

Rise in Book-Banning Raises Alarm

By Sally Streff Buzbee
Associated Press

More books were banned from public school libraries and classrooms last year than the year before, a liberal advocacy group said yesterday, although the number of attempts to remove controversial material actually fell.

"The attacks are bolder, broader and more organized than ever before," said People for the American Way legal director Elliot Minberg.

The group said it documented 338 attempts to remove or restrict access to a book, and said 50 percent, or 169, were successful. The year before, 375 attempts were documented and 42 percent, or 157, were successful.

But conservatives accused the group of exaggerating the number of incidents among the nation's 80,000 public schools, and of attacking parents' legitimate concerns.

"When a government restricts what its citizens can read, that's censorship," said Gary L. Bauer of the Family Research Council in Washington. "But when parents have input on what local officials do in the schools, that's democracy."

People for the American Way said its report listed only instances when a parent or community member tried to keep a book not just from one child, but from all children.

"I support parental involvement," Minberg said. "But I don't want my children's education restricted be-

cause someone else objects to a book."

Among the books challenged, often because they contain profanity, violence or sexual scenes, were anthologies of scary stories and such classics as John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" and Maya Angelou's "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings."

The most frequent complaint against a book was that its treatment of sexuality was offensive. Profanity was the next most frequent complaint.

Eighteen percent of the attempts involved people affiliated with conservative religious groups, People for the American Way said. Five percent of the complaints came from left-leaning parents or groups.