

# REPORTER

ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

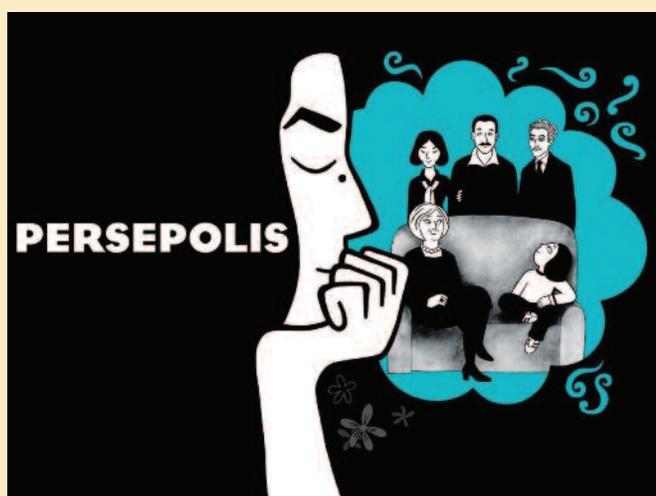
AUGUST 2013

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# The Illinois Library Association Reporter

is a forum for those who are improving and reinventing Illinois libraries, with articles that seek to: explore new ideas and practices from all types of libraries and library systems; examine the challenges facing the profession; and inform the library community and its supporters with news and comment about important issues. The *ILA Reporter* is produced and circulated with the purpose of enhancing and supporting the value of libraries, which provide free and equal access to information. This access is essential for an open democratic society, an informed electorate, and the advancement of knowledge for all people.



## ON THE COVER

This month's cover illustration is from Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel, *Persepolis*, one of four books facing recent challenges in Illinois' schools and libraries. Named a *New York Times* Notable Book and a *Time Magazine* "Best Comix of the Year," the brilliant illustrations and simple, direct text chronicle growing up in Tehran during the Islamic revolution. Students at Chicago's Lane Tech High School were instrumental in protesting the removal of the book, and their story, as well as that of students in Glen Ellyn who fought to keep Stephen Chbosky's *Perks of Being a Wallflower*, begins on page 4.

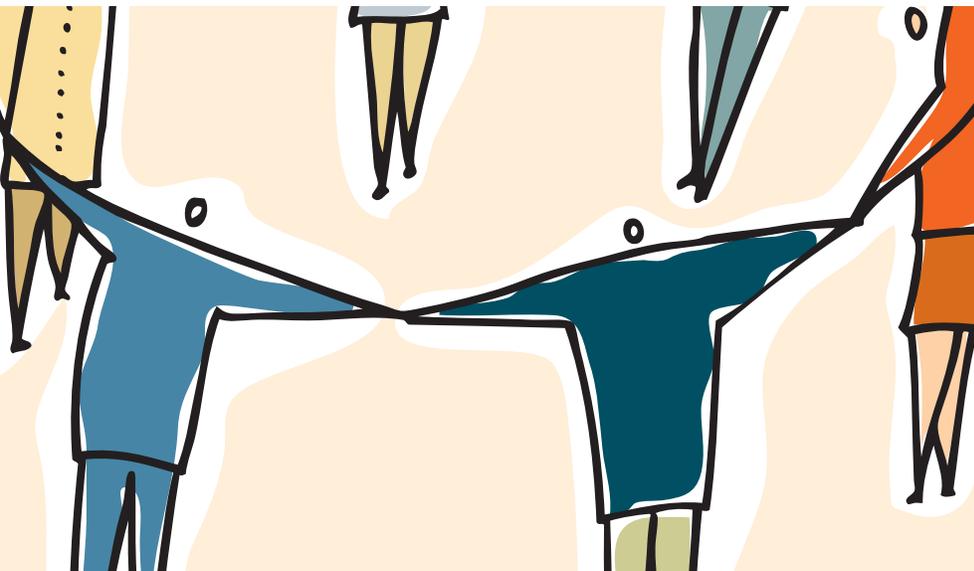
The Illinois Library Association is the voice for Illinois libraries and the millions who depend on them. It provides leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library services in Illinois and for the library community in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. It is the eighth oldest library association in the world and the third largest state association in the United States, with members in academic, public, school, government, and special libraries. Its 3,200 members are primarily librarians and library staff, but also trustees, publishers, and other supporters.

The Illinois Library Association has four full-time staff members. It is governed by a sixteen-member executive board, made up of elected officers. The association employs the services of Kolkmeier Consulting for legislative advocacy. ILA is a 501(c)(3) charitable and educational organization.

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See ILA calendar for submission deadlines for the *ILA Reporter*. Copy should be submitted by e-mail to [ila@ila.org](mailto:ila@ila.org). You are encouraged to include digital or film photos (black/white or color) and graphics (on disk or camera-ready) with your articles, which will be included on a space-available basis.

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# The Perks of Being a Reader: Kids Fight and Win Book Battle in Glen Ellyn

## TIMELINE OF EVENTS

### **May 7, 2013, *Glen Ellyn Patch***

The Glen Ellyn School District 41 Board of Education on Monday nixed a recommendation to keep a controversial novel in eighth-grade classrooms at Hadley Junior High School after two parents requested to have it removed because of its mature content.

### **May 10, 2013, Lucy Lloyd, *Inklings* blog**

As I sat down to write a column about Mother's Day, I noticed a nearby school district recently banned *Perks of Being a Wallflower* from its junior high school. Thanks, Mom, for teaching me to love learning for the sake of learning, for having a home filled with books, for instilling in me an abiding distaste of censorship and the love of a good argument.

### **May 13, 2013, *Chicago Tribune***

The decision [to remove the book] sparked outrage in the community, with some parents and teachers calling it censorship. "They're young adults and we can't keep them in a bubble. If they want to keep their kids in a bubble, that's fine, but they shouldn't be telling me what to do," said parent Anne Blyth. "They can exercise their choice not to read it, but don't take away ours."

### **June 10, 2013, *NBC News***

School district officials in Glen Ellyn voted 6–1 Monday night to lift a ban on the book, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. A public meeting was packed, with students, parents, and members of the clergy addressing the District 41 board members. "In this ultra-connected age, young people face countless challenges and temptations. Books like 'perks' help kids to anticipate what they will likely encounter," said Brett Cooper, a teacher at Hadley Junior High School, speaking in support of the book. "Parents may benefit, too, by reading the book, discussing it with their kids and contemplating alternative responses to similarly challenging circumstances." Novelist Judy Blume, who has also faced censorship battles, spoke out in favor of the book over the weekend during an appearance at the Printers Row Lit Fest.

[continued on page 6]



It was almost the end of the school year, but students from Hadley Junior High School and Glenbard West High School weren't quite ready for summer vacation. Some of them were writing letters, some were talking to the school board, and some of them were doing what kids do — making videos to share with their friends. Maddie and Maddie, each with their long blonde hair and bright, fresh faces, are on the screen and they're asking you to help them fight the ban to *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* in Glen Ellyn School District 41.

“They think we're too young.” “They think we don't have a voice.”

For the two high school students who made the video, this indefinite “they” could be school board members or parents demanding removal of a book, or just adults in general. Helping kids find a way for their voices to be heard is at the heart of the National Coalition Against Censorship's (NCAC) Youth Free Expression project and Kids' Right to Read Project (KRRP), a coalition co-founded by NCAC with the American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression.

