

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP**

**KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

October 13, 2020

By electronic mail

Board of Education
Kingsburg Elementary Charter School District
1310 Stroud Ave
Kingsburg CA 93631

Re: Removal of *Ghost Boys* from curriculum

Dear Board members:

As organizations dedicated to protecting the freedom to read, the First Amendment, and high quality public education, the National Coalition Against Censorship and the other groups signed below are deeply concerned by the Kingsburg Elementary Charter School District's removal of the novel *Ghost Boys* from the curriculum.

As we understand the facts, the book was removed after a parent complained about the political views expressed by the book. Although District regulations state that a challenged book can remain in the curriculum pending resolution of a complaint, Superintendent Sever ordered the book removed immediately. In addition, although District regulations permit the superintendent to appoint a committee to assess a challenged book, Dr. Sever did not do so, and instead unilaterally ordered that the book be permanently removed from the curriculum.

We urge the Board to create a committee to review *Ghost Boys*, and to return the book to the classroom while the review is pending. To avoid the premature removal of challenged books in the future, we also recommend several changes in the current policy for dealing with challenges.

First, we recommend that the policy be changed to require that books remain in the classroom pending the resolution of challenges. Currently, a book can be immediately removed whenever a single parent objects to it. There are hundreds of challenges to books in schools every year and for a wide variety of reasons. Some parents claim *Huckleberry Finn* is racist. Others believe that *A Catcher in the Rye* is profane and anti-family.

The current policy discourages teachers from challenging their students. Teachers know that if they assign a book that might be objectionable in any way to anyone, they run the risk of having to delete the book from their lessons with no notice, forcing them to create a new lesson plan

for a substitute book. To avoid this possibility, teachers will self-censor, choosing books of lower quality to avoid further controversy.

Second, curriculum decisions, particularly decisions surrounding challenged works, require a balancing of the interests of a variety of stakeholders, including parents, teachers, librarians, and students. These are very difficult decisions that are best made by a committee which represents the viewpoints of all stakeholders. Therefore, we urge the Board to amend its procedures to require that a representative committee assess challenged works.

Finally, decisions regarding curriculum are seen as legitimate by all parties when the selection criteria are set forth clearly in district regulations. In weighing book challenges, those policies should include both the criteria that should be considered by the review committee as well as factors that should *not* be considered, including the political views of the book's author.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If we can be of assistance in regard to drafting regulations governing book challenges, please do not hesitate to contact us. NCAC can send you a model policy to review.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by:

American Booksellers for Free Expression
Authors Guild
National Council of Teachers of English
PEN America Children's and Young Adult Book Committee
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

Cc: Constance Lunde, President
Shane Murray, Clerk
Brad Bergstrom, Member
Karyll Smith Quinn, Member
Frank Yanes, Member

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