

NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP

KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ

July 11, 2022

School Board
Fairview School District
7466 McCray Road,
Fairview, PA 16415

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 regards to the recent decision to remove *Gender Queer* from the Fairview High School library. We are concerned both by the circumvention of district policy and the consequences of these actions. We are asking you to return the book to the shelves pending a formal review.

District policy 109.2 explicitly states that book challenges must be adjudicated by a committee of professionals, and that the "[d]ecision of [the] reevaluation committee is binding." Yet, as we understand it, the decision to remove *Gender Queer* was made unilaterally by Superintendent Erik Kincade, ignoring this policy. In an email that was shared with the media, the superintendent acknowledges that he "[did] not feel the need to create a committee to help with these book selections."

The Superintendent's decision also appears to be a breach of the district policy to consider library resources holistically. His email states that he judged the book based on "some of the graphic images." However, district policy requires a reevaluation committee to "weigh values and faults and form opinions based on the material as a whole, rather than passages taken out of context."

District Policy 109.2 offers a thoughtful and intentional procedure for addressing library resource challenges. Dr. Kincade's choice to ignore this policy was both improper and in opposition to the best interests of the Fairview School District. The formation of a reevaluation committee helps ensure that book challenge decisions are made based on objective criteria which prioritize the needs of students. The review process helps guarantee that the needs of all students are served by the district's educational resources.

A library, including a school library, should include a broad selection of books that provide value to students. *Gender Queer* offers an educational resource not just for LGBTQ students, but for all Fairview High students. *School Library Journal* calls *Gender Queer* "a great resource for those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand."

Gender Queer won the American Library Association's Alex Award for books "that have special appeal to young adults, ages 12 through 18."

Your school district aspires to produce students who are "empowered, innovative, and inspired learners....valuing others and making positive contributions to our global society." Graphic novels like *Gender Queer* are essential to achieve this goal. They provide complicated but honest stories that help students develop a wider understanding of their world.

We urge you to reaffirm your commitment to expanding the opportunities for intellectual engagement for your students by enforcing your established policies. Ignoring written policy sets a dangerous precedent for the district and threatens the academic and intellectual freedom of your students.

Please return *Gender Queer* to the library and allow a formal review that is conducted in accordance with district policies.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours,,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

Co-signed by: American Booksellers for Free Expression
The Authors Guild
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
National Council of Teachers of English
PEN America
The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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