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## Academic Freedom Workshop

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# ACADEMIC FREEDOM WORKSHOP

Indianapolis, March 17-19, 1978

## A Report:

Academic freedom is not only an issue for the universities and the public libraries. It is a growing concern for the public school systems as well. Academic freedom is guaranteed by the First Amendment through free speech and free press. This means that a teacher can raise controversial issues in a well disciplined classroom where the subject is handled objectively.

However, groups and individuals are seeking to control subject matter and teaching methods by demanding that their views and beliefs are the only ones to be taught through the methods they deem proper. This is censorship!

Because censorship attempts are being supported on an ever-increasing scale (printed materials, finances, and consultants) several professional groups, including the International Reading Association and the American Library Association, and seeking an informal national consortium to help support professionals who are under attack by censors.

With this in mind the A.L.A.'s Office for Intellectual Freedom organized and staffed the workshop. One of its goals, which was met, was to bring together a group of professionals who would learn techniques to handle attempted censorship. This group's second goal, also met, to study the possibility of promoting a state level organization to be a clearinghouse for intellectual freedom support.

Two sets of recommendations coming from the workshop that are of importance to the IRA/MRA members are on the national and state level. The representatives of the five state IRA affiliates suggest that IRA:

1. Continue being active within the informal consortium called the Academic Freedom Group.
2. Form a high level committee called the Committee on Intellectual Freedom (The use of *intellectual* in place of *academic* should help alleviate a possible impression that the

committee would be restricted to adjust college and university concerns.)

3. Charge the committee to (1) discuss and define censorship in schools. (2) alert IRA members to censorship problems, and (3) maintain communications between the Academic Freedom Group and the I.R.A.

The state caucuses were held so that the members of the different state affiliate associations could plan steps to be taken at the state level. The Michigan caucus suggested the following steps:

1. That each organization select a committee and appoint a chairperson for Intellectual Freedom.
2. That William Smith as chairperson of the Michigan Association for Media in Education Intellectual Freedom Committee use his committee as the clearinghouse for a study group on intellectual freedom with a possible formation of an informal consortium on state level.
3. That each association's committee send two persons to an organizational and discussion meeting for a state intellectual freedom group.

The MRA representatives have also suggested that the 1979 MRA Convention offer a workshop on academic freedom. It is also suggested that William Smith's name be added to the MRA's hot line list to give members immediate access to information and help in case of censorship attempts.

The workshop has provided its participants with many suggestions for steps to be taken to help stop censorship attempts. For more information, please write to either one of your workshop representatives.

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