



## SCHOOLS Oklahoma

On October 19, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Oklahoma filed a lawsuit in federal court alleging an Oklahoma law banning critical race theory (CRT) is inherently unconstitutional and being used to ban books and teachings related to race in violation of the 1st and 14th Amendments.

CRT is a framework utilized in graduate-level law schools examining the ongoing impacts of slavery and racism in the US and exploring systemic ways racism has shaped foundational institutions. It is not taught in K-12 schools.

However, in Oklahoma and other parts of the US, legislation and policies targeting CRT and “divisive concepts” define them in vague terms which can encapsulate all teaching about race and racism, inequality, bias, and even gender identity issues.

Plaintiffs in the lawsuit argue the bill is being used to silence lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) voices in addition to those of Black authors and people of color.

Teachers say the new law, House Bill 1775, limits their ability to teach important lessons on history and current events.

ACLU of Oklahoma claims they have documents showing Edmond Public Schools banning books and certain language from being used.

They say documents sent to English teachers providing guidance on HB 1775 direct instructors to “avoid the term ‘diversity’” and “do not discuss White privilege.”

The lawsuit asserts that the law has a chilling effect on the language and lesson plans teachers use in their classes, particularly content designed to help ensure historically

marginalized students have an equitable education.

The lawsuit also claims that Edmond Public Schools have banned books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and *A Raisin in the Sun* from being taught in English classes.

Megan Lambert, lead attorney for ACLU of Oklahoma, characterized these books as “texts by Black authors or about the Black experience or about issues of racism in American history.”

An Edmond English teacher who is a plaintiff in the case claims that only White male authors were allowed on the approved reading list.

In July, Oklahoma’s Board of Education passed administrative rules prescribing school district compliance with the law. Under these rules, educators’ licenses can be suspended and schools’ accreditation threatened if any prohibited concepts are taught.

Parents and private citizens can file reports against teachers they believe have acted in violation of the law.

According to the ACLU of Oklahoma, the bill’s lead authors denounced teaching about “implicit bias” and “systemic racism” when they were promoting it.

Cutting through the smokescreen, Sykes said, “A lot of these laws are written in such a confusing way as to say essentially, ‘Don’t say anything racist.’ But the subtext is: ‘Don’t talk about racism.’”

Regan Killackey, a teacher and a plaintiff in the case, was told to avoid incorporating certain race-related concepts, phrases, and books in his curriculum. According to the lawsuit, he no longer engages students in conversations about race or gender.

The Oklahoma law prohibits educators from teaching that “members of

one race or sex cannot and should not attempt to treat others without respect to race or sex” and that teachers cannot make any individual “feel discomfort, guilt, anguish, or any other form of psychological distress on account of his or her race or sex.”

Emerson Sykes, staff attorney with the ACLU Speech, Privacy, and Technology Project, pointed out that “It’s inevitable that there is some amount of discomfort in learning about difficult things.”

Sykes also said that the vagueness of the law creates a situation where “people who are subject to the law have no way of knowing what’s prohibited and what’s not.” It also “opens up the door to arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement by officials.”

Anthony Crawford, a plaintiff and English teacher at a predominantly Black high school in Oklahoma City, said he didn’t learn about African American history growing up and has sought to incorporate such lessons into his classes.

Crawford said the law’s passage took an emotional toll on him and his students. “I felt like it was a shot at teachers like me who really want to see Black and brown kids really do something with their lives. Because they need this part of history. They need to understand what happened to their people.”

After the law passed he said, “They’re like, ‘OK, now what?’ What are they going to learn now? What are they going to do in order to feel that empowerment? How are they going to figure out who they are, where they came from, what their ancestors did? How can they go on moving forward to improve their lives?”

Donovan Chaney, a Black 17-year old student in Crawford’s class said he sees the law as a “way to censor our next generation, so they don’t know



all the horrible things that went on before they were born.”

Crawford said the law contradicts many of the state’s academic standards. He and his superintendent were able to tie everything in his curriculum to those standards. “That’s where my confusion became frustration because now I just feel like . . . politicians are trying to eradicate history, to eradicate what happened to Black folks in history.”

The law applies to public colleges and universities as well as to K-12 schools.

The Black Emergency Response Team of the University of Oklahoma (BERT), one of the plaintiffs, was formed in 2019 in response to a string of racist incidents including a notorious fraternity scandal.

BERT convinced the university administration to establish a mandatory diversity training course for students.

The school dropped this requirement after the law was implemented, as it specifically bans colleges from requiring diversity training. The university also ended mandatory sexual harassment training for incoming freshmen.

In a statement, Lilly Amechi, a representative for BERT, said “We believe all students deserve to have a free and open exchange about our history—not one that erases the legacy of discrimination and lived experiences of Black and brown people, women and girls, and LGBTQ+ individuals.”

Among the defendants of the suit are Oklahoma’s governor, attorney general, and superintendent of public instruction.

Carly Atchison, a spokesperson for Governor Kevin Stitt, said “It’s par for the course that when something goes against the left’s liberal agenda, activist groups attempt to come into Oklahoma and challenge our laws and our way of life.”

Plaintiffs of the case include a student, two teachers, BERT, the University of Oklahoma chapter of the American Association of University Professors, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People of Oklahoma, and the Oklahoma chapter of the American Indian Movement.

The suit says the law prevents students and teachers from asking uncomfortable questions and from teaching and discussion of key parts of Oklahoma’s history. These include:

The 1889 Lands Run, when settlers raced to claim land from Oklahoma’s Indian Territory

The 1921 Tulsa Massacre, in which a White mob attacked and firebombed a Black neighborhood, killing hundreds of people and destroying more than 35 square blocks of Black-owned homes and businesses.

Genevieve Bonadies Torres, associate director of the Educational Opportunities Project with the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under law, issued a statement calling Oklahoma’s law “an unvarnished attempt to silence the experiences and perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and LGBTQ+ people, and other groups who have long faced exclusion and marginalization.”

(See: *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy, v.6 iss.3: For the Record: Nationwide*)

**Reported in: KFOR, October 20, 2021; USA Today, October 19, 2021; NBC News, October 19, 2021.**

### Anchorage, Alaska

Without formal announcement, the Anchorage School District (ASD) removed recommended resources on equity, race, and racism from their website in July. The action was seemingly taken in response to ongoing pressure applied by school board

member Dave Donley and the blog *Must Read Alaska*.

The removed content was previously included among the “Equity Resources” recommended by ASD’s Office of Equity and Compliance.

Over the course of numerous school board meetings, Donley raised objections to the book list, arguing that it was “Marxist,” “racist propaganda,” and in violation of Anchorage Municipal Code Section 1.15.110.

Donley’s objections continued despite district lawyers determining the recommendations complied with municipal code.

In late 2020, the district added a disclaimer to their website stating that “These books have been recommended by staff as self- and facilitated-study resources on equity and race. The authors represent prominent voices in the ongoing national discussion about equity and race. These resources are not part of the ASD student curriculum, nor are the authors endorsed by ASD.”

