

# **"We Move": How Florida School Librarians are Protecting Controversial Titles and Navigating a Legally Perilous Environment**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Using a mixed method approach and informed by Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence Theory, this study examines the impact on school librarians of recent legislation in Florida that has facilitated widespread materials challenges and removals of titles in public school libraries across the state. Participants were presented with several series of questions that included their comfortability with collecting materials that could potentially be considered controversial, and their perceptions of support for their collection development decisions by stakeholders including principals, parents, colleagues, and their community. Additional series of questions focused on the participants' experience with self-censorship and their familiarity with both Florida State law and federal case law that pertains to students' First Amendment and intellectual freedom rights. Multiple, successive rounds of recruitment yielded 49 survey participants and 9 interviewees. Preliminary analysis suggests that Florida school librarians increasingly rely on professional reviews to both guide their selection choices as well as protect themselves in the event of a materials challenge. Additionally, although a large majority of the respondents indicated strong support for intellectual freedom, many avoid selecting materials perceived as controversial to avoid controversy. However, the data also suggest that communication, collaboration, and involvement with like-minded individuals and organizations can be key mitigators of self-censorship and appear to offer a fruitful avenue to assist Florida school librarians in navigating the current environment. Finally, Florida school librarians appear to have a more robust awareness and deeper understanding of state laws compared to the federal case law that provides critical context.

## **ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS**

School libraries; intellectual freedom; social justice; censorship; information policy.

## **AUTHOR KEYWORDS**

Self-censorship; First Amendment; challenges; Spiral of Silence.

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