



School Libraries & Access to Books

SUMMARY: *Book censorship and attacks on school libraries and librarians have dramatically increased over the past year. Access to books, libraries and librarians have been shown to positively impact student academic success and are an essential part of a high-quality education although they are often under-funded.*

Libraries and access to a diverse range of books fosters literacy skills, inquiry-based learning, information literacy, and critical thinking. This resolution re-affirms PTA's long-standing position that parents have a right to guide their children in choosing appropriate reading and educational materials and be involved in book selection and review committees. Additionally, students should have access to a variety of books in an environment that is accessible, inviting, and encouraging of independent reading as well as the ability to access resources that help them better understand the lives, cultures, and experiences of different people and through research learn about different viewpoints on topics of personal interest.

WHEREAS, Book censorship across the United States has been steadily rising with more than 1,600 book titles across 32 states banned from public schools during the 2021-22 school year, and

WHEREAS, Research shows that higher standardized test scores are correlated with access to libraries and librarians and additionally increasing access to books and giving children the choice to choose what they want to read improves academic performance and attitudes toward reading and learning, and

WHEREAS, Across the country 2.5 million children are enrolled in school districts where there are no libraries and 80% of preschool and after-school programs serving low-income populations do not have age-appropriate books for their children, and

WHEREAS, Lack of access to relevant books in the home, especially for young children, is a significant contributor to persistent educational achievement disparities, and

WHEREAS, A school library is essential in supporting each school's instructional program and providing access to books, printed reading materials and a variety of learning and teaching resources, and

WHEREAS, School librarians are required to complete a master's degree in school library media, and are certified teachers, information specialists, and information resource managers who support development of student reading and research skills and help classroom teachers identify supplemental materials to support instruction, and

WHEREAS, Studies show that classroom libraries help increase performance on reading and writing assessments yet most classroom libraries are funded by teachers, and

WHEREAS, School Libraries in low-income areas have lower librarian staffing levels and less up-to-date library collections,

THEREFORE BE IT

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations recognize the importance of school and classroom libraries and the critical role they play in supporting and enriching the curriculum, fostering literacy skills, expanding access to books, enabling students to research and read about topics of interest, and develop critical thinking skills; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA supports increased funding for school libraries and dedicated classroom library funding to maintain of up-to-date library collections; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations recognize the essential role of school librarians and support staffing standards that provide a minimum of 1 full-time certified school librarian for every school as well as staffing additional librarians and media specialist assistants based on school enrollment; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations support the inclusion of books in school libraries and classroom libraries that are developmentally appropriate, historically accurate, and which present the diverse viewpoints, racial and ethnic heritages, disabilities, family structures, gender identities, sexual orientation, and faith traditions of our nation's students, families and communities; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations oppose laws that ban or proscribe removal of books because of bias, partisan or doctrinal disapproval; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations recognize and support the rights of parents and caregivers to guide their children in choosing appropriate reading and educational materials and support access to library collections, inclusion of parents, caregivers and educators on book selection and challenge committees and supplemental instructional material selection and review committees; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations urge school divisions to clearly provide information and forms on their websites regarding how items are added to library and classroom collections and how resources are suggested for inclusion, and removal; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA and its constituent associations support family engagement programs that raise awareness of evidence-based literacy instruction, intervention and assessment practices and which provide parents and caregivers with practical tips they can use at home to support improving literacy skills; and be it further

RESOLVED, Virginia PTA encourages its constituent associations to host family engagement programs, advocate for grants, and partner with community nonprofits to increase access to books and printed reading material for all children beginning at birth.

APPROVED May 20, 2023 at the Virginia PTA Annual Meeting