This is the reading list that was subsequently removed from the district’s Equity Resources page in response to community pressure:

- *Antiracist Baby* by Ibram X. Kendi
- *How to be an Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi
- *Stamped from the Beginning* by Ibram X. Kendi
- *The New Jim Crow* by Michele Alexander
- *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* by Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz
- *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo
- *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo

A link to a parenting guide called “How to Talk to Kids About Race and Racism” was also removed from the site.



All that remains are links to a series of podcasts from *The New York Times* called “Listen to What They’re Saying” and part two of a conversation between Brené Brown and Aiko Bethea called “Creating Transformative Cultures.” A phone number is also provided for those interested in “additional resources on equity.”

**Reported in: *Must Read Alaska*, July 15, 2021.**

### Jonesboro, Arkansas

On October 12, the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library’s board of directors refused to remove three challenged books from the library. Less than a week later, they also announced they were moving some titles out of the children’s section to make them less accessible.

The books retained were:

- *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe
- *It’s Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexual Health* by Robbie H. Harris
- *L&R, g&R* by Lauren Myracle

The library has seen public outcry and numerous book challenges of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) material after setting up a Pride Month display in the children’s section in June.

“I want to set the record straight. We don’t buy pornographic material,” said library director David Eckert. “*It’s Perfectly Normal* can be bought at Walmart or Target.”

Steven Summers read *The GayBCs* by M. L. Webb as his public comment and expressed dismay that the staff of the library was being harassed for providing inclusive material like this.

Chenoa Summers supported the library board’s decision. “Being gay is not a mental illness,” she said.

Other community members continued to raise objections after the board made the decision to retain the materials.

Janice Porter said, “I ask this board and director to end your shocking indifference and make accommodations for parents who wish to protect their children from early sexualization.”

Sharon Stallings also spoke out against the requirement to wear a face mask during board meetings. She removed her mask while speaking and was directed by the board to put it back on.

Board member Mark Nichols said one of the books retained, *Gender Queer*, should be moved to a different section.

Rebecca Robinson observed, “Jonesboro is more bigoted and hateful than I had ever imagined. I will raise my children with science and knowledge and compassion.”

Cause for celebration by those opposed to censorship was short-lived, however.

On October 18, Eckert announced that the library will move sex education books for children to the parent/teacher section.

“This section contains educational resources for caregivers to help with school work, learning disabilities, and those who homeschool their children,” said Eckert.

One of the titles moved was the recently challenged and retained book *It’s Perfectly Normal*.

The other relocated titles were:

- *You Be You: The Kid’s Guide to Gender, Sexuality, and Family* by Jonathan Branfinan
- *Why Boys & Girls Are Different* by Carol Greene
- *Talking to Your Kids About Sex: From Toddlers to Preteens* by Lauri Berkenkamp

Board member Mark Nichols said they will be announcing the relocation of additional library materials to the parent/teacher section soon.

On October 20, Kailey Holt Luster was voted in to fill an open seat on the library board. Luster is a member of Safe Library Books for Kids—Arkansas, a group which opposes including LGBTQIA+ materials in the children’s sections of public libraries.

Safe Library Books for Kids—Arkansas recently shared a post “The library has never apologized for displaying controversial SEXUAL material in June. They have given no indication they are interested in making better choices in the future. They have not responded positively in any way to concerned parents. Shame on them.”

Luster was the fourth person in a row outspokenly opposed to LGBTQIA+ library books to be nominated by County Judge Marvin Day. Three now sit on the board.

(See: *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*, v.6 iss.3: *Censorship Dateline: Schools*)

**Reported in: *Jonesboro Sun*, October 12, 2021; October 18, 2021; and October 20, 2021.**

### Durango, Colorado

*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Sáenz was removed from a Bayfield Middle School classroom library after a parent complained it contained swearing, underage drinking, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) relationships.

The book was not part of the curriculum and none of the books in the “free-choice” library it was removed from were required reading.

Principal Brandon Thurston told teacher Dana Gerrits to remove the



book because it violated a school policy on controversial materials.

*Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* is a young adult novel exploring themes of Mexican-American identity, gender and sexuality, homosexuality, artistic expression, friendship, and family relationships.

The book has received numerous accolades, including the Paul Belpré Narrative Medal for Latino Fiction, the Michael L. Printz Award for young adult fiction, and a Lambda Literary Award. *Publisher's Weekly* called it “a tender, honest exploration of identity and sexuality, and a passionate reminder that love—whether romantic or familial—should be open, free, and without shame.”

Eighth grade student Alek Burgess, who is enrolled in the class from which the book was removed, said “I really feel like, by them banning this book, it’s just spreading the message that it’s not OK to be gay, especially in school.”

Superintendent Kevin Aten said the book was removed because “there was a personnel matter that I’m not going to comment on.”

The district’s policy requires controversial materials which are not part of a district-approved curriculum to receive administrative approval before being used as instructional material.

The policy holds that “the value of any book or other material shall be judged as a whole, taking into account the purpose of the material rather than individual, isolated expressions, or incidents in the work.”

According to the policy, the superintendent will re-evaluate challenged material when a written form is completed, signed, and submitted. Aten said no written complaint about the novel was received.

Rachel Rosenthal, a high school teacher and Gay Straight Alliance

sponsor, expressed concern for the school district’s LGBTQIA+ youth. “When they see a book banned that has a character that is LGBTQ, it’s seen as a personal affront or a personal attack because it’s removing a book that represents them.”

Roxanne Henderson, a Bayfield High School English teacher, said “I’m disappointed that an extremely benign book about the process of growing up would be denied to students at the middle school—students who probably need to read literature like that.”

**Reported in: *Durango Herald*, October 7, 2021.**

### Melbourne, Florida

On Monday, October 11th, the Melbourne High School issued a statement that they removed *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe from its library.

The statement indicated they received a complaint about it the previous week and that district staff will be retrained “in the process of purchasing book titles.”

Melbourne High School is part of the Brevard Public Schools District (BPS). A district spokesperson provided a statement that “The book was taken out of the library immediately after district leaders learned of the content of the book.”

In another statement, Superintendent Mark Mullins said, “BPS staff immediately agreed that this book violates our guidelines and that it has no place in our school district. I have directed staff to ensure there are no other similar books in our libraries.”

Mullins also urged district families to seek out items in the library and report any they feel are inappropriate. “I want to remind families that each school’s library books can be reviewed online. I encourage parents to review the content that is available to students.”

The district’s “Process for Requesting Reconsideration of Non-State-Adopted Instructional Materials (Classroom and Library)” was apparently not referred to as part of this decision-making process. The required procedures are provided in granular detail in section J of policy number 2520, which was adopted on May 1, 2002, and last revised on June 25, 2019.

The policy states that “challenged material shall remain in use and shall not be removed until the following informal and formal due process procedures have been completed.”

The process requires the parent, legal guardian, or resident objecting to classroom or library material to submit a written request for a conference with the principal (or designee) to discuss the material. That conference is to be scheduled within ten working days of the receipt of the written request.

If the individual’s issue is not resolved at the conference, the principal (or designee) will explain the reconsideration process to them and they can file a written request for reconsideration using form 2520 F2. The form must be filed within ten days of the conference.