This video was one in a series of final dominoes that led to the ultimate return of *Perks* to classroom libraries in Glen Ellyn. The next was an endorsement from famed and often controversial author Judy Blume, whom the girls met at an event promoting her new film *Tiger Eyes*. They approached her, told their story, and asked for help. A short video of the author saying “Keep the book alive!” began circulating around news feeds and on Twitter, and soon the web was buzzing.

The Maddies in the video — Maddie Howard and Maddie Giffin, students at Glenbard West High School in Glen Ellyn — were just two in a group of students instrumental in the ultimate un-banning of *Perks*. Through their activism, they and other younger students demonstrated that, despite what adults may think and whether or not they are invited to share their opinions, young people do indeed have something to say. And in debates like the one in Glen Ellyn, they often contribute a much-needed voice of courage and reason.

## A FLURRY OF ACTIVITY

In the past three months, four challenge cases have been reported in Illinois: the sudden removal and equally sudden replacement of *Persepolis* in the Chicago Public School system, the debate over *Monster* by Walter Dean Myers in a school in Oak Park, the request to remove *We All Have Different Families* in Aurora because of its depiction of same-sex parents, and *Perks* in Glen Ellyn.

Student protest and effectively using social and other media to draw attention to the issue marked both the Glen Ellyn and Chicago incidents. Removing books is easy when it happens quietly, and calling attention to these cases has long been a strategy of intellectual freedom advocates. Adding student and youth voices to the mix is proving to be an effective way of breaking the silence.

Though they frequently disagree with removing books, teachers and librarians can be reticent to speak out for personal and professional reasons. Unless a student sits on the school board or a book is removed mid-lesson or unit, students don't always know why, or even if, a book has been removed. Glen Ellyn teachers and librarians faced some critics for supporting the student activists and giving them the tools to participate in the conversation. The Illinois Family Institute (IFI), a designated hate group according to the Southern Law Poverty Center, sent out an action alert about *Perks* that called out Hadley teachers by name and accused them of “attempt(ing) to manipulate student opinion.”

The IFI took the position that students shouldn't have a voice: “The deference schools are giving to the strident voices of students in curricular issues is foolish and inappropriate. Students lack the maturity, knowledge, and wisdom to make curricular decisions.” Statements like these upset the cadre of student activists, but also further enflamed their interest. After all, if someone is calling your voice strident, those in power and those who would rather silence you are probably hearing you.

“They think we're too young.”  
“They think we don't have a voice.”

## MAKING NOISE AND GETTING NOTICED

Over the course of the debate, half a dozen Hadley eighth-graders signed up to speak at school board meetings. They told the board that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, far from harming them, had helped them deal with their own feelings of depression, struggling to belong, or being alone.

“I couldn’t have been more proud,” said eighth-grader Olivia Mullenax. Since the ban, Olivia has helped start a youth chapter of KRRP in Glen Ellyn. “At every board meeting, my fellow advocates continued to display an outstanding amount of maturity and wisdom, making a strong impression on everyone, not just the board.”

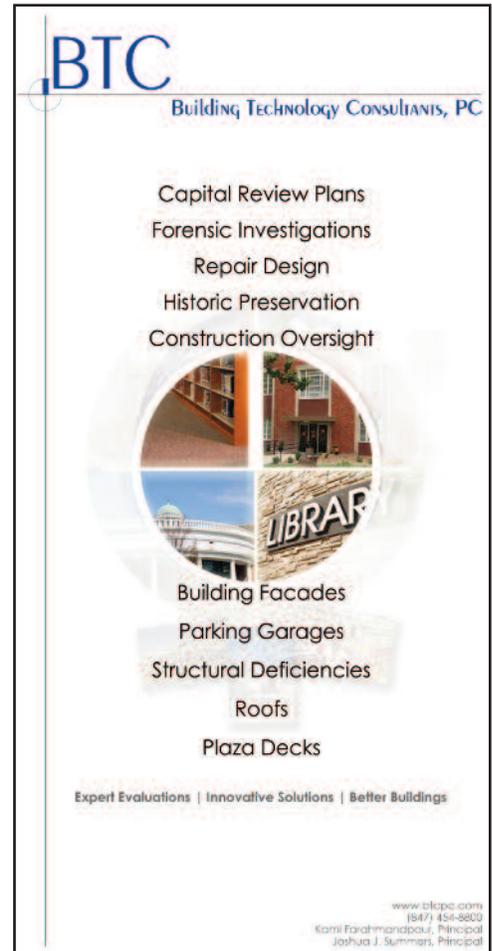
The Glen Ellyn students belie the myth that teens don’t care and don’t engage. In most of KRRP’s cases, at least one student will speak up to defend their intellectual freedom and their right to read a good, thought-provoking, affecting book.

“We should be able to educate ourselves about topics such as sex, homosexuality, rape and depression which are discussed in this specific book,” said eighth-grader Nicole Clapp. “These are real issues that need to be taught to kids my age, because not only will we encounter some of these problems in high school, we have already encountered aspects of these issues in middle school.”

Teens are impressive advocates — they are able to perceive things aptly and clearly. They aren’t as anxious about the audiences they have to please. They don’t worry about angering voters, bosses, or constituents. They don’t know yet how much someone can have to lose and this makes their voices strong, but also sometimes less polished, brasher.

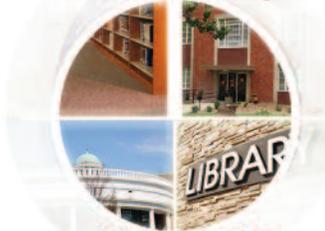
“Adults don’t think teens have an opinion and adults have molded society into believing that. But in reality, teens have such a big impact when it comes to voicing their opinion because they see things in such a different perspective than adults,” Maddie Giffin said recently in an e-mail. “Some people probably thought I was weird for sticking up for a book, but that can be because they are not mature enough to see the bigger picture of why I was doing it.”

For more information about the Kids Right to Read Project, contact Acacia O’Connor at [acacia@ncac.org](mailto:acacia@ncac.org). 



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# In Their Own Words: Voices of Glen Ellyn Students

**A**fter anxiously sitting through each board meeting, and listening to the statements of those opposed to the return of the book, I have grown to understand the point they were trying to get across. Children and parents should establish an open connection with each other. If we as teenagers are unable to speak with our parents about problems occurring within our life, who else are we to go to? It was wonderful that these kids felt comfortable going to their parents and earnestly telling them they felt uneasy reading the mature content included in *Perks*. However, this is no reason to strip their fellow students from the opportunity to read this remarkable piece of literature. There was a point in my life where I had very few people I was close to; overall eighth grade was a very cruel period for me. This book helped me to realize that loneliness was not an abnormal emotion. There was nothing to be ashamed of.

There is a large amount of sexual content within the book, and I agree with the argument that some teens are still not able to handle these types of passages. However sexual harassment, rape, homosexuality, these things do exist. I can honestly say that I have been in similar situations described in the book. Yes it is embarrassing; yes you do leave that party feeling dirty and disgraceful. But this book showed me that it's okay to make mistakes, and that in order to move on you must leave them in the past and continue life. So when some citizens of the district

complained about the book's content I took it quite personally. They stood up (figuratively waving their Bibles in the air), claiming this book was sinful, shameful, inappropriate and that anyone who felt otherwise was a sinner! They had no right to tell me I was a sinner. They were not God, they were not my parents.

