

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

June 1, 2023

Board of Education
Newtown Public School District
3 Primrose St.
Newtown, CT 06470

Dear Members of the Newtown Board of Education,

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 to highlight issues that arose when challenges to Mike Curato's *Flamer* and Craig Thompson's *Blankets* were discussed during the May 16th school board meeting.

Our first concern is that news reports indicate that some board members have stated that the challenged books might be "obscene." This is potentially problematic because, as you know, very few books are legally obscene under Supreme Court precedent. For example, a book cannot be obscene unless the book, "taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, and scientific value." *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15 (1973). Similarly, under Connecticut law, a work is not considered "obscene as to minors" unless "taken as a whole, it lacks serious literary, artistic, educational, political or scientific value for minors." It is very unlikely that the District's professional educators have purchased books which meet this criterion.

Secondly, we are concerned that board members have suggested limiting students' access to books by requiring parental consent. Restrictions on access to books are ill-advised. Segregating books may influence how students read and understand texts, stigmatizing the viewpoints and ideas they express. This discourages students from reading books that they might find stimulating or educational. It may also have a chilling effect on teachers and librarians who are likely to avoid acquiring books that could be potentially targeted for restricted access. The district can better address concerns about books by providing parents with more information about why they have been chosen for school classrooms and libraries.

Finally, we understand that the review committee recommended that the books be retained. Review committees play an important role in adjudicating book challenges. Because they represent all stakeholders, they ensure that every party feels that their views have been considered and that decisions about educational material are made in an objective, nonpolitical manner. Therefore, school boards should give serious consideration to their recommendations and only overturn them in unusual cases.

Please let us know if we can be of any assistance in this matter.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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

A project of the National
Coalition Against Censorship

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