

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

May 5, 2022

School Board of Walton County  
145 Park Street  
DeFuniak Springs, FL 32435

Re: Book challenge procedures

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 response to reports that your district recently received challenges to more than fifty library books, and to suggest that you might consider amending your book challenge procedures. Your current procedures do not clearly set forth the criteria to be used in adjudicating challenges, and do not ensure that review committees represent all stakeholder groups.

Challenges to educational materials are often emotionally charged, and as a result it is important that districts adjudicate challenges in a manner which ensures that all interested parties feel that their views have been heard and considered. It is also essential that community members feel that decisions about educational material are made in an objective, nonpolitical manner, and that the process makes serving the needs of students the paramount goal of the process. Finally, district procedures should discourage frivolous challenges, since adjudicating challenges can consume large amounts of employee time and attention.

We have almost fifty years of experience advising school districts how to achieve those goals. Attached please find a copy of our guidelines for administrators, which includes sample book challenge procedures from school districts across the country. For example, because your procedures include no explicit criteria governing the adjudication of challenges, that leaves the reviewers free to substitute their personal values for objective criteria. In contrast, the best policies include criteria such as relevance to the curriculum; reviews, awards and recommendations by educational experts; and age appropriateness. Moreover, the best review committees include teachers, community members, parents, and older students.

We have found that weak policies tend to engender controversy, since they open the district to accusation of bias or impropriety. Therefore, we urge you to consider amending your policies in the manner suggested in the attached guidelines. Effective book challenge procedures help the district to protect the freedom of expression and information of its students and staff.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Finan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Finan  
Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship

A project of the National  
Coalition Against Censorship

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