Several people have made claims that the few kids who initially requested the removal of the book were bullied. Now I completely agree that no child should be harassed based on what they believe or how they live their life, no one deserves that. However, like most situations there was more than one side to this story. Yes, the kids felt their peers acted slightly cold toward them after their request, yet they completely left out the fact that they too contributed to this ongoing feud between those against and for the banning. My sister would come home, and angrily tell my parents about the anti-homosexuality comments made to her by those girls at school. The girls would bring up Bible quotes on their phone that supposedly stated being gay was a sin. They would tell my sister that if she ever had sex before marriage, had a baby out of wedlock, or was a lesbian, they would refuse to be her friend. So yes, I feel terrible that these girls were bullied at school; however, I would definitely qualify their rude comments and prejudice as bullying. Therefore I do believe that each child has the right to do what they please without being ridiculed, but these girls were not completely innocent.

[continued on page 10]



"I felt the book was wrongly banned due to the fact that while the controversial parts were out on display, the meaningful and educational parts were not fairly represented."

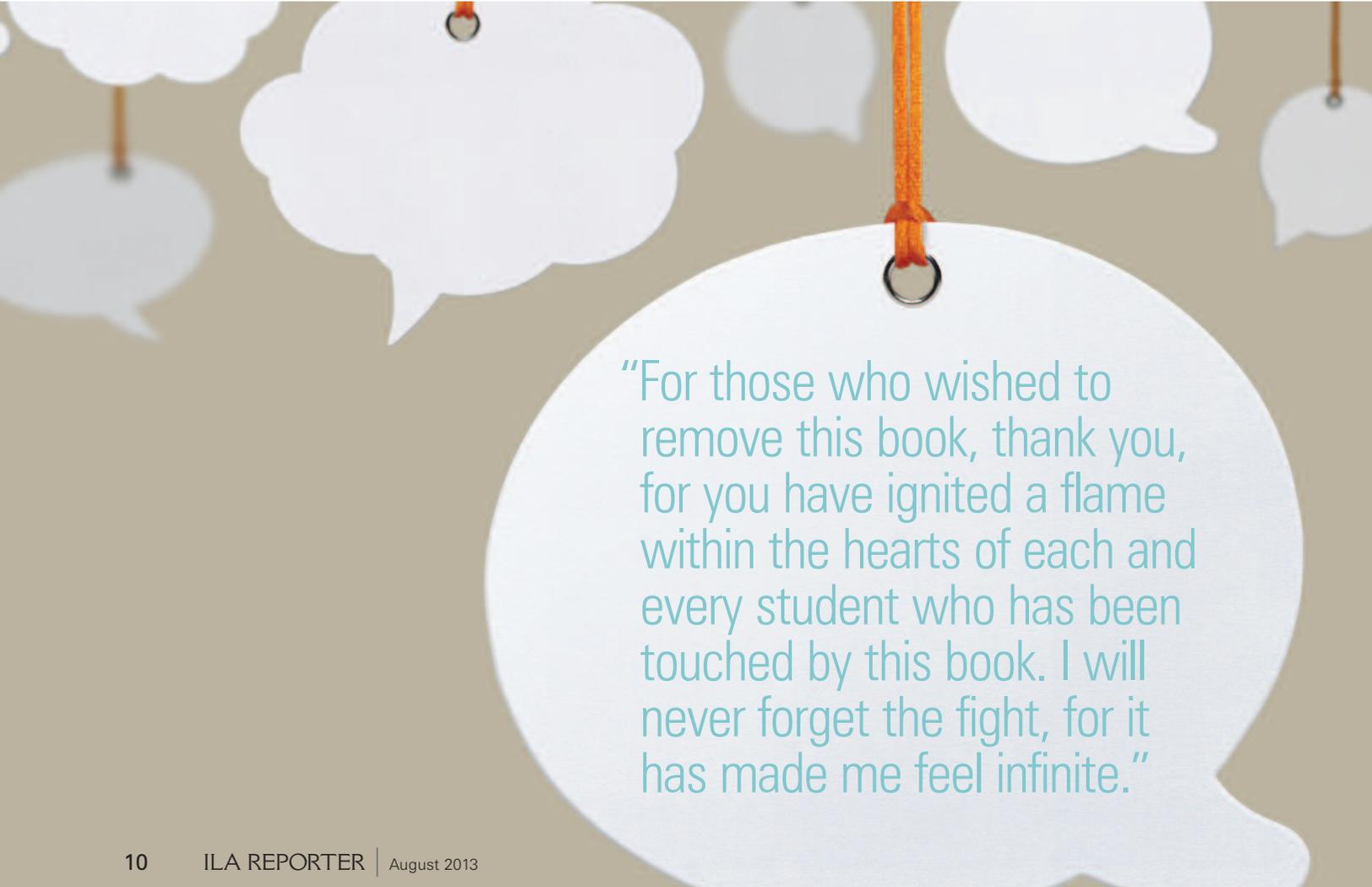
*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* issue has been an experience of a lifetime. Through this I have learned one must accept the opinions of others, for they are as likely to change theirs, as you are to change yours. Censorship is a very serious issue and through the publicity we have received, people's awareness has grown. For those who wished to remove this book, thank you, for you have ignited a flame within the hearts of each and every student who has been touched by this book. I will never forget the fight, for it has made me feel infinite.

—Maddie Howard, Glenbard West High School, sophomore

### UN-BAN *THE PERKS OF BEING A WALLFLOWER*

Tonight I am here to express my concern about the banning of the book *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. I am here with my fellow peers to ask you to please put the book back into District 41. I felt the book was wrongly banned due to the fact that while the controversial parts were out on display, the meaningful and educational parts were not fairly represented. One of the

main reasons that I was so concerned with the banning of the book is that this book is very powerful. It contains strong messages of individuality and self worth that have served as a basis for moral values. It has left a strong impact on me and other students, and makes us feel good about who we are, or what we have become. It has implanted powerful messages I will try and incorporate into my life. I do recognize that there is mature content in the book, but I think that I am mature enough to handle it. I know when to stop reading if something makes me uncomfortable, and if I am confused I know my parents are always there to talk. Like it or not, eighth-graders at our school are already exposed to such language in the book on a daily basis at Hadley. We are no strangers to explicit language, as it can be heard in the hallway all the time. But instead of having a negative [impact], it is a lesson; a lesson of what happens when we make bad choices. *Perks* mentions things that I think all teenagers will have to deal with eventually: going to parties, being offered drugs or alcohol, or being pressured into doing things we might not be ready for. It shows us what we should expect will happen to our lives if we make bad choices. In short, things would not turn out well, and no matter how fun those temptations might seem, Stephen Chbosky's writing warns us otherwise.



“For those who wished to remove this book, thank you, for you have ignited a flame within the hearts of each and every student who has been touched by this book. I will never forget the fight, for it has made me feel infinite.”

As for removing the book from Hadley shelves, I strongly disagree. While some kids feel uncomfortable or chose to stop reading the book because of its mature content, other students will be able to handle it. We should be able to have the option to keep reading. While one set of parents may express their concern for letting their child read the book, their decision to withhold it from their child should not be universal. Other students have parents comfortable with them reading *Perks* and should be able to keep reading. It also troubles me that this is the only book out of many mentioned for its mature content. What about other books that mention drugs, alcohol, sexual, alcoholic, physical abuse, and sexual situations, including teen prostitution. If you're going to ban this book, you might have to add more to the list.

