Parents’ Perceptions of School Libraries Survey - 2023
EveryLibrary Institute NFP and Book Riot

December 2023

https://www.everylibraryinstitute.org/parent_perception_school_libraries_2023
The EveryLibrary Institute and Book Riot conducted the "Parents' Perception of School Libraries and Librarians" survey of 616 parents and guardians during December 2023 to understand their perceptions on topics like book bans, access to school libraries, and the involvement of parents in their children's reading choices.

Key findings indicate a strong belief among parents in the importance of school librarians, with a vast majority asserting that every school should have one. Despite this, there are considerable concerns about unrestricted access to books. Most parents feel that access to certain books should be age-restricted or require parental permission. 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. An even larger majority favor book rating systems in school libraries.

The survey shows an often contradictory landscape of opinions by parents and caregivers about how their children interact with the school library. Parents overwhelmingly recognize the importance of school librarians and value the safety and educational role of school libraries. However, they also express considerable concerns about unrestricted access to certain books, with many advocating for age-appropriate restrictions and greater parental oversight.

View the survey results at "Parents' Perception of School Libraries and Librarians".
Q2: 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%
Q3: Should a school library restrict access to certain books based on a child's age or require parental permission to check out certain books?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>60.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>11.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents’ Perception of School Librarians Survey – EveryLibrary Institute and Book Riot – December 2023
Q4: Do you know how school librarians decide if a book should be in the school library’s collection?

- Yes: 18.56%
- No: 81.44%
Q7: 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?

- LGBTQ+ characters and themes in children's books?
- Children's books about race/racism?
- Children's books about social justice?
- Children's books about puberty and sexual education?
Q7 Table: 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>SOMEWHAT COMFORTABLE</th>
<th>NOT COMFORTABLE</th>
<th>TOTAL</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>
<td>478</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>165</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>178</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's books about race/racism?</td>
<td>47.53%</td>
<td>32.47%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>221</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's books about social justice?</td>
<td>52.32%</td>
<td>31.43%</td>
<td>16.24%</td>
<td>474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>248</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></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>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>191</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>122</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q8: At what grade level is it appropriate for students to have access to the following...

- Age-appropriate books with LGBTQ+ characters:
  - Pre K: 10%
  - Elementary School: 30%
  - Middle School: 20%
  - High School: 50%
  - All of the above: 10%
  - Never: 0%

- Age-appropriate books about race/racism:
  - Pre K: 10%
  - Elementary School: 30%
  - Middle School: 20%
  - High School: 50%
  - All of the above: 10%
  - Never: 0%

- Age-appropriate books about social justice:
  - Pre K: 10%
  - Elementary School: 30%
  - Middle School: 20%
  - High School: 50%
  - All of the above: 10%
  - Never: 0%

- Age-appropriate books about puberty and sexual education:
  - Pre K: 10%
  - Elementary School: 30%
  - Middle School: 20%
  - High School: 50%
  - All of the above: 10%
  - Never: 0%
Q9: Have any books been banned from a school library in your community in the past year?

- Yes: 9.64%
- No: 23.06%
- Unsure: 67.30%
Q11: Should parents receive a notification about everything their child checks out?

Yes: 56.81%
No: 43.19%
Q12: Should parents be able to sign a form indicating that their child cannot access the school library?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>46.22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q13: Should parents sign a permission form before students can access the school library?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>38.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>61.01%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q15: Do you trust school librarians to select appropriate books and materials for school libraries?

Yes: 80.65%
No: 19.35%
Q16: Do you trust school librarians to recommend age and content-appropriate books and materials to students?

- Yes: 82.35%
- No: 17.65%
Q21: Do you feel your child or children are safe at the school library?

Yes: 93.64%
No: 6.36%
Q22: Have you met your child’s school librarian?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>55.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>3.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q23: Has your child ever checked out a book from their school library that made you feel uncomfortable?

- Yes: 8.32%
- No: 86.65%
- Comments: 5.03%
Q24: Has your child ever checked out a book from the school library that made *them* feel uncomfortable?

- Yes: 6.35%
- No: 85.78%
- Comments: 7.88%
Q25: Rate these statements on a scale of “Agree” to “Disagree” to reflect your parenting practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I would request that a book be banned from their school library if it makes me or my child feel uncomfortable.</td>
<td>32.11%</td>
<td>67.89%</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am the one who is responsible for what my child reads.</td>
<td>70.28%</td>
<td>29.72%</td>
<td>434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use parental blocks and filters on their phones/devices, apps, and the internet.</td>
<td>67.44%</td>
<td>32.56%</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are some books that are inappropriate for all children.</td>
<td>85.45%</td>
<td>14.55%</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q26: Rate these statements on a scale of “Agree” to “Disagree” to reflect your opinions about book bans.

- Book bans in school libraries cause harm to children. [Agree: 40%, Disagree: 60%]
- I believe that banning books is an appropriate way to prevent children from learning about certain topics. [Agree: 50%, Disagree: 50%]
- School librarians should be arrested for giving children access to certain books. [Agree: 20%, Disagree: 80%]
- Banning books infringes on my rights as a parent to make decisions for my own child. [Agree: 60%, Disagree: 40%]
Q27: Rate these statements on a scale of “Agree” to “Disagree” to reflect your opinions about school library practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>AGREE</th>
<th>DISAGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>80.23% 349</td>
<td>19.77% 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School libraries should only contain books appropriate for every age group in the school (i.e., the youngest and most sensitive readers).</td>
<td>49.54% 215</td>
<td>50.46% 219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I believe children’s book characters should be diverse and reflect many experiences.</td>
<td>86.11% 372</td>
<td>13.89% 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teenagers should have access to a wide range of books in their school library, including on complex and controversial subjects and themes.</td>
<td>87.50% 378</td>
<td>12.50% 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children have the right as students to decide their own reading materials.</td>
<td>60.28% 261</td>
<td>39.72% 172</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q28: Rate these statements on a scale of “Agree” to “Disagree” to reflect your opinions about school library policies.

The school website should have a list of every book in the school library.

Every school should have a school librarian.

Parents should be able to decide if their child is able to access information about challenging topics such as sex ed, racism, etc.
Q40: Is book banning an issue that is important to you when you vote?

Yes: 56.10%

No: 43.90%
Q41: Are you registered to vote?

- Yes: 84.63%
- No, but I plan to before the next election: 5.20%
- No, and I don't plan to before the next election: 10.17%
Demographics of Respondents

616 total responses

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.

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: Republican Party = 25%; Democratic Party = 27%; Independent = 26%; None = 18%
Acknowledgements

Please cite this report as:
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This is the third survey in a series. Book Riot and the EveryLibrary Institute will continue to publish commentary and reports from this survey. Please visit bookriot.com and everylibraryinstitute.org for insights.