

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP** **KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

February 9, 2023

School Board
Pinellas County Schools
301 4TH St. SW
Largo, FL 33770

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 regard to the District's recent removal of the book *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison from school libraries and classrooms.

Our concern is that Associate Superintendent Daniel Evans bypassed written policy and improperly removed *The Bluest Eye* from school libraries and curriculum. Board Policy requires that challenges to instructional and library media materials will be adjudicated by the assigned school or district-level review committee. It says, "The material in question will remain in use until the... Committee recommends a final decision."

The Associate Superintendent has justified the book removal based on the Florida Department of Education's training on the implementation of recently adopted Florida law regarding library book collections. However, the training specifically instructs employees to "follow your district policy" when adjudicating challenged materials.

School policy requires that library books be "suited to student needs and their ability to comprehend the material presented" and "appropriate for the grade level and age group for which the materials are used and made available." The specific criteria set forth in the training includes "the accurate portrayal of the state's broad racial, ethnic, socioeconomic and cultural diversity, without bias or indoctrination."

Decisions about how to apply these criteria are best made by committees that represent all stakeholders. In fact, the state training explicitly states that decisions should be made after gathering input from "teachers, students, parents, administration."

We urge the district to return the book to school libraries and classrooms and to comply with district policy in all book challenge proceedings.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely yours,



Christopher Finan
Executive 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
National Council of Teachers of English
PEN America
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

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