The controversy surrounding book bans and censorship has taken center stage in the United States since the November 2021 elections in Virginia and Texas. The issue of "parents' rights" has dominated the political and social discussions about book bans and censorship, with numerous pro-censorship groups claiming “parental concerns” about book themes, topics, and characters as their authority as justification for book bans and censorship. To better understand if the attitudes of American parents and guardians toward book bans, censorship, and library practices line up with these special interest groups’ rhetoric, we conducted an extensive survey of parents and guardians of children under 18 across the United States.

The survey aimed to uncover the truth about the current political and social moment for libraries and librarians and to provide a more nuanced understanding of public opinion that might not be represented in mainstream media or political rhetoric. We asked parents and guardians across America about their attitudes about school libraries and public libraries, school librarians and librarians in public libraries, and their comfort with sensitive content. The survey results provide valuable insights into the concerns and priorities of parents regarding their children's education and access to information.

The survey findings indicate that most American parents are opposed to book bans and censorship. They value the expertise of librarians and believe that these professionals play an important role in helping children navigate sensitive content. Furthermore, the survey results highlight the importance of parental involvement in children's reading and education. Most parents believe that they should have the final say in what their children read and should be involved in the selection of books for school and public libraries.
The survey also revealed societal divisions on how to handle sensitive topics in literature and education settings. While some parents believe that books containing sensitive content should be banned entirely from libraries, and others believe that they should be available with appropriate age ratings or parental guidance, many parents are not uncomfortable with these themes. They would allow their children access at any age. The nuanced responses underscore the complexity of public opinion compared to the more polarized views often presented by so-called parents' rights groups.

The survey results have important implications for policymakers, educators, librarians, and the public. The survey can inform librarians in curating content and creating policies that align with community values and expectations. The results can also inform policymakers and educators in making decisions that reflect the actual views of parents rather than those of special interest groups. Sharing the results can contribute to a more informed discussion among the general public about the role of libraries and the nature of censorship.
During the fall of 2023, EveryLibrary Institute and Book Riot partnered on a series of three surveys asking parents and guardians about their perceptions of public libraries, school libraries, and the library profession.

The surveys were conducted through Survey Monkey, and responses were collected via paid Survey Monkey collectors. Each survey began with a qualifying question asking respondents if they were the parents or legal guardians of a child under 18. Percentages in this report have been rounded down to the nearest whole number.

The "Parents Perception of Public Libraries and Book Bans" was conducted in September 2023. It gathered insights from 1,063 parents and guardians with children under 18 about their experiences and opinions about book bans, their trust in public libraries, and their understanding of librarians' book selection process.

The "Parents' Perception of School Libraries and Librarians" survey was conducted in November 2023. It gathered insights from 616 parents and guardians with children under 18 to understand their perceptions of school librarians, book bans, access to school libraries, and the involvement of parents in their children's reading choices.

EveryLibrary Institute and Book Riot also surveyed parents about how they perceived the trustworthiness of librarians as a profession. The “Parent Perceptions of Librarians” survey was conducted in October 2023 and surveyed 1,527 parents and guardians with children under 18– 1,004 in a survey asking them about their attitudes toward and characteristics of librarians, and 523 in a survey asking them to rank the trustworthiness of librarians and compare them to other professions.
85% of respondents say they trust librarians.*
58% of parents think public librarians should be primarily responsible for what books are selected for the public library as opposed to elected officials, library boards, or parent groups.*
92% of respondents say libraries are safe spaces for their children.*
75% of respondents do not believe their libraries are experiencing book bans.*
67% of respondents feel that book bans infringe on their rights to make decisions for their children.*
75% of respondents report that neither they nor their child have checked out a book from the library that they felt was inappropriate.*
63% of respondents agree or somewhat agree that “banning books is a waste of time” at the public library.
57% of respondents say banning books from the school library is an appropriate way to prevent children from learning about certain topics.
80% of respondents agree that “school libraries should have content rating systems.

The surveys found that the majority of respondents trust librarians and want librarians to continue to have the power to select books for their libraries; they view libraries as safe places for their children, and have not personally encountered inappropriate library books or experienced a book ban in their community. They feel book bans infringe on their rights as a parent. These findings are discussed in greater detail in the section called “Library Experiences.”

The findings support librarians' role as trusted sources of information. Librarians, alongside healthcare providers and educators, are considered one of the most trustworthy professions. A majority (56%) believe that librarians are and should be non-political. These findings are discussed in greater detail in the section called “Opinions About Library Professionals.”

There is overwhelming support for the need for school librarians. More than 9 out of 10 respondents endorse having a school librarian in every school regardless of how they answer any other question in the survey. However, respondents have less understanding of school libraries and less trust in school librarians than public librarians. These findings are discussed in greater detail in the sections called “Opinions About Library Professionals” and “Perceptions of the Collection Development Process.”

