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## The Issue of Access: Looking Back, Stepping Up, and Moving Forward

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I am pleased to present a diverse set of voices on the unpleasant subject of censorship. At the heart of the issue of censorship of books in schools, and of this issue of *Knowledge Quest*, is access to diverse voices.

Our feature article “Joining Forces to Amplify Voice” by high school librarian Sue Kowalski from upstate New York, details her experiences revamping her collection policies to prepare stakeholders to respond to challenges from a position of transparency and communication. She stresses the importance of forming and maintaining collaborative relationships with administrators, organizations, teachers, families, and students, in order to strengthen collection development and foster a culture of literacy and dialogue.

Juan Rivera takes us back in order to move forward. He uses his experience working on AASL’s resource guide on LGBTQ+ materials in school libraries to show how we can apply essential questions based on our National Standards’ Shared Foundations to defend intellectual freedom in the face of book challenges.

Lindsay Cesari gives us insight into an aspect of our school librarian role that is sometimes overlooked: working with classroom teachers to select novels for the curriculum. She describes the challenge of selecting new, more diverse texts for her junior high school, while at the same time defending an existing text. The situation led the selection committee to formalize a

procedure for selecting new texts, a process that they anticipate will bolster their defense of selections from future challenges while also giving learners a choice among several titles.

High school student Josh Spilka contributes an important student perspective on book bans, highlighting both the personal effects on students and the success of students’ organizing efforts to push back against book bans.

Ashley Hope Pérez offers her multifaceted perspective as a YA author and former English teacher from Texas, currently a literature professor and defender of intellectual freedom in Ohio. She highlights the importance of recognizing the new tactics being employed in book banning, as well as the importance of recognizing—and maintaining our resolve against—“soft” censorship, or self-censorship.

Finally, middle school librarian Mitzi Mack of Florida—a hotbed of book challenges and attempts to pass restrictive legislation—reminds us of the foundational importance of access to diverse books, and describes the support available from our local and state organizations as well as from ALA.

If the new wave of book banning hasn’t yet hit your school, district, or state, I hope that this issue of *Knowledge Quest* helps inform you about the trends elsewhere in the country, gives you ideas for showing solidarity against

censorship, and helps you prepare in the event that you and your students face this adversity. Even if you never have to face a material challenge yourself, I hope that you will use the strategy in the Ashley Hope Pérez article of articulating to yourself and others what you stand for. Whether you work in a diverse community or a majority-white community, in a school with an active Gay-Straight Alliance or a school with no such thing, I hope that one of the values for which you can articulate your stand is access to diverse books.

If you have experienced a book challenge or ban, I hope that this *KQ* issue brings you ideas to further strengthen your practice and procedures, and brings you more well-informed allies as well.

And now, it's Friday, so I need to go prep a #FReadom post.

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