—Olivia Mullenax, Hadley Junior High School, eighth-grader

I would like to inform everyone that several students at my school have used this book to help them with their depression, and to give them hope that even though they feel the way they do, it will eventually get better. I think the challengers of this book have only read it to look for things they find unfavorable or objectionable. If they read it to find the message, I believe that they probably would not challenge it. What I took from this book was that even if you've been bullied your whole life, you can meet people who actually want to be your friend, and also that it is okay to be different from others. It has taught me many life lessons as well as given me hope that I can be myself and be accepted. So, again please reconsider, so other students won't miss out on this potentially positive educational opportunity.

—Nicole Clapp, Hadley Junior High School, eighth-grader



## FREEDOM TO LEARN

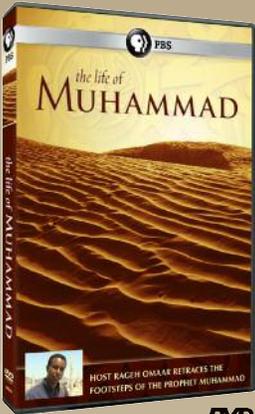
I respectfully ask you to reconsider your decision on banning *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. I just finished researching censorship in depth and ironically finished the book last week. When my teacher told me that I wasn't supposed to be reading it at school, I was frustrated because I didn't want someone to control what I was reading. Censorship to me is wrong, because I believe it restricts and limits our ability to learn about worldly topics and our ability to grow up educated about drugs, alcohol, sex, politics and world history, to name a few issues. I believe that it doesn't allow us to form opinions that are different from our parents. One of the main things I took away from researching censorship in schools is that it really does affect kids because we are stripped of our intellectual freedom, which according to the American Library Association, "is the right of every individual to both seek and receive information from all points of view without restriction. It provides for free access to all expressions of ideas through which any and all sides of a question, cause or movement may be explored."

This to me means that we should be able to educate ourselves about topics such as sex, homosexuality, rape, and depression, which are discussed in this specific book. These are real issues that need to be taught to kids my age, because not only will we encounter some of these problems in high school, we have already encountered aspects of these issues in middle school. Just because some parents don't want their child to read this book doesn't mean that my parents feel the same. I don't want people I don't know to censor what is right or wrong for me to read. I am mature enough to have a conversation with my parents if I feel uncomfortable or unsure about what I am reading. It gives my parents an opportunity to teach me about these situations.



**PBS**

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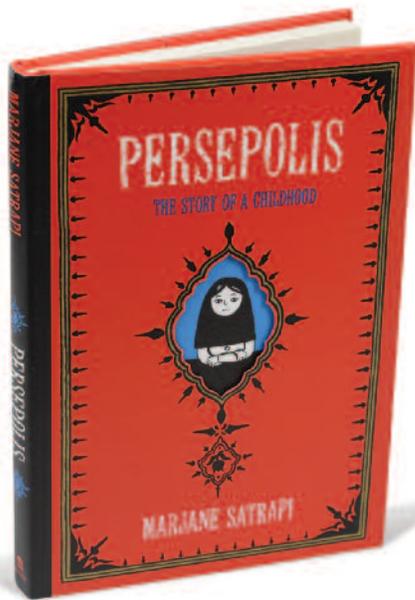
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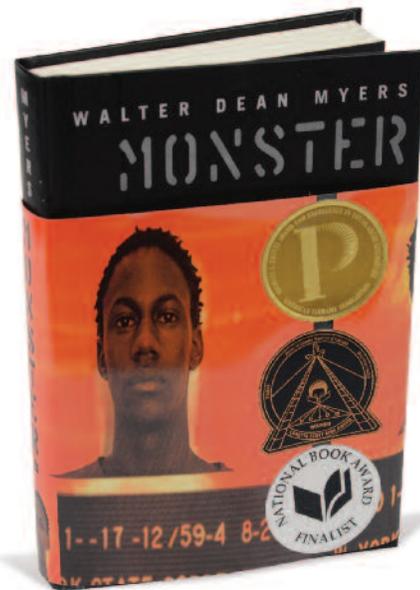
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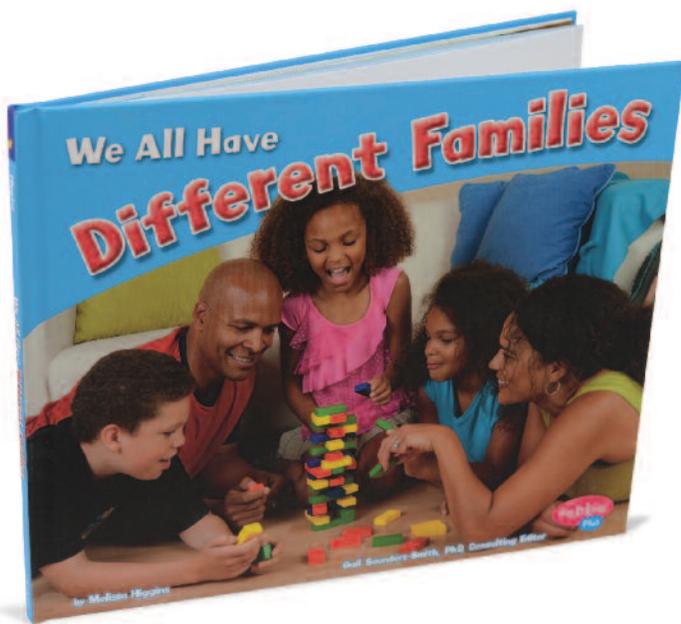
# Recent Book Challenges in Illinois



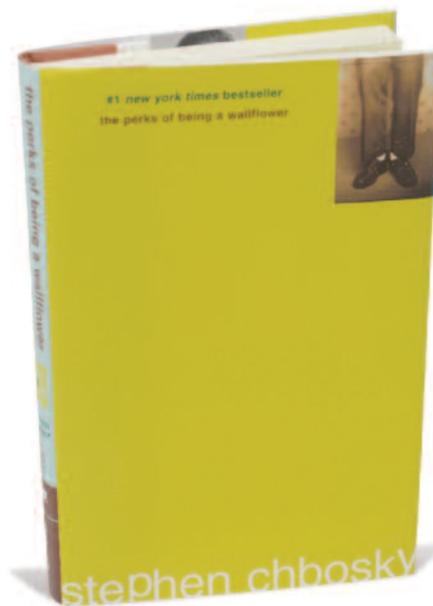
Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. Pantheon Books. Removed, via a district directive, from all Chicago public schools (March 2013) due to “graphic illustrations and language” and concerns about “developmental preparedness” and “student readiness.” Seventh- and eleventh-grade students study the autobiographical graphic novel about the author’s experience growing up in Iran during the Iranian revolution as part of Chicago Public Schools’ Literacy Content Framework. As the news spread of the directive, students mobilized a media campaign in opposition to “banning a book that’s all about the freedom of speech.” Students took to their Facebook and Twitter accounts, checked out all library copies of the book, wrote blogs, sent e-mails, wrote investigative articles for the student newspaper, contacted the author, staged protests, and appeared on local radio and television programs. Eventually, the school issued a letter telling high school principals to disregard the earlier order to pull the book. The title is a reference to the ancient capital of the Persian Empire, Persepolis. *Newsweek* ranked the book #5 on its list of the ten best fiction books of the decade.



Myers, Walter Dean. *Monster*. HarperCollins. Challenged by a small group of parents who objected to the novel being taught in their Oak Park middle school children’s classrooms (May 2013) because of explicit language and mature themes. The book was retained and District 97 will offer those parents an alternative book for their students to read. A fictional, courtroom drama about an African American teen on trial for murder, the novel was nominated for the 1999 National Book Award for Young People’s Literature, won the Michael L. Printz Award in 2000, and was named a Coretta Scott King Award Honor Book the same year.



