



SCHOOLS Ely, Minnesota

Chad Davis, parent of an 11th grade English student, objected to the teaching of *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* at the April 12, 2021, board meeting of the Ely High School.

Austin Channing Brown's best-selling memoir details myriad ways in which institutions claiming to value diversity fall short of their principles. It also explores the role White, middle-class, evangelicalism has played in increasing racial hostility in the country.

Davis decried the book as full of "anti-White rhetoric and cancel culture all rooted in critical race theory." He called for its removal from the curriculum.

He expressed concern that the email he sent to English teacher James Lah, Principal Megan Anderson, School Superintendent Erik Erie, and the school board did not result in the book being banned.

This is the first book challenge the school has received in at least 20 years. The district does not have a policy in place to address it.

The Minnesota School Board Association advised them to adopt the association's recommended policy on textbooks and instructional materials. However, any proposed change to school district policy must be read at three consecutive school board meetings before it can be approved—a process which was not yet underway.

At the May 10 board meeting, Erie announced that the Memorial School English Department reviewed the book and the ban request.

Erie said they "will have a recommendation that will go to the 6-12 principal. The principal will make a recommendation and it will be discussed at our advisory council committee later this month."

**Reported in: *The Timberjay*,
April 14, 2021, and May 12, 2021.**

St. Louis County, Missouri

Parents complained about the use of *Dear Martin* by Nic Stone in the "culture and identity" unit of Rockwood School District's ninth grade English classes.

Rockwood School District is headquartered in Eureka and is St. Louis County's largest public school system, serving over 22,000 students.

Dear Martin is about Justyce McAllister, a Black student attending a predominantly White preparatory high school in Atlanta. After being thrown to the ground and handcuffed by a White police officer, he attempts to make sense of life as a Black teenager today by writing letters to the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Stone said the shooting deaths of Jordan Davis and Michael Brown inspired and informed her writing.

Dear Martin was nominated for numerous awards and was included on the American Library Association's 2018 Top Ten Amazing Audiobooks for Young Adults and Top Ten Quick Picks for Reluctant Young Adult Readers lists.

The National Coalition Against Censorship stated that the book "speaks to many Black teens' experiences with racism and explores the different historical approaches to confronting racist violence, while offering words of affirmation and healing."

The school district's lesson plans contextualize the book's themes of racism and police violence through discussions on racial profiling, civil disobedience, and affirmative action.

Janet Deidrick said she was "heart-sick" when listening to the audiobook and hearing what she described as an "anti-police sentiment."

Complaints from parents are part of a larger movement resisting the

district's efforts to adopt a more inclusive curriculum aligned with its "educational equity resolution" and goals of "identifying conscious and unconscious biases and eliminating barriers to educational achievement."

According to Rockwood spokesperson Mary LaPak, when the district selects "literature that students can choose to read, we look for books that include people with disabilities, people of different backgrounds, and people with different life experiences. We want all children to have access to books that are reflective of themselves."

To protest this, local parents organized a forum with Republican state Representative Dottie Bailey and state Senators Andrew Koenig and Cindy O'Laughlin to discuss "what is being taught in your child's school."

Earlier this year, the district increased security at its board meetings to two or three police officers. LaPak said this was in response to the "tone of social media posts directed towards district personnel."

Rockwood Superintendent Mark Miles and District Director of Educational Equity and Diversity Brittany Hogan are both stepping down from their positions. Miles has served for two years and Hogan has served for one.

According to Geneviève Steidtmann, parent of a Rockwood seventh grader, the pushback against the curriculum is "proving the point that we need this education more than ever. . . . Stopping teachers from teaching facts and the truth is dangerous."

Missouri is one of the states that currently has a bill to ban the teaching of critical race theory in public schools passing through their legislature (HB 952).



(See “Nationwide” on page 17 for more news pertaining to efforts to ban the teaching of critical race theory.)

Reported in: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 29, 2021.

Springfield, Missouri

During a meeting of the Springfield Public Schools Board, Theresa Drussa, grandmother of a high school senior, challenged the teaching of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky.

