

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

March 5, 2024

School Board
St. Johns County School District
40 Orange Street
St. Augustine, FL 32084

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 are writing in regard to the District's recent order that books with sexual content be removed from district libraries in accordance with Florida statute (1006.28). We are concerned with how the reviews are being conducted.

Based on media reports and the district's own statements, it is our understanding that the District has repeatedly violated its own policies when conducting reviews of books with sexual content. For example, district procedures outlined in the *Library Material Objection Procedures and Guidelines*, explicitly state that objections to books must be adjudicated by a committee, which includes school administrators, subject area experts, teachers, parents, and community members. Yet, the District has stated that removal decisions of books with sexual content have been made by the Superintendent, district library media committee, and/or individual media specialists guided by a "district guidance document" (*SJCSD Guidance for High School Library Books 4.28.23*), which provides broad criteria on how to examine books with sexual content.

We are also concerned that, according to a school spokesperson, Superintendent Forson unilaterally made the decision to remove Mary H.K. Choi's *Yolk* from district libraries. The Superintendent's actions were improper because district policy does not permit books to be removed by such a process. Under district policy, challenged books must be assessed by a review committee. We urge you to return the book to shelves until a challenge procedure is completed.

Aside from violating district policy, these decisions are unwise because challenges to educational materials are often highly contentious. As a result, it is important that districts adjudicate challenges in a transparent manner which ensures that all parties feel that their views have been considered and that decisions about educational material are made in an objective, nonpolitical manner. The district's current policy is well-crafted to address these concerns and ignoring it leaves the district open to suspicion that the district is acting improperly.

Therefore, we strongly urge the district to allow a committee to review any improperly removed books and to comply with district policy in all future book challenge proceedings.

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

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



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

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