Higgins, Melissa. *We All Have Different Families*. Capstone Press. Challenged in the Indian Prairie District 204 (May 2013) by a handful of residents because the book “focused too much on diversity and not enough on unity.” The twenty-four-page book features references to single parents, adoption, foster families, divorce, children who live with grandparents, stepparents, and has an image and a paragraph about a family with two dads. The district — which includes portions of Naperville, Aurora, Bolingbrook, and Plainfield — is putting together a process to notify parents when their children will be studying books that might be considered controversial.



Chbosky, Stephen. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. MTV Books/Pocket Books. Removed (April 2013) from eighth-grade classrooms at Hadley Junior High School in Glen Ellyn because of concerns about sexually explicit content and language. In June, the Glen Ellyn Elementary District 41 School Board overturned the decision and the book will be back on the shelves when students return in the fall. Most board members were willing to reinstate the book after assurances from district administrators that a revised parental notification letter would be sent at the start of each school year warning parents that their children could be getting access to sometimes mature content in classroom libraries. Published in 1999, the coming-of-age tale is about an introspective 15-year-old high school freshman who writes letters to an anonymous friend. Intelligent beyond his years, he is an unconventional thinker; yet, as the story begins, Charlie is also shy and unpopular. Last year, a film adaptation of the novel was released to positive critical response and commercial success. The film has won numerous awards. **IL**

# Critical Collaboration: Public Library and School District Partnerships in Illinois

**P**ublic libraries and the school districts located within their boundaries stand in special relationship to one another, often with differing responsibilities to the very same communities. At times they carry out their missions in a completely independent manner. At other times, their missions are in alignment — in an almost symbiotic way — and it is at these times that the collaboration between public libraries and the school districts in their communities is at its most critical.

Why critical? Critical because collaboration among community institutions is a vital component to making the best use of all available resources; critical because collaboration among community institutions is urgently needed since the tasks ahead are large; and critical because in a world where people wonder whether libraries are relevant, collaboration can be the clear path to a vision that libraries play an essential role in the life of a community.

As a practical matter, this critical collaboration may look vastly different depending on location; there is no single, uniform model for the way schools and public libraries work together.

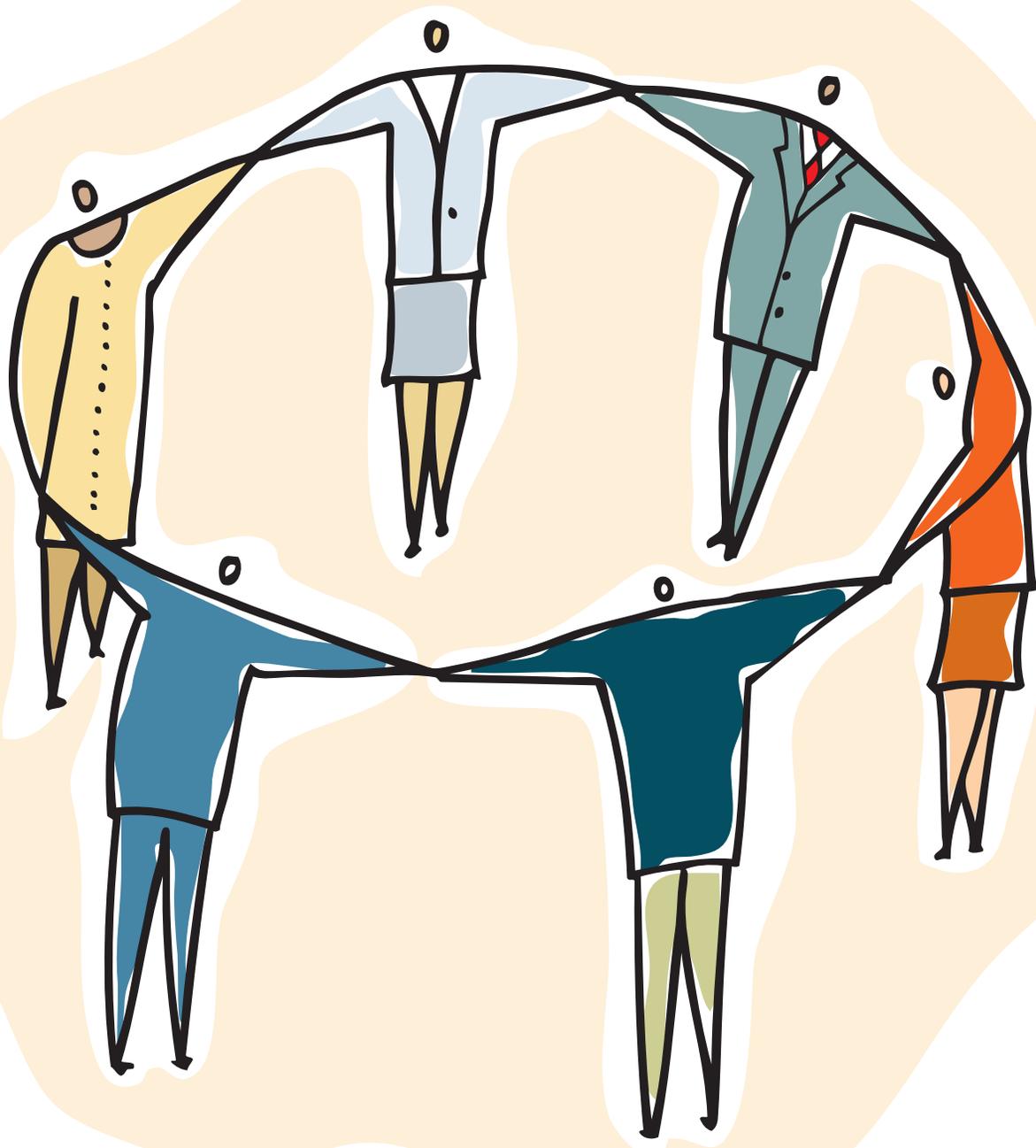
In Illinois, we have strong evidence of good relationships between public libraries and the school districts they serve. In response to a survey this year, more than 220 individuals responded on behalf of their institutions to a series of questions relating to public library/school district partnerships. The results beckon us to listen, reflect, and perhaps consider differently the choices we make in collaborating across our communities.

## THE SURVEY AND ITS PURPOSE

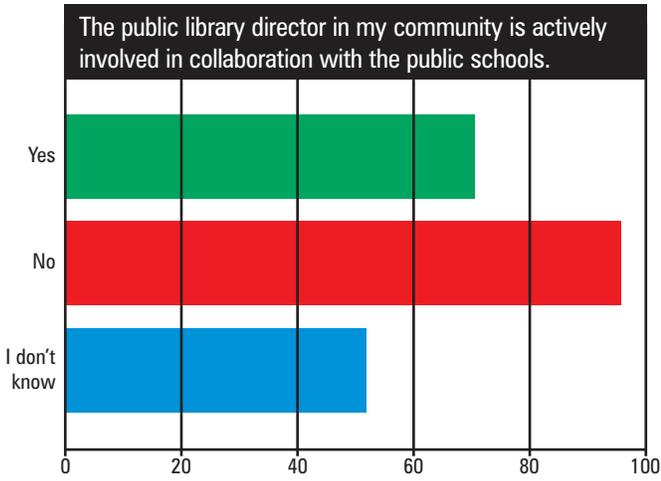
All responses to the survey were completely voluntary. The survey was available online in multiple venues (ILA website and numerous listservs across the state) during the months of February and March 2013. There were 223 individual responses to a set of 15 survey questions. The purpose of the survey was threefold: to provide a snapshot of the “state of collaboration” between public libraries and schools in Illinois; to provide a forum to share ideas for collaborative projects and highlight some that are truly innovative; and to provide a realistic look at barriers to collaboration.

