

November 17, 2021

School Board Members  
Brevard County Public Schools  
2700 Judge Fran Jamieson Way  
Viera, FL 3294

Re: Book Challenge Procedures / *Gender Queer*

Dear Board Members:

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 *Gender Queer* from school library shelves.

It is our understanding that the District did not follow its book challenge procedures regarding *Gender Queer*. According to a statement by Superintendent Mark Mullins, members of the school staff decided to remove the book on their own authority. "BPS staff immediately agreed that this book violates our guidelines and that it has no place in our school district," Mullins said.

We are writing to urge you to ensure that all challenges are addressed pursuant to District regulations. Book challenges are often highly contentious and emotional, and the District's regulations are well crafted to guarantee 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, the District policy requires that books be reviewed by a committee that includes all stakeholders; that the committee meetings be publicized and open to the public; and that the committee consider the book as a whole, with a focus on "determin[ing] the extent the challenged material supports the curriculum."

By exempting the challenges to *Gender Queer* from the District's regulations, the District has deprived itself, and its students, of the advantages of this sound policy. Indeed, the removal of *Gender Queer* demonstrates the pitfalls of exempting certain challenges from the District's regulations. *Gender Queer* 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 students. *Gender Queer* clearly has value for many students, especially "those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand," as noted by

the *School Library Journal*. It was a 2020 American Library Association Alex Award Winner, a 2020 Stonewall — Israel Fishman Non-fiction Award Honor Book. By exempting *Gender Queer* from the standard procedures, the District raises the suspicion that the removal of the book was motivated by hostility to the book's position on gender nonconformity.

Had the district's regulations been followed, the District might have decided that, on balance, the needs of its students are best served by retaining *Gender Queer* on library shelves.

Therefore, we urge the District to submit *Gender Queer* to the mandated review process, return it to the shelves pending completion of the review as mandated by district procedures, and make it clear to employees that all challenges must be resolved pursuant to those procedures.

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  
PEN America Children's and Young Adult Book Committee  
Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators

A project of the National  
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