Whether they are new to the school library scene or are veterans trying to brush up on their knowledge about minors’ Constitutional rights, school librarians can use the following online and print resources about intellectual freedom and privacy to help ensure student access to information for both instructional and recreational purposes. Using the resources in this article, school librarians will be able to build a strong foundation of knowledge about the relevant issues, implement practices to develop a vital library program, and know how to seek support in the event of a materials challenge.

Building a Foundation: Understanding the Issues
To be effective, school librarians must understand the wide range of issues related to intellectual freedom and privacy. Numerous resources provide excellent overviews about these issues.

documents such as the Library Bill of Rights and the Freedom to Read statement, as well as interpretations and ALA policy statements on intellectual freedom. It also includes essays explaining relevant laws. The ninth edition is arranged topically, making it easy to find information about nine intellectual freedom issues (e.g., access, censorship, children and youth, copyright, privacy, etc.). New to this edition are practical checklists for creating library policy, “Issue at a Glance” pages summarizing key points librarians need to know, step-by-step instructions for handling challenges, and specific tips for school librarians.


Besides this rich resource, school librarians must continually seek out new interpretations and reports. For example, in June 2014 the Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) and the Office for Information Technology Policy (OITP) released Fencing Out Knowledge: Impacts of the Children’s Internet Protection Act 10 Years Later written by Kristen R. Batch <www.ala.org/offices/sites/ala.org/offices/files/content/oitp/publications/issuebriefs/cipa_report.pdf>. Reflecting on how the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) has negatively impacted access to information since it was passed in 2000, the study underscores school librarians’ need to understand the law, what content it requires be filtered, and how librarians can meet that requirement—all with the goal of not overfiltering. Learn more about the report by reading “Filtering beyond CIPA: Consequences of and Alternatives to Overfiltering in Schools” by Kristen R. Batch in the September/October 2015 issue of Knowledge Quest.

ALA and its Intellectual Freedom Committee are continually working on new interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights. The most recent, approved by the ALA Council in June 2015, directly relate to school libraries:

• Labeling Systems: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights
• Rating Systems: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights
• Internet Filtering: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights

ALA also offers a number of tool kits, including the Privacy Tool Kit <www.ala.org/advocacy/privacyconfidentiality/toolkitsprivacy/privacy>. Developed by ALA’s Privacy Subcommittee in 2005, it was updated in January 2014. The Privacy Tool Kit now includes a significant section on minors’ privacy rights and technology-related privacy threats. Check the ALA Intellectual Freedom website regularly for new resources <www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom>.

For one-stop online foundational knowledge, check out the Intellectual Freedom Resources LibGuide <http://chs.csdtvt.libguides.com/intellectualfreedom> compiled by Vermont high school librarian Christine Eldred. This online resource is organized using ten tabs, each representing a category of information. These categories include the latest news feeds, basic information about the theory behind intellectual freedom, ideas to ensure that library policies and procedures are in order, annual events that raise awareness, and privacy pointers. Much of the content to which this LibGuide links is from the American Library Association, so it’s a perfect way to augment the Intellectual Freedom Manual highlighted above. Eldred does an outstanding job grouping information to help make the exploration less overwhelming and the ideas more digestible.

From published books to recently released online reports and projects to helpful LibGuides, school librarians can find a multitude of resources that will strengthen their foundational knowledge of intellectual freedom and privacy issues.

Developing a Vital Library Program: Putting Theory into Practice

Once school librarians are well versed in and/or refreshed on the foundations of intellectual freedom, it’s important to put those theories into practice in their own schools and libraries.

For quick help when confronting an issue, check out an online database facilitated by the Cooperative Children’s Book Center of the University of Wisconsin—Madison. Titled What If...? Questions and Answers on Intellectual Freedom <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/freedom/
The What IF? database allows practitioners to pose questions that they face in their day-to-day professional lives. Experienced librarians, teachers, and school librarians, can use the What IF forum to ask questions and receive thoughtful personal answers with complete confidentiality. The new questions with answers are then added to the What IF? database.