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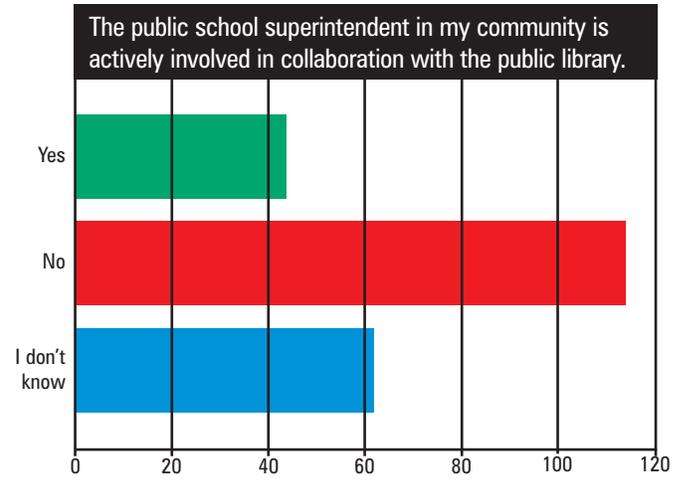
“Critical because collaboration among community institutions is a vital component to making the best use of all available resources; critical because collaboration among community institutions is urgently needed since the tasks ahead are large; and critical because in a world where people wonder whether libraries are relevant, collaboration can be the clear path to a vision that libraries play an essential role in the life of a community.”



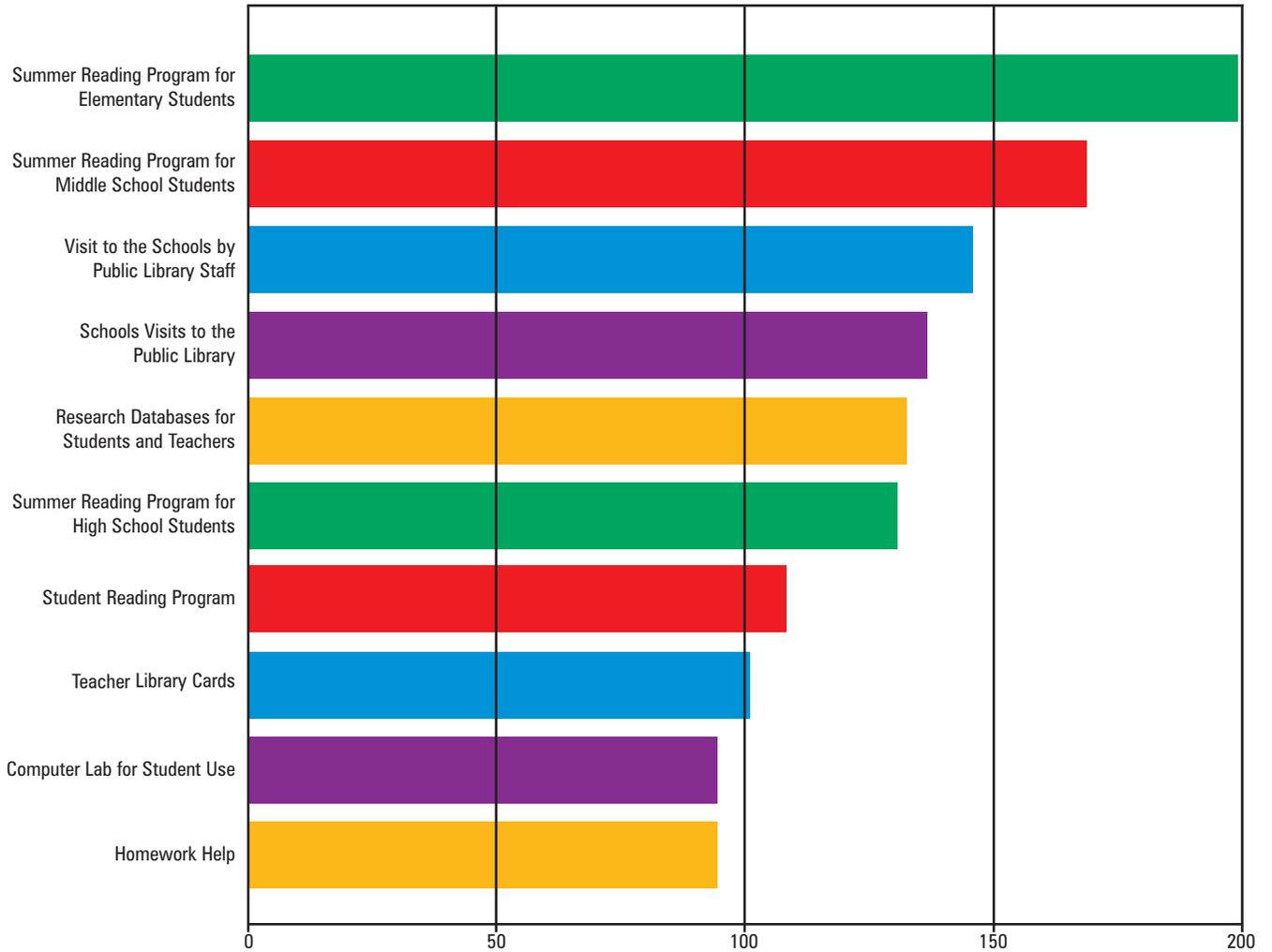
**Figure 1: Public Library Director Involvement**



**Figure 2: Public School Superintendent Involvement**



**Figure 3: Types of Services Offered by Public Libraries**



## WHO RESPONDED

The largest number of responses were from school librarians/library media specialists (76), followed by public library youth services librarians (56), public library youth services department heads (38), public library directors (33), school library district librarians (13), and principals (7). Most responses were from institutions within Reaching Across Illinois Library System (178), though there were some responses from Illinois Heartland Library System (28), and Chicago Public Library (2). Interestingly, a number of respondents (15) did not know the library system in which their school or library was located.

## WHAT THEY SAID

Most respondents indicated that the public library in their community provides some services to the schools (118). However, the range of services and collaboration crosses the spectrum — 9 respondents said the public libraries in their communities do not provide any services to the schools, 41 said the public libraries provide extensive services to the schools, and 54 respondents said the relationship between the public libraries and the schools goes well beyond that, characterizing the relationship as a true collaborative partnership.

Many public libraries (almost half of those that responded) are actively working with the schools in their communities to meet the demands of the new Common Core State Standards. And almost half of all responses were from communities where there is a full-time (83) or half-time (21) dedicated school liaison in the public library.

“Many public libraries are actively working with the schools in their communities to meet the demands of the new Common Core State Standards.”

## WHAT COLLABORATION LOOKS LIKE IN ILLINOIS

The range of programs and collaboration among public libraries and school districts is extensive, with virtually all school districts enjoying public library summer reading programs for elementary students, in addition to other services such as summer reading for middle and high school students, visits to the schools not related to summer reading, research databases, student reading programs (Monarch, Bluestem, Caudill, Lincoln) teacher library cards, computer labs, and homework help (see Figure 3: Types of Services Offered by Public Libraries).