The level of familiarity with the public library does not correlate with support, however. Respondents who are most willing to see librarians jailed and books banned are, paradoxically, also more likely to have signed their child up for a library card. Surprisingly, respondents most comfortable with the idea of librarians being prosecuted were more likely to say that librarians should be given primary say in collection development decisions. These findings are discussed in greater detail in the section called “Insights into Respondent Attitudes.”
Parents are deeply divided about book bans and the nature of library collections and do not feel that they have an understanding of how books are selected for libraries. There are striking levels of discomfort around children’s books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes as opposed to children’s books about sexual education, social justice, and race or racism. Results show that parents favor increased oversight and restriction in school libraries. These findings are outlined in the sections called “Comfort with Children’s Book Contents” and “Attitudes Toward Book Access.”
Opinions About Library Professionals

Parents almost unanimously agree that schools should have a school librarian on staff. A smaller though still overwhelming percentage believe that school librarians are trustworthy as professionals. While public librarians are slightly more trusted than school librarians, both are highly trusted.

- 91% of parents and guardians say that they trust public librarians and trust them to curate appropriate books and materials.
- 80% of parents and guardians say that they trust school librarians. 95% believe that every school should have a school librarian. 82% of parents trust school librarians to recommend age and content-appropriate books and materials to students.

Parents have a high level of trust in school and public librarians compared to similar professions. Librarians, alongside healthcare providers and educators, rank as the most trustworthy professions, with public librarians ranking as most trustworthy followed by doctors, school librarians, teachers, and nurses. Librarians are approachable to many respondents, well-known in the community, and advocates for lifelong learning. Most agree that they are experts at connecting people to their needs.

- 69% agree that a librarian is someone they can relate to.
- 53% agree that the librarian is well-known in the community.
- 85% agree that librarians support children's learning.
- 70% agree that librarians understand their community's needs.
- 77% agree that librarians make the library a place for fun and creativity.
- 78% agree that librarians are true advocates for lifelong learning.
- 77% agree that librarians are friendly and approachable.
• 75% agree that librarians are experts at connecting people to what they need.
• 83% agree that librarians know what books children would love.
• 67% agree that librarians are knowledgeable about their community.

When asked whether they think public librarians have a political agenda and if they should have one, parents appear to have mixed opinions. 35% of them believe that librarians have a political agenda and that they should. On the other hand, only 9% of parents feel that librarians do not have a political agenda but should have one. 12% of parents think that librarians have a political agenda but should not have one. The largest grouping of respondents, accounting for 44%, do not believe that librarians have a political agenda, nor do they think they should have one. Therefore, 79% of parents feel that librarians are doing what they should be doing, whether that means having a political agenda or not.

**Perceptions of the Collection Development Process**

Fewer than half of parents feel that they know how book selection for libraries works. Over twice as many parents know how books are chosen for the public library compared to how many know how books are chosen for the school library.

• 47% of parents and guardians say they know how public librarians decide what books should be in a public library collection.
• 19% of parents and guardians say they know how school librarians decide what books should be in a library collection.
Attitudes Toward Book Access

Opinions on the “effectiveness” of book bans are mixed. Most parents believe that book bans are ineffective in public libraries and infringe on their parental rights in any library. Additionally, many feel that book bans in school libraries can do more harm than good. Paradoxically, a majority also believes banning books from school libraries is acceptable for preventing children from being exposed to certain topics.

Despite support for book bans, only a minority of parents are experiencing or engaging with them firsthand.

- 40% of parents reported book ban activity in their community’s public library in the past year.
- 33% of parents are aware of books being banned in their child’s school library in the past year.
- 23% said that no books had been banned from a school library in their community.
- 63% of respondents agree or somewhat agree that “banning books is a waste of time” at the public library.
- 57% of respondents to the school library survey say banning books from the school library is an appropriate way to prevent children from learning about certain topics.
- 73% agree or somewhat agree that book bans at public libraries infringe on their right to make decisions for their children, and 62% agree that book bans from school libraries infringe on their right to make decisions for their children.
- 54% of parents agree that book bans in school libraries cause harm.

When asked about their opinion on book rating systems, most parents believe that school libraries should have content rating systems based on the age-appropriateness of the content, similar to the rating systems used for movies, TV shows, or video games.
Half of the parents who responded to the survey agreed that school libraries should only contain books appropriate for every age group in the school (i.e., the youngest and most sensitive readers). Two-thirds think the school website should list every book available in the library. A majority also believe in proactive parental involvement, like being notified when their child checks out a book, or having the option to opt their children out of using the school library altogether. These results show that parents favor increased oversight and restriction in school libraries.

- 80% of respondents agree that "school libraries should have content rating systems based on their appropriateness for different age groups or contents, similar to the rating systems used for movies, TV shows, or video games."
- 50% agree that "school libraries should only contain books appropriate for every age group in the school."
- 67% think that the school website should have a list of every book in the school library.
Library Experiences

An average of 92% of parents agree that libraries are safe places for their children. Respondents were more likely to report that they or their child had found or checked out a book they considered inappropriate at the public library than at the school library. This is interesting because a smaller percentage of respondents believe that school librarians are trustworthy professionals.

Parents are more than twice as likely to know how books are selected in public libraries than in school libraries. As stated above, a majority also feel that banning books from the school library is an appropriate way to prevent children from learning about certain topics. This stands out because respondents reported lower levels of trust in school librarians, lower understanding of how school library collections are developed, and more willingness to see book bans in schools. However, there are more self-reported instances of respondents encountering books that troubled them and their children in public libraries than in school libraries.