The policy goes on to delineate the reconsideration process and timeline in detail, including the minimum constituency of the committee that will be designated to review the challenged materials.

None of this appears to have happened before *Gender Queer* was removed “immediately” after district administrators were notified it was in the high school library.

*Gender Queer* received an Alex Award, a Stonewall Book Award, was nominated for an Ignatz Award, and was included on the Young Adult Library Services Association’s 2020 list of Great Graphic Novels for Teens.



Kobabe, who uses Spivak pronouns, wrote and illustrated eir memoir in part to explain what it means to be nonbinary and asexual.

The book's publisher called the school's decision "short-sighted and reactionary."

"Oni Press supports Maia Kobabe for the truth and strength in sharing eir story," they said in their statement. "The fact is *Gender Queer* is an important, timely piece of work that serves as an invaluable resource for not only those that identify as nonbinary or genderqueer, but for people looking to understand what that means."

**Reported in: *Florida Today*, October 11, 2021.**

### Waukee, Iowa

The Waukee Northwest High School library removed three books from circulation after a woman attending a school board meeting called them inappropriate. All three had lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) content.

Amanda McClanahan, the person who objected to the books during the October 25 board meeting, is not a parent in the school district.

McClanahan read excerpts from *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson, *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison, and *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe. She also showed illustrations from Kobabe's memoir.

Amanda Vasquez, chair of the Iowa Library Association's Intellectual Freedom Committee, pointed out the dangers of judging a book by an excerpt. "It's important to look at the work as a whole . . . Any one small portion of a book might be taken out of context and seem to mean one thing when it means another."

The district indicated that the review process can take as long as 45 days and would not begin until forms

requesting the books' reconsideration were completed and submitted.

The Waukee Community School District's policy covering objection to instructional materials and reconsideration procedures (0602.9) clearly delineates all steps to the objection/reconsideration process. The district's actions in this case did not align with their policy.

The policy specifies that "instructional material shall not be removed or withdrawn from use during the pendency of the review process except upon three-fourths vote of the entire membership of the review committee and approval of the building principal, who shall state compelling reasons in writing for such action."

Removal of the books could not have happened in accord with the school policy as the committee that votes on such an action is only formed after a formal request for reconsideration is submitted in writing to the principal. No formal request was received for any of the books.

Max Mowitz, program director at One Iowa, said that books chronicling the experiences of LGBTQIA+ youth can help them feel seen and validated.

"It's so important to have things like shows, television, books, magazines that show and reflect [not only] who you are right now, but who you will be in the future," said Mowitz. "That's really, really powerful and it can save lives."

**Reported in: *Axios*, October 27, 2021; *We Are Iowa*, November 1, 2021; *KCCI*, November 1, 2021.**

### Georgetown Township, Michigan

At the October 18 meeting of the Georgetown Finance Committee, the township superintendent Dan Carlton was instructed to review all materials at the Georgetown Township Public Library (GTPL) and "remove any

material that is deemed to be inappropriate for children and youth."

Township Supervisor Jim Wierenga said the action was not taken because of a specific complaint, but in response to a national conversation.

This would violate GTPL's established policies, which require submission of a completed "request for reconsideration of library material" form to initiate the reconsideration process.

The policy also places the library director, not the township superintendent, in charge of material review and determinations for reconsideration.

GTPL said that it has received no recent book challenges.

Deborah Caldwell-Stone, Director of the Office for Intellectual Freedom, said the library should adhere to the policy they have in place.

Caldwell-Stone said, "There's an old saying in library land that every good public library has a book in it to offend everybody in a community, because of the need to serve so many diverse information needs and interests."

"We firmly believe that a parent certainly has the right to guide their own child's reading, but we believe that they shouldn't dictate what other families have access to," said Caldwell-Stone.

**Reported in: *WOOD TV*, October 26, 2021.**

### Brooklyn, New York

Fifth-graders from P.S. 295 spent months designing a mural spanning the wall of a cafeteria they share with M.S. 443 in Park Slope, Brooklyn. It was removed and destroyed the day after it went on display.

Elementary school principal Lisa Pagano felt certain messages included were problematic. She specifically raised objections to the phrases "Black Lives Matter," "Black Trans Lives



Matter,” and “Your Silence Will Not Protect You,” a quote from Black queer feminist writer Audre Lorde reading.

Pagano sent an email to Groundswell, the community arts organization facilitating the mural project, and requested that they substitute a message “with more inclusivity” such as “Hate has no home here,” instead.

Sarah Katz, a Groundswell official, pushed back in an email.

“We believe that naming and supporting communities most impacted by oppressive systems is essential to cultivating authentic inclusion,” wrote Katz. “‘Black Trans Lives Matter’ acknowledges a truth that certain communities have been historically undervalued and seeks to center those communities . . . closer to justice.”

The mural went up unchanged in July. It was affixed to the wall with adhesive.

The next day, a custodian was ordered to remove the mural from the wall. It was destroyed in the process. The administrator who ordered the removal remains undisclosed.

Pro-mural parents and students have demonstrated by writing the mural’s messages as well as other quotes from Lorde in chalk on the sidewalk in front of the schools. One elementary staff member left the school in protest.

The Department of Education is now investigating and principals from both schools could face disciplinary action.

Nathaniel Styer, press secretary for the department, said “Our schools must be safe and inclusive environments, and this should not have happened, and we’re very sorry this happened to our students.”

Other parents voiced opposition, asserting the mural should never have gone up in the first place. This division and the destruction of the

student-made mural are a microcosm illustrating the sort of fallout that is happening nationwide in response to an organized movement working to ban materials, curricula, and conversations they consider to be “critical race theory.”

Students involved in creating the mural were disturbed by its removal.

“I was really, really sad and angry to hear that the mural was taken down and destroyed,” said 11-year old Kai Gelber-Higgins.

Hollis Albaeck, another 11-year old muralist said, “I feel like people of color need more respect because they are just as important as White folks, but our country is not showing that, so now we need to bring back their trust in us as being kind people.”

Discord around racial and cultural insensitivity at the elementary school predates the incident with the mural. Victor Quiñonez objected to the observation of “colonial day” during which students were made to play roles on settler ships.

“By the time our second child was in that school, I said, ‘No, I’m not going to put my kid in a Pilgrim dress and take on the persona of [a] White settler colonizer,’ said Quiñonez, whose daughter was one of the muralists.

Doug Hecklinger, a fifth-grade teacher at P.S. 295 who came out as queer to his students a few years ago, said school administrators failed to create an environment that would nurture cultural understanding and indicated equity, diversity, and inclusion training for teachers was needed.

“Some teachers didn’t feel comfortable using a diversity of books without more training.” Hecklinger recalled a colleague complaining, “Why can’t we read normal children’s books?”

Carlos Menchaca, a Democratic council member, allocated Groundswell a \$20,000 grant to create the

mural, something which had been done for more than a dozen other schools previously.

During its 25-year history, Groundswell has completed more than 200 pieces of public art at 128 schools around the city. They recruited students from the elementary school to brainstorm the content and design for the Park Slope mural.

