

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

October 14, 2022

Board of Trustees
School District of Pickens County
1348 Griffin Mill Road
Easley, SC 29640

Dear Members of the Board of 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 regards to the School Board's decision to remove *Stamped: Racism, Anti-Racism, and You* from the district's libraries. We urge the Board to return the book to library shelves.

We are concerned that the Board removed *Stamped* because they disagreed with the views expressed therein. During their September 26th meeting, Board Members described the book as "an opinion piece" and its ideas as "dangerous." For those reasons, the Board ordered the book removed despite the reconsideration committee's recommendation to retain it.

That action was improper because, as you know, the Supreme Court has warned that "school boards may not remove books from library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books" *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 872 (1982) (plurality opinion). Just last year, the Court reaffirmed the principle underlying *Pico*, stating that public schools have a responsibility to protect unpopular ideas. *Mahanoy Area Sch. Dist. v. B. L.*, 594 U.S. ___, 141 S. Ct. 2038, 2046 (2021). Therefore, any decision that suggests viewpoint discrimination raises serious First Amendment concerns.

Moreover, the Board's decision is also contrary to its own principles. For example, Policy IJ requires that the district "provide instructional materials on opposing sides of controversial issues so that young citizens may develop, under guidance, the practice of critical reading and thinking." Similarly, Policy IMB affirms that "students should have an opportunity to examine controversial issues within the context of their formal education experiences."

The district can uphold these principles while better addressing community concerns by providing parents with more information about why books have been chosen for school classrooms and libraries. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English encourages schools to "systematically assess, develop, and provide parents with rationales that explain the pedagogical purposes" of instructional materials.

We strongly urge you to return *Stamped* to district libraries and to ensure that future decisions are consistent with students' First Amendment rights to read.

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, flowing style.

Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

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

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