- 65% of respondents said ‘no’ when asked if a book that their child checked out from the public library made them (the parent) uncomfortable; 67% said ‘no’ when asked if their child has themself ever been uncomfortable with a book they checked out from the public library.
- 86% of respondents said ‘no’ when asked if a book that their child checked out for the school library made them (the parent) uncomfortable; 85% said ‘no’ when asked if their child has ever been uncomfortable with a book they checked out from the school library.
- 92% of all respondents say they feel their child/children are safe at the public library.
- 93% of all respondents say they feel their child/children are safe at the school library.
Comfort with Children’s Book Contents

Parents surveyed about materials at public libraries are least comfortable with children’s books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes. They are most likely to consider children’s books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes to be harmful to children. Parents are most comfortable with children’s books about social justice in public libraries and are least likely to consider children’s books about social justice to be harmful to children. Parents are significantly more comfortable with children’s books about puberty and sexual education than they are with children’s books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes. See Appendix B for responses in full.

Table 1: Parental attitudes about books in public libraries.
“In general, does having access to books with the following themes have a positive, negative, or neutral impact on children?”
Table 2: Parental attitudes about books in public libraries.
“At what age should children up to the age of 18 begin to have access to LGBTQ+ characters and themes in children’s books?” See Appendix B for responses in full.
Parents surveyed about materials in school libraries are least comfortable with children's books featuring LGBTQ+ characters and themes and are most likely to say that books with LGBTQ+ characters should never be available to anyone of any age. Parents are less comfortable with children's books with children's books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes at the school library than the public library. These echo the findings of the public libraries survey.

Parents are most comfortable with children's books about social justice and are least likely to say that children's books about puberty and sexual education should never be available to any age. These also echo the findings of the public libraries survey.

Table 3: Parental attitudes about books in public libraries.
“On a scale of "Very comfortable" to "Not comfortable," how comfortable are you with the following themes in children's books?”

Parents surveyed about materials in school libraries are least comfortable with children's books featuring LGBTQ+ characters and themes and are most likely to say that books with LGBTQ+ characters should never be available to anyone of any age. Parents are less comfortable with children's books with children's books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes at the school library than the public library. These echo the findings of the public libraries survey.

Parents are most comfortable with children's books about social justice and are least likely to say that children's books about puberty and sexual education should never be available to any age. These also echo the findings of the public libraries survey.
Parents are much more comfortable with children's books about puberty and sexual education than they are with children's books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes. This clashes with the narrative that children's books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes are inherently sexual and should be banned on these grounds. There is more comfort with books that are about sex than books that are considered to be inherently about sex because they have LGBTQ+ themes or characters.

Table 4: Parental attitudes about books in school libraries.
“At what age should children up to the age of 18 begin to have access to LGBTQ+ characters and themes in children’s books?” See Appendix B for responses in full.
Table 5: Parental attitudes about books in school libraries.
“On a scale of "Very comfortable" to "Not comfortable," how comfortable are you with the following themes in children's books in school libraries?”
Republican Respondent Attitudes

The issue of book bans vs. open access has been politicized by special interest groups, political actors, and issue-advocacy organizations across the political spectrum. Groups like Moms for Liberty and MoveOn both use book bans as a way to identify and cultivate new supporters for their broader social and political issues. It is, therefore, important to understand if there are similarities or differences between political perspectives and how those perspectives can manifest in public policy issues.

Towards School Libraries
The survey asked respondents to self-identify as either Republican (24%), Democrat (27%), Independent (26%), or not aligned (18%) and other (3%). In order to understand the political landscape behind libraries and book bans as a social issue, we ran comparative cross-tabs for self-identified Republican and Democrat parents and guardians; their political identities are evident in the responses.

When discussing school libraries, compared to the overall pool of respondents, Republican parents are less likely to say that book banning is an important issue when they vote. Interestingly, they trust school librarians to recommend age and content-appropriate books to their children.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents, Republican parents are more likely to say that people of any age should “never” have access to age-appropriate books with LGBTQ+ characters, say that parents should receive a notification about everything their child checks out at the school library, and say parents should be able to sign a form indicating that their child cannot access the school library.
Republican parents favor control and restriction more but are less motivated to act on their opinions about book bans at the polls than the general pool of respondents.

*Toward Public Libraries*

The survey asked respondents to self-identify as either Republican (29%), Democrat (36%), Independent (20%), or not aligned (13%). In order to understand the political landscape behind libraries and book bans as a social issue, we ran comparative cross-tabs for self-identified Republican and Democrat parents and guardians.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents when discussing public libraries, Republican parents are slightly less likely to feel their child is safe at the library. They also say that librarians should be primarily responsible for which books are available for checkout at the library.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents, Republican parents are more likely to have a child with a library card and firmly agree that book banning is the right way to prevent children from seeing something inappropriate.

