

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP** **YOUTH
FREE
EXPRESSION**

February 22, 2022

Board of Directors
North Thurston Public Schools
305 College Street NE
Lacey, WA 98516-5390

Dear Board members:

The National Coalition Against Censorship is a coalition of national nonprofit groups which is dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, including the First Amendment rights of K-12 students, teachers, and staff. We are writing in regard to recent news reports indicating that the district has barred students from protesting on its campuses.

It is unclear from media reports whether the district has banned all protests, or only disruptive protests, and our inquiry to the district seeking clarification went unanswered. Therefore, we are writing to ask you to clarify that the ban applies only to protests which threaten to substantially disrupt the operations of the school. Any broader ban would be a violation of your students' clearly established First Amendment rights. More than fifty years ago, in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969), the Supreme Court established that students have the right to protest on school grounds, and that schools may not forbid such protests, nor punish students for engaging in such protests, unless the protests are conducted in a manner which threatens to substantially disrupt the activities of the school. That holding was reaffirmed by the Supreme Court just last year, in *Mahanoy Area School District v. B. L.*, 141 S.Ct. 2038 (2021).

Therefore, we ask that you clarify to your students and the community that students have the right to protest in a manner that does not substantially disrupt school, and that no student will be punished for engaging in such protest.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship