

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

October 16, 2023

School Board
Sunapee School District
70 Lower Main Street
Sunapee, NH 03782

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 have nearly 50 years of experience advising public institutions in developing best practices for addressing book challenges. We have been made aware that you are updating your Book and Material Selection Policy and we are writing to recommend a revision to your proposed policy.

We note that your Policy IIA Book and Material Selection currently states that "books or materials involved will be suspended pending a decision in writing by the above committee." We have found that such policies are counterproductive because they encourage large-scale meritless challenges, which may be filed for the sole purpose of temporarily, but effectively limiting students' access to ideas the complainers dislike. When mass challenges are filed in the absence of such a policy, most books removed from libraries are likely to be returned after review. In the meantime, however, students are deprived of these books.

For example, in Beaufort County Schools in South Carolina, a policy which contained a similar provision led to nearly a hundred books being challenged in October 2022. According to the school's website, as of September 2023, only 72 books had been reviewed and only four were removed.¹ Thus students have been deprived of valuable books for almost a year.

Moreover, as Beaufort County demonstrates, large-scale challenges are also harmful to the district itself because they force the administration to spend huge amounts of time and resources adjudicating challenges. Any policy that encourages large-scale challenges is problematic.

For these reasons, many districts include an explicit requirement that access to challenged books remain unrestricted during the reconsideration process. Therefore, we encourage you to add similar language to your revised policy.

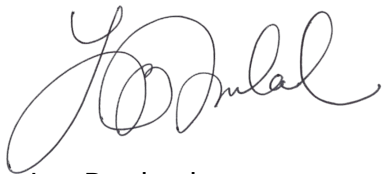
¹"School Library Materials Reconsideration Information" *Beaufort County School District*
<https://www.beaufortschools.net/academics/instructional-programs-support/library-media-services/school-library-materials-reconsideration-information>

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.

Please let us know if you have any questions or need any further support in this matter; I would be delighted to discuss further with you.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lee Rowland', written in a cursive style.

Lee Rowland
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship
Lee@ncac.org

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

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