

# National Coalition Against Censorship

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Joan E. Bertin  
Executive Director

## NCAC PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

Actors' Equity Association  
American Association of  
School Administrators  
American Association of  
University Professors  
American Association of  
University Women  
American Booksellers Foundation  
for Free Expression  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Ethical Union  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Federation of Television  
& Radio Artists  
American Jewish Committee  
American Jewish Congress  
American Library Association  
American Literary Translators  
Association  
American Orthopsychiatric Association  
American Society of Journalists  
& Authors  
Americans United for Separation of  
Church & State  
Association of American Publishers  
Authors Guild  
Catholics for Choice  
Children's Literature Association  
College Art Association  
The Creative Coalition  
Directors Guild of America  
The Dramatists Guild of America  
Educational Book & Media Association  
First Amendment Lawyers Association  
International Reading Association  
Lambda Legal  
Modern Language Association  
National Center for Science Education  
National Communication Association  
National Council for the Social Studies  
National Council of the Churches  
of Christ  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Education Association  
The Newspaper Guild/CWA  
Office of Communication,  
United Church of Christ  
PEN American Center  
People for the American Way  
Planned Parenthood Federation  
of America  
Screen Actors Guild  
Sexuality Information & Education  
Council of the U.S.  
Society of Children's Book Writers  
& Illustrators  
Student Press Law Center  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Democratic Intellectuals  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Methodist Communications,  
United Methodist Church  
Women's American ORT  
Writers Guild of America, East  
Writers Guild of America, West

April 8, 2010

Michael D. Moskalski, D.Ed., Superintendent/Principal  
Members of the School Board  
Rancocas Valley Regional High School  
520 Jacksonville Road  
Mt. Holly, NJ 08060

Dear Dr. Moskalski and Members of the Rancocas Valley School Board,

The undersigned organizations write to express concern about the challenge to several books in the Rancocas Valley Regional High School Media Center collection.

The challenge has been brought by a small organized group of residents who oppose three books in the library because they appear on a list of gay and lesbian-themed books created by the Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLSEN). Without questioning the sincerity of those who object to these book, their views are not shared by all, and they have no right to impose their views on others or to demand that the contents of the library reflect their personal, religious, or moral values.

No parent has the right "to tell a public school what his or her child will and will not be taught." *Leebaert v. Harrington*, 332 F.3d 134, 141 (2d Cir. 2003). Nor do parents have "a fundamental right generally to direct how a public school teaches their child." *Blau v. Fort Thomas Public School District, et al*, 401 F.3d 381, 395 (6th Cir. 2005). "[T]he mere fact that a child is exposed on occasion in public school to a concept offensive to a parent's religious belief does not inhibit the parent from instructing the child differently. A parent whose 'child is exposed to sensitive topics or information [at school] remains free to discuss these matters and to place them in the family's moral or religious context, or to supplement the information with more appropriate materials.'" *Parker v. Hurley*, 514 F. 3d 87, 105 (1st Cir. 2008) (citation omitted).

These principles apply with special force in the library. Schools "may not remove books from library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books...." *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 872 (1982). In that case, the Supreme Court rejected the claim that library selections should transmit "community values." Unlike "the compulsory environment of the classroom," in the library, the "regime of voluntary inquiry" controls. 457 U.S. at 869.

No one has to read something just because it's on the library shelf. No book is right for everyone, and the role of the library is to allow students to make choices according to their

own interests, experiences, and family values. Some parents prefer to keep their children from reading about sex; others may strongly disapprove of teen sexual activity and still not censor their children's reading. Some parents appreciate books that delve into the subject of sexual orientation, because they can create opportunities for adults and teens to talk about the topic. Even if the books are too mature for some students, they will be meaningful to others.

The attempt "to eliminate everything that is objectionable...will leave public schools in shreds. Nothing but educational confusion and a discrediting of the public school system can result...." *McCullum v. Board of Educ.*, 333 U.S. 203, 235 (1948) (Jackson, J. concurring). In practice, acceding to the demands to remove one kind of book invariably invites multiple, sometimes conflicting demands on school officials to exclude other material that other parents find objectionable. To avoid such difficulties, and to provide students with the breadth of information and skills necessary to succeed in a diverse society, educators are well-advised to defend the rights of students to access the broadest range of knowledge. School officials have much wider discretion to include material that has pedagogical value than to exclude it, and their decisions to do so have rarely, if ever, been rejected in the courts. See *Monteiro v. Tempe Union High School District* (9th Cir. 1998).

The task of selecting school materials properly belongs to professional librarians and educators. Parents may be equipped to make choices for their own children, but, no matter how well-intentioned, they simply are not equipped to make decisions for others.

The First Amendment protects the rights of each of us to make our own decisions about what to read and think. The Constitution and intellectual freedom demand no less.

Sincerely,

Joan Bertin, Executive Director, National Coalition Against Censorship.

Millie Davis, Division Director, Communications and Affiliate Services, National Council of Teachers of English

Chris Finan, President, American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression

Michael B. Keegan, President, People For the American Way Foundation

Judith Platt, Director, Freedom to Read and Communications/Public Affairs, Association of American Publishers

Larry Siems, Director, Freedom to Write and International Programs, PEN American Center