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PRESS RELEASE

First Amendment and Education Groups Unite to Oppose Effort to Rate and Censor Books

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is leading a coalition of groups which on August 1st sent a letter to a Virginia school board addressing claims that award-winning contemporary novels contain “pornographic” material.

In June, the Chesterfield, VA, school board caved in to pressure to scrap a summer reading list after complaints from parents and a local politician that three books contained content they consider “pornographic.” The books are *Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell, *Dope Sick* by Walter Dean Myers, and *Tyrell* by Coe Booth, all of which have received praise for their literary and educational value. This month the board will convene a panel to address calls to remove the books from the library and to institute a rating system to flag books containing sexual references and profanity. The coalition urges the panel to retain the books and to resist calls to rate or label books.

The challenges to these books come after another Virginia parent objected to the sexual content in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison after it was assigned to her son in a 12th grade Advanced Placement English class. However, as NCAC’s letter points out, if the board decided to remove the books simply because some parents don’t like them, the district could be charged with violating the First Amendment rights of students “who have a constitutional right to read books selected for their ‘legitimate educational value.’”

The use of inflammatory language like “pornography,” to describe valuable literature, according to NCAC Executive Director Joan Bertin, “verges on the ludicrous” but is an increasingly common tactic used by people who want to purge schools of literature they find personally offensive. “This is a real problem in a democratic society, where the public schools have an obligation to educate students from families with widely different views about religion, morality, sexuality, and literature.”

The letter was signed by American Booksellers for Free Expression, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Association of American Publishers, the Authors Guild, the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, Macmillan Publishers US, and the National Council of Teachers of English.

[READ THE FULL LETTER HERE.](#)

ncac.org

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) is an alliance of 50 national non-profit organizations dedicated to defending freedom of thought, inquiry and expression.