



A project of the **National Coalition Against Censorship**
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American Booksellers for Free Expression
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
Association of American Publishers

February 26, 2018

Members of the School Board
Cody District Public Schools
Park County School District 6
919 Cody Ave,
Cody, WY 82414

Dear School Board Members,

We are a coalition of literary, artistic and educational organizations dedicated to promoting free expression and fighting the suppression of free speech. We offer support and guidance to educators in protecting the right of students to read freely. In a November 30, 2017 letter to Assistant Superintendent Tim Foley, we opposed the challenge filed by a parent in an effort to remove *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl* from the Cody High School library. We wrote to also suggest substantial improvements to your policies for reviewing books.

On Tuesday night, ignoring the KEC Committee's December vote (7-2) to retain *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl*, you voted 5-1 to remove the book from the library.

The board's decision undermines the achievement of educational objectives established in your own policies, impairing students' well-established right to access ideas pursuant to the First Amendment. It runs counter to any reasonable and robust review process by undercutting the recommendation process altogether. Furthermore, it flies in the face of the philosophy outlined in your Board of Education Policy IJ (*Learning Resources and Materials*), and Policy IJL (*Library Materials Selection and Adoption*).

The Supreme Court has established that public school officials' discretion regarding the removal of library books is particularly limited to ensure the protection of students' First Amendment right to access information because "students must always remain free to inquire, to study, and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding" and "the school library is the principal locus of such freedom." *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868-69 (1982)(plurality opinion). In the same case, the Court also cautioned, "[l]ocal school boards may not remove books from library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek by their removal to 'prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion.'" *Board of Education v.*

Pico, 457 U.S. 853, 872 (1982)(plurality opinion). Thus, **the removal of books from public school libraries to suppress ideas is a violation of the First Amendment.**

Tanya Lee Stone's *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl* is a critically acclaimed book that takes on difficult challenges many young readers face in high school. Because of its resonance with teen readers, the book is on a number of distinguished literary lists, including the American Library Association 2007 Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers, School Library Journal Book of the Month, New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age, Texas Tayshas State Reading List, Maryland Great Books for Teens 2006, Kentucky Bluegrass Award Master List, among others. *School Library Journal* praised Stone's "realistic and frank...descriptions of the teens and their sexuality." *Booklist*, the renowned ALA-supported literary review for librarians, agrees that "Stone's novel in verse, more poetic prose than poetry, packs a steamy, emotional wallop..." stressing that "the lessons learned here, however, are important."

The school board, following the recommendation of the KEC Committee, should consider the value this title has for those who choose to read it. Literature holds a unique place in helping young people cope with the challenges of growing up and books like *A Bad Boy Can Be Good for a Girl* can provide a safe space to explore those challenges and develop empathy for others facing similar problems.

While not every book is right for every reader, the role of school libraries is to allow students and their parents to make choices according to their own interests, experiences, and family values. However, no parent, student or community member may impose their views, values and interests on others by restricting an entire community's access to particular books.

We strongly urge you to reverse this decision, and keep *A Bad Boy Can Be Good For a Girl* in the Cody High School library so that all students who wish to read it may do so.

We are ready to offer any help we can provide in making policy changes that will strengthen the protections for the First Amendment rights of students in Cody.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns regarding this matter.

Sincerely,



Chris Finan, Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



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