

December 2, 2021

Board of Trustees
Keller Independent School District
350 Keller Parkway,
Keller, TX 762481

Re: Book Challenges

Dear Board Members:

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, including the rights of K-12 students, teachers, and staff. We are writing in regard to apparent violations of the District's policies when it removed several books from school library shelves: *Panic*, by Sharon Draper; *Jack of Hearts (and Other Parts)*, by L.C. Rosen; *Infinity Reaper*, *Infinity Cycle*, by Adam Silvera; *Flamer*, by Mike Curato; *L8r, g8r*, by Lauren Myracle; and *Gender Queer*, by Maia Kobabe. We urge you to return all of the books to the shelves until you amend your policies to ensure that all challenges are resolved pursuant to your adjudication procedures.

Based on comments made by Superintendent Westfall at the Board's November 15, 2021 meeting, as well as information posted on the District's website, it is our understanding that the District has removed several books from district libraries without submitting those books to the District's book challenge procedures, and despite the fact that District policy expressly states that "[a]ccess to a challenged resource shall not be restricted during the reconsideration process" (BP EF(Local))

We are writing to urge you to ensure that all challenges are addressed pursuant to District regulations. Book challenges are often highly contentious and emotional, and the District's regulations are well crafted to guarantee that all parties feel that they have been heard and respected, and also to ensure that decisions are made based on objective criteria which focus on the needs of students. For example, the District policy requires that books be reviewed by a committee that includes all stakeholders; that the committee consider the book as a whole; that "[t]he major criterion for the final decision on challenged resources is the appropriateness of the resource for its intended educational use[,]": and that "[n]o challenged instructional resource shall be removed solely because of the ideas expressed therein."

By exempting certain challenges from the District's regulations, the District has deprived itself, and its students, of the advantages of this very sound policy. The books in question will not appeal to every student. But if every library book is required to serve every student, the shelves would be bare. A library, including a school library, is meant to include a broad selection of books that provide value to students. For example, in of the books, *Gender Queer*, clearly has value for many students, especially "those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand," as noted by the *School Library Journal*. It was a 2020 American Library Association Alex Award Winner, a 2020 Stonewall — Israel Fishman Non-fiction Award Honor Book. By exempting *Gender Queer* from the standard procedures, the District raises the suspicion that the removal of the book was motivated by hostility to the book's position on gender nonconformity.

Had the district's regulations been followed, the District might have decided that, on balance, the needs of its students are best served by retaining some or all of the books on library shelves.

Therefore, we urge the District to return all of the books to the shelves until it amends its policies to ensure that all challenges are resolved pursuant to its adjudication procedures.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Library Association Office for Intellectual Freedom
Freedom to Read Foundation
PEN America
PEN America Children's and Young Adult Books Committee

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