

# NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

August 26, 2020

David Vinson, Ph.D.  
Superintendent  
Wylie Independent School District  
951 South Ballard Avenue  
Wylie, TX 75098

Re: Removal of Political Cartoon From School Website

Dear Dr. Vinson,

I am writing on behalf of the National Coalition Against Censorship and the other organizations signed below to protest the decision to remove from a school website an editorial cartoon that was part of a class assignment because it criticizes the use of violence against Black people over the course of American history, including violence by police.

NCAC is an alliance of 57 national non-profit organizations, including literary, artistic, religious, educational, professional, labor, and civil liberties groups. We promote freedom of thought, inquiry and expression for all Americans, including K-12 students, teachers, and staff.

Based on news reports, it is our understanding that a social studies teacher at Cooper Junior High School posted two editorial cartoons as part of the assignment—the cartoon about racial violence and another depicting opposition to wearing a mask as protection against the Covid-19. The assignment was cancelled after the National Fraternal Order of Police complained that the cartoon about racial violence is “abhorrent and disturbing.” Texas Governor Greg Abbott has demanded that the teacher be fired and asked the Texas Education Agency to investigate.

Yet the teacher appears to have been following the curriculum established by the state board of education, the [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies](#). It requires middle school students to “discuss how and whether the actions of U.S. citizens and the local, state, and federal governments have achieved the ideals espoused in the founding documents.” It further requires them to “organize and interpret information from . . . visuals,” to “identify bias and points of view created by the historical context surrounding an event,” and to “evaluate the validity of a source based on corroboration with other sources and information about the author.”

## NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association  
AICA-USA  
American Association of  
School Administrators  
American Association of  
University Professors  
American Association of  
University Women  
American Booksellers for Free Expression  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Ethical Union  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Jewish Committee  
American Library Association  
American Literary Translators Association  
American Society of Journalists & Authors  
Americans United for Separation of Church  
& State  
Association of American Publishers  
Authors Guild  
Catholics for Choice  
Children's Literature Association  
College Art Association  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund  
The Creative Coalition  
Directors Guild of America  
The Dramatists Guild of America  
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund  
Educational Book & Media Association  
First Amendment Lawyers Association  
Free Speech Coalition  
Freedom to Read Foundation  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and  
Social Justice  
International Literacy Association  
Lambda Legal  
Modern Language Association  
National Center for Science Education  
National Communication Association  
National Council for the Social Studies  
National Council of the Churches  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Education Association  
National Youth Rights Association  
The NewsGuild-CWA  
PEN America  
People For the American Way  
Planned Parenthood Federation  
of America  
Project Censored  
SAG-AFTRA  
Sexuality Information & Education Council  
of the U.S.  
Society of Children's Book Writers  
& Illustrators  
Student Press Law Center  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Democratic Intellectuals  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Church of Christ  
Office of Communication  
United Methodist Church,  
United Methodist Communications  
Women's American ORT  
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance  
Writers Guild of America, East  
Writers Guild of America, West

The teacher at Cooper Junior High School asked students to write about the role that protest plays in democracy and about whether protest leads to change in society. In other words, it asked students to do exactly what the standards require them to do: “discuss how and whether the actions of U.S. citizens . . . have achieved the ideals espoused in the founding documents” The assignment included the two cartoons as examples of protest by people on opposite ends of the political spectrum. There was no effort to endorse either view.

However, the actions taken by school officials were anything but neutral. By cancelling the assignment, they expressed official disapproval of the ideas expressed by the cartoon depicting racial violence. As a result, they violated their duty as public officials. More than 75 years ago, the [Supreme Court stated](#) that “no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion,” and just three years ago [the Court reiterated](#) that ““If there is a bedrock principle underlying the First Amendment, it is that the government may not prohibit the expression of an idea simply because society finds the idea itself offensive or disagreeable.”

The district’s actions create a dangerous precedent, putting teachers on notice that they cannot present any material that might be offensive to someone in the community. Just as teachers in San Francisco should feel free to show students a cartoon which argues that Blue Lives Matter, teachers in the Wylie ISD should be able to display a cartoon that argues that Black Lives Matter.

NCAC calls upon the board to rescind its ban on the cartoon, allowing the assignment to be completed. It should further publicly commit that the teacher will not be fired or otherwise punished. Finally, we urge you to reaffirm your obligation to present students with views from across the political spectrum and to establish procedures that guarantee teachers can operate free from the fear of political censorship.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan  
Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by:

American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom

Cartoonists Rights Network International  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund  
Electronic Frontier Foundation  
Freedom to Read Foundation  
Index on Censorship  
National Council for the Social Studies  
National Council of Teachers of English  
PEN America and the Artists at Risk Connection  
PEN America Children's and Young Adult Book Committee

Cc: Matt Atkins, Board President  
Heather Leggett, Board Vice-President  
Jacob Day, Board Secretary  
Stacie Gooch, Board Member  
Barbara Goss, Board Member  
Mitch Herzog, Board Member  
Stacie Smith, Board Member