

St. Louis County Schools reportedly pulled books from library during Banned Book Week

The News Tribune investigated St. Louis County Schools' library policies following reports that the district had pulled books from the North Woods School in Cook in October 2025. A library assistant received a termination notice two days after the Banned Books Week display was taken down.



St. Louis County School District's North Woods School in Cook, Minn.

News Reporting

COOK — Every fall, libraries across the U.S. take part in a weeklong advocacy campaign known as Banned Book Week. Aimed at raising awareness about censorship and challenged books, participating libraries might host book readings, organize talks with intellectual freedom advocates, or create displays of challenged and banned books.

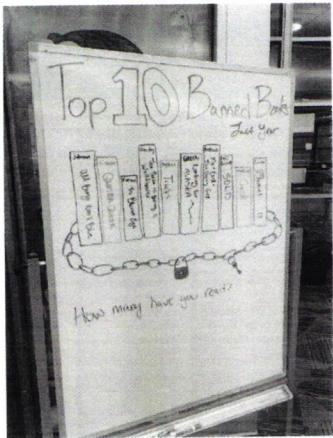
It's an event that Quinn Krebsbach, a library assistant who was eventually terminated from North Woods School in Cook, had taken part in before in various libraries during his career, by putting up banned-book displays without concern.

First Day Hike near Superior at Pattison State Park

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So, when the whiteboard display and advertisements Krebsbach put up in the school library Oct. 5 for Banned Books Week became the subject of multiple complaints, the backlash was unexpected.

"I have done really similar displays about banned books in the past, and it's always been something that was well received," he said. "It's a time of year when libraries across the country celebrate freedom from censorship and freedom to read by doing education about book banning. ... I was really surprised that there was this kind of reaction."



The display created by former North Woods School library assistant Quinn Krebsbach for Banned Book Week in October. This image was obtained by the Duluth News Tribune through a data request to the St. Louis County school district.

Contributed / St. Louis County Schools

In the wake of those complaints, Krebsbach said, the district's lack of policy around library materials and content complaints left him with little guidance on how to move forward.

"Under Minnesota law, there is supposed to be a policy," Krebsbach said. "It would have been useful in a situation like this."

Since 2024, public libraries, including those in public schools, are required under Minnesota's [Access to Library Materials and Rights Protected](#) law to adopt policies that establish procedures for selecting books, maintaining library materials and handling content challenges and reconsideration of materials.

Despite the law taking effect in August 2024, St. Louis County Schools is one of several school districts in the region still operating without the required policy.

"We want districts to have these policies, because it really does make things better for them in the long run," said Ann Kaste, with the Minnesota Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee. "What the law says is that every district must have a policy and procedure around collection, development and challenges, but then there is no consequence if districts don't have it."

"That really gets into the issue, though, where you have school librarians, media specialists ... put in a bad situation, in a district where they weren't backed by policies and procedures."

The book display

Holding a master's degree in library and information science, Krebsbach, 27, was hired as a library assistant for St. Louis County Schools at the start of September, just as the school year was beginning.

One of the largest in the region, the district is made up of five schools, including North Woods School. Both the elementary and secondary schools are housed in the same building in Cook and share resources, including the school library, where Krebsbach's book display was set up.

The display consisted of a whiteboard listing the American Library Association's top 10 most challenged books of 2024, and the question, "How many have you read?"



"All Boys Aren't Blue" by George M. Johnson was the No. 1 banned book in the US in 2025.

Emma McNamee / Duluth Media Group

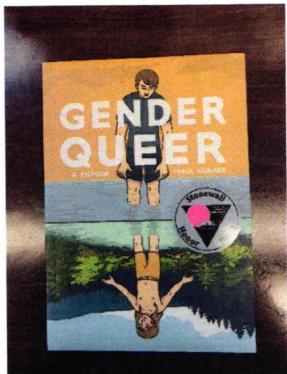
Included in the display list were "All Boys Aren't Blue" by George M. Johnson and "Gender Queer: A Memoir" by Maia Kobabe. Both books received awards from the American Library Association and were purchased to help fill the gap in LGBTQ+ content in the North Woods School library collection, Krebsbach said.

"Librarians are trained not to make choices based on our own personal biases, but to try to just represent the wide range of what people in the community might use or might like," Krebsbach added. "It's really disappointing to see choices made based on people's individual biases about what should be there, what shouldn't be there, and disappointing to see educational materials taken out of the library collection."