Republican parents are similar to the overall pool of respondents in library usage, report that they are “extremely aware” or very aware” of book bans and censorship in public libraries and school libraries around the United States over the past three years, and say that parent groups should be primarily responsible for which books are available for check out at the library.

Republican parents favor book bans and parent groups controlling what is available at the public library. The fact that they are slightly more likely to have a child with a library card than the general pool of respondents while being less likely to say that their child is safe at the library stands out.
Democrat Respondent Attitudes

**Toward School Libraries**
When discussing school libraries, compared to the overall pool of respondents, Democrat parents are less likely to say that people of any age should “never” have access to age-appropriate books with LGBTQ+ characters in school libraries, say that parents should receive a notification about everything their child checks out at the school library, and say that parents should be able to sign a form indicating that their child cannot access the school library.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents, Democrat parents are more likely to say that book banning is an important issue when they vote, say they are comfortable with LGBTQ+ characters and themes in children’s books, and trust school librarians.

Democrat parents were less in favor of control and restriction and more motivated to act on their opinions about book bans at the polls than the general pool of respondents.

**Toward Public Libraries**
Compared to the overall pool of respondents, Democrat parents, when discussing public libraries, are less likely to firmly agree that book banning is the right way to prevent children from seeing something inappropriate or that parent groups should be primarily responsible for selecting books for the public library.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents, Democrat parents are more likely to be library users, have a child with a library card, feel their child is safe at the library, and are significantly more likely to report that they are “extremely aware” or “very aware” of book bans and censorship in public libraries and school libraries around the United States over the past three years. They are more likely to say that librarians should be primarily responsible for selecting books for the public library. Democrat parents are similar to the overall pool of respondents in library usage.
People Who Support Prosecuting School Librarians

16% of respondents said "I agree" to the statement "school librarians should be prosecuted for giving children access to certain books."
The subset of respondents comfortable with prosecuting librarians will be referred to as "pro-prosecution respondents" going forward.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents, pro-prosecution respondents are less likely to be white or Democrat, have a child in public school, attend school board meetings, trust librarians, and feel their child is safe in the school library.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents, pro-prosecution respondents are more likely to be Republican, say they know how books are selected for the school library, say that a school library should restrict access to certain books based on a child's age or require parental permission to check out certain books, say that they are not comfortable with LGBTQ+ characters and themes in children's books, say that parents should receive a notification about everything their child checks out at the school library, say that parents should sign a form before their child can access the school library, and say that they or their child has checked out a book that they considered inappropriate.

Pro-prosecution respondents are similar to the overall pool of respondents in their likelihood to consider book banning an essential issue when voting.

Pro-prosecution respondents display a mistrust of librarians and libraries in their survey responses. They are also more likely to have had an incident of discomfort with a book their child checked out from a school library. They have less exposure to how the school library works since they are less likely to have a child in public schools or attend school board meetings. Despite the smaller likelihood that they have recent first-hand experiences with school libraries and school board meetings, they feel significantly more confident than the overall pool of respondents that they know how books are selected for the school library.
Laws that protect minors from harmful materials are in force in all 50 states. These laws prevent children from viewing material that is considered obscene and is not protected under the First Amendment. Even with strict laws in place to prevent children from exposure to harmful materials, lawmakers in 15 states in 2023 filed bills during the 2023 legislative session that would change obscenity laws to allow for the prosecution of librarians and educators about the books on their shelves. These bills put librarians and educators in a dangerous position. Two bills passed, with one being invalidated in court and one now in force in Indiana.

Because the current social and political climate has become so willing to consider criminal charges against librarians over books, we asked parents in the survey about their level of agreement with the concept of prosecuting librarians for giving children access to certain books through the library. The results are shocking. One-quarter of respondents said "I agree" with the statement "librarians should be prosecuted for giving children access to certain books." 23% said they somewhat agree. 9% were unsure.

Because of the prevalence of a “pro-prosecution” attitude among parents, we are focusing this section of the report on their answers. Compared to the overall pool of respondents, pro-prosecution respondents are much closer in their attitudes to the general pool of participants than those who were comfortable with jail time for school librarians. The variations between the two pools were less pronounced in this survey than the survey examining attitudes toward school librarians. Compared to the overall pool of respondents, pro-prosecution respondents are less likely to be Democrats (though not significantly) and have a child in public school.

Compared to the overall pool of respondents, pro-prosecution respondents are more likely to be Republican, say that book banning is an important issue when they vote, have a child with a library card, say that a book that their child checked out for the public library made them (the parent) or their child uncomfortable,
say that people of any age should "never" have access to LGBTQ+ characters and themes in children's books, feel that book banning is the right way to prevent children from seeing something inappropriate, and report that they are "extremely aware" or very aware" of book bans and censorship in public libraries and school libraries around the United States over the past three years.

Strikingly, when asked, "Who should be primarily responsible for deciding which books should be available for checkout in a public library? (Check all that apply)"
60% of pro-prosecution respondents said that librarians should be primarily responsible for which books are available for check out at the library (58% of overall respondents for this survey stated this). 59% of pro-prosecution respondents said that parent groups should be primarily responsible for which books are available for checkout at the library (53% of overall). It stands out that pro-prosecution respondents are slightly more likely to say that librarians should be primarily responsible for selecting items for the library than parent groups.

