

Factors Influencing the Outcome of Challenges to Materials in Secondary Schools [hopkins]

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A national study of library media material challenges in secondary-level public school libraries was conducted during the 1989-90 school year.¹ The overall purpose of the study was to identify the factors that influenced whether challenges to library media materials resulted in retention, restriction, or removal of materials. The study specifically examined the most recent resolved challenge to library media materials occurring during a three-year period. Factors that were examined had been identified in previous research in intellectual freedom, library and information studies, educational administration, and behavioral science. The factors that were examined focused on the district materials selection policy, characteristics of the library media specialist, school environment, community environment, initiator of the challenge, and complaint background. These factors were examined using a conceptual model based upon relevant research.

The study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 was designed to identify schools in which challenges to library media materials had taken place. Toward that end, a one-page questionnaire was distributed to a proportionate, stratified random sample of public schools with grades 7 or higher. The sample was stratified by community size ranging from large central cities to rural communities. From a population of 34,644, a sample population of 6,617 was selected, of which 6,557 were used. Years focused on were 1986-87, 1987-88, and 1988-89. From a response rate of 72 percent, or 4,736, it was learned that 64.1 percent of respondents who were school library media specialists reported no challenges and that 35.1 percent reported one or more challenges.

Respondents to the one-page questionnaire who reported one or more challenges received a second questionnaire in spring 1990, which focused on four areas: the background on the school, school district, and library media specialist; school library media materials and complaints; most recent resolved complaint occurring since September 1987; perspectives of the library media specialists on their own professional experience and on school, community, and national environments.

In phase 2, the overall response rate was 70 percent; 1,171 of 1,661 questionnaires were completed and returned. Of these, 739, or 63.1 percent, indicated challenges experienced during the period under investigation.

Overall, there were six general factors found to influence the outcome of challenges to library media center (LMC) materials:

—the existence of a school board-approved district materials selection policy and the degree to which it was used when LMC materials were challenged;

- the school environment, including the influence and power of the school principal and the support of classroom teachers;
- the community environment, through support received outside the school district in which a challenge occurred;
- the initiator of the challenge;
- selected characteristics of the library media specialist including gross degrees of dogmatism and internal or external locus of control;
- complaint background, including whether there was active support of the retention or removal of materials and whether the challenge was oral or written.

Details on the study can be found in professional literature including the following by researcher Dianne McAfee Hopkins:

- “A Conceptual Model of Factors Influencing the Outcome of Challenges to Library Materials in Secondary School Settings.” *Library Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (January 1993): 40-72.
- “Perspectives of Secondary Library Media Specialists About Material Challenges.” *School Library Media Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Fall 1992): 15-24.
- “Put It in Writing: What You Should Know About Challenges to School Library Materials.” *School Library Journal* 39, no. 1 (January 1993): 26-30.

Individual copies of the full U.S. Department of Education report, which includes the questionnaire, are available for \$20 from the School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Helen C. White Hall, 600 N. Park St., Madison, WI 53706. Title: “Factors Influencing the Outcome of Challenges to Materials in Secondary School Libraries: Report of a National Study.” Also available in ERIC ED 338 266.

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