

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

May 18, 2023

School Board  
Hanover County Public Schools  
200 Berkley Street  
Ashland, VA 23005

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 have almost 50 years of experience advising public institutions in developing best practices for book challenge policies that are consistent with First Amendment principles. We understand that these are emotionally charged issues and therefore, we are writing to suggest slight, but important changes to your proposed policy 6-5.2.

Our first concern with the proposed policy is that it requires materials to be removed pending adjudication if the complainant alleges that they are "pervasively vulgar." That means that the filing of a complaint by a single person can force the removal of a book for an unspecified period of time. This is an open invitation to would-be censors to file meritless challenges for the sole purpose of limiting students' access to books they dislike. For example, in Beaufort County Schools in South Carolina, a similar policy led to nearly a hundred books being challenged in October 2022. According to media reports, as of March 2023, only 37 books had been reviewed and only three were removed. Thus, the district has been forced to spend huge amounts of time adjudicating baseless claims and students have been denied access to valuable books for months. Your proposed policy risks exposing the district to a similar fate.

Our second concern is that the proposed policy says that when books are challenged for reasons other than pervasive vulgarity, they "may continue to be used until the challenge has been resolved or the appeals process has been completed." In our experience, the use of the term "may" is vague and can be misinterpreted. Instead, we suggest that the proposed policy be amended to say that books "shall continue to be used."

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.

Sincerely,



Christopher Finan  
Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship

CC: Superintendent Dr. Michael Gill

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

A project of the National  
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