

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

August 25, 2022

Board of Education
Madison County Schools
476 Highland Colony Parkway
Ridgeland, MS 39157

Dear Members of the School Board,

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of 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 access to 10 books has been restricted so that students must obtain parental consent to read them. We are asking the district to reconsider its decision and remove restrictions from these books.

We are concerned that the district may have targeted these books for the political views they express. All 10 books on the list address race-related or LGBTQ themes. As you know, targeting viewpoints is improper under *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, (1982). Last year in *Mahanoy Area Sch. Dist. v. B. L.*, 594 U.S. ___, 141 S. Ct. 2038 (2021), the court reaffirmed this principle, stating that American public schools are "nurseries of democracy," and therefore, responsible for cultivating and preparing students for their responsibilities to society, including engaging with unpopular ideas. Any decision that reflects viewpoint discrimination would raise serious First Amendment concerns.

We are also concerned that segregating books may influence how students read and understand texts and may stigmatize the viewpoints and ideas expressed by those books. As a result, such stigmatization can discourage students from reading books that they might find stimulating or educational. It may also have a chilling effect on teachers and librarians who are likely to avoid acquiring books that could be potentially targeted for restricted access.

We understand that school districts sometimes come under heavy pressure to censor books, so we ask the district to take steps to ensure that any decisions are not made for improper reasons. The district can better address concerns about books by providing parents with more information about why they have been chosen for school classrooms and libraries. The National Council of Teachers of English encourages schools to "systematically access, develop, and provide parents with rationales that explain the pedagogical purposes" of instructional materials.

We strongly urge you to reconsider your current policy and to adopt alternatives that do not endanger students' rights to read and learn.

Thank you for your attention and consideration to this matter.

Sincerely,

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

Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: The Authors Guild
National Council of Teachers of English

A project of the National
Coalition Against Censorship

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