Anita Skop, superintendent of District 15, apologized for removing the artwork and hurting students’ feelings. She informed parents that “this isn’t going to be glossed over.” She also said she supported a proposal to rename P.S. 295 the Audre Lorde School.

**Reported in: *The New York Times*, October 29, 2021.**

## Forsyth County, North Carolina

Ken Raymond, chairman of the Forsyth County Republican Party, advised the mother of a 10-year old Vienna Elementary School student to call the police regarding an unnamed book her child checked out from the school library.

According to Raymond, the mother indicated she didn’t trust the school board because of their recent vote to uphold the school’s mask requirement.

In his October 22 newsletter, he recounts instructing her to call the police or the Sheriff’s Department if “the majority of the school board doesn’t listen to her.”

In his October 15 newsletter entitled “Pornography in schools—Call the police” he repeatedly urges parents to call the police on “teachers that distribute pornography.”

Raymond claimed the school provides “copies of sexually explicit books” that “were banned by the American Library Association [ALA]” through their online library.



Contrary to Raymond's claim, ALA has never banned a book. Book banning runs contrary to the ethical underpinnings of librarianship.

ALA's Office for Intellectual Freedom works to prevent the banning of books and to raise awareness about the importance of access to library materials of all kinds, on all topics, and representing all voices—free from judgment or impediment.

Raymond identified the following books from the Vienna Elementary School as ones considered to be “sexually graphic”:

- *And Tango Makes Three* by Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson
- *Olive's Ocean* by Kevin Henkes
- *Rick* by Alex Gino
- *Julián is a Mermaid* by Jessica Love (mis-titled as “Julianne is a Mermaid”)
- *Hurricane Child* by Kacen Callender

Also included on Raymond's list were an unspecified biography of Ellen DeGeneres and something called “Mabel is a Label” that does not appear to be a book.

Raymond misleadingly wrote that making these materials “available online may qualify this as a federal crime.”

The books Raymond listed are award-winning and best-selling children's titles. With one exception, they portray lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) characters, including children and penguins.

*Olive's Ocean* is the odd title out. It is about friendship, loss, and the relationship between a child and her grandmother. The most sexually graphic thing in it is an objectively non-salacious description of a child seeing his heterosexual parents kiss each other good morning.

Raymond encouraged all parents to “get your child's login information, access his school's online library, and find out what's being made available to them in school and what they can access online.” He pledged to help them “expose” anything to which a parent objects.

Brent Campbell, a spokesman for Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County Schools, said that the district had not received any complaints from a Vienna parent about any of the books on Raymond's list. He said none of the titles listed were part of any required curriculum, though many of them were available on their ebook platform.

Campbell also said that the district has a formal process for requesting reconsideration of materials.

“We are very intentional about being inclusive of all types of students and beliefs and carefully evaluate the possible removal of some materials simply because it does not align with the personal or political beliefs of others,” said Campbell. “Censorship can be a slippery slope.”

**Reported in: *Winston-Salem Journal*, October 22, 2021.**

### Hudson, Ohio

At the September 13th board meeting of the Hudson City School District, Mayor Craig Shubert threatened the board members with criminal charges after members of the Summit County chapter of Moms for Liberty raised concerns about a book used in a college-level writing course.

“Write a sex scene you wouldn't show your mom. Rewrite the sex scene from above into one that you let your mom read,” parent Monica Haven read from *642 Things to Write About* by Po Bronson. “Describe your favorite part of a man's body using only verbs.”

*642 Things* is used in “Writing in the Liberal Arts II,” a college-level course offered to seniors in association with Hiram College. Parents are required to sign a consent form for their children to participate, acknowledging that the course material contains “adult themes.”

The book was used in the class for five years. It was withdrawn before the board meeting was held.

“On Friday, September 10, the Hudson City School District was made aware of inappropriate and offensive writing prompts included in a supplemental resource . . . used in our High School Senior College Credit Plus Writing sections,” proclaimed a statement issued by Hudson City Schools Superintendent Phil Herman.

“The district immediately determined this writing resource should not be in the hands of our students, and on Monday, collected the books from the students enrolled in the course. It is important to note that at no time were any of these inappropriate writing prompts assigned as part of the class,” continued the statement.

During the meeting, Mayor Shubert told the board, “It has come to my attention that your educators are distributing essentially what is child pornography in the classroom. I've spoken to a judge this evening. She's already confirmed that. So I'm going to give you a simple choice. You either choose to resign from this Board of Education or you will be charged.”

On September 17, the Hudson Police Department and the Summit County Prosecutor's Office released a joint statement, clearing the board of criminal misconduct in this case.

“These allegations have resulted in threats being made against board members, faculty, and administrators in Hudson. Those threats must stop.”



Under Ohio law, a prompt about fictional writing is not child pornography,” said Prosecutor Sherri Bevan Walsh.

At the September 20 board meeting, dozens of community members attended in support of the district board of education.

“The prompts which some find distasteful were never used in class, and frankly I am disappointed to see that so many people are wasting their time arguing over something that is such a small issue,” said Matthew Constable, a 2018 graduate who took the writing class as a senior.

“I believe it is okay to examine the book to determine if it’s appropriate for use in school. But calling for the entire board of education to resign under a baseless threat of criminal prosecution is completely childish, irresponsible, unnecessary, and honestly, it’s disturbing,” continued Constable. Some in attendance booed the recent graduate while he was speaking. One audience member walked out in protest.

The chilling effect from the threats, book ban, and false allegations of criminal misconduct was already evident.

“I’ve always been proud of my lessons, but now I’m second-guessing things on a daily basis,” said social studies teacher Marty Bach. He described “a stifling fear that is permeating our schools.”

“Should I detail how horrific the lynching system was against African Americans?” asked Bach. “Should I dial back the mass graves at Wounded Knee?”

“Should I cut the relationships unit completely and let these young adults navigate the world of Tinder . . . without any thoughtful discussion?” asked Bach, referring to a class covering dating, issues of consent, sexual assault, and toxic relationships.

Jennifer Scheeser said, “I had one friend tell me she’ll be retiring as quickly as possible and another friend—and recent Hudson graduate—tell me, ‘I’m changing my major. I don’t want to be a teacher anymore. I just want to help kids, but people will be out to destroy me.’”

The September 27 board meeting had to be moved to the auditorium to accommodate more than 400 attendees, most of whom gave the board a standing ovation for their dedication and perseverance. Former mayors Bill Currin and David Bail presented a joint statement to the board.

“Let us all support our teachers, our school administration, staff, and board members as together we pursue the hard work of ensuring the continued recognized excellence of our public schools,” said Basil, in a rebuff of mayor Shubert’s recent actions.

During the public comment section, nearly 40 people spoke in support of the board. Andrea Bucey Tikkanen said, “Hear us tonight. We are the vast majority. We are proud of this town, proud of you.”

Regarding *642 Things*, Karen Gondek said, “The book is not the issue. The book is a tool that was weaponized for political gain.”