She alleged the book was “pornographic” and “contains sexual abuse, teenage sex, rape, abortion, and LSD.” While she said she did not read past page 31, she argued “that was plenty.” She said her desire to ban the book from the school is not “just about my grandchildren. It’s about all children. It scares me to think how many girls may have been date raped because the guys read that book.”

Chbosky’s 1999 young adult novel is narrated by a freshman attending a high school in a Pittsburgh suburb during the early 90’s. It addresses themes and issues commonly encountered during adolescence, including sexuality, drug use, rape, and mental health.

The Perks of Being a Wallflower was included on the American Library Association’s (ALA) lists of Best Books for Young Adults and Best Books for Reluctant Readers in 2000.

It has also made seven appearances on ALA’s Top Ten Most Challenged Books Lists (2004, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2013, and 2014).

Springfield Public Schools taught Chbosky’s novel in an elective course on film and literature that is available to high school juniors and seniors. The book and the film it inspired were one of several options for the course.

Stephen Hall, chief communications officer for Springfield Public

Schools, stated, “All options are included in the syllabus for both students and parents to review.”

Hall added that “throughout history we have had a number of pieces of literature that have been controversial for various reasons. Part of what we have to do as we evaluate curriculum and make decisions is [ask ourselves,] ‘How can we best prepare students at the appropriate age to be critical thinkers?’ The best way to become critical thinkers, oftentimes, is to have access to a variety of literature.”

In accordance with their policy, a committee made up of the principal, two teachers, and a librarian will review the book and consider Drussa’s request to remove it from the curriculum.

Other possible outcomes include limiting its use, requiring a permission slip or parental consent to read it, or simply retaining it without restriction.

No deadline was set for the committee to make their determination.

Reported in: KY3, March 30, 2021.

La Vista, Nebraska

After a parent complained about the book *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child’s Story About Racial Injustice*, Papillion-La Vista Schools Superintendent Andrew Rikli offered an apology to the police and publicly disparaged his staff. He pulled the book and the read-aloud video of it from the schools.

Jared Wagenknecht, vice president of the Papillion-La Vista Education Association (PLEA), defended both the curriculum and its teachers at the April 12 board meeting of the Papillion-La Vista School.

The book by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard follows a White family and a Black

family as they discuss the police shooting of a Black man in their community. It aims to “answer children’s questions about such traumatic events and to help children identify and counter racial injustice in their own lives.”

Wagenknecht said that PLEA “stands in strong support of educators who engage their students in courageous conversations about racism and social justice. The problem is not the material in question. The problem is continuing to ignore the very real issues of racism and injustice. It is also concerning that teachers were immediately blamed.”

He explained that the content was provided to teachers in accordance with district policy by a group of “instructional coaches and administrators” tasked with engaging “students in conversations about race equity and injustices.”

Wagenknecht observed the district didn’t follow its policies for dealing with challenged materials, noting the following oversights: failure to consult with teachers, not providing alternative materials, and not requesting a review board.

“Instead, the district gave unilateral veto power to one particular community group. This set a dangerous precedent,” said Wagenknecht.

Elizabeth von Nagy, a Papillion-La Vista High School librarian, spoke about the book’s authors, accolades, and merits.

Von Nagy beseeched the board members to speak with the district’s Black students. “I urge you to ask them if the district’s response was palpable and supportive, especially given the district’s focus on equity and diversity this school year.”

A resident identifying himself as a “concerned citizen” spoke up to call the book “race propaganda.”



Superintendent Rikli again apologized for the book and defended banning it. “We are not a school district that believes that it is our role to share negative perceptions with our students about law enforcement.”

Wagenknecht observed that the worst consequences of the district’s response are the missed opportunities for discussion and questions. “Our students deserve to be engaged. It is our job to help students process and make sense of the world that they have inherited.”

Reported in: *Omaha World-Herald*, April 14, 2021; *WOWT*, April 8, 2021, and April 12, 2021.

Austin, Texas

The Eanes Independent School District (ISD) in Austin, Texas, stopped teaching Kyle Lukoff’s picture book *Call Me Max* after receiving parent complaints.

