

March 23, 2022

Board of Trustees
Prosper Independent School District
605 East Seventh Street
Prosper, TX 75078

Re: Removal of Thirty Books from district libraries

Dear Trustees:

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 reports that thirty books have been removed from district libraries without following the district's book challenge procedures. We call upon the district to return the books to district libraries.

It is our understanding that, in late February or early March, more than fifty books were temporarily removed from district libraries on the suspicion that they were "pervasively vulgar." It was the position of district administrators that Board Policy EF Legal permits the removal of such books without complying with the district's instructional materials policy.

Subsequently, district librarians were told to permanently remove approximately 30 books from library shelves because, in the view of someone in the district, the books did not fit the district's "community standards." When asked for clarification regarding what "community standards" means, the district told librarians that the books were removed because they included explicit sex and/or drug use; profanity; and violence.

Both removals are highly problematic. First, the Board Policy EF Legal merely says that, under state and federal law, the district "may remove materials because they are pervasively vulgar." It does not say that the district must remove such books. It certainly does not state that the administrators are free to ignore the district's book review policies when such books are challenged.

Second, as discussed above, many of the books were removed for reasons other than "pervasive vulgarity." Those books clearly are not exempted from the district's book review policies by Board Policy EF Legal.

Finally, controversies surrounding instructional resources can be highly emotional, and it is important that all stakeholders feel that they have been heard. Moreover, different books appeal to different people, and so it is essential that book reviews are conducted with input from a variety of individuals, including teachers, parents, community members, and students.

The Board's book review regulations are well-crafted to achieve those objectives. For example, Board Policy EF Local states that book reviews should be conducted by a committee; that the committee must include teachers, and that "[o]ther members of the committee may include District-level staff, library staff, secondary-level students, parents, and any other appropriate individuals"; and that "[a]ll members of the committee shall review the challenged resource in its entirety." The policy also states that "[t]he major criterion for the final decision on challenged resources is the appropriateness of the resource for its intended educational use."

It is entirely improper for district employees to ignore duly adopted district regulations. It is also poor policy to permit this particular policy to be ignored. For example, the district has ordered the removal of several books written by Ellen Hopkins. Those books, which are written in verse, address social problems such as drug addiction, mental illness, and crime, and several have won major awards. There are clearly powerful reasons why such books might be valuable for some students. To allow one or two administrators to remove such books without ensuring that they hear from those who might benefit from them ignores the obligations of the school district to serve the needs of all its students. This is presumably why board policy entrusts book review decisions to a committee of diverse stakeholders, rather than to an administrator acting alone, without input.

Finally, ignoring book challenge procedures exposes the district to potential legal liability. The Supreme Court has limited the ability of public schools to remove library books. In particular, the Court has said that books cannot be removed because of disagreement with the views expressed therein. Well-crafted book challenge regulations ensure that those illicit concerns do not infect the adjudication process. When a district ignores those regulations, it creates suspicion that it has acted improperly.

Therefore, we urge the district to return the books to library shelves, and to make clear to all district personnel that compliance with board regulations is not optional.

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
National Council of Teachers of English\
PEN America Children's and Young Adult Books Committee
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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