“I trust the educators we have in Hudson to do what’s best for our kids. We should be respecting them and listening to them,” said parent Danielle Sarver Coombs. “I want my kids exposed to different ideas.”

Moms for Liberty members were also in attendance. They spoke out in support of the mayor’s actions and voiced strange new threats. “Teachers are going to have parents sitting in the classroom watching you,” said Karen Matier. “That’s what needs to happen because you have lost all of our trust.”

Reverend Peter Wiley, senior pastor at First Congregational Church of

Hudson observed that there are passages in Shakespeare and *The Bible* that are “far more violent and salacious” than the writing prompts in *642 Things*.

“The idea that the board could keep track of millions of pages read by kids is absurd,” said Wiley. He then praised the board for their professionalism and civility in the face of threats and yelled condemnation.

Despite these admonitions, the outrage engine of Moms for Liberty churned on and the administration continued bending to their will.

On September 29, Herman announced that the district had removed three books from school libraries pending further review: *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison, *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe, and *A Girl on the Shore* by Inio Asano.

The books were removed in response to concerns raised by members of the Summit County Moms for Liberty during the September 27 board meeting. No time frame was given for when the reconsideration process would be completed.

Herman also announced he initiated a review of how books are selected for school library collections.

On October 1, *Me, Earl, and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews was also removed from school libraries for reconsideration.

Mayor Schubert’s involvement in the push to censor school materials appears to have been politically motivated.

A November 15 report from the Summit County Prosecutor’s Office determined no school board policies were violated in the selection and approval of *642 Things*.

Walsh’s six page report lambasted Shubert for leveling false allegations of child pornography against the board and detailed scores of threats that were leveled at them as a result.





The report revealed Hudson's involvement with the issue began at a political fundraiser he attended just hours prior to the September 13th board meeting.

"My office's report into this matter may seem harsh," said Walsh in a statement, but "the reckless conduct by Hudson's Mayor resulted in threats, fear, and hate-filled words from around the country."

The report characterized Shubert's repeated claims of child pornography as "extremely troubling" since they continued weeks after the prosecutor's office determined them to be false, including in an October 18 Facebook video with US Senate candidate Josh Mandel.

Shubert responded on November 18 by again calling for Hudson school board members to be held accountable for allowing "pornographic content" in the curriculum. He said the prosecutor's office "has ignored the real crime of who is responsible for 'pandering sexually oriented matter involving a minor.'"

Walsh responded to Shubert's statement by saying the Mayor does not understand Ohio law and "wants to create a public battle over censorship."

**Reported in: News 5 Cleveland, September 14, 2021; Yahoo! News, September 15, 2021; Cleveland.com, September 28, 2021; WOIO, September 17, 2021; Akron Beacon Journal, September 28, 2021; October 2, 2021; October 10, 2021; and November 16, 2021.**

### Lansdale, Pennsylvania

At the October 21 board meeting of the North Penn School District (NPSD), parents affiliated with a local chapter of Moms for Liberty voiced complaints about three books and disparaged the school board members.

Carrie Rocks raised objections to *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe. Rocks

read from Kobabe's award-winning memoir about growing up nonbinary and asexual before lashing out at the board.

"Is it your intent to groom our children? Who made it your job to steal their innocence?" Rock demanded. "You are Satan's pawns to me right now. You are all disgusting."

Vicki Flannery read excerpts from *All Boys Aren't Blue*, George M. Johnson's memoir about growing up Black and queer. Flannery also took aim at the school board, stating "If you see this as acceptable, you belong on a national registry and not a school board."

Ken Ferry performed a similar bit of theater around Jonathan Evison's *Lawn Boy*.

Jason Lanier, who did not identify as a parent, also raised objections to library material. "There's a whole lot of books in our libraries which really have no business being there. A bunch of them talk about Critical Race Theory and talking [*sic*] about how good it is. A bunch of them talk about very sexually explicit content."

Through 90 minutes of public comment and additional shouted objections, board members did not respond directly other than to ask commenters to remain civil and to provide notifications when a speaker's time had expired.

Ultimately, the behavior of some Moms for Liberty members grew so disruptive, district security had to escort them from the meeting.

They realized their aims nonetheless.

In a statement, school district spokesperson Christine Liberaski said "Last week it came to our attention that books were ordered for some of our schools' libraries that contain material not appropriate for children and have upset some of our families."

Liberaski said *All Boys Aren't Blue* was removed from circulation at the Oak Park elementary school library for "not being developmentally appropriate for that age group."

*Gender Queer* had been ordered for the North Penn High School library, but was withdrawn before it was put into circulation.

*Lawn Boy* was removed from circulation at the Penndale Middle School.

**Reported in: The Reporter, October 26, 2021.**

### North Kingstown, Rhode Island

It was reported on October 20 that Nicole Solas filed a police report against the North Kingstown High School for having *Gender Queer* in its library, claiming that the book was pornography.

*Gender Queer* received an Alex Award, a Stonewall Book Award, was nominated for an Ignatz Award, and was included on the Young Adult Library Services Association's 2020 list of Great Graphic Novels for Teens.

Kobabe's memoir is a nonbinary coming of age graphic novel. Kobabe wrote and illustrated it in part to explain what it means to be nonbinary and asexual.

In an email, Superintendent Phil Auger wrote that the book is "a valuable resource for someone who is working through issues of sexual identity and/or identifying as transgender."

There have been numerous efforts to ban *Gender Queer* from libraries this year as part of an organized effort to suppress lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) voices and representation. Virtually all have utilized the same excerpts and poster-size blow-ups from the book.

In an editorial for *The Washington Post*, Kobabe wrote, "Removing



or restricting queer books in libraries and schools is like cutting a lifeline for queer youth, who might not yet even know what terms to ask Google to find out more about their own identities, bodies, and health.”

Another mother requested that Maia Kobabe’s memoir *Gender Queer* be removed from the school library or for the school to restrict access to it. When Chairman Greg Blasbalg asked if she’d read the book, she responded, “Well, no, I’m not going to read this book.”

At the October 26 meeting of the North Kingstown High School board, people demanding the book’s ban came out in force. Protesters held up signs with images from the book.

Ramona Bessinger, a teacher in the Providence School Department, said “Our job as educators is to teach children how to read and write. Our job is not to teach children how to give blowjobs.”

“You’re talking about children—you’re going to expose them to pornographic material? You might as well put *Playboy* and *Hustler* in there,” said another speaker.

Tiffany Macleod held a sign proclaiming “North Kingstown School Department is lying to parents.”

Auger again defended Kobabe’s memoir and spoke out against book bans generally.

“Any discussion of banning a book should not be taken lightly,” said Auger. “The book in question deals with mature questions of sexual identity and there are students in our high school that are asking these questions. As part of a public school population, LGBTQ youth have as much of a need and a right to have access to library resources to support their overall health and wellbeing.”

Board member Jen Lima added that “A library is there to provide us information on all topics, not just those that make us feel comfortable.”

**Reported in: ABC6, October 20, 2021; *The Washington Post*, October 29, 2021; *The Independent*, October 28, 2021.**

### Hamilton County, Tennessee

Censorship efforts led by school board member Rhonda Thurman were on the agenda at the October 21 meeting of the Hamilton County Department of Education.