An important way for school librarians to transform foundational intellectual freedom and privacy knowledge into practice is to promote their own library services. Doing so has a twofold advantage: the first is that they can hold themselves accountable to the vision of a library being accessible and relevant to the community. The second advantage is that promoting a library program raises awareness and creates allies amongst constituents who may be called upon for support in the event of a materials challenge. Four national high-profile events observed annually provide an opportunity for school librarians to educate library users and the school community:

- AASL’s School Library Month (<www.al.org/aasl/slm>), observed in April
- Choose Privacy Week (<http://chooseprivacyweek.org>), observed the first week in May
- Banned Books Week (<www.bannedbooksweek.org>), observed the last week in September
- AASL’s Banned Websites Awareness Day (<www.al.org/aasl/advocacy/bwad>), observed on Wednesday during Banned Books Week

Together, these four observances can have a powerful impact.

Two books will help school librarians translate ALA policy statements into practice:

- protecting intellectual freedom and privacy in your school library (<www.abc-clio.com/LibrariesUnlimited/product.aspx?pc=A3820P>) by Helen R. Adams (Libraries Unlimited 2013). Its nine chapters explore protecting privacy and confidentiality in the context of a school library, working with homeless students, English language learners, and other special-needs students; dealing with challenges to school library materials; overcoming restrictive Internet filtering; and advocating for intellectual freedom. Additionally, the book offers practical evaluation tools such as a “challenge-proofing your school library checklist” and a “privacy checklist: evaluating the library media program.”
Responding to a Materials Challenge: Where to Turn for Help

Even with a solid foundation of knowledge about intellectual freedom and a strong library program backed by allies, a librarian may still need additional advice and assistance—especially during a conflict or a challenge to materials.

National organizations can be a vital source of professional support. The American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom (www.ala.org/offices/oif) offers assistance by telephone or e-mail to librarians who are faced with actual or possible challenges to library materials, services, and programs. The office also maintains a confidential database of materials that have been challenged. This assistance dealing with a resource challenge is freely available to all, not only ALA and AASL members. OIF staff also offer advice on filtering and privacy issues. Read “ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom: Who We Are and How We Help Librarians” in the September/October Knowledge Quest print issue.

As teacher librarians who collaborate with classroom instructors, school librarians should note that the National Council of Teachers of English (www.ncte.org) offers advice and support to teachers who are facing challenges in their classrooms. A good place to start is by reading the “Five Most Helpful Resources” that prevent and combat censorship, as well as the organization’s position statements, all freely accessible at NCTE’s Intellectual Freedom Center (www.ncte.org/action/anti-censorship).

Additionally, personal support and encouragement from colleagues can prove to be invaluable. Many state professional associations have intellectual freedom round tables or intellectual freedom committees with seasoned and knowledgeable practitioners. School librarians who have developed relationships with colleagues and familiarized themselves with nearby resources will know where to turn at the local level as well.

Whether school librarians are building the foundation of their intellectual freedom and privacy knowledge, putting that knowledge into practice for their communities, or facing a challenge to library or classroom materials, a wealth of useful resources can help them on the journey.

Carin Bringelson is director of online content and collections at TeachingBooks.net in Madison, Wisconsin. She recently served as the chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee for the Wisconsin Educational Media & Technology Association. Her passion for social justice and intellectual freedom are integral parts of her life, both inside and outside of her work at TeachingBooks.net.

Resources at a Glance

Online Resources


Banned Books Week: <www.bannedbookswEEK.org>.

Banned Websites Awareness Day: <www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/bwad>.


Choose Privacy Week: <http://chooseprivacyweek.org>.

Intellectual Freedom Center of the National Council of Teachers of English: <www.ncte.org/action/anti-censorship>.


Privacy Tool Kit: <www.ala.org/advocacy/privacyconfidentiality/toolkitsprivacy/privacy>.

School Library Month: <www.ala.org/aasl/slm>.


Books

