

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

August 24, 2022

School Board
Pinellas County Schools
301 4TH St. SW
Largo, FL 33770

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 the Pinellas County School Board has recommended removing a selection of books. We are concerned that these recommendations curtail students' First Amendment rights and adversely affect students' access to information. We call upon the district to rescind its recommendations and have schools return any books removed.

Our first concern is that many of the books were targeted for the political views they express, including *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You*; *What is White Privilege?*; and *Anti Racist Baby*. As you know, that is improper under *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, (1982). 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.

Our second concern is that the review process was inadequate. According to news reports, a committee of library media specialists reviewed 94 books over the span of just two days. It seems extremely unlikely that a comprehensive assessment of the educational value of these books could have taken place so quickly. It is important that book decisions are made thoughtfully because, as the Supreme Court stated in *Pico*, "access to ideas makes it possible for citizens generally to exercise their rights of free speech and press in a meaningful manner, such access prepares students for active and effective participation in the pluralistic, often contentious society in which they will soon be adult members." The Court reiterated that idea last year in *Mahanoy Area School District v. B.L.*, when it said, "America's public schools are the nurseries of democracy. Our representative democracy only works if we protect the 'marketplace of ideas.'" Students' rights to access ideas are threatened when book removal decisions are made in a cursory manner.

Also, when book challenge adjudications are made pursuant to a comprehensive committee review, it is less likely that decisions will be the result of political pressure or other improper considerations. Comprehensive reviews help ensure that a library collection will reflect the needs of all students.

Therefore, we urge you to retract these recommendations and, going forward, ensure that any decisions are made solely on the basis of legitimate criteria as mandated in district policy.

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

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