Lukoff’s book tells the story of a young transgender boy discovering his identity. Lukoff is transgender and a former elementary school librarian in addition to being an award-winning children’s author.

The book was part of a list of suggested diverse books circulated by a district teacher and had not been adopted through the district’s curriculum review process.

Call Me Max was the only title on the list whose teaching was prohibited. Parents also called for the termination of the teacher who read it aloud in the classroom.

The school district’s Chief Learning Officer, Susan Fambrough, sent an email to all parents stating, “Counselors were made available to support students and the school administration worked with families to provide an explanation and reassurances.”

Lukoff responded with a public letter to Fambrough in which he stated:

“I spent eight years as an elementary school librarian, and am familiar with the situations where so many resources are expended to ensure the wellbeing of students and families--after the Sandy Hook shooting, for example, or after a death in the school, or some other crisis.”

Lukoff asked, “Do you believe that a read-aloud about a transgender child is an equivalent trauma? How do you think transgender people in your community feel having their identities treated like a disaster?”

Other parents and transgender advocates strongly criticized the ISD’s response.

“It tells them that they must be invisible, that they can’t talk about who they are, that they are unworthy,” said Jo Ivester, whose transgender son attended Eanes schools from kindergarten through graduation. She added that reading *Call Me Max* would have been life-changing for her son.

A transgender student who graduated from the ISD in 2020 told *Today*, “One of the reasons I never came out as trans at school is because I knew the school wouldn’t protect me if I needed protecting. This whole situation is sending that same message to every trans kid in the district today.”

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) sent a letter to the Eanes ISD Board of Trustees stating, “The singling out of this one book from the list and banning it for the viewpoint it expresses, raises serious constitutional concerns.”

The statement continued, “Since the District assigns many books in which cisgendered individuals are presented, the removal of *Call Me Max* suggests that the District has engaged in censorship, which violates the First Amendment.”

Furthermore, NCAC compelled the ISD’s Board to “publicly state that

the teacher did not commit a terminable offense, nor any offense at all, and will not be disciplined for his or her good faith effort to comply with the District’s stated devotion to diversity, equity, and inclusion.”

Reported in: *Today*, March 12, 2021; *School Library Journal*, March 17, 2021; *National Coalition Against Censorship*, March 30, 2021.

Leander, Texas

Numerous books were pulled from the shelves of Leander Independent School District (ISD) high schools following a raucous meeting in which a woman dropped a dildo on the table in front of the school board members.

The challenged books were used in non-mandatory, student-led book clubs. District leaders say the titles were selected to encourage independent reading by including a variety of topics, voices, and cultures.

An email from the district stated that reading lists were not vetted in their typical fashion. The selection process took place in the spring and summer of 2020 and was done remotely due to the pandemic. As a result, recommendations and online reviews were relied upon more heavily than usual.

One book parents specifically challenged during the February 25, 2021, board meeting was *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado. Machado’s award-winning memoir is about her struggles to survive domestic violence and escape an abusive lesbian relationship.

“Material that has intense themes, that’s what literature is,” Machado said. “Suggesting that students reading a book that will help them think about relationships and how those can look, suggesting that that’s child abuse, is deranged and homophobic.”



“You cannot prevent your children from being gay. You cannot prevent your children from being in relationships. You cannot prevent your children from going out into the world and living the life they want to live. I would hope that [parents] would value their kids and their kids’ lives, health, and safety over their squeamishness,” said Machado.

Lori Hines, who dropped the dildo during the board meeting, said the school should adhere to a “solid, traditional curriculum.” She continued, “In all these book clubs, there’s no classic literature. When I say classic, I am including anything from the antiquities to *To Kill a Mockingbird*.”

Another parent challenged the book *None of the Above* by I.W. Gregorio, a novel about a teenage intersex girl whose secret is revealed to her entire school.

The mother objected to Gregario’s book because it discussed “gender fluidity and gender reassignment surgery” and, in her opinion, had “anti-Christian themes.”

Jacqueline Woodson’s novel *Red at the Bone* was also specifically challenged by parents at the meeting. One parent characterized it as “erotica for teens.”

