



The San Antonio Youth Commission is addressing a critical and growing issue facing tens of thousands of students across our city. In the past few years, school districts across the state have banned books. In fact, the American Library Association found Texas led the country in the number of banned books last year.ⁱ With the impending implementation of House Bill 900 passed by the 88th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, all school districts will be impacted by book ban initiatives.ⁱⁱ Already in many high schools, students are unable to access literature that is deemed harmful by a loud minority of parents. Many are now forced to have a permission slip signed by a parent to read books once integral to our education system like *The Great Gatsby* and *Animal Farm*. Our access to learning material has disappeared as our school libraries shelves lay bare. The single most valuable resource in our modern society is our public schools and we must do everything in our power to protect them.

The San Antonio Youth Commission drafted and approved the following statement on March 23, 2024, in support of those affected by these discriminatory practices. This statement was read at the City of San Antonio's City Council A Session meeting on April 4, 2024.

Book banning, in all forms, is harmful because targeted literature presents diverse ways of life across cultures and beliefs. These books are vital to the protection of all individuals' inclusion in our community. They are tools used to ensure diversified global education. If similar action continues to go unchecked, underrepresented communities will continue to see their silencing become normalized. We view these books as opportunities to broaden students' worldviews and expand opportunities for in and out-of-classroom learning. The best way to protect these worldviews is by celebrating and respecting them.

The main targets of book-banning campaigns are pieces of literature that present unique perspectives or discuss underrepresented historical viewpoints that differ from the majority, with action being taken solely to suppress and silence affected groups. The banning of these books leads to ignorance within multicultural interactions.

In recent years, book banning has seen a significant uptick after its adoption into the mainstream political debate and its formation as a major wedge issue. Texas school districts have been the

most prevalent contributors to this increase, banning multitudes of books from appearing in their school libraries. Additionally, the Texas legislature has taken overly vague action towards literary suppression by passing legislation like House Bill 900. As a result, students and teachers have seen a severe negative impact on their willingness to discuss important, often contentious topics and the general quality of their education.

School libraries are vital for children's education as they provide free and convenient access to information. If those institutions become overly suppressed and politicized, their importance and function deteriorate. While public libraries continue to offer banned books to the general public, it becomes infinitely more challenging for students to access these books if the only available venue is through a public library or private purchase. Students, especially those who lack independent transportation methods, become reliant on parents to check books out or purchase them on their behalf. This turns education into a time-consuming or costly habit.

Book banning aims not to protect students but to ensure their conformity and erase individuality. While parental choice and their involvement in education are vital to the upbringing of students, the banning of books severely undermines that choice. If the power to ban rests on a singular parental complaint, that parent's beliefs are turned into a guideline for the upbringing of all students. One person's perspective should never have the ability to influence or silence the rest of a community. It is in the best public interest for individuals—no matter their age—to have the final say in the books they read. If the decision continues to rest solely on the shoulders of politicians or the complaints of a single parent, the nuances, messages, and the impact of literature as a medium will be lost.

The city has already done incredible work in combating this. For instance, the San Antonio Public Library's Banned Book Week raises awareness on this issue while simultaneously increasing access to banned books for our community. To quote the City of San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg, "the City of San Antonio combats censorship in all its forms and fully supports complete access to information within our public library system". We stand with the mayor in that message, and we would like the city to continue assisting young people by amplifying the voices of youth in San Antonio.

We urge everyone to share our message and continue supporting initiatives against book bans.

The San Antonio Youth Commission (SAYC) is tasked with advising City Council on matters that directly affect local youth, with the intention of valuing and empowering the City's youth voice to provide a unique insight into City issues and problems. SAYC provides an outlet to youth to civically engage with the City through advocacy and community service. For more information on SAYC, please visit: [San Antonio Youth Commission \(SAYC\)](#).

To contact members of SAYC for interviews, please contact Camryn Blackmon, Commission Liaison, at camryn.blackmon@sanantonio.gov.

ⁱ See <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/slideshows/states-with-the-most-banned-books?onepage> and <https://www.texastribune.org/2023/10/11/texas-library-book-bans/>

ⁱⁱ House Bill 900, referred to as the READERS Act, forbids school districts from purchasing “sexually explicit” books and requires them to purchase books from sellers that rate their books according to state guidelines. The guidelines have not been finalized. To access House Bill 900, go to <https://capitol.texas.gov/BillLookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=88R&Bill=HB900>