

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP**

**KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

June 20, 2024

Board of Trustees
Greenville County Schools
301 E. Camperdown Way
Greenville, SC 29601

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 urge you to reconsider the Board's recent decision to remove Ellen Hopkins' *Perfect* and *Tilt* and Sarah J. Maas' *Empire of Storms* from high school libraries.

It is our understanding that the challenge to *Perfect*, *Tilt* and *Empire of Storms* were initially referred to a review committee. The committee in this case reviewed these three books and concluded that they should remain in the high school library. On May 29th, ignoring the committee's decision, the board voted 9-1 to permanently remove these books from school libraries.

The Board should only in the rarest case overrule the recommendations of a review committee. Recognizing that book challenges are often highly contentious and emotional, the district's regulations require a formal review to ensure that all parties feel that they have been heard and respected.¹ 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 that benefits the school community as a whole. Overturning the review committee's recommendation also opens the Board to claims that the books were removed based on their viewpoints, in violation of the First Amendment. Therefore, school boards should give serious consideration to their recommendations and only overturn them in unusual cases.

While not every book is right for every reader, the role of school libraries is to allow students and their parents to make choices according to their own interests, experiences, and family values. However, no parent, student or community member may impose their views, values and interests on others by restricting an entire community's access to particular books.

¹ *Greenville County Schools*, Policy KNBA, Complaints About Instructional Materials
<https://go.boarddocs.com/sc/greenville/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=9UXHMR493491>

The Supreme Court has established that public school officials' discretion regarding the removal of library books is particularly limited to ensure the protection of students' First Amendment right to access information because "students must always remain free to inquire, to study, and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding" and "the school library is the principal locus of such freedom." *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868-69 (1982)(plurality opinion). In the same case, the Court also cautioned, "[l]ocal school boards may not remove books from library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek by their removal to 'prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion.'" *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 872 (1982)(plurality opinion). Thus, the removal of books from public school libraries to suppress ideas is a violation of the First Amendment.

Therefore, we urge you to return *Perfect*, *Tilt* and *Empire of Storms* to the shelves of your high school libraries.

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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