

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

November 28, 2023

School Board
North Syracuse Central School District
5355 West Taft Road
North Syracuse, NY 13212

Dear Members,

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 to recommend a small but important change to the process for reviewing challenged materials.

We understand there has been a recent challenge to books in the district. We have been told by Associate Superintendent Leahey that, during the district's ongoing review process, at least one of the challenged books was "temporarily removed while the committee is formed and reviews the complaint." We recommend that the district amend its policies to require that access to challenged materials remain unrestricted during the review process.

We understand that book challenges are often emotionally charged and districts must carefully balance the competing interests of various stakeholders. NCAC has almost 50 years of experience advising school districts in developing best practices to address these concerns. We have found that temporarily removing books before a final decision is made can encourage large-scale meritless challenges, which may be filed for the sole purpose of limiting students' access to ideas the complainer dislikes. When mass challenges are filed, most books are likely to be retained after review. Therefore, if books are temporarily removed, students are deprived of access to valuable material for no reason. In addition, large-scale challenges are harmful to the district itself because they force the administration to spend huge amounts of time and resources adjudicating challenges.

For example, in Beaufort County Schools in South Carolina, a policy which permitted temporary removal led to nearly a hundred books being challenged in October 2022. Over a year later, the district still has not completed the adjudication process. Moreover, of the 89 books reviewed so far, only four have been removed.¹

¹ "School Library Materials Reconsideration Information" *Beaufort County School District*
<https://www.beaufortschools.net/academics/instructional-programs-support/library-media-services/school-library-materials-reconsideration-information>

Therefore, we encourage you to amend your policy to ensure that access to instructional materials is not restricted before the review process is complete.

We have created a resource to help school officials address the problem of book challenges, *Material Review and Policy Guidelines and Examples*, which includes sample book challenge procedures from school districts across the country. It is attached.

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

Thank you for your attention and consideration to this matter.

Sincerely,



Christine Emeran
Youth Free Expression Program 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
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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