In an October 13th interview with WRCB TV and an October 15 opinion article she wrote for the *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, Thurman requested clarification on how school library books are selected and asked that four books be removed from school libraries.

Thurman objected to four books:

- *More Than Words Can Tell* by Brigid Kemmerer
- *On the Come Up* by Angie Thomas
- *Far From the Tree* by Robin Benway
- *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas

Thurman said parents complained to her about these books in August. She said the use of profanity and references to sex and violence made them inappropriate for inclusion in school libraries.

*More than Words Can Tell* received a Booklist starred review and was nominated for the CILIP Carnegie Medal.

*On the Come Up* was included in the American Library Association’s “2020 Top Ten Books for Young Adults,” and was nominated for a Carnegie Medal, Kirkus Prize, and Boston Globe-Horn Book Award.

*The Hate U Give* won the Michael L. Printz Award, the William C. Morris Award for best debut book for teens, and was a Coretta Scott King Book Award Honor Book.

*Far From the Tree* won the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature and the PEN America Award for Young Adult Literature.

“I am still in disbelief this insanity is allowed in our school libraries and classrooms,” Thurman said.

A joint statement from the Tennessee Association of School Librarians, Tennessee Library Association, and Friends of the Tennessee Libraries said that, “We oppose censorship within school libraries on the grounds that it is unconstitutional and contrary to the professional ethics of librarianship.”

The statement noted that challenge and removal processes were already in place at the local school district level.

“Every book is not for every reader, but every child should have access to books they may want to read. School librarians strive to know learners and assist them in finding books that fit their needs and interests,” said the statement.

The school district’s reconsideration policy was discussed at the board meeting per Thurman’s request.

During the meeting, representatives from Chattanooga’s Moms for Social Justice spoke out in defense of the books. “What we are seeing in our country is a small faction of predominantly conservative parents targeting books that are mostly written by authors of color,” said Taylor Lyons.

“They are calling these books into question because they depict life experiences that are a reality for millions of students across our country and that makes them uncomfortable and we understand because it makes us uncomfortable too. Important books such as these make us feel uncomfortable because they teach us important things about ourselves and society,” said Lyons.

Edna Varner, a retired Hamilton County educator, spoke at the



meeting on behalf of the Chattanooga-Hamilton County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Varner argued this debate was needless as district policies already allow parents to opt their children out of books or lessons they find objectionable. She encouraged board and community members to put their time to better use.

“There are plenty of ways we can come together without month after month of complaining,” Varner said. “You have important work to do.”

No action was taken at the meeting regarding the books’ disposition, but discussion is expected to continue at the November board meeting.

**Reported in: WRCB, October 13, 2021; Nashville Tennessean, October 21, 2021; News Channel 9 ABC, October 22, 2021.**

## Williamson County, Tennessee

The Williamson County branch of Moms for Liberty sent the Tennessee Department of Education (DOE) a spreadsheet itemizing objections to 29 books, 1 video, and 1 article contained in the K-8 Wit & Wisdom curriculum.

Among the complaints is that *Seahorse: The Shyest Fish in the Sea* is not age appropriate for first graders because it includes “mating seahorses with pictures of positions and discussion of the male carrying the eggs.”

While it’s easy to focus on the absurdity of railing against the sexiness of seahorses, an organization like Moms for Liberty sending a list of censorship demands to a state department of education poses very real threats to educational opportunities.

As of this writing, Moms for Liberty is a group with 142 chapters in 35 states and well over 55,000 members. It receives funding from the

Conservatives for Good Government PAC and Megyn Kelly hosted fundraisers. It has been promoted on *FOX News*.

Moms for Liberty was started in Florida as a “parents’ rights group” opposed to school mask mandates. Their focus quickly shifted to limiting curricula and banning books from school libraries. They actively oppose sex education, anything they consider to be “critical race theory,” and books with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) characters or authors.

The co-director of Moms for Liberty is the wife of Christian Ziegler, vice chairman of the Florida Republican Party. Ziegler has championed Moms for Liberty and expects them to aid Governor Ron DeSantis’s 2022 reelection campaign.

Nationwide, Moms for Liberty have become known for their “I don’t co-parent with the government” t-shirts and viral protest videos.

Major news outlets have portrayed them as both a grassroots organization and as a well-funded and organized astroturf campaign. Both stances are accurate, making grounds for their dismissal on either count irrelevant.

They are well-funded by prominent Republican party members and organizations. They are equipped with resources for confronting school board members, administrators, and teachers in Youtube-worthy ways.

The astroturf campaign is channeling very real fear and rage felt by White conservative parents nationwide, as well as a genuine desire to protect their children in the ways they feel are best.

The confluence of these two streams has resulted in a movement which Attorney General Merrick Garland condemned for creating

a “disturbing spike in harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence against school administrators, board members, and staff.”

While the letter and spreadsheet sent to the Tennessee DOE lacked the bluster and violence Moms for Liberty have become known for, it still grabbed headlines because of the sexy seahorses.

Many of the titles that Moms for Liberty requested the Tennessee DOE remove from statewide curricula dealt with racism, race, and the histories of Black and indigenous peoples in the US instead of seahorses. These include the following titles and rationales for exclusion:

*Cendrillon: A Caribbean Cinderella* by Robert D. San Souci was characterized as inappropriate because it contains “many French Creole words.”

*First Nations of North America: Plains Indians* by Andrew Santella was characterized as inappropriate because it “paints White people in a negative light.”

*The Buffalo are Back* by Jean Craighead George was characterized as inappropriate because it is “divisive and dark.” The spreadsheet notes that it’s “not historically accurate” since “the true history is that the railroad was being built and therefore a lot of the buffalo were pushed out and died.”

*The Story of Johnny Appleseed* by Aliko was characterized as inappropriate because “for no reason and no context, there are two pages of divisiveness where it talks about Native Americans hating White men.”

*Ruby Bridges Goes to School* by Ruby Bridges was characterized as inappropriate for the first grade because it contains “racist remarks,” “shows division along racial lines,” “shows the oppression of people of color,” and “causes shame for young impressionable White children.”



Moms for Liberty recommended *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles be used in the 6th–8th grade instead of the prescribed 2nd, because it has “themes of segregation and racism,” “is highly inflammatory and divisive,” and “instills shame in White children.”

Frances E. Ruffin’s *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the March to Washington* was characterized as inappropriate due to “photographs of political violence.”

A cautionary note regarding *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco warns that “the earlier versions of this book are fine. However, according to reviews, the newer 25th anniversary edition ends with a gay marriage so it’s important to know which version the schools are using.”

*Coming to America* by Betsy Maestro is listed as being inappropriate because it presents information “about difficult subjects such as slavery and Indian conflicts . . . without noting any of the challenges associated with illegal immigration in our country.”

*Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech is inappropriate due to “an unnecessary slap at historical monuments . . . totally missing the point that it is to honor those who have been presidents, she says ‘I’ve got nothing against the presidents, but you’d think the Sioux would be mighty sad to have those White faces carved into their sacred hill. I bet my mother was upset. I wondered why whoever carved them couldn’t have put a couple Indians up there too.’”

*Putting Up the Sky: Seven Native American Plays for Children* by Joseph Bruchac is listed as being inappropriate for containing “Native American parables.”

*Thunder Rolling in the Mountains* by Scott O’Dell and Elizabeth Hall “painted White people as ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ or ‘couldn’t be trusted.’”

*The River Between Us* by Richard Peck “painted White people as ‘bad’ or ‘evil’ or ‘couldn’t be trusted.’”

*We Are the Ship: The Story of the Negro League Baseball* by Kadir Nelson is questioned because it “talks about being hanged, referencing the ‘N’ word.”

The complete list of titles requested for removal from public school curricula in Tennessee:

- *Amos and Boris* by William Steig
- *Brave Irene* by William Steig
- *The Buffalo Are Back* by Jean Craighead George
- *Coming to America: The Story of Immigration* by Betsy Maestro
- *Feelings* by Aliki
- *George vs. George: The American Revolution as Seen from Both Sides* by Rosalyn Schanzer
- *Gifts from the Gods: Ancient Words & Wisdom from Greek & Roman Mythology* by Lisa Lunge-Larsen
- *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen
- *Hurricane* by Jessica Rudolph
- *Johnny Appleseed* by Steven Kellogg
- *The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco
- *Love That Dog* by Sharon Creech
- *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the March on Washington* by Frances E. Ruffin
- *Plains Indians* by Andrew Santella
- *Pushing Up the Sky: Seven Native American Plays for Children* by Joseph Bruchac
- *The River Between Us* by Richard Peck
- *The Rough-Face Girl* by Rafe Martin
- *Ruby Bridges Goes to School* by Ruby Bridges
- *Seahorse: The Shyest Fish in the Sea* by Chris Butterworth (book and video)
- *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh
- *Shark Attack!* by Cathy East

Dubowski

- *The Story of Johnny Appleseed* by Aliki
- *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles
- *Thunder Rolling in the Mountains* by Scott O’Dell
- *Understanding Greek Myths* by Natalie Hyde
- *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech
- *What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?* by Steve Jenkins
- “When Peace Met Power” by Laura Helweg (article)
- *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears* by Verna Aardema
- *Woods Runner* by Gary Paulsen

**Reported in: *LGBTQ Nation*, September 24, 2021; *The Guardian*, June 30 and September 25, 2021; *Media Matters for America*, November 12, 2021; *The Washington Post*, October 15, 2021.**

### Austin, Texas

On September 16, Lake Travis Independent School District (ISD) announced they were removing *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Pérez from the Hudson Bend and Bee Cave middle school libraries for review.

The announcement came the day after former school board candidate Kara Bell raised objections to the book during a school board meeting.

*Out of Darkness* is set in East Texas in 1937 and details the ill-fated love between a Mexican American girl and an African American boy. It was a 2016 Michael L. Printz award honor book. The Michael L. Printz is a prestigious award recognizing each year’s “best book written for teens, based entirely on its literary merit.” Up to four Honor Books are also designated annually.

Bell read a passage from the book then proclaimed “I do not want my children to learn about anal sex in



middle school. I've never had anal sex. I don't want to have anal sex. I don't want my kids having anal sex. I want you to start focusing on education and not public health." A video of her comments went viral.

Pérez responded on social media by providing context for the passage Bell excerpted. "What she's reading from is from a part of the book where the whole point is to capture the utterly relentless sexual objectification and racialization the Mexican American main character endures."

Jonathan Friedman, Director of Free Expression and Education at PEN America, said "I think to pretend books that deal explicitly with sex or sexual assault are in some way a threat to young people are doing them a disservice. This is about having access for young people to a wide variety of literature that people from different backgrounds are reflected in."

"Craven political leaders are fueling a panic about supposedly 'divisive concepts' being taught in schools, and that in turn has sparked a wave of righteous but misguided parental calls for out and out censorship," said Friedman.

Earlier this year, Bell was charged with a Class C misdemeanor for assaulting a Nordstrom Rack employee after refusing to put on a mask. In the body cam video of the attack, Bell can be heard proclaiming "I am a woman of God!"

"For anyone who believes in liberty and choice, calling to ban books from a classroom should be anathema," said Jonathan Friedman, Director of Free Expression and Education at PEN America. "The solution to creating a better classroom for our kids isn't trying to cover their eyes from difficult or challenging books—even ones we disagree with."

Pérez said she hopes students are "kind of hungry for stories from

people at the margins of history." She said that, in *Out of Darkness*, "I knew a lot of the historical details, but I was also trying to tell stories that reflect the marginal experiences by the characters."

According to a spokesperson for the school district, their policy holds that "A district shall not remove materials from a library for the purpose of denying students access to ideas with which the district disagrees. A district may remove materials, because they are pervasively vulgar or based solely upon the educational suitability of the books in question."

No indication was provided regarding how long the review process may take.

**Reported in: KXAN, September 16, 2021; Book Riot September 21, 2021.**

### Leander, Texas

In early August, Leander Independent School District (ISD) announced an additional seven titles it was banning from school libraries, continuing an ongoing censorship saga that began in February.

These titles are part of the 140 optional book club titles that were suspended from circulation pending review on April 21. Virtually all of the books suspended or banned were by Black or lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) authors.

The latest titles banned from the school district were:

- *None of the Above* by I.W. Gregorio
- *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Perez
- *Red at the Bone* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Brave Face: A Memoir* by Shaun David Hutchinson
- *In the Dream House: A Memoir* by Carmen Maria Machado

- *Ordinary Hazards: A Memoir* by Nikki Grimes
- *Shout* by Laurie Halse Anderson

*Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, *The Nowhere Girls* by Amy Reed, *My Friend Dahmer* by Derf Backderf, *Dear Evan Hansen* by Val Emmich, *American Street* by Ibi Zoboi, and *The Book of Unknown Americans* by Christina Henríquez remain under review.

Following this announcement, Jonathan Friedman, director of free expression and education at PEN America said, "This is a sad day for literature and for students' freedom to learn."

Friedman said, "It is disheartening to see a school district closing off avenues for learning and engagement across lines of difference. Not only is the removal of these books harmful to the literary community as a whole, it also contributes to the further minimization of the issues that people of color and LGBTQ+ individuals face."

Making the books' removal more egregious is that 80% of the district's reviewers said Machado's book met the curriculum standards and 88% said *Red at the Bone* met the standards. The district removed them anyway.

Even while the review of suspended book club titles was ongoing, additional calls for censorship emerged.

During the public comments section of the September 9 school board meeting, complaints about *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison were raised by Brandi Burkman, a parent who described the book as the depraved work of a pedophile.

Burkman and another parent filed reports with the police regarding obscenities contained in the book.

*Lawn Boy* was not one of the book club titles and according to the district, no requests for reconsideration were submitted for *Lawn Boy*.



Subsequently, it is not currently under review.

