



**ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION**

Because Libraries Matter

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## Press Release

**The 2022 Illinois Library Association's (ILA) Intellectual Freedom Award is being given to the students of Downers Grove High Schools, in particular, to a group of student leaders who stood up to a book ban at their school. This award, presented by the ILA Intellectual Freedom Committee recognizes the group for their outstanding contributions in defending intellectual freedom. The award was established in 2007 in honor of former ILA Director Robert P. Doyle.**

When two parents of students at Downers Grove High School, Illinois School District 99 tried to ban *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe from the library due to its LGBTQ+ themes, a group of five student leaders organized and rallied students and parents to support keeping the book in the collection. The leaders: Lauren Pierret, Tabitha Irvin, Julia Hanson, Josiah Poynter, and Emily Hernandez attended school board meetings to speak out against censorship and support intellectual freedom. They also advocated for intellectual freedom by publishing articles about the book challenge in the school newspaper.

Lauren Pierret, who bravely spoke to the school board, was verbally ridiculed by members of the Proud Boys, a national white supremacist group. Attendees at the meeting report that the supporters of intellectual freedom outnumbered the other side two to one. Facing an organized and well-funded effort to censor books, these five high school students courageously supported their LGBTQ+ classmates and refused to allow hatred and bigotry to intimidate the school board members and students.

Through the organizing and advocacy efforts of the five students there was a large number of supporters of intellectual freedom at the school board meetings. Following school district policy, a committee was formed to address the challenged book. The committee and principals from both Downers Grove North and Downers Grove South High Schools, the superintendent, and legal counsel recommended to the board that *Gender Queer* should remain in the library collection. The School Board voted 7-0 on June 6, 2022, to retain the book.

The ILA's Intellectual Freedom Committee is honored to present this award to the students of Downers Grove High Schools, in particular the leaders who championed the freedom to read and their right to access reading materials that entertain and educate. Their actions reflect the reality across the United States: the vast majority of Americans do not support book bans.

The ILA Intellectual Freedom Award will be presented at an awards ceremony during the 2022 Illinois Library Association Annual Conference. The conference will take place October 18-20, 2022, at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont, IL.

For further information, contact the Illinois Library Association.

For Immediate Release