

Position Statement on Labeling Books with Reading Levels

The following position statement is currently under review to align with the *National School Library Standards* (<http://standards.aasl.org>).

Librarians use spine labels to organize and identify library resources by call number to help patrons locate general subject areas or specific fiction, non-fiction, reference, audiovisual, or other items. Viewpoint-neutral directional labeling in libraries increases students' access to information and supports their First Amendment right to read. Best practice in school libraries includes books and other resources being shelved using a standard classification system that also enables students to find resources in other libraries, such as a public library, from which they may borrow materials.

One of the realities some school librarians face in their jobs is pressure by administrators and classroom teachers to label and arrange library collections according to reading levels. Student browsing behaviors can be profoundly altered with the addition of external reading level labels. With reading level labels often closely tied to reward points, student browsing becomes mainly a search for books that must be read and tests completed for individual or classroom point goals and/or grades. School library collections are not merely extensions of classroom book collections or classroom teaching methods, but rather places where children can explore interests safely and without restrictions. A minor's right to access resources freely and without restriction has long been and continues to be the position of the American Library Association and the American Association of School Librarians.

Labeling and shelving a book with an assigned grade level on its spine allows other students to observe the reading level of peers, thus threatening the confidentiality of students' reading levels. Only a student, the child's parents or guardian, the teacher, and the school librarian as appropriate should have knowledge of a student's reading capability.

Non-standard shelving practices make it difficult for library staff and patrons to locate specific titles. More importantly, students may have no understanding of how most school and public libraries arrange their materials, thus further affecting book selection in other libraries.

It is the responsibility of school librarians to promote free access for students and not to aid in restricting their library materials. School librarians should resist labeling and advocate for development of district policies regarding leveled reading programs that rely on library staff compliance with library book labeling and non-standard shelving requirements. These policies should address the concerns of privacy, student First Amendment Rights, behavior modification in both browsing and motivational reading attitudes, and related issues.

For additional supporting information see also:

American Association of School Librarians. "Position Statement on the Value of Independent Reading in the School Library Program (<http://www.ala.org/aasl/advocacy/resources/statements/ind-reading>)."

American Library Association. "Labeling and Rating System: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights (</advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/labelingrating>)." July 11, 2011.

American Library Association. "Questions and Answers on Labeling and Rating Systems (</advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/qa-labeling>)." January 16, 2010.

American Library Association. "Restricted Access to Library Materials: An Interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights (<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/restrictedaccess>)." July 1, 2014.

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