Stephani Bercu, a parent of both an eighth and a tenth grader, said reading passages from these books at board meetings misrepresents texts with complex themes.

“I have no problem with someone keeping their kid from reading a book on the list,” Bercu said. “You always have the option of talking to the teacher to find another alternative.”

However, Bercu viewed removing options from the reading lists as indefensible, as then “they are trying to take the choice away from my child.”

Lorena Germán, who taught English at Headwaters School in Austin, spoke out against a proposal to

require parental permission to read book club titles.

“We’re going to ask for permission forms for some books and not others? That’s a form of censorship. And we’ve seen that the books that have the worst luck with censorship are books . . . about LGBTQ [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning] topics,” said Germán.

The Citizen’s Curriculum Advisory Committee (CCAC) was tasked with vetting all 140 student-choice book club selections. CCAC consists of more than 70 parents, educators, counselors, librarians, instructional coaches, principals, and assistant principals.

While many titles are yet to be reviewed by CCAC, the following titles had been removed from the curriculum or suspended pending further review as of April 21:

Removed:

- *Kiss Number 8* by Colleen AF Venable
- *Laura Dean Keeps Breaking Up with Me* by Mariko Tamaki
- *Shirley Jackson’s The Lottery: The Authorized Graphic Adaptation* by Miles Hyman
- *The Handmaid’s Tale: The Graphic Novel* by Margaret Atwood
- *V for Vendetta* by Alan Moore
- *Y: The Last Man: Book One* by Brian K. Vaughan

Suspended pending further review:

- *In the Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado
- *None of the Above* by I.W. Gregorio
- *Red at the Bone* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Beneath a Meth Moon: An Elegy* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez
- *The Nowhere Girls* by Amy Reed

- *How I Resist* by Maureen Johnson, editor
- *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter* by Erika Sánchez
- *What We Saw* by Aaron Hartzler
- *My Friend Dahmer* by Derf Backderf
- *Speak: The Graphic Novel* by Laurie Halse Anderson

Virtually all of the banned titles focus on characters or have authors who are women; Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC); or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) themes.

Board member Jim MacKay said he wants to see an itemization of what sexual content is acceptable and unacceptable in classroom material.

Aaron Johnson, another board member, unilaterally defended book bans. “We use an Internet content filter to protect our students and staff every day. In my mind, this is no different. We should have an effective filter for literature.”

Many people recognized the benefits of exploring challenging topics by discussing literary works within an educational framework guided by teachers and librarians.

Bercu said, “We pay our curriculum people and our English teachers because that’s their expertise and that’s their knowledge. If we are not trusting our qualified paid professionals, then why are we paying them?”

“It breaks my heart that we’re just muting those voices,” said Stephanie Martin, a Leander ISD teacher. “What are we saying to our kids? ‘No, those stories don’t matter. They’re being taken away from you.’”

Twenty authors of books removed or suspended from the Leander ISD book club curriculum sent an open



letter to school district officials on April 21, 2021.

They affirmed that including “own voices” LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC works in the curriculum is “both morally necessary and educationally beneficial.”

The letter states:

We believe that there is zero reason that any of the books that have been targeted for removal in Leander cannot be discussed in the classroom in age-appropriate ways. In fact, it is the very role of teachers and librarians to make those determinations and to guide students in their learning and exploration, including through subject matter that may require thoughtful conversation and engagement.

In all, we are deeply concerned that this entire episode risks sending a dangerous message to students: that the best way to confront ideas or literature with which one disagrees is to prohibit or silence it, rather than finding other, constructive ways to engage with it.

The letter concludes, “We believe in the capacity of these and all books to expand the reader’s frame of reference—challenging them to confront new ideas and allowing them to explore other perspectives. We are sending this letter to you today not simply to stand up for our own books, but to stand against censorship in our schools. We call on you to resist this misguided effort to ban books and graphic novels, and to revoke any current bans and suspensions for the dignity and equality of all.”

The letter can be viewed in its entirety on PEN America’s website.

