight for the First petition, which gathered nearly 600 signatures demanding that Canby follow its own established reconsideration process and expressing support for the books challenged by only a handful of people. In all our undertakings we work closely with the OLA Intellectual Freedom Committee which provides invaluable guidance and support.

Beyond notifying and organizing parents, PDSAL also supports school libraries in a tangible way by providing direct grants. These \$250-\$500 awards are made to library staff who want to increase the inclusiveness and representativeness of their collections. Most recently, a grant was awarded to West Linn High School to update and diversify their non-fiction history collection. Students in the ethnic studies class will perform an audit of the current collection and identify gaps. The librarian will use the PDSAL funds to purchase books to address these gaps. Several additional awards will be made this year.

Parents Defending Schools and Libraries strives to amplify the voices of parents, students, and others who value our libraries and our children's right to read. We work with many organizations across the region and across the country, but our focus is the Pacific Northwest. We look forward to the day when we won't be needed. In the meantime, we welcome any and all ideas to help us hold up the voices of parents who want their kids to read, explore, and learn without censorship. Please explore the website, sign up to receive alerts, and spread the word.

Darin Stewart
dls@pdsal.org