Pro-prosecution respondents are similar to the overall pool of respondents in reporting that they use the public library and feel their child is safe there. The level of familiarity that this group has with the public library is slightly higher than the overall pool of respondents. They report that they use the public library and, interestingly, are more likely to have a child with a library card. The subset that is comfortable with prosecuting public librarians has more exposure to public libraries compared to the respondents overall. Conversely, those comfortable with prosecuting school librarians had less exposure to school libraries than the overall pool. This subset are also more likely to report an incident of discomfort with a book they or their child checked out from a public library.

Pro-prosecution respondents are activated on this issue and more likely to consider book banning an important issue when they vote and report that they are "extremely aware" or "very aware" of book bans and censorship in public libraries. This varies from pro-prosecution respondents for school librarians who were just as activated on this issue as the general pool of responses but not more.
The findings from the survey series reveal conflicting attitudes of American parents and guardians toward book bans, censorship, and library practices. While on the surface, the results of the surveys deliver positive news for librarians and their supporters by showing that most parents trust librarians and believe they should have the power to select books for their libraries, view libraries as safe spaces for their children, and have not encountered inappropriate library books or experienced a book ban in their communities.

A significant majority of respondents view book banning as either a waste of time or an infringement on their rights to make decisions for their children. This suggests a general disapproval of the practice among parents. This fact should inform our sector’s engagement with the media and elected officials as well. Elected officials need to be reminded of how unpopular and unproductive book bans and censorship are viewed by parents and grandparents.

A high percentage of respondents feel that their children are safe at libraries and believe that librarians should primarily be responsible for selecting books in public libraries. However, many are unaware of the criteria librarians use for book selection. It is important for library leaders and pro-library advocacy groups to emphasize this fact. The rhetoric of parental control and parental concern tries to place a wedge between the trust parents have in librarians in schools and public libraries and the parents and families they serve. Part of this trust matrix is to share and explain the collection development and selection process to parents, the media, and policymakers. Without a current understanding of why a book is selected, it is difficult for parents to defend collection decisions when confronted by controversy.

Despite this generally positive framework, we see deep division and troubling trends about what parents want the future of libraries to be. For instance, a
surprisingly high number of parents expressed their opinion that library workers should face prosecution, that students in public schools should require parental permission to use the library (so-called opt-in policies), and that librarians should not be responsible for what is available at the public library. These policies will cause a significant shift in how libraries operate if they have the mainstream traction that these surveys reveal they already have.

As a librarian, you have an obligation to uphold the civil rights of all minorities, including LGBTQ+, racial, and religious groups, and ensure their representation in library collections. However, there are times when parents may express discomfort with sensitive topics that they feel are inappropriate for their children to read. In such situations, you must adopt approaches that address these concerns while staying true to your professional commitments and legal obligations.

One approach to address some parents' discomfort with sensitive topics is through education and outreach. You can engage in community education initiatives to explain the importance of diverse books and their role in promoting understanding and empathy. By providing parents with a deeper understanding of the value of diverse books, you can help alleviate their concerns about their children's exposure to sensitive topics.

Another approach is to clearly communicate about the criteria and processes used for selecting books. Explaining the framework of civil rights or public accommodation laws, professional standards, and ethical guidelines can demystify the process and alleviate concerns about arbitrary or biased choices. By providing transparency in the selection process, you can help parents understand the reasons behind the inclusion of certain books in the collection.

Throughout this survey, we have seen how important it is to encourage and support higher levels of parental involvement in their school and public libraries. Librarians should help parents navigate the collection with their children and respect their right to guide their own children's reading while also maintaining a diverse collection. By providing parents with the tools they need to make informed decisions about their
children's reading choices, you can help them feel more comfortable with the collection.

Invest in continuous professional development for librarians. This includes discussions with other librarians, library boards, school boards, and elected officials about sensitive materials. Stay informed about the legal and ethical frameworks governing library services, including the rights of minors to access information, is important. This knowledge can be crucial in discussions with parents and policy debates. Working with library boards, educational institutions, and policymakers to advocate for policies that support the inclusion of diverse materials in library collections is another approach that can be taken.

Librarians have a responsibility to counter false narratives about the contents of library collections and the process of book selection. These findings show that the belief that library users are allies is inaccurate. It is not enough to attract people to the library - maintaining parents' trust in schools and public libraries requires more. Librarians and supporters should take an active role in addressing misinformation about libraries in their communities.

