



# BE READY FOR A BOOK CHALLENGE

A FIVE-STEP CHECKLIST



CALIFORNIA  
STATE LIBRARY



CSLA  
California School Library Association  
Established 1916

California public libraries are for everyone.

The information, resources and services that libraries across California offer reflect library community members.

Book challenges happen. They always have. They always will. But the American Library Association reported a record number of book challenges in 2023.

Often, a book challenge originates from a parent, who has expressed concern about an aspect of their child's curriculum. Recently, however, challenges are a more concerted effort by groups or politicians.

In any case, it is critical that a school district or local library is prepared to defend and uphold their collection to ensure access for each and every user.

## 1 Investigate and Inventory

Find out what policies there are in your library, school, or district regarding book challenges.

Is there a collection development policy? Does it address the issues in the California Department of Education Policies Worksheet? (below).

Is there a procedure that outlines the process for handling book challenges?

In the absence of a collection development policy, work with administration to create one using the following steps.

## 2 Create a "Triple C" Collection Development Policy

The most important piece of preparation for a potential challenge is to establish a collection development plan that plainly states criteria for selecting library materials. The collection development policy should be clear, concise and comprehensive.

The California Department of Education recommends that each school district has a collection development policy that has been approved by the school board. Public library jurisdictions have approved policies as well. Policies are most often approved by a school or public library board.

The best time to create or review a collection development plan is right now. That is, before there is a challenge. Determine staff who are responsible for selecting the books. In schools, it is most often the teacher librarian or district librarian. In public libraries, your contact may be the library director for city or county libraries.

- What are the criteria for the selection of materials?
- Do collection development staff use a [Recommended Literature List](#), professional reviews or first-hand evaluations?
- Is there a process for accepting and reviewing donated books?
- Are procedures for reconsidering books clear?

You do not need to reinvent the wheel.

- See links to sample policies and worksheets
- Connect with neighboring school districts or libraries. Talk to the teacher librarian or official who has coordinated the response.
- Consider examples and how they fit with your school district's or public library's collection development policy.
- Look at mission and vision statements to support your collection development policy
- Understand how diversity, equity and inclusion policies and complaint procedures apply in the library.
- Be aware of key state laws, such as [The Fair, Accurate, Inclusive, and Respectful Education Act \(SB 48\)](#) and district administrative regulations.
- A flowchart showing the roles and responsibilities for your district's libraries can also be useful.
- For public libraries, Interpretations of the Library Bill of Rights provides important information to consider.

Here are some sample policies, worksheets, and checklists to help:

- [Sample Collection Policy](#)
- For a fee, the California School Boards Association can provide [sample district selection policies](#).
- Chicago Public Schools: [New Collection Development Policy for School Libraries](#).
- ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom: [Online Workbook](#)
- [Copy of California Department of Education: District Selection Policies Worksheet](#)
- [District Selection Policy Checklist](#)

### 3 Get approval from your governing board

Once your collection policy is created and ready for adoption, seek approval by the governing board. Having a new or updated policy in place when selecting materials for library collections and responding to challenges from parents, staff or community members will better communicate how the books were selected and why they belong in the library.

### 4 Raise awareness about the plan

Inform and train all teacher librarians, librarians or appropriate co-workers on the new policy. Establish clear policies to provide greater understanding of the multiple steps taken to promote an inclusive collection of materials that reflects the community and is aligned with California educational standards.

### 5 Do not make exceptions to your adopted policy

You've done it. You have created a Clear, Concise and Comprehensive policy, trained staff and raised public awareness. Now, stick to it — do not allow exceptions. The policy exists to inform everyone how materials are selected and sets clear procedures for challenging material.

Respond to any questions or requests professionally, keep your administrators informed and follow your newly-adopted policy.

If your library is receiving challenges, you can also report them to the American Library Association at [www.ALA.org/ChallengeReporting](http://www.ALA.org/ChallengeReporting).

Additional Resources:

- [Challenge Support | Tools, Publications & Resources](#)
- [Office for Intellectual Freedom | About ALA](#)