Last year, the May/June 2022 issue of *Knowledge Quest* presented a wide range of powerful resources to support school librarians facing book challenges and outright bans. In that issue, literature professor and award-winning YA author Ashley Hope Perez noted the “broader chilling effect in schools, the silent ripple of ‘soft’ censorship by students, teachers, librarians.” *Knowledge Quest* November/December 2023 offers us ways to be not silent but aware, reflective, and actively engaged in explicitly addressing “soft censorship” in ourselves, with classroom teachers, and with school and district administrators. In the current socio-political climate, all school librarians, whether faced with an active challenge or not, will at some point find themselves face to face with their own feelings and biases — and pressure from others at their schools — about adding or weeding specific titles based on those feelings or biases; that is, soft censorship. Our awareness at this moment, focused reflection on evidence, and active engagement in our professional ethics are what will guide us in creating school libraries that serve all students’ information needs.

Nan Trowell Brown, who is the content editor for this issue, brings extensive expertise in confronting censorship, working in advocacy with the Georgia Library Media Association, Forsyth Coalition for Education, and the Georgia Coalition for Education Justice. Nan knows soft censorship is not quiet; she hears from school librarians who “feel forced to consider soft censorship” in the face of informal complaints from staff and administrators. She is an active ally in providing the information school librarians need to resist giving in to this kind of censorship and has gathered an impressive roster of authors to address soft censorship from a variety of perspectives. As you read, you will be rewarded with a wealth of resources to support you.

Marie Masferrer’s article delivers the bottom line about what’s truly at stake: our students’ freedom to know themselves and their world. She asks us to start by finding factual, accurate information about the laws in our state, the policies in our district, and the published guidance from professional organizations so that we can

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**Aware, Reflective, and Actively Engaged**

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communicate with our school staff about what is really happening and what is fearmongering. It is that fear that pressures us into soft censorship. Marie calls on us to use our individual and collective voices to speak out about what is ethical, equitable, and supportive to students.

In Robbie Barber’s article, she notes that soft censorship may be a greater threat to school libraries than the challenges and bans we fear. She strongly encourages us all to use the data available to us to make evidence-based decisions about collection development and weeding. Her ideas about what “counts” as data are illuminating, including not only circulation records, district demographics, home languages, and district reading assessment results, but also systematic observation of library use and surveys of learners and classroom teachers about their perceptions of library access. Using data will give school librarians the information we need to be more reflective and move beyond fear or misperceptions in our work. You will expand your relevant data sources when you read about her work.

Samantha Archibold Mora and Amy Bingham tell the story of using their circulation data, an inclusive selection policy, and learner input to analyze and develop a growing collection of graphic novels and manga for Samantha’s middle school students. They are motivated by the ethics of the library profession and the evidence that engaged readers exhibit higher reading achievement, but also because they support the pleasure their learners find in books and the social and emotional growth they develop through reading. Samantha and Amy value relevant, engaging texts to develop voracious, empathetic readers and give us the information we need to support more graphic novels and manga in our own collections.

I experienced Kristina Weber’s piece as if she had her hands on my shoulders and was giving me a brisk, supportive shake to say, “You’ve got this!” She identifies how books by LGBTQ and BIPOC authors and about LGBTQIA and BIPOC characters are most often the subjects of challenges and bans. Our learners are depending on us to protect their access to information. Kristina is clear: We are facing an organized and well-funded movement to ban books. Yet she reminds us to remember our training; we are the experts. We are trained to do this work: we use evidence, consult selection and weeding guides, and use information accurately and appropriately. We will support each other during this complicated time.

Debra Schneider manages the Instructional Media Center, the hub of the Tracy Unified School District instructional materials program and its 17 associated libraries, in Tracy, California. She manages, trains, and supports library staff to provide instruction in literacy, information literacy, digital literacy, and digital citizenship. Over the last 10 years, she has increased the diversity of the library collections at all 17 site libraries, decreased the average age of the collections, initiated access to e-books and audiobooks in the public library system for all TUSD students, and implemented lunch time and after-school library programming for students. She advocated for and received increased library staffing in the district budget, including the addition of teacher librarians for all K–5, K–8, and 6–8 schools in TUSD, a rarity in California. She is a member of the California School Library Association.