

**NATIONAL [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] COALITION
AGAINST [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] CENSORSHIP** **YOUTH
FREE
EXPRESSION**

February 8, 2023

Board of Education
Cardinal School District
15982 E. High Street
Middlefield, Ohio 44062

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression, including artistic expression and the rights of K-12 students, teachers and staff. We are writing in response to media reports that the district has canceled performances of Cardinal High School's spring production of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*. We urge the district to allow the students to perform the Tony Award winning musical.

According to a news article in *The Hill*, dated 2/1/23, the school received a few complaints about the play's language, an appearance by Jesus, and inclusion of gay characters. After a month of rehearsals, the musical was canceled because school administrators stated that the play contained "vulgarity and [was] therefore not suitable for our pre-teen and teenage students in an educational setting."

Those concerns are not sufficient grounds for canceling the play. As noted by the Dramatists Guild, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* is "among the most frequently produced shows in schools across the country." Moreover, the board has made a commitment to respecting students' free speech rights (Administration Regulation 5723). Therefore, the district should do everything possible to ensure that the play goes forward. The Board can respect students' free speech rights while recognizing concerns expressed by the superintendent by permitting the production to go forward by noting in the promotional material that the play is equivalent to a movie rated PG-13 or limiting attendance to high school students and adults.

We understand that challenges to student artistic expression are often emotionally charged. As a result, it is important that districts make decisions in a manner which ensures that all parties feel that their views have been considered and that decisions about artistic expression are handled in an objective, nonpolitical manner. NCAC has created a resource to help school officials address the problem of challenges to artistic displays including performances, *Guidelines For Developing Policies On The Display Of Student Art*. It is attached.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

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