

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

May 20, 2021

Board of Education
Broward County Public Schools
600 SE Third Avenue
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 33301

Re: Pause in teaching of *Ghost Boys*

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 your District's decision to pause the teaching of the novel *Ghost Boys* at a local elementary school. We urge you to allow the teacher to complete his class on the book and to reconsider the requested parental notification.

As we understand the facts, the book was being taught by a veteran teacher, but was removed after a parent who is affiliated with law enforcement complained to the local police union about the political views ostensibly expressed by the book. The police union then complained to the Board, and the teacher who was teaching the book was ordered to pause teaching it until parents were informed about the nature of the book and were given the opportunity to have their children opt out of reading it.

This action raises serious First Amendment concerns. First, it does not appear to be the District's policy to require parental notification for all books. By singling out *Ghost Boys* for special scrutiny because of its supposed position on police practice, the District has engaged in viewpoint discrimination, which almost always violates the First Amendment. Moreover, singling out a certain type of content necessarily gives a biased perspective, casts a negative light on the book regardless of its literary worth, and needlessly stokes alarm among parents.

The parent's complaint is based on a misapprehension of the very purpose of exposing students to literature. Literature is not social science; it is not taught as objective truth. Rather, the purpose of literature is to evoke empathy with a variety of human experiences. Characters in a book can often espouse points of view that some, or even most, people disagree with. The District's response to the complaint should have been to inform the parent of all this and explain that literature is not meant to indoctrinate students, but rather to expose them to different viewpoints and experiences. Such a position is clearly indicated in Florida's Grade 5 literature standards, which explicitly call for students to

question the viewpoints of literary characters, by “[d]escrib[ing] how a narrator’s or speaker’s point of view influences how events are described.” Instead, the District paused the teaching of the book and impermissibly singled it out for parental notification.

Finally, we urge the District to adopt a policy for adjudicating challenges to instructional materials. Most districts have such a policy, which, among other things, ensures that all voices are heard and considered when material is challenged; and that materials are chosen and used for legitimate pedagogical reasons, rather than because materials do or do not offend the political view of particular members of the community. We have attached a copy of our guidelines for creating such a policy.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Bookseller for Free Expression

The Authors Guild

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

National Council of Teachers of English

PEN America

PEN American Children's and Young Adult Books Committee

Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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