

NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP

KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ

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American Booksellers for
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Comic Book Legal Defense
Fund

July 2, 2019

Dr. Robert Ranells, Superintendent
Wallace School District
P.O. Box 267
Silverton, ID 83867

Sent via Electronic Mail to: rranells@wsd393.org

Dear Dr. Ranells,

As organizations dedicated to the freedom to read and the application of First Amendment law in public institutions, we were concerned to learn about that *The Walking Dead* graphic novel series was removed from the Wallace High School (WHS) library and banned from campus.

We understand that, despite a review committee recommendation to keep *The Walking Dead* available to students, you decided unilaterally to ban the collection entirely from school grounds in order to accommodate select parents' preferences. We also understand that your district is currently debating the possibility of restricting student access to the district-wide interlibrary loan system of over 50,000 books, which includes *The Walking Dead*.

We urge you to honor your First Amendment obligations by rescinding this ban and restoring *The Walking Dead* to WHS library shelves. Please also consider the attached guidelines for reviewing future challenged books. We also hope you will continue to afford your students access to the district interlibrary loan system whereby they may exercise their freedom to explore new ideas.

The Walking Dead is an award-winning graphic novel series by Robert Kirkman and Charlie Adlard that serves as the basis for two television series, mobile games, prose novels and merchandise popular among teen and adult audiences. It has been recognized with industry awards including two Eisner Awards.

The graphic novel series casts a diverse ensemble of characters within a horror setting to examine serious topics including trauma, grief, loss, and the capacity for people to rebuild personal, social, and societal bonds when their status quo has been ripped away. The series explores the nature of civilization by casting its characters into a survivalist environment where readers are invited to consider how they would live without the conveniences and security of the

modern world. As it progresses, the series also explores the role of law in society, with several storylines that explore authoritarian, democratic, anarchic, and militarized forms of government.

Over its run of more than 30 volumes, *The Walking Dead* explores many of the emotional, social, and intellectual issues teens grapple with every day, while also providing vital ways of thinking about topics examined in the course of their education.

The First Amendment protects students' freedom to access information and engage in non-disruptive conduct in school. In keeping with First Amendment principles, Wallace District libraries "provide a wide range of materials on all appropriate levels of difficulty, with diversity of appeal, and the presentation of different points of view." (Wallace District Policy 2510). District Policies [2340](#) and [4120](#) also affirm students' rights to "have free access to information...without personal prejudice" and outline a process for assessing the suitability of learning materials based on pedagogical goals. Concerns about occasional coarse language or sensitive themes should be considered in that context.

Your decision to disregard the review committee's recommendation and ban *The Walking Dead* based on your subjective assessment of isolated passages undermines the committee's work. It also infringes on students' First Amendment freedoms and will only invite challenges from others seeking accommodation for different views and beliefs. Parents who object to *The Walking Dead* or any other books obtained through either library system could easily supervise their children's reading choices. However, attempts by school officials to restrict library access violates the rights of families who want their kids to access a wider diversity of material.

We strongly urge you to reaffirm your commitment to free expression and uphold the review committee's recommendation to keep *The Walking Dead* available to students who opt to read it. This will assure that students at WHS have the freedom to explore a wide range of literature and also ensure that administrators respond consistently to future challenges that seek to remove books based on personal views.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to us for additional support.

With warm regards,



Chris Finan, Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship



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