

Library-focused bills - negative impact on literacy and youth mental health

With literacy and youth mental health identified as critical issues in our state, current bills in the Georgia legislature to limit access to reading options for students are both puzzling and concerning. Georgia Library Media Association (GLMA) holds that families' rights to determine what their children read and learn should *not* be limited by others' preferences for their own families.

Subjective expansion beyond the Supreme Court definition of obscene materials in SB 394, combined with threats of both criminal and civil penalties for such materials in libraries in schools in SB 154, attempt to intimidate educators to consider needs of (often marginalized) students against their own freedom and livelihoods.

Free choice, high interest reading is a critical part of students developing *and* maintaining reading fluency as well as improving empathy and mental wellness. Limiting 7th and 8th grade students to materials which are age-relevant to kindergarteners, as required by SB 394, would counteract expensive programming targeted to improving literacy growth in Georgia students.

SB 390 and SB 379 also devalue the contributions of certified professionals (librarians and school counselors) and restrict valid business practices of long-standing professional organizations. Claims that work of these professionals could be completed as well by non-certified persons are not substantiated. Several elements of SB 394 call for specific expertise of a certified school librarian; the Georgia Department of Education has not filled the vacancy created with retirement of their library media liaison in July, 2023.

Parents and guardians of students in most public schools with online library catalogs already have access to their child's school library account using a student ID. Bypassing important direct conversations about reading choices with their child with the email notification options required in SB 365 may force some students into ethical dilemmas and erode trust in parent-child relationships.

GLMA asks Georgia legislators to please support *all* students by allowing these bills which limit reading choices and devalue the work of dedicated certified professionals to die in their current chamber.