

NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP

KIDS' RIGHT TO READ

March 24, 2024

Principal Francesca McAuliffe
PS 55 The Henry M. Boehm School
54 Osborne Street
Staten Island, NY 10312

Dear Principal McAuliffe,

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 concern over news reports that school administrators may have improperly ordered the removal of hundreds of books without following New York City Department of Education policy.¹

According to media reports,² a community member took pictures of hundreds of children's books in boxes discarded outside PS 55, The Henry M. Boehm School in Staten Island. These books had handwritten notes attached that justified their removal. They included books like *We are Still Here*, a native American history, with a note that said "negative slant on white people," and a book about African-American artist Nina Simone with a note that read, "This is about how Black people were treated poorly but overcame it. (Can go both ways)."³ Another book titled *The Derby Daredevils* included a note that stated "Not approved. Discusses dad being transgender. Teenage girls having a crush on another girl in class."⁴ Such action suggests the likelihood that these books were removed for improper reasons, such as personal hostility to the perceived message of the book.

As you know, removing books from school libraries due to disagreement with the viewpoints therein is improper under *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, (1982). In *Mahanoy Area Sch. Dist. v. B. L.*, 594 U.S. ___, 141 S. Ct. 2038 (2021), the court reaffirmed this principle, stating that American public schools are "nursery of democracy," and therefore, responsible for cultivating and preparing students for their responsibilities to society, including engaging with unpopular ideas. Therefore,

¹"NYC School Librarian Guidebook: Selection of Materials." New York City School Library System, NYC DOE Office of Library Services, nycdoe.libguides.com/librarianguidebook/selection.

²Gould, Jessica. "Books on Black History, Immigration Found in Trash by Staten Island School, Sparking Investigation." Gothamist, gothamist.com/news/books-on-black-history-immigration-found-in-trash-by-staten-island-school-sparking-investigation.

³Alfonseca, Kiara. "Books Allegedly Tossed in the Trash at NYC School Sparks Investigation." ABC News, ABC News Network, abcnews.go.com/US/nyc-school-investigated-hundreds-books-allegedly-tossed-trash/story?id=108248819.

⁴Gould, Gothamist

removing books because of their content from libraries raises serious First Amendment concerns.

When book selections are made following a comprehensive review that includes multiple stakeholders, it is less likely that decisions will be the result of political pressure or other improper considerations. Comprehensive reviews help ensure that a library collection will reflect the needs of all students. The New York City's Department of Education Collection Development policy details procedures for school librarians to select reading materials for school libraries. To evaluate new materials, librarians should consult with reputable selection tools, educational specialists, and other members of the school community including students. Had the books been reviewed pursuant to the DOE's policy, the selection process might have determined that the students of PS 55 are best served by including the books on library shelves.

Therefore, we strongly urge you to return any library books that may have been removed, desist from removing any others, and uphold the First Amendment values of free inquiry and free access to information.

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
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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