Reported in: KXAN, March 3, 2021; KVUE, March 8, 2021, and April 6, 2021; Austin American-Statesman, March 9, 2021; Community Impact Newspaper,

March 29, 2021, and April 21, 2021; PEN America, April 21, 2021.

Richardson, Texas

During the April 5, 2021, board meeting of the Richardson Independent School District (ISD), parents objected that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) materials were added to the library catalog.

Some parents argued that students should not be allowed to read about gender identity or transgender issues and that including such books in the catalog makes them too easy to find.

Superintendent Jeannie Stone issued a statement that books related to gender identity and LGBTQIA+ topics have been present in Richardson ISD libraries for years and that they recently added more age-appropriate books on gender identity as part of ongoing inclusiveness efforts.

Stephanie Tyroch, mother of two Richardson students, felt the ISD should provide education solely on reading, writing, and mathematics. She said social and political issues should only be taught at home.

Parent Kelli Vaughn-Hebert praised the ISD for making inclusive materials available to kids. She said that their kids spend a majority of their day around diverse classmates and should be taught how to respect and appreciate students with different backgrounds.

Resident Barndi Dawson observed that children’s books allow students to approach discussions on sensitive topics. “We may not have the same belief system, but we all want what is best for our children, and resource options allow all of us to choose reading materials that meet our own family’s needs,” said Dawson.

Julie Briggs, director of library and information technology for

Richardson ISD, said that the district’s Equity Council recently discussed the books and decided to keep them in elementary libraries.

Briggs said that research suggests the longer transgender children are not recognized by the gender they identify with, the more profound and long-lasting the negative consequences they experience will be. These consequences may include drug misuse, degraded mental health, and suicide.

“Together we can ensure that all students can find books that are a good fit for them and their own families,” Briggs said. She added that the same policies that allow for LGBTQIA+ materials to be represented in their libraries also allow books about God to be included.

The board could take no action regarding books, curriculum, or the library’s collection policy at the meeting, as the discussion emerged organically and was not on the agenda.

Reported in: *The Dallas Morning News*, April 7, 2021.

Murray, Utah

Murray City School District (MCSD) suspended their Equity Book Bundle Program and Equity Council after a third-grader brought a copy of Kyle Lukoff’s picture book *Call Me Max* to school.

The student who owned the book wanted to share it with his class, so he asked his teacher to read it. Parents complained because the book was about a transgender child.

Call Me Max was not part of the Equity Book Bundle Program, had not been selected by the Equity Council, and was not in any of the school districts’ libraries. The programs were suspended anyway as they had become synonymous with the MCSD’s effort to teach about diversity.



Of the 38 books included in the Equity Book Bundle Program, only two were about the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community: *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders, for fifth graders, and *Rainbow Revolutionaries: 50 LGBTQ+ People Who Made History* by Sarah Prager, for sixth graders.

The primary focus of the Equity Council and book program was to help address race and racism by introducing students to authors who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

MCSD's suspension of this program during Black History Month proved controversial. In response to community complaints, MCSD spokesperson Dave Perry called the timing "purely coincidental."

Other community members voiced their dismay that MCSD suspended their equity programs over an unrelated event in an effort to placate transphobic parents.

"I feel it sends a terrible message to the LGBTQ+ community to pause this council for an incident that has nothing to do with them," said Murray City District 1 Councilmember Kat Martinez.

One parent wrote to the MCSD board that "These teachings in public schools are vital to increasing awareness and putting an end to bullying, depression, and suicide."

Lukoff is transgender and a former elementary school librarian, as well as an award-winning children's author. He wrote *Call Me Max* for a kindergarten through third grade audience.

"I try to write books about trans kids that don't reinforce misogyny and gender binaries or the concept that your body or being trans is a problem," Lukoff said.

Lukoff believes it is important for young people to see transgender characters, since transgender people are part of the community.

"It's only a problem if you think that being transgender is itself wrong," Lukoff said. "That's something the parent then has to work through."

According to MCSD officials, there is no timetable regarding when the Equity Book Bundle Program and Equity Council will be reinstated.

Reported in: *The Salt Lake Tribune*, February 11, 2021; *ABC4 News*, February 12, 2021.

