



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

February 8, 2019

Vincenza Gallasio  
Superintendent – District 31  
715 Ocean Terrace  
Staten Island, NY 10301

**Sent via electronic mail: [VGallas@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:VGallas@schools.nyc.gov)**

Dear Mr. Gallasio,

We are an alliance of organizations dedicated to defending young people's First Amendment freedom to read and learn free from censorship. We write in response to reports that your administration pulled *Assassination Classroom*, a manga comic by Yusei Matsui, from the Markham Intermediate School library after a parent complained about the book's title and fictional superhero themes.

**We urge you to honor your constitutional and educational obligations to your students by returning *Assassination Classroom* to library shelves and to follow district procedures for the review of controversial materials.**

We believe that the parental objection to *Assassination Classroom* takes the book's title and themes out of context and disregards the book's value as a whole.

*Assassination Classroom* is not about actual violence. It is a story about a class of misfit students who pledge to stop an alien super-villain disguised as a teacher from destroying the world. The series uses comedy and superhero genre tropes to emphasize the values of camaraderie among students and the impact good teaching can make in the lives of pupils others have discarded. *School Library Journal* writes, "Underneath the veneer of violence and comedy is a story about a bunch of misfit kids getting the attention they deserve... When everyone else has given up on these kids, it's the superpowered, tentacled weirdo who shows them they are worth something, and sometimes that all that is needed for kids to excel."

*Assassination Classroom* is the basis of a popular animated series of the same name, and falls within the *manga*, or Japanese comic book, publishing category. Manga like *Assassination Classroom* have earned substantial international readership by addressing the social and developmental concerns of audiences with research and specificity. For educators, manga can be a valuable tool for inspiring life-long readers, engaging reluctant readers, and assisting struggling students. For new and reluctant readers, manga are less daunting than

prose and more likely to be read. For advanced readers, they offer a novel and expansive reading experience.

The First Amendment imposes a constitutional obligation on school officials to resist pressure to promote a particular ideology or to suppress controversial or unpopular ideas. Nor may they restrict access to books based on their own tastes or a parent's subjective view of what is "appropriate" in literature. *Island Trees School District v. Pico*, 457 US 853 (1982). Rather, school officials must consider the offending material "as a whole" and make educational decisions that advance strictly secular pedagogical objectives.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with the principles outlined by the Supreme Court, the NYC School Librarian Guidebook explicitly prohibits removing *Assassination Classroom*, or any challenged material, from use until a Material Evaluation Committee has made a final decision about the book's educational value. The guidebook calls for the reviewing committee, including at least one "librarian [and] two classroom teachers familiar with the subject matter of the material," to "weigh values and faults against each other and form opinions based on the materials *as a whole*." Not only does the removal of library books based on the subjective and decontextualized critique of community members violate students' First Amendment rights, it also sets a dangerous precedent that will invite challenges to any idea that offends sensitive readers.

We believe every public school should serve as a place where students of diverse perspectives and capacities can engage with new ideas. We recognize that parents are entitled to direct their child's education. But no parent has the right to decide what others may read.

While not everyone will understand or agree with manga's styles of expression, schools should create opportunities for educators to share the educational benefits of such reading so that each parent can make an informed decision for their child.

**We strongly urge you to return *Assassination Classroom* to library shelves and convene a Materials Evaluation Committee that includes librarians and teachers to review the book.**

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us for assistance.

Sincerely,



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<sup>1</sup> (See also, *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier*, 484 U.S. 260, 261 (1988) restricting administrators' editorial discretion to actions that are "reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns" and *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) ("If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion."))

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cc: Nicolas Mele, Principal  
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