Over half of all respondents indicated that their school libraries and public libraries collaborate to create joint programs. Additional programs and joint collaborative projects described in the free response portion of the survey provide a snapshot of the kinds and types of programs happening across the state — and is a resource for new collaborative projects and ideas, a shopping list for any library looking to begin a new program.

Joint Family Reading Nights  
Reading Buddy Programs  
Bookmobile Service  
ILL Pickup and Drop-off  
Teen Advisory Boards  
Assignment Alerts  
Bookmark Design Contest  
Bibliographies for School Assignments  
Classroom Sets of Books  
School District Artwork Display  
After School Clubs  
Writing Workshops  
Author Visits  
ACT Prep and Proctored Practice Tests  
Library Card Sign-Up at the Schools  
Database Acquisition and Presentation  
Battle of the Books  
Field Trips to the Public Library  
Poetry Slams  
New Book “Release” Parties (i.e., *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*)  
Principal-led Story Evenings at the Public Library  
“Public Library Card” is on student school supply list  
Poetry Scavenger Program  
Public Library Presentations at School District SIP Days  
Joint Grant Proposals  
Early Childhood Programs  
Programs for Teachers (CPDUs provided)

## SOLVING A PROBLEM, MEETING A NEED

In Illinois, there are joint collaborative public library/school programs that take creative to a whole new level — they are strategic, vital, and visionary; and they can only be described as “outside-the-box.” They are worthy of special mention as they provide both inspiration and guidance in how communities can work together to solve a problem and meet a need. Five communities where school and public libraries are collaborating in everything from curriculum planning to joint summer reading programs to developing discussion guides and serving the unserved, as well as English-language learners, are featured in the case studies on the following pages.

## BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

Alongside the stories of successful collaborative projects, survey respondents told equally compelling stories of multiple barriers that both public libraries and schools encounter when they try to work together. Of these barriers, the one that was mentioned most often was the unfortunate reality that many Illinois schoolchildren are not served by a public library in their community because they live in unincorporated or out-of-district areas; full library service to all schoolchildren remains elusive. For schools, this means it is sometimes difficult to collaborate with and promote public library programs if those programs and services are not available to every student. Glen Ellyn’s Open Books, Open Doors program bridges that elusive divide, and provides a model for eliminating this barrier.

Other, often-mentioned barriers are lack of time, interest, and support. Lack of time is understandable — many libraries are understaffed, stretched thin by lack of funding and a demand for their services; they do what they can. But one respondent commented that this lack of time had a solution in working “smarter” through better coordination of services and streamlined communication with the schools when there is a dedicated (full- or part-time) school liaison in the public library.

Lack of interest and support are more challenging to address. Respondents to the survey indicated that most public library directors and school superintendents are not involved in the collaboration process (see Figs. 1 and 2: Public School Superintendent Involvement and Public Library Director Involvement). Many respondents indicated that basic communication was difficult between the public library and schools; e-mails and phone calls sometimes go unanswered and ideas for joint projects are rebuffed. Public librarians often feel that school administrators don’t understand the value of public or school libraries. And many, many respondents recounted the feeling of an “elephant in the room” when they reached across the community to collaborate: they feared they were stepping into each other’s “territory” (see *My Turn* column on page 24).

Naming the barriers, looking at them closely and creatively, and recognizing some may need a work-around, may be the best place to begin; all of which can help in relieving the strain that these barriers represent. However, many respondents to the survey also commented that each and every positive collaboration and project were the result of a good relationship between willing and open participants who value and respect each other’s work. And that’s an excellent reminder of what each of us needs to bring to each and every table at which we sit.

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE IN ILLINOIS

Illinois public libraries and the schools they serve have many opportunities to leverage their respective assets and reach across their communities to help one another. While our public library and school district partnerships are thriving in many communities, each and every institution can continue to grow and reach out even more. Whether that growth comes from tackling a new idea from the list in this article, or whether the growth will come from working to build a true partnership, this critical collaboration has the power to extend the boundaries and reach of the public library and school district missions, thereby accomplishing more through cooperation and creative thinking than either institution could attain on its own. In so doing, we have the power to create not only stronger institutions, but also stronger communities. **ILA**

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# School and Public Library Partnership Case Studies

## **PUBLIC LIBRARIANS PARTICIPATE ON SCHOOL DISTRICT CURRICULUM COMMITTEES**

**Downers Grove Public Library and Downers Grove School Districts 58 and 99**

According to Katie Bradley, children's program coordinator at the Downers Grove Public Library, children's librarians came to participate on elementary school curriculum committees for two reasons: Matt Rich, the new assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, wanted the schools to have a closer relationship with the library. And the public library's strategic plan called for more partnerships within the community, with schools seeming like an ideal candidate.

When they all sat down to talk, the idea of having public librarians sit on curriculum committees percolated to the top. "Sitting on these committees has really opened our minds to what happens in the school district and how...things actually come about in a school setting," said Bradley. At present, public librarians participate on elementary school curriculum committees for math, English, library, technology, and (beginning next school year) science. Next year, this model will be used at the high school level, and Downers Grove Public Library Teen Services Coordinator Lynette Pitrak will sit on high school curriculum committees.

The partnership has led to many other opportunities for the public library and the schools to work together, including School District Technology Department meetings with parents that are held at the public library and jointly presented; Author Fest, a three-day partnership among the schools, the PTA, and Anderson's Bookshop; and Speed Dating with Books, a collaborative program between the public library and the middle schools, which drew 350 middle school students to the public library for a special Valentine's Day program.

## **SUMMER SCHOOL AT THE PUBLIC LIBRARY**

**Lisle Library District and Lisle Community Unit School District 202**

Summer school teachers in the Lisle School District struggled with the fact that school libraries were not open in the summer. According to Wesley Gosselink, principal at Tate Woods Elementary School in Lisle, "We brainstormed... and realized we have a wonderful resource in the public library. We reached out to see if they might be willing to host us one day per week for our summer school program." And the rest, as they say, is history.

The schools, working with Lindsey Dorfman, director of youth services for the public library, have created a truly unique collaboration. Since 2009, summer school students in Lisle spend one of their four days per week at the public library. The library provides a meeting room, and library staff and school district staff plan activities that support students in the maintenance of skills over the summer. Students also have an opportunity to participate in summer reading, check out books and, according to Gosselink, "experience the library environment in order to raise their awareness of resources and their comfort in that environment."

This program serves between thirty and forty students per year. Last year, 87 percent of the students who participated regularly in the five-week program showed maintenance in academic skills, as measured by their spring and fall running record, a success for which the whole community can be proud.

## BATAVIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CREATE DISCUSSION GUIDES FOR ONE BOOK, ONE BATAVIA

**Batavia Public Library and Batavia Public School  
District 101**

Looking for ways to provide students with the experience of writing and designing for a real-world audience, collaboration was born between the school district's English and graphic arts teachers, the high school librarian, and the public library. Many communities have "One Book, One City" events, but according to Daniel Russo, Batavia High School librarian, Batavia's event is distinctive due to the partnership between the Batavia High School Learning Resource Center and the Batavia Public Library. High school students not only read the yearly selection, they write and produce a series of book discussion guides for the community. These discussion guides are the real thing — a true, professional product for the entire community to use. Seeing is believing — check out the discussion guide created by Batavia High School students for this year's One Book, One Batavia, *A Night to Remember* by Walter Lord at [tinyurl.com/mfosc4n](http://tinyurl.com/mfosc4n).

