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Dr. Karen Kidd, Director of Curriculum and Instruction  
605 E. 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Prosper, TX 75078

By electronic mail: [kjkidd@prosper-isd.net](mailto:kjkidd@prosper-isd.net)

Dear Dr. Kidd:

As organizations dedicated to protecting the freedom to read, the First Amendment, and high quality public education, we urge you to keep *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles in the Prosper High School English curriculum. We understand that the book was removed from classrooms in response to a parent's recent objections to its references to sexuality. We urge you to follow District Policy EF and return the book to classrooms while convening a reconsideration committee to review the book's suitability for instruction. In reviewing the merits of *A Separate Peace*, we hope your review committee will consider the legal and educational points we raise below.

**1. Removing a book from the curriculum, without review and in response to parental pressures, violates Prosper District Policy EF and raises serious First Amendment concerns.**

The unilateral decision by the principal to remove *A Separate Peace* from the curriculum contravenes Prosper District Policy EF and impermissibly threatens students' First Amendment rights. Policy EF on Instructional Resources clearly outlines a procedure for the review of challenged materials, which requires the establishment of a reconsideration committee, including teachers, library staff, students and parents, as appropriate. While Prosper school district officials may restrict an individual parent's child access to challenged texts or provide them alternate assignments upon request, Policy EF explicitly prohibits general restrictions that deny *all* students access to challenged texts during the reconsideration process.

Moreover, the Supreme Court has cautioned school officials that their broad discretion to direct the use of curricular texts must be exercised within the parameters of the First Amendment. *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260, 261 (1988). School officials risk violating students' First Amendment rights when they impose restrictions that are not "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns." *Id.*

Were school administrators to remove a book from the curriculum solely because some parents claimed it contradicted their religious, political or moral beliefs, they would be impermissibly allowing the viewpoint of these parents to dominate the public education process. *See Monteiro v. Tempe Union High School District* (9th Cir. 1998) (recognizing the First Amendment right of students to read books selected for their "legitimate educational

value,” even if offensive to some parents and students), *Pratt v. Independent School Dist. No. 831* (8th Cir. 1982) and *Case v. Unified School Dist. No. 233* (D. Kan. 1995) (First Amendment violated by removing materials because of hostility to content and message.)

**2. A pedagogically sound approach to curricular selection requires educational professionals to ask whether a book has educational value.**

*A Separate Peace* is a highly praised and critically acclaimed novel that is also very popular with teen readers. Set in a New Hampshire preparatory school, the book tells the story of two adolescent boys coming of age at the height of World War II. It deals with issues of friendship, self-discovery and loss—issues that many teenagers are dealing with themselves. The National Institute of Arts and Letters lauded John Knowles’ “considerable literary achievement” with a Rosenthal Award in 1960. A *New York Times* bestseller and National Book Award Finalist, the book was also awarded the 1961 William Faulkner Foundation Award. The *National Review* agrees that the book is “a masterpiece.”

That *A Separate Peace* contains sexual themes does not discount its pedagogical value, particularly since, taken as a whole, it is not “patently offensive,” does not “appeal to prurient interest,” and has “serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.” *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15 (1973).

Removing *A Separate Peace* based on the objections of some families over the educational interests of all students would undermine the district’s commitment to viewpoint neutrality and equal opportunity. While some students and parents may dislike the book, curricular choices should be dictated by pedagogical interests and the educational value of the book as a whole, not the subjective views and tastes of individuals. We encourage you to abide by Policy EF and return *A Separate Peace* to classrooms pending completion of its review and offer alternative assignments to students who object to reading it.

Please do not hesitate to contact us with questions. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Chris Finan, Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship



Charles Brownstein, Executive Director  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund



Millie Davis, Director  
Intellectual Freedom Center  
National Council of Teachers of English



David Grogan, Director  
American Booksellers for Free Expression

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Rasenberger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mary Rasenberger, Executive Director  
Authors Guild