

NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP

KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ

January 7, 2022

School Board Members
Wayzata Public Schools
210 County Road 101 N
P.O. Box 660
Wayzata, MN 55391

Re: Removal of *Lawn Boy*

Dear Board Members:

The National Coalition Against Censorship is an alliance of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting freedom of expression. We are writing in regard to the recent removal of *Lawn Boy* from the Wayzata High School library in violation of District regulations.

It is our understanding that the principal of Wayzata High School removed the book without following the District's book challenge procedures. Book challenges are often highly contentious and emotional, and the District's regulations are well crafted to ensure that all parties feel that they have been heard and respected, and also to ensure that decisions are made based on objective criteria which focus on the needs of students. For example, Board Policy 529-R provides that a diverse committee of education professionals and community members review the challenged work; that the person challenging the work not be a member of the committee; that the primary consideration be the educational suitability of the work, and that the committee's decision can only be overturned by a vote of the Board.

BP 529-R applies to challenges brought by school employees; hence it applies in this case, which was apparently brought by Principal Gengler. By violating the District's regulations, Principal Gengler has not only set a poor example for students, he has also deprived the school, and its students, of the advantages of the District's very sound book challenge policy. Indeed, the removal of *Lawn Boy* demonstrates the pitfalls of exempting some challenges from the District's regulations. *Lawn Boy* will not appeal to every student. But if every library book is required to serve every student, the shelves would be bare. A library, including a school library, is meant to include a broad selection of books that provide value to a range of students. Had the book been reviewed by a committee of stakeholders as required by District policies, the

committee might have determined that the students of Wayzata High School are best served by retaining the book on library shelves, as was recently the case in Fairfax County, Virginia.¹

In addition, it is highly problematic for book removal decisions to be made by a single person. Such action increases the likelihood that a book will be removed for improper reasons, such as personal hostility to the perceived message of the book. Moreover, libraries have a public mission to serve all of its community, and of course, every library book may not appeal to all readers. When book removal decisions are made by a properly constituted committee, it is more likely that books meeting all students' needs will be incorporated into the library's collection. It is less likely that decisions will be the result of political pressure or other improper considerations.

Therefore, we urge the District to return *Lawn Boy* to the shelves at Wayzata High School and to conduct a formal review of the book pursuant to District policy. We also encourage you to ensure that the District's book challenge regulations are followed in the future.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

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

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¹ Nicole Asbury (November 23, 2021). "Fairfax schools will return two books to shelves after complaints over sexual content". *Washington Post*. Retrieved November 23, 2021.