


**NATIONAL  
COALITION  
AGAINST  
CENSORSHIP**  **KIDS'  
RIGHT  
TO READ**

A project of the National  
Coalition Against Censorship

**CO-SPONSORED BY**

American Booksellers for  
Free Expression  
Comic Book Legal Defense  
Fund

May 13, 2019

Dr. Michael Gill, Superintendent  
Hanover County Public Schools  
200 Berkley Street  
Ashland, VA 23005

**Sent via Electronic Mail to:** [mgill@hcps.us](mailto:mgill@hcps.us)

Dear Dr. Gill,

We are a collective of organizations dedicated to defending young people's freedom to read, including the freedom to read stories about LGBTQ characters and history. We are writing concerning recent media reports of controversy around Hanover County students' freedom to read *PRIDE: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders. We want to support you in protecting your students' right to express and learn from diverse perspectives.

According to public reports, Principal Keck removed the book from a Henry Clay Elementary second-grade classroom and criticized the teacher for exercising "poor judgement" after one parent complained it made her daughter "question her Christian faith." While parents can choose books for their own children based on personal beliefs, public educators have a constitutional responsibility not to make viewpoint-based decisions.

We hope you will continue to make *PRIDE: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* available to students who wish to read it. Should you consider the book for your core curriculum, we hope you will convene a committee, as per Policy 6-5.6 and consider the attached guidelines for viewpoint-neutral review. Ultimately, we hope you will support your teachers and work together to preserve intellectual freedom in Hanover County classrooms.

Books that honor LGBTQ histories and narratives are disproportionately censored in schools, chilling LGBTQ voices in the community. Such censorship stigmatizes an already marginalized community and is especially harmful to LGBTQ youth who face serious threats to their mental and physical health. Classrooms should be welcoming spaces where students can ask questions and express their own thoughts, trusting that their teachers will be ready to guide them towards deeper understanding and tolerance towards those who are different from them.

Board Policy 6-5.6 allows teachers to "enrich and support curriculum objectives" with supplemental texts, which "do not require the prior approval of the principal or the principal's designee." In this case, a teacher used *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* to teach her students profound lessons about human rights activism and LGBTQ equality. In addition to telling an important civil rights history and promoting civic engagement, this important book teaches values enshrined in the Hanover County Code of

Conduct, like “recognizing the importance of the dignity and worth of each individual” and “contributing to a climate of mutual respect for all.” Good Reads describes this biography of the first openly gay elected official and his fight for equality as an ‘undertold story of love, hope, equality, and pride.’

We encourage you to consider the entire book - not just the controversial elements - and how its messages might enrich your students.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further guidance. Thank you.

With warm regards,



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



Mary Rasenberger, Executive Director  
The Authors Guild



David Grogan, Director  
American Booksellers for Free Expression  
Committee



Fatima Shaikh, Co-Chair  
PEN Children’s and Young Adult Books



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Robt Seda-Schreiber, Chief Activist  
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