Librarians can navigate the complexities of serving a diverse community while staying true to professional commitments and legal obligations. The goal is to create an environment where all patrons feel represented and respected and where uncomfortable topics can be explored in a safe and educational setting.
APPENDIX A:
DEMOGRAPHICS OF
RESPONDENTS

Survey 1 - Parents Perception of Public Libraries - Demographics of
Respondents - October 2023
Please see https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/parent_perception_public_libraries_2023

1,063 total respondents
• 853 parents or guardians responded to the survey. MOE +/- 4.6%
• 92% report visiting a public library at least once in the last 12 months, and 88% report having a library card.
• The education levels of respondents are 18% high school graduates, 28% college graduates, and 22% who have completed graduate school.
• 65% of responses are in households with an annual income below $100,000.
• 85% of respondents are registered to vote.
• The age distribution of respondents is 18-29 (18.1%); 30-44 (30.1%); 45-60 (40.8%); >60 (11%).
• 88% of respondents are parents, 11% are grandparents, and a small percentage are foster parents, guardians, or other family members.
• Respondents reported their race as White 66.22%; Black or African American 9.56%; Hispanic or Latino 10.29%; Asian or Asian American 9.44%; American Indian or Alaska Native 1.09%; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander 0.85%; Another race 2.54%.
• Respondents’ self-reported political affiliations are Republican Party 28.97%; Democratic Party 35.94%; Independent 20.42%; None 13.57%.
Survey 2 - Parents’ Perception of Librarians - Demographics of Respondents - November 2023

Please see https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/parent_perceptions_librarians_survey_2023

1004 total respondents on “Long Survey”
523 total respondents on “Short Survey”

- 76% of respondents have visited a library in the past year.
- 84% of respondents report having a library card.
- Schooling: Children in Pre-K - 17.67%; Elementary School - 40.68%; Middle School - 35.33%; High School - 44.27%.
- Type of School: 68% of responding parents have children in public schools; 24% are in private schools; 9% are in charter schools; 9% are homeschooled; 9% are not currently enrolled.
- Age of Parents and Guardians Responding: 18-26 = 4.5%; 27-42 = 41%; 43-58 = 47%; 59+ = 7.2%.
- Responding parents and guardians were 77% White, 11% Black or African American, 5.8% Hispanic or Latino, while 4.5% were Asian, API, or Native American.
- The respondent panel was 85% self-reported as a “Parent,” 7% self-reported as a “Grand Parent,” and the remainder as other relationships or legal guardian status.
- Household income for respondents was: Under $50,000 = 27%; $50,000 to $100,000 = 26%; $100,000 to $200,000 = 27%; Over $200k = 8.2%.
- Respondents self-report being aligned with the Republican Party at 28%, the Democratic Party at 45%, and Independents or non-aligned at 24%.
616 total responses

- Relationship to the child / children in the household: 84% are a parent; 11% are a grandparent; the remainder have a family or legal guardian status.
- Children ages: Pre K = 22.08%; Elementary School = 39.51%; Middle School = 29.14%; High School = 43.93%.
- Of those in school, 78% are in Public School, 13% in Private School, 7% are homeschool, and 4.5% do not currently attend school.
- 85% of respondents say that their child has access to a school library and 68% report that their child has a public library card themselves.
- Relationship to the child/children: 85% parents, 10% grandparents, 10% other household arrangement.
- Age of respondents: 18-29 = 9.38%; 30-44 = 35.42%; 45-60 = 38.33%; > 60 = 16.88%.
- Race of respondents: White 71%, Black or African American 10%, Hispanic or Latino 7.5%, Asian or Asian American 3.5%, American Indian or Alaska Native 2%.
- Political affiliation of respondents: Republican Party = 25%; Democratic Party =27%; Independent = 26%; None = 18%.
- 84% self-report being registered to vote.
Survey 1 - Parents’ Perception of Public Libraries and Book Bans - All Responses - October 2023

- A small majority of respondents (53%) do not know how librarians decide what books should be in a library collection.
- 43% report that their local library has age restrictions on children’s library card borrowing privileges.
- 19% report that there are no restrictions on their child’s card, and 37% are unsure.
- A supermajority (66%) of respondents said ‘no’ when asked if a book that their child checked out made them (the parent) uncomfortable.
- 67% said ‘no’ when asked if their child has ever been uncomfortable with a book they checked out.
- 92% of all respondents say their child/children are safe at the library.
- Only 13% of respondents say that children of any age should have access to age-appropriate books about race, social justice, sexual education, and LGBTQ+ themes.
- 9 out of 10 parents or guardians say that they are the ones who should make decisions about what books their own child reads. 65% report that book banning is an important issue when voting.
- Respondents are more comfortable with a child accessing age-appropriate children's books related to "social justice" and "race/racism" than they are with a child accessing age-appropriate children's books related to "LGBTQ+ characters" and "puberty and sexual education" themes.
- Respondents were most likely to feel comfortable with their child reading age-appropriate children's books containing "social justice" themes and least likely to feel comfortable with their child reading age-appropriate children's books with LGBTQ+ characters.
Nearly 16% of respondents do not think children under 18 should have access to books with LGBTQ+ characters.

9% do not think children under 18 should read books about race/racism.

There are significant differences between parents’ perceptions of whether books with "social justice", "race/racism", “LGBTQ+”, and "puberty and sexual education" themes have positive, negative, or neutral impacts on children.

50% report being “extremely aware” or "very aware" of attempts to ban books nationwide this year, and only 7% report being “not at all aware” of book bans.

40% think that a book has been banned at their local library this year.

64% agree or somewhat agree that “banning books is a waste of time”.