Nationwide

Bills banning the teaching of the 1619 Project curriculum were introduced earlier this year by Republican state legislators in Arkansas, Idaho, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, and South Dakota.

The 1619 Project consists of a series of essays published in *The New York Times Magazine* and an accompanying curriculum created by the Pulitzer Center. They explore the role of slavery and racial discrimination in the nation's history, including as the root of many contemporary social problems.

Since its publication in 2019, the 1619 Project has been taught in all 50 states. Reporter Nikole Hannah-Jones led the project and won a Pulitzer for her contributions.

Hannah-Jones' introductory essay to the 1619 Project concludes: "I wish, now, that I could go back to the younger me and tell her that her people's ancestry started here, on these lands, and to go boldly, proudly, draw the stars and those stripes of the American flag. We were told once, by virtue of our bondage, that we could never be American. But it was by virtue of our bondage that we became the most American of all."

The bills that would ban this landmark work from schools are all

identical to or closely modeled upon legislation proposed by US Senator Tom Cotton in July of 2020. Cotton is a Republican representing Arkansas.

Cleopatra Warren, a high school economics and history teacher at Coretta Scott King Young Women's Leadership Academy in Atlanta, said the proposed legislation was "reminiscent of slave codes, Black codes, and Jim Crow laws which forbade Blacks from reading, writing, or learning about their history."

Stephanie P. Jones, assistant professor of education at Grinnell College, observed that these attempted bans are part of a long history.

"This type of mishandling of curriculum has been in place since the US public schools have been in place," said Jones. "They were not designed to educate Black children and they were not designed to educate White children to be critical of anything related to the foundations of this country."

Mark Schulte, education director for the Pulitzer Center, asked: "How can students understand the unrest of 2020 without understanding the country's difficult history?"

Similar legislation in Arizona that banned Mexican-American studies was deemed unconstitutional in 2017 when a US District Court judge ruled it was enacted for racial and political reasons.

Stefanie Wager, president of the National Council for the Social Studies, said banning curricula is "kind of like banning books. When you're trying to ban an idea, it never works out well."

Wager added that, "The work of historians, the work of social studies teachers, is engaging students in uncovering that evidence, and challenging and weighing that evidence. To try to squash that, or stop that in any way, is not the mark of a quality social studies educator."

Hannah-Jones wrote that, "Attempting to control what teachers



can teach in the name of patriotism is seeking indoctrination not education. Education should open minds, not close them.”

The bills to ban the 1619 Project curriculum from schools in Arkansas, Mississippi, and South Dakota failed or were withdrawn.

The Missouri (HB 952) and Iowa (HF 222) bills continue to move forward. The ACLU of Iowa said in a statement that HF 222 “is an incredibly harmful government attempt at censorship, with the goal of shutting down ideas and preventing students from being exposed to an important discussion on the impact and legacy of slavery in our country.”

Idaho’s governor, Brad Little, signed H377 into law on April 28, 2021, banning critical race theory, including the 1619 Project, from being taught in public schools, charter schools, and institutions of higher education.

Reported in: *Education Week*, February 3, 2021; *KCRG*, February 11, 2021; *PEW Stateline*, February 26, 2021; *The Washington Post*, April 7, 2021; *The Guardian*, May 6, 2021.

LIBRARIES Lafayette, Louisiana

The Lafayette Public Library Board voted 5-2 to reject receipt of a \$2,700 grant from the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities (LEH). The grant would have funded two discussion facilitators and the purchase of books as part of LEH’s “Who Gets to Vote?” library reading and book discussion program.

According to the grant application, the LEH series “is intended to engage members of the general public in conversations on the history of voting—and efforts to suppress the vote—in the United States.”

The library board rejected the grant for not representing “both sides” of the issue of voter suppression.

State Senator Gerald Boudreaux called the board’s actions “incomprehensible” in a statement proclaiming that “the other side falls in the category of ‘Jim Crow Laws’ and the ‘KKK.’”

Library Director Teresa Elberston retired in response to the board’s action, abruptly ending her 38-year career at the library.