"All Boys Aren't Blue" is a young adult memoir consisting of a series of personal essays by Johnson, a journalist and LGBTQ+ activist. A New York Times Best Seller, the book delves into themes of race, gender and sexuality, and is recommended for ages 14 and up. Kobabe's illustrated memoir, "Gender Queer," an autobiographical comic exploring gender identity and asexuality, is recommended for older teens and adults.

During 2024, the two books were the most challenged in the United States, over claims of sexually explicit content and LGBTQ+ themes.

"I was absolutely horrified that this was in a library," wrote one parent in a complaint to North Woods School staff obtained by the News Tribune. "I hope they will be removed immediately. ... I am shocked that the librarian thinks this is appropriate."



“Gender Queer: A Memoir” by Maia Kobabe is a an autobiographical comic exploring gender identity and asexuality that is one of the most banned books in 2024.

Emma McNamee / Duluth Media Group

The district and school received multiple complaints over the display, with parents voicing concerns over titles that were not “age-appropriate” being displayed in the K-12 library.

Additionally, complaints were made over the content of lessons that Krebsbach had planned for Banned Book Week. Using children’s books that had faced content challenges, second- and fourth-grade classes engaged in discussions about censorship, banned books and what to do if library materials made a student feel uncomfortable.

“My children will not be a part of any of this,” read another parent complaint. “This is very disturbing, and I am not sure why this is allowed? I would hope that he will have to take this down immediately and NOT say anything to our children about these types of books. They are banned for a reason!”

Books, display taken down

Krebsbach was asked to take down the display after meeting with North Woods Principal Kelly Engman and Assistant Principal John Jirik.

The whiteboard, Krebsbach said, was taken down. Copies of “All Boys Aren’t Blue” and “Gender Queer” remained on the new book display until those were taken down as well.

“I was asked not to display anything that was controversial,” Krebsbach said, “And I had asked for more feedback on that, and at that time, (Jirik) said that those two titles had particularly been called out by parents as controversial or problematic. He had taken them off the shelf, off of the display, and out of the library ... and I had reason to believe they were not going to be returned to the library.”

Two days later, Krebsbach received another request. In an Oct. 9, 2025, email obtained by the Duluth News Tribune, Jirik requested that Krebsbach remove all new books from the library and that they be brought to his room. According to order forms obtained by the News Tribune, Krebsbach ordered more than 80 new books for the North Woods library collection, amounting to more than \$500 worth of library materials.

Krebsbach stated that he pulled all new materials from the shelf that same day and delivered them to Jirik's room. Hours later, after the school day had ended, Krebsbach was notified via voicemail and later email that his employment with St. Louis County Schools had been terminated.

That same day, an alert was sent out to parents and staff members stating that the school had investigated reports of "inappropriate" library materials and "taken action to ensure that our library is a safe place."

"They weren't ever super explicit on what they intended to do with the books," Krebsbach said. "They had previously said that they weren't going to ban any books, but then they pulled 'Gender Queer' and 'All Boys Aren't Blue.' So it was a little bit of an unclear situation about what was actually going on and what they really were going to do with the books."

District Superintendent Reggie Engebritson declined to comment on whether all the books were returned to the library, or if any books were placed on restricted access. The district also declined to comment on any review process or the lack of policies in place regarding library materials and challenged content.

Two challenges filed

The American Library Association [defines challenges](#) to library materials as attempts to remove or restrict materials based on the objections of a person or group. Under the [Access to Library Materials and Rights Protected](#) law, school districts are also required to submit a completed challenge report to the Minnesota Department of Education detailing the reasoning and results of the challenge. Those reports are later collected by MLA and the ALA and added to the national list of challenged books.

During 2025, MLA received reports of approximately 25 book challenges.

Two challenge reports involving St. Louis County Schools were submitted to MDE, regarding the books "All Boys Aren't Blue" and "Gender Queer." Krebsbach submitted both complaints following the end of his employment at North Woods School. As of December, the reports were still under review.

"Taking books away from students means taking away their chance to learn. It means prioritizing one person's idea of what should be valued in the library collection over everybody else's views," Krebsbach said. "I'm just really disappointed in the way that this situation has been handled, and I hope that all the books that were pulled off the shelf are returned to students promptly, because the students are in school to learn, and they deserve all the learning resources that we can give them."