74% agree or somewhat agree that book bans infringe on their right to make decisions for their children (42% agree; 32% somewhat agree).

57% say that reading opens children up to new ideas, new people, and new perspectives, and 44% say that teens should have access to books on controversial subjects and themes.

67% agree or somewhat agree that books about complex topics like race or sex belong in the library. That falls to 60% when asked about LGBTQ+ themes specifically.

33% say that some books in the children's section of public libraries are not appropriate for any child.

31% say that banning books is the right way to prevent children from seeing something inappropriate.

25% think that librarians should be prosecuted for giving children access to certain books while 41% do not.

90% of respondents agree or somewhat agree that they are the ones who should make decisions about what books their child reads.

95% believe that parents should be involved in helping their children decide what to read.

57% agree and 32% somewhat agree that books should be diverse and reflect multiple communities.

87% report using filters or blocks on their child’s internet devices.
58% believe that librarians should make decisions about which books are in the library, while only 22% believe those choices should be made by local elected officials and 18% by the state legislature.

53% also believe that parent groups should be involved in collection development choices; 47% see library boards as playing that role.

65% report that book banning is an important issue when voting. Of those respondents who look at book bans as an important issue, 30% vote Republican, 41% vote Democrat, 18% vote Independent, and 9% are unaffiliated voters.
Survey 2 - Parents’ Perception of Librarians - All Responses - November 2023

- 92% trust children’s librarians to select appropriate books and materials for the library.
- 92% trust librarians to recommend age and content-appropriate books and materials to them and their children.
- 90% report that they feel comfortable allowing their child to select their own materials (books, magazines, movies, audiobooks, games, etc.) from the library.
- 96% say they feel their children are safe in the library.
- When to rate their overall impression of the librarians across the country: 51% were very satisfied with librarians; 34% were satisfied; Only 6% were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied; 12% of the respondents were neither.
- 69% agree that a Librarian is someone they can relate to.
- 53% agree that the librarian is well-known in the community.
- 85% agree that librarians support children’s learning.
- 70% agree that librarians understand their community's needs.
- 77% agree that librarians make the library a place for fun and creativity.
- 78% agree that librarians are true advocates for lifelong learning.
- 77% agree that librarians are friendly and approachable.
- 67% agree that librarians are knowledgeable about their community.
- 75% agree that librarians are experts at connecting people to what they need.
- 83% agree that librarians know what books children would love.
- 85% of parents say they are familiar with how to request a specific book at their library.
- 43% of parents say they are familiar with collection development policies at their library.
- 43% report knowing how to find their library’s collection development policy.
- 43% are familiar with the Library Bill of Rights.
- 56% of parents say that they would know how to file a complaint to the library about a book they consider inappropriate.
- 62% of parents said that they were aware that a Master's Degree is required for many jobs in libraries.
- 9 out of 10 report being registered to vote.
- 7 out of 10 report that “Book banning is an issue that is important to you when you vote.”

We asked respondents to rank various professions for their relative Trustworthiness and Untrustworthiness, both Public Librarians and School Librarians were in the Top 5 most trustworthy professions alongside health care and educators:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trustworthy</th>
<th>Untrustworthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>87.23%</td>
<td>12.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+Public Librarians</td>
<td>91.04%</td>
<td>8.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police Officers</td>
<td>54.10%</td>
<td>45.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurses</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
<td>14.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctors</td>
<td>87.88%</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers</td>
<td>19.64%</td>
<td>80.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profession</td>
<td>Trustworthy</td>
<td>Untrustworthy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountants</td>
<td>68.00%</td>
<td>32.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists</td>
<td>23.40%</td>
<td>76.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bankers</td>
<td>32.00%</td>
<td>68.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Agents</td>
<td>37.04%</td>
<td>62.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselors/Social Workers</td>
<td>60.61%</td>
<td>39.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumbers</td>
<td>45.45%</td>
<td>54.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail Carriers</td>
<td>69.70%</td>
<td>30.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinarians</td>
<td>74.19%</td>
<td>25.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>6.11%</td>
<td>93.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentists</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>42.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Leaders</td>
<td>42.19%</td>
<td>57.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+School Librarians</td>
<td>86.54%</td>
<td>13.46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked, “Do you feel that your child is capable of selecting their own reading materials from the library?” respondents said:

- Pre-K = 8.75%
- Elementary = 37.89%
- Middle School = 27.64%
- High School = 17.82%
- Any age = 6.94%
- Never = 0.96%

When asked if their child/children have a library card:

- 64% report that “Yes, they do have a personal library card”
- 14% report that “They use my library card to check out books”
- 17% say, “No, they do not have a personal library card”

On the issue of “age-restricted” library cards, 35% report being Unsure if their library has an age restriction. Otherwise, 44% of parents say that their library is restricted by age, and the remaining 35% say that the library does not.

Parents report that the most important resources available at their local library are:

- Having many types of books = 46.06%
- Knowledgeable staff = 40.72%
- Public computers = 33.26%
- Programs for families = 27.86%

Parents report that they use books (46%), computers (32%), and programs (27%) offered by their libraries most frequently and rely on knowledgeable staff (30%) when visiting their library.

