

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP**

**KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

January 17, 2022

School Board
St. Lucie Public Schools
9461 Brandywine Lane
Port St. Lucie, FL 34986

Dear Members of the School Board,

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 district's response to book challenges last year which appears to be in violation of district policy.

Our first concern is that former Superintendent Wayne Gent unilaterally removed from school libraries *Two Boys Kissing*, *Tricks*, *Sloppy Firsts*, and *The Bluest Eye* without submitting them to a review by a formal committee as required by district policy. When we asked the district for the rationale behind these removals, a district employee stated that the former superintendent "made those decisions independently after hearing the complaints from the citizen who filed the requests for reconsideration and spoke about them at Board Meetings."

As you know, the Supreme Court has limited the ability of districts to remove library books and we are concerned that the district has no idea whether or not Superintendent Gent acted illegally. Moreover, the superintendent's choice to ignore this policy was in opposition to the best interests of the district. The formation of a reevaluation committee helps ensure that book challenge decisions are made based on objective criteria which prioritize the needs of students and ensures that all stakeholders needs are heard. Therefore, we urge you to return the books to the shelves and submit them to the standard review process.

Our second concern is that other books which have been submitted for review this school year "are temporarily out of circulation until the conclusion of the challenge process." This is in direct contravention of the district's media specialist handbook, which explicitly states that "[a]ccess to challenged materials shall not be restricted during the reconsideration process." Ignoring this policy is unwise because temporarily removing books may encourage others to file meritless challenges for the sole purpose of limiting students' access to ideas they dislike. In addition, such challenges put enormous strain on the District which will be required to spend time adjudicating baseless claims. Therefore, we urge you to comply with district policy in all book challenge proceedings.

We understand that challenges to educational materials are often emotionally charged. As a result, it is important that districts adjudicate challenges in a manner which ensures that all parties feel that their views have been considered and that decisions about educational material are made in an objective, nonpolitical manner.

NCAC has created a resource to help school officials address the problem of book challenges, *Material Review and Policy Guidelines and Examples*. It is attached.

Please let us know if you have any questions or need any further support in this matter.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Authors Guild
Children's and Young Adult Books Committee, PEN America
National Council of Teachers of English
PEN America
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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