American Library Association President Julius C. Jefferson and United for Libraries President David Paige sent a joint letter to the members of the Lafayette Public Library Board urging them to reconsider their vote and update their policies and procedures regarding programming.

The discussion would have focused on two books: *Bending Toward Justice* by Gary May and *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* by Martha S. Jones.

Theodore Foster is an assistant professor of African American history at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and author of the discussion guide for one of the books LEH selected as part of the grant. Foster was to be one of the discussion leaders for the library.

University of Louisiana at Lafayette President Joseph Savoie described Foster as “a dynamic and thoughtful scholar of Black life, culture, and politics in our nation. That he is qualified to facilitate this discussion and provide context to it is without question.”

Senator Boudreaux said he was working to help the University of Louisiana at Lafayette’s DuPre Library secure the funding that had been intended for the Lafayette Public Library so the book discussions can still take place in the community.

The grant is part of the “Why it Matters: Civic and Electoral Participation” initiative, administered by the

Federation of State Humanities Councils and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Reported in: *The Acadiana Advocate*, January 29, 2021, and February 5, 2021; *KLFY 10*, February 2, 2021; *KATC 3*, February 3, 2021.

Midland County, Texas

Library Director Debbie Garza removed Pride displays at the Midland County Public Libraries’ downtown and Centennial branches when some residents complained about them.

The displays featured lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) books, rainbow banners, and hearts, as well as “You belong!” signs. They were set up to celebrate Pride month in June 2020 and removed after two weeks.

Garza indicated that all future displays would require her approval.

While the books that had been displayed in the children and young adult sections were written for those age groups, staff said Garza reassigned some titles to the adult section after removing the displays.

Terry Johnson said that he and other members of the library commissioners’ court (the local version of a library board) received complaints but hadn’t been given any presentations about the displays before they were set up.

He said, “If they want to do it again, I think that’s something the court should be involved in.”

Multiple employees resigned after the displays were removed.

Former library clerk Hannah Woupio, who resigned within a month of the removal, said that “the whole department was upset because even if you don’t agree with it or the lifestyle, it’s still censorship.”



Several employees expressed concern to Garza that removing the displays violated the American Library Association's (ALA) Library Bill of Rights and said that the removal should be reported to the Office for Intellectual Freedom.

Garza responded that "if ALA or TLA [Texas Library Association] or any organization is to be contacted, such contact will be made by my office."

A former youth services employee said, "We set up the display and I will never forget seeing the faces of the teens that I worked so close with light up. A teen cried as she looked at the display. She stayed in the teen area for an hour just looking at everything, smiling."

She said the removal of the displays "was a slap in the face and [brought] a horrible realization that homophobia existed within the library administration."

When children and teens who were looking for LGBTQIA+ books asked staff what happened to the displays, and Woupio informed them they were removed by the library director, she said "you could see them die a little bit inside."

Reported in: *Houston Chronicle*, April 19, 2021.

Nationwide

Dr. Seuss Enterprises issued a statement on March 2, 2021, announcing they would cease publication of six of Dr. Seuss's children's books due to racist stereotypes that "portray people in ways that are hurtful and wrong."

The six titles withdrawn from publication were *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street*, *If I Ran the Zoo*, *McElligot's Pool*, *On Beyond Zebra!*, *Scrambled Eggs Super!*, and *The Cat's Quizzer*. The titles contain offensive depictions of African and Asian people.

Shortly after Dr. Seuss Enterprises' announcement was made regarding the racist imagery, more than half of Amazon's top 20 slots were held by Seuss titles.

The decision also left libraries in a quandary regarding what to do with their copies of the six books being withdrawn from publication.

Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, said, "Any author, or anyone publishing books, can make choices about what is out in the world."

Caldwell-Stone noted, however, that "an author's or publisher's decision to stop publishing a book should not be grounds alone for removing a book from a library's collection."

Nationwide, librarians sought ways of resolving the tension between their commitment to intellectual freedom and the risk of exposing young children to harmful stereotypes.

