

The Manitoba School Library Association is deeply concerned about multiple recent calls to ban books with 2SLGBTQ+ perspectives and books referencing sexual health education from public and school libraries.

The Manitoba School Library Association (MSLA) is committed to promoting the development and maintenance of high-quality school libraries that meet the varied learning and information needs of all Manitoba students. One of the key ways we support this goal is by advocating for collection diversity in school libraries. Collection diversity refers to the practice of curating a school library collection to ensure that it includes material that is representative of diverse perspectives, experiences, abilities and identities. This includes materials that feature information, characters and storylines that reflect a range of cultural, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as materials that explore themes related to gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of identity.

Collection diversity is essential in school libraries because it helps to ensure that all students can find materials that resonate with their own experiences and interests, thereby fostering a sense of belonging and validation. A diverse collection also provides opportunities for students to encounter perspectives and experiences that are different from their own, which can promote empathy, understanding, and critical thinking skills. Moreover, collection diversity is particularly important for students from marginalized or underrepresented communities, who may not see themselves represented in the mainstream literature. By including materials that represent a range of perspectives and identities, school libraries can help promote social justice and equity, and to support students in developing a positive sense of self and community.

In light of the important benefits of diverse school library collections, we encourage all school boards and administrators to prioritize collection diversity in classrooms and school libraries. This can be achieved through the implementation of the following strategies, preferably by a qualified teacher-librarian:

- Regularly reviewing the school library collection to ensure that it includes materials that represent a range of perspectives and identities, and removing materials that perpetuate harmful stereotypes or biases.
- Working with teachers, students and other members of the school community to identify gaps in the collection and to develop strategies for addressing them.
- Seeking out resources and materials that promote diversity and inclusion, and making them visible to teachers and students.
- Collaborating with community organizations and groups to identify and acquire materials that represent diverse perspectives and identities.

These strategies align with the Manitoba provincial government's Safe and Caring Schools: Respect for Human Diversity document which sets legislative requirements for the

development of a respect for human diversity policy for all school divisions and independent schools in the province. Diverse school library collections also reflect the values enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child.

The MSLA recognizes that there may be instances where an individual or group wishes to challenge the inclusion of a particular item in a school library collection. In such cases, the MSLA advocates that challenges should be handled in a respectful and professional manner. The MSLA also believes in the importance of having clear policies, record keeping practices and procedures in place for addressing challenges to classroom and school library materials. These proceedings should be open, transparent, and carried out on a single case-by-case basis at the school level by a committee made up of administrators, teachers, the teacher-librarian and community members with knowledge of intellectual freedom and the principles of diversity. The material in question should be viewed or read by all committee members in its entirety, and careful consideration should be given to the overall quality of the material and to the benefits of maintaining the item in the collection, as well as to the suitability of the material for that specific school library. These policies and procedures should emphasize intellectual freedom and the right to access information while also acknowledging the need to balance divergent viewpoints and values. The Manitoba School Library Association believes that respectful policies for challenging classroom and school library materials can help to promote critical thinking, dialogue, and understanding within the school community.

By prioritizing collection diversity in school libraries, we can create learning environments that are truly inclusive and that support the needs of all students.