

## **MARCH 2024**

### **PUBLIC POLICY-DIVERSITY, EQUITY and INCLUSION**

#### **Book Banning and Why It Affects All of Us**

Books, texts and supplemental reading materials that support our state mandated public school curriculum are the bones of our public schools.

As most of us are products and teachers of those same schools and colleges and universities, we know the importance of basic information for our future leaders and voters, our children. Books and the public education they support are the foundation of our future democracy.

So, now I'll climb down from my soapbox and share some facts:

- 26 states have banned over 1100 books from their public and school libraries, a 33% increase since 2020 according to Kathi Harper, AAUW-CA's School Board Project Chair.
- Much of the push for bans is supported by political agendas, PACs and their money. Groups such as "Moms for Liberty" have chapters in every state and claim to support parents' rights, but seem to be much more about getting schools to align with their personal religious and political views and to elect school board candidates that support hurtful, diminishing policy.
- Book Banning is a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion issue as well as a Public Policy issue for us as AAUW members.
- Most of the banning demands are counter to our Public Policy Priority of Equal Access to Quality Public Education for All Students, including: Access to diverse staff and curriculum that represents historically accurate information.
- As the majority of the books banned have LGBTQ characters, issues and racial-minority themes, banning also runs counter to another AAUW-CA Public Policy Priority: Social and Racial Justice for All Members of Society.
- Is book banning happening at our Redding Library or in the Shasta Public Libraries? I asked Jessie Spragge, our new Assistant Library Director this recently. The good news is "No." Parents occasionally bring a book from the children's section to her and ask if it should be there. She says it is the librarian's responsibility to place books in the proper library collection, such as Teen, Adult or Children.
- The age ranges for these collections are determined by our local librarians. Their decisions are partly based on publisher designations, ALA (American Library Association) guidance and local norms. Determinations are often made based on the age of a book's characters as well as themes. A book questioned is often only mis-assigned. A questioned book can be moved to the adult section, but not removed from the library. Totally banning a book from all readers is a government decision, not a library decision.

What can we as an AAUW Branch and as individuals do to support our public schools and our library? 1. Respond to efforts to ban books by writing letters to editors and legislators.

2. Attend and share AAUW's Public Policies at school board meetings.

3. Encourage and endorse candidates for school boards who support our priorities and will stand against book banning.

4. Be aware that CA AB 1078 signed into law 9/2023 prevents public school districts from banning books and censoring approved curriculum.

5. Let me and Maureen, our president, know if you'd like to help so we can coordinate a group effort to counter book banning.

Lastly, from "Unite Against Book Bans.org":

- Reading is a foundational skill, critical to exercising our democratic freedoms.
- We can trust individuals to make their own decisions about what they read and believe.
- Parents have the right to guide their children's reading and education, but not make decisions for other parent's children.
- Young people deserve to see themselves reflected in a library's books.
- Banning books from public libraries is a slippery slope to government censorship and the erosion of our country's commitment to freedom of expression.

-Penny Harris, Public Policy, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Chair