A spokesperson said the "Brooklyn Public Library stands firmly against censorship so while we do not showcase books with outdated or offensive viewpoints, we do not remove them either, using them instead as a springboard for conversations about healing and moving forward."

The New York Public Library (NYPL), Denver Public Library, and Los Angeles Public Library all decided to retain copies of the six titles until they are too worn to circulate.

Angela Montefinise, senior director of communications for NYPL, said that "in the meantime, librarians, who care deeply about serving their communities and ensuring accurate and diverse representation in our collections—especially children's books—will strongly consider this information when planning storytimes, displays, and recommendations."

The District of Columbia Public Library is undertaking an internal review of the books.

Other public libraries, like those in Lake Forest, Illinois, and Marshalltown, Iowa, removed them from circulation to prevent their theft, as the discontinued titles quickly began selling for thousands of dollars in used book markets.

The Chicago Public Library is temporarily removing the six titles from circulation while it decides what to do with them.

Chicago Public Library spokesperson Patrick Molloy said, "Library staff encourage patrons of all ages to engage critically with our materials, but materials that become dated or that foster inaccurate, culturally harmful stereotypes are removed to make space for more current, comprehensive materials."

The Indianapolis Public Library is also considering removing the titles. Joe Backe, the communications director, said, "As the library pursues an improved approach to our strategic priority of racial equity, we will continue to avoid promoting or elevating these types of materials."

While the announcement made headlines around the globe, criticism of racist stereotypes and xenophobia in Dr. Seuss's work is nothing new. In addition to the offensive portrayals in his children's books, he also wrote a minstrel show and performed in blackface.

The harm ensuant from exposing children to racist portrayals is also well-documented.

According to *Education Week*, "Teachers and education researchers have long described how books that lean on stereotypes of people [of] color, or reduce their lives and experiences to a 'single story,' can lead students of color to internalize negative messages and discourage interest



in reading—while at the same time, implicitly telling White students that these stereotypes are correct and normal.”

Reported in: *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 6, 2021; *Business Insider*, March 10, 2021; *Education Week*, March 2, 2021; *ABC News*, March 6, 2021; *MSN*, March 2, 2021; *Times-Republican*, March 6, 2021; *Patch*, March 22, 2021; *Indianapolis Star*, March 2, 2021.

PRISONS Florence, Arizona

Edward Lee Jones, an inmate at the Eyman state prison in Florence, Arizona, is suing the Department of Corrections, alleging their regulations regarding access to books, CDs, and other materials are being applied in an unconstitutionally inconsistent fashion.

Easha Anand is representing Jones in *Edward Lee Jones, Jr., v. S. Slade, et al.* (20-15642) on behalf of the Roderrick and Solange MacArthur Justice Center.

“In this case, the Arizona Department of Corrections confiscated a Kendrick Lamar CD [“Untitled Unmastered”] from Mr. Jones, supposedly because it promoted violence and had sexual content. Yet at the same time, inmates are allowed to watch violent TV shows like *Dexter*, read James Patterson books that describe rape, and listen to country music songs about cold-blooded murder,” said Anand.

Anand said this demonstrates that the Department of Corrections is banning materials selectively, an act prohibited under the First Amendment. While Jones lost his case in the US District Court of Arizona, the 9th US Circuit Court of Appeals will allow the matter to be revisited.

The District Court ruling asserted Jones’s rights were not violated as he was allowed to listen to country music as an alternative.

Anand says they will argue the prison has a broad policy which is being applied unevenly to suppress “rap music and R&B music—both of

which happen to be quintessentially produced by Black artists.”

In her 2019 ruling in *Prison Legal News v. Charles L. Ryan, et al.* (2:15-cv-02245-ROS), Judge Roslyn Silver found the department’s policy on banned media “violates the First Amendment on its face.”

That case involved the department banning copies of *Prison Legal News* that contained court documents detailing correctional officers sexually assaulting inmates.

The Department of Corrections was also sued by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) in 2019 for banning *Chokehold* by Paul Butler, a book calling for significant changes in the criminal justice system.

The ACLU and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty have filed amicus briefs in support of Jones.

Reported in: *Fronteras*, February 12, 2021.