When asked, “Do you think public librarians have a political agenda?” parents are not of one mind:

- Yes, and they should = 35%
- No, but they should = 9%
- Yes, and they should not = 12%
- No, and they should not = 44%
When asked, “Who should have the authority to select books in a public library?”: (1 being the lowest ranking, 5 being the highest ranking)

- Librarians (3.6) and Library Boards (3.4) were rated highest, followed by
- Parents Groups (3.2), with
- Local Elected Officials (2.4) and State Legislatures (2.2) being ranked lowest.

The rankings are the same for school libraries, with School Librarians (3.6) and School Boards (3.3) ranking higher than Parent Groups (3.1), Local Elected Officials (2.5), and State Legislatures (2.3).
Survey 3 - Parents’ Perception of School Libraries and Book Bans - All Responses - December 2023

- 96% agree that every school should have a school librarian.
- 94% report feeling that their child or children are safe at the school library.
- 81% trust school librarians to select appropriate books and materials for school libraries.
- 82% trust school librarians to recommend age and content-appropriate books and materials to students.
- 86% say that their child has never checked out a book from the school library that made them feel uncomfortable.
- 86% of parents and grandparents have never been uncomfortable with a book their child checked out of a school library.
- Only 18% of respondents know how school librarians decide if a book should be in the school library’s collection.
- Only 41% report having met their child’s school librarian.
- While 39% say that parents should sign a permission form before students can access the school library, 58% say that parents should be able to sign a form indicating that their child cannot access the school library.
- Two-thirds of respondents agree that the school website should have a list of every book in the school library, and 57% say that parents should receive a notification about everything their child checks out.
- 86% believe children’s book characters should be diverse and reflect many experiences.
87% believe that teenagers should have access to a wide range of books in their school library, including on complex and controversial subjects and themes. 

60% believe that children have the right as students to decide their own reading materials. 

However, 76% say that parents themselves should be able to decide if their child is able to access information about challenging topics such as sex ed, racism, etc., and 49% agree that school libraries should only contain books appropriate for every age group in the school (i.e., the youngest and most sensitive readers). 

80% agree with the statement that school libraries should have content rating systems based on their appropriateness for different age groups or contents, similar to the rating systems used for movies, TV shows, or video games. 

54% agree with the statement that book bans in school libraries cause harm to children, while 42% believe that banning books is an appropriate way to prevent children from learning about certain topics. 

Only 16% agree with the statement that school librarians should be arrested for giving children access to certain books. 

62% agree that banning books infringes on their rights as a parent to make decisions for their own child, but 32% would request that a book be banned from their school library “if it makes me or my child feel uncomfortable”. 

70% agree with the statement that “I am the one who is responsible for what my child reads”. 

85% agree with the statement, “There are some books that are inappropriate for all children”. 

67% report using parental blocks and filters on their phones/devices, apps, and the internet. 

67% of parents are unsure if any books have been banned from their school library in the past year; 9.6% report that a book ban has occurred; 23% report that no bans have occurred. 

56% say book banning is an issue that is important when they vote.
On a scale of "Very comfortable" to "Not comfortable," how comfortable are you with the following themes in children's books in the school library?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>VERY COMFORTABLE</th>
<th>SOMEWHA COMFORTABLE</th>
<th>NOT COMFORTABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ+ characters and themes in children's books?</td>
<td>34.52%</td>
<td>28.24%</td>
<td>37.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's books about race/ racism?</td>
<td>47.53%</td>
<td>32.47%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's books about social justice?</td>
<td>52.32%</td>
<td>31.43%</td>
<td>16.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's books about puberty and sexual education?</td>
<td>40.47%</td>
<td>33.69%</td>
<td>25.85%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At what grade level is it appropriate for students to have access to the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age-appropriate books with LGBTQ+ characters</th>
<th>PRE K</th>
<th>ELEM SCHOOL</th>
<th>MIDDLE SCHOOL</th>
<th>HIGH SCHOOL</th>
<th>ALL OF THE ABOVE</th>
<th>NEVER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10.06%</td>
<td>12.79%</td>
<td>24.95%</td>
<td>24.95%</td>
<td>9.43%</td>
<td>17.82%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Age-appropriate books about race/racism     | 13.47%| 32.42%      | 22.53%        | 13.89%      | 11.79%          | 5.89% |

| Age-appropriate books about social justice  | 11.37%| 24.42%      | 27.16%        | 18.11%      | 12.21%          | 6.74% |

| Age-appropriate books about puberty and sexual education | 5.68%| 18.95% | 44.42% | 17.26% | 9.05% | 4.63% |
What is the appropriate grade level for a child to choose their own library books without adult supervision?

Pre-K 10.50%
Elementary School 31.09%
Middle School 27.33%
High School 19.41%
All of the above 10.30%
Never 1.39%

Should a school library restrict access to certain books based on a child's age or require parental permission to check out certain books?

Yes 60.32%
No 28.17%
Unsure 11.51%
Please visit https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/parent_perceptions_survey_2023 to view results from each survey and visit bookriot.com to read ongoing analysis and coverage of this survey.

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