

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP**

**KIDS'
RIGHT
TO READ**

August 16, 2023

Board of Education
Craven County Schools
3600 Trent Road
New Bern, NC 28562

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

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 news reports that 11 school library books are currently being reviewed by school board members. We would like to suggest that you could avoid potential controversy and better serve students by revising your procedures for addressing objections to materials.

We understand issues around what materials should be available to students are often emotionally charged. As a result, it is important that districts make decisions about library collections in a manner which ensures that all parties, including educational professionals, students, parents and other members of the school community, feel that their views have been considered and that decisions about educational material are made in an objective, nonpolitical manner.

NCAC has almost 50 years of experience advising public institutions in developing best practices that address those concerns. We recommend that book review policies include all of the following:

1. Record all complaints in writing using a form which requires complainants to affirm that they have read the entire book and identify the grounds for their objections. A written form helps reviewers identify the controversial elements of the work and increases transparency.
2. Convene a diverse committee of educators and other stakeholders to review the material and recommend a decision to the administration. A diverse committee ensures that all community stakeholders voices are heard and considered.
3. Establish clear and objective review criteria for the committee to follow in making their recommendation. Such criteria helps ensure that such recommendations are made in the best interests of students as opposed to disagreement with the viewpoints expressed in the challenged material.
4. Provide a process by which committee decisions can be appealed to the board.
5. Finally we recommend that the policy states that the challenged materials remain on the shelves pending review. The absence of this provision may

encourage the filing of meritless challenges for the sole purpose of limiting students' access to books with unpopular views and force districts to spend enormous amounts of time adjudicating challenges. For example, in Beaufort County Schools in South Carolina, a policy which lacked that provision led to nearly a hundred books being challenged in October 2022. According to media reports, as of March 2023, only 37 books had been reviewed and only three were removed.

We have attached a resource, *Material Review and Policy Guidelines and Examples*, which elaborates on our recommendations and includes sample policies from districts across the country.

We believe that a robust and clear policy is in everyone's best interest. An effective book challenge procedure helps ensure that the district continues to uphold the rights of its students to free inquiry and free expression, while ensuring that all parties feel that their concerns have been heard and considered by the district.

Please let us know if you have any questions or need any further support in this matter.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

CC: Superintendent Dr. Wendy Miller

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

A project of the National
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