

February 1, 2022

Board of Education
Forsyth County Schools
1120 Dahlonega Highway
Cumming, GA 30040

Re: Recent library book removals

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 the district's recent removal of numerous books from school libraries in violation of district regulations. We urge you to have the books returned to the shelves and to adjudicate the challenges to those books pursuant to the district's challenge regulations.

According to media reports, after a parent complained that some library books contained allegedly "sexually explicit" materials, Superintendent Bearden asked staff members to find and review any books that they believed contain "sexually explicit" material and, as a result of that review, eight books were removed from all district libraries. We have been informed by a district spokesperson that two of the books will be reviewed by the district's Media Committee, but that the others will not be reviewed and have been removed permanently.

These actions are in violation of the district's book challenge policies. Board Regulation IFBD-R(1), which was adopted only 14 months ago and revised last October, states: that challenges to library materials must be adjudicated according to the policy set forth therein, and that "[a]ccess to challenged materials **shall not** be restricted during the challenge process." Please note that the emphasis on "shall not" appears in the original regulation, yet the administration has chosen to ignore that very explicit policy. In addition, the policy states that "[a] questioned item will be considered in its entirety, not judged solely on portions taken out of context." By exempting from the review process works which supposedly contain "sexually explicit" material, the administration has violated that provision as well.

Book challenges are often highly contentious and emotional, and the district's regulations are well crafted to ensure that all parties feel that they have been heard and respected. It also ensures that decisions are made based on objective criteria which focus on the needs of students. For example, Board Regulation IFBD-R(1) provides that a diverse committee of

education professionals and community members review the challenged work; that the work be considered in its entirety; and that the review committee consider a long list of very specific criteria when determining whether to retain or remove the book.

Instead of following this very sound and thoughtful policy, a handful of administrators have substituted their own opinion for the deliberations of a committee that represents all members of the school community. Administrators are often inclined to dislike controversial books and are therefore more likely to call for their removal than a committee, which weighs their literary, artistic and political value for students.

Therefore, we urge the Board to return the challenged books to library shelves and to ensure that its challenge procedures are followed in this case and in all future cases.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: The Authors Guild
The PEN Children's and Young Adult Books Committee

A project of the National
Coalition Against Censorship

CO-SPONSORED BY

American Booksellers for Free
Expression
Comic Book Legal Defense
Fund
National Council of Teachers of
English

NCAC.ORG