## BUS TO BOOKS

**Glen Ellyn Public Library, Glen Ellyn School Districts  
89 and 41, Lombard School District 44, Glen Ellyn  
Children's Resource Center**

Begun through the efforts of teachers in the community looking for ways to connect low-income and English Language Learners (ELL) students with the public library, this eight-week summer program has provided bus service to and from the library for the last ten years to public school students who apply on a first-come/first-served basis. There are actually multiple collaborations at work here, including a nonprofit after school program that serves two school districts in Glen Ellyn, a school district in Lombard that serves Glen Ellyn residents, and the Glen Ellyn Public Library.

A teacher coordinates parent permission and rides the bus with the students; the public library provides the school coordinator with a stipend and also pays for a translator to accompany students and families. Community volunteers work with adults in an English Conversation Group, which provides an opportunity for those interested in information on the citizenship exam.

Bus service is funded through various grants and the Friends of the Library; all other expenses are paid for through the youth services department budget. According to Amy Waters, youth services department school liaison for the Glen Ellyn Public Library, "connecting families with the library and connecting the library to our community is what Bus to Books is all about." Students that attend Bus to Books sign up for a library card, check out books and materials, participate in the summer reading program, as well as craft and other activities created by the youth services department.

## OPEN BOOKS, OPEN DOORS—PUBLIC LIBRARY ACCESS FOR STUDENTS LIVING IN UNINCORPORATED AREAS

**Glen Ellyn Public Library, Glen Ellyn School Districts  
89 and 41, Lombard School District 44, Glen Ellyn  
Children's Resource Center**

Created several years ago in response to the reality that many schoolchildren live in unincorporated areas that feed into their school districts, Open Books, Open Doors provides full library access to families living in unincorporated areas who qualify for a LINK card or who participate in the school district's free and reduced lunch program. Once families fill out a form and provide a copy of their lease or tax bill, the public library pays the fee for full library card access from a fund specifically created for this purpose. The school principals play a vital role in helping families fill out the forms and certifying their participation in the free and reduced lunch program.

## JOINT DUAL LANGUAGE FAMILY NIGHTS

**Harvard Diggins Library and Harvard Community Unit  
School District 50**

Two years ago, Harvard Diggins Library Director Karen Sutera and Harvard School District Dual Language Coordinator Carolyn Villareal brainstormed ways they could strengthen the relationship between the schools and the public library. The public library had limited staff to provide programming in Spanish, and the schools were running out of space to hold the growing number of families who participated in Dual Language Family Nights. They decided to work together — and Dual Language Family Nights at the public library began.

"Hosting this event at the library has been positive for everyone involved," according to Sutera. The library has plenty of space, and the district's teachers, who are paid a stipend by the district for their time, are fluent in both English and Spanish. This year, the McHenry County Conservation District has also become a partner in Dual Language Family Nights, bringing hands-on materials and activities for students and increasing families' awareness of the county's outdoor activities. 

# ILA Welcomes New Members

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## ◀ MY TURN ▶

| Lauren Collen, Machesney Elementary School |

# How Does Your

# Garden Grow?

In reading through the survey responses for this issue's main article, "Critical Collaboration: Public Library and School District Partnerships in Illinois," communication problems appeared as recurring theme. The most frequently named barrier to collaboration — even greater than inadequate funding or inadequate staffing — was inadequate communication from the schools. Some librarians used the words "stepping on toes" to describe why it is difficult for some public libraries and schools to effectively work together.

I wondered whether this recurring comment was based on actual conversations or if it was inferred from situations where silence (perhaps those unanswered e-mails or unreturned phone calls) led someone to believe he/she had overstepped his/her bounds. Having worked both sides of this library coin — as a public library youth services librarian, as well as a library media specialist in a public school — I know what this feels like.

If you're a school librarian, it might be that a new public library program idea or service gives you a niggling sense that someone is suggesting they need to do what you perceive is YOUR job (and perhaps they are implying that the service is needed because you are not doing your job very well). Or if you are a public librarian, it may be some nagging suspicion that a poor response to a great new program idea is because this program is really not YOUR mission — it's someone else's, and you need to back off.

Hmmm, I wondered. Are there hard-and-fast boundaries between these two spheres or are we digging boundary lines that don't have to exist?

All of this wondering got me asking more questions. I went back to some of the survey respondents and asked: are your perceptions of "stepping on toes" an inference or have you been directly rebuffed? The answers: mostly inferences; some direct rebuffs. So it's not just me who has, at times, felt this slight undercurrent of discomfort, this resistance or tug away from working together.

"In our library world, when we ignore opportunities to work together for our communities, we may be leaving an empty space for weeds to flourish."

The truth is, sometimes we may be stepping on toes. One survey respondent stated that it seemed like the public library offered "replacement" programs for what was already being done in the schools, thereby creating a duplication of services. Perhaps alternative programs that extend and expand on what the schools already provide would be a better public library approach. In that situation, a BIG conversation that brings everyone to the table would really help.

But, I also wonder if we are aware that sometimes we are second-guessing ourselves and undermining potential successes by not completely acknowledging our partners in the room or around the table. When e-mails and phone calls go unanswered, we feel rejected or discouraged. We might persevere with an idea, but we might not. We might give up, feel frustrated, or disheartened. We might just step around the miscommunication and, in so doing, miss important opportunities to serve our patrons.

I've been doing a lot of gardening this summer. And my large garden — vegetables, flowers, trees, shrubs, and grass, has gotten me to thinking. If I ignore a space in my garden, it doesn't just stay empty — it grows weeds. As I've thought about this “stepping on toes” issue, I can't help but think I can learn how to solve it from my garden. Gardens are a long-term proposition — and they need constant attention. When I take time to plan, the whole space benefits from my efforts; when I ignore a small garden problem, it doesn't go away — it gets worse.

In our library world, when we ignore opportunities to work together for our communities, we may be leaving an empty space for weeds to flourish rather than intentionally planning and planting for our collective garden. To keep the weeds from taking over, what can we do?

In almost every one of the innovative and out-of-the-box collaborations I learned of through the survey responses, the library administration and school administration were involved in the conversation — working together to solve problems. Yet in the survey responses, it was very clear that library directors and school administration are not always an integral part of the collaboration conversation, or if they are involved it is behind the scenes and everyone is not aware of their participation. Bringing those important people to the table with everyone else is a good place to start. It's simple, and it works.

## OTHER SIMPLE SOLUTIONS

- Ask questions in order to understand how each organization gets things done; when you understand how an individual organization works, you can then work together to meet (not compete for) your community's needs.
- Listen carefully, both to what is and is not said; when there are gaps in communication, actively look for ways to respectfully bridge the divide.
- Get everyone on board; make sure your entire staff understands the programs and partnerships and that they are supportive.
- See the big picture; in the end we are all in the very same garden, and we have everything to gain and nothing to lose by working well together.

Our public library and school library communities comprise many of the same people and interests — we want our children to learn and our families and businesses to thrive. In order to grow our collective library garden, we need to be constant gardeners, weeding out negative and unproductive communications with each other so our partnerships and communities can flourish. **ILA**



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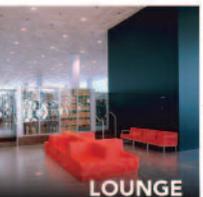
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