



KIDS' RIGHT TO READ

August 22, 2022

Collier County Public Schools
School Board
5775 Osceola Trail
Naples, FL 34109

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 response to reports that the Collier County School District libraries recently added an "Advisory Notice" label to over a hundred library books. We are asking the District to reconsider its decision and remove the advisory notices. We are concerned that labeling books in this manner harms students' education, is inconsistent with district policy, and raises constitutional concerns.

Advisory notices and warning labels are imprecise and potentially prejudicial. Segregating and labeling books influences how readers read and understand texts and can stigmatize the viewpoints and ideas expressed by those books. It can discourage students from reading books that they might find stimulating or educational and may have a chilling effect on teachers and librarians who are likely to avoid "red-flagged" books.

The use of advisory notices is inconsistent with the District's long-standing instructional materials policy (Policy 2520) which takes into account criteria such as age, educational purpose, and cultural diversity. The district's advisory notices conflict with that policy because they seem to be based solely on the objections of a handful of parents, not on professional evaluations of the merits of the books.

For this reason, the district's advisory notices raise potential First Amendment concerns. Last year in *Mahanoy Area Sch. Dist. v. B. L.*, 594 U.S. ___, 141 S. Ct. 2038 (2021), the Supreme Court stated that American public schools have an obligation to protect unpopular ideas. The Supreme Court has also established that "the school library is the principal locus of such freedom" where "students must always remain free to inquire, to study, and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding" *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868-69 (1982)(plurality opinion). The district's advisory notices undermine these constitutional principles.

The district can better address concerns about books by providing parents with more information about why they have been chosen for school classrooms and libraries. The National Council of Teachers of English encourages schools to "systematically

access, develop, and provide parents with rationales that explain the pedagogical purposes" of instructional materials.

We strongly urge you to reconsider your advisory notice policy and to adopt alternative policies that do not endanger students' rights to read and learn.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Author's Guild
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
National Council of Teachers of English
PEN America

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