Following the meeting, board member Jim MacKay emailed his resignation to the superintendent and to the school board president, lamenting that the board was not sufficiently limiting students' access to LGBTQIA+ reading material.

"I cannot, and quite frankly will not support a superintendent or board that turns a blind eye to the incredible harm we are potentially doing [to] our innocent children," wrote MacKay. "I will keep for myself the shame and guilt of our 'literature program' for the rest of my life."

(See: Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy, v.6 iss.2: *Censorship Dateline: Schools*)

**Reported in: *Book & Film Globe*, August 9, 2021; *Book Riot*, August 11, 2021; *Austin American-Statesman*, September 16, 2021; *CBS Austin*, September 14, 2021; *PEN America*, August 5, 2021.**

## Houston, Texas

Spring Branch Independent School District (ISD) banned the graphic novel *The Breakaways* by Cathy G. Johnson from all of its elementary schools following one parent's complaint.

According to the publisher, *The Breakaways* is intended for readers aged 8–11. Johnson's critically-acclaimed graphic novel tells the tale of a diverse group of kids on a pretty bad soccer team who form bonds of friendship and learn to make room for themselves in the world. It won the 2019 Dorry Award for Children's/YA Book of the Year.

One of the characters is transgender. Some of the characters kiss. The decision to ban it occurred while the Texas state legislature was considering a bill to bar transgender student

athletes from competing on teams aligned with their gender identity.

Spring Branch ISD's policy states that library books should be selected to "help students gain an awareness of our pluralistic society" and to "present various sides of controversial issues."

After the parent's complaint was received, the book was reviewed for reconsideration by a committee of two librarians, two teachers, and an administrator. They decided that "the book was not age appropriate nor was it appropriate for its intended educational use." The committee "recommended that *The Breakaways* not be available in elementary libraries."

Johnson said "The book includes kids of all sorts of identities to reflect the world around us. There is a transgender student who comes out in the book. He is just one of many characters who make up my book, as well as one of the identities that make up the world."

She said this was the first time she was aware of her book being banned from a school library. "As a teacher and as someone who identifies as queer myself, it isn't surprising and it's sad. It's something we need to fight against," Johnson said.

Austin Ruiz, communications and marketing manager for the Montrose Center, a Houston-based nonprofit that supports the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) community, indicated that positive representations of LGBTQIA+ youth in media can be lifelines for kids who face a greater risk of bullying and violence in schools, as well as higher rates of suicide.

"It's important for youth . . . to see literature that they can read and say, 'That's something that I identify with and it's OK and normal and not a bad thing,'" said Ruiz. "It could be the difference between them continuing

or unfortunately trying to harm themselves."

Johnson noted how valuable it was for her to find books that reflected her experience growing up. "I value being able to continue that as an author and educator by creating work representative of all identities." She added that, "Research does show that representation helps students do better in school and achieve more."

Johnson said, "I hope going forward that transgender students in Texas are offered the same opportunities, dignities, and respect that cisgender students have."

Spring Branch ISD officials said the fact that a character in the book comes out as transgender did not figure into its decision to remove the book from its elementary schools.

Mandy Giles, a parent of two non-binary children, said that kids are already aware of issues of gender identity and sexual orientation. She said kids need positive portrayals of children from all ethnic, gender, and identity backgrounds.

Giles said banning the book "makes us feel attacked, especially my children feeling attacked. That their existence, their humanity is being erased."

Johnson shared a message of acceptance and compassion for the children who may be hurt by the district's decision: "There are people out there who love you and you'll find them."

**Reported in: *Houston Chronicle*, October 7, 2021; *ABC 13*, October 7, 2021.**

## Southlake, Texas

On October 4 the Carroll Independent School District (ISD) school board voted 3-2 to formally reprimand Rickie Farah, a fourth grade teacher at Johnson Elementary School, for having *This Book is Anti-Racist* in her classroom library.



Rickie Farah was named Carroll ISD Teacher of the Year last year. The reprimand has joined the award in her personnel file.

Kirkus Reviews called Tiffany Jewell's *This Book is Anti-Racist* "a guidebook for taking action against racism" and named it one of their Best Books of 2020. It's an Indie-bound and *New York Times* bestseller. Muns said the book violated her family's "morals and faith."

Sarah Muns and her husband complained to the board that their child had checked the book out during the previous school year. The ISD's administration investigated the matter and determined that nothing Farah did warranted disciplinary action.

Hannah Smith and Cam Bryan, two of the board members who voted for the reprimand, received campaign donations from the Muns family while they were running for school board.

Smith made the motion to reprimand Farah. Bryan seconded. Trustee Eric Lannen joined them in voting for the motion.

In dissent, Board President Michelle Moore said, "I think the administration did a great job investigating this and trying to work with the family to address the concerns related to this matter and I am in agreement with the administration's decision."

Smith and Bryan have also opposed the district adopting a cultural competency plan and hiring a director of equity and inclusion.

They were endorsed by the Southlake Families PAC, which has raised more than \$200,000 since 2020. In addition to Smith and Bryan, they campaigned for the winner of the mayoral race.

"The PAC has gotten control of our town. This teacher is one of our best and brightest," said Jennifer Hough, parent of a student in the ISD.

"This has just killed teacher morale around here and who's ultimately going to be hurt are the kids."

Sheri Mills, the other board member who opposed the reprimand, issued a warning to teachers in the district.

"If you are worried about teaching in this school district, you should watch this vote. I want you to know that you are right to be worried by whoever votes yes," Mills said.

Less than a week after the reprimand was issued to Farah, district administrators told teachers they'd be receiving mandatory training on new district-wide rules governing which books are allowed to be in classrooms.

In an email sent October 7, administrators directed all classroom libraries to be closed "until they can be vetted."

Administrators distributed a rubric for determining which books need to be removed from Carroll ISD classroom libraries. Language used in the rubric echoed that of HB 3979, Texas's law banning the teaching of critical race theory in schools.

Five Carroll teachers anonymously reported concerns that the guidelines are too vague and that they are afraid of punishment from the board if a parent issues a complaint. Four said they were considering leaving the school district.

One English teacher wrapped their classroom library shelves with caution tape. Another draped black sheets over them along with a sign proclaiming, "You can't read any of the books on my shelves."

One teacher said she was getting rid of *Separate is Never Equal* by Duncan Tonatiuh, because it details a family's fight to end segregation.

Another said she had to pull *A Good Kind of Trouble* by Lisa Moore Ramée, because the story involves the Black Lives Matter movement.

A high school English teacher said it would take her months to review every book in her classroom and that she would likely need to get rid of many of them, based on the guidelines. She said she no longer feels safe keeping a copy of *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas or any books by Toni Morrison.

"One of the questions we're supposed to ask is 'Does the writer have a neutral stance on the topic? Well, if you're Toni Morrison, how can you have a neutral stance toward racism?'" asked the teacher. "All of this is creating a chilling effect that's going to hurt our students."

"It is frightening to think that we are back in the days of book banning," said Kim Anderson, director of the National Education Association. "Why don't school board members who are taking these actions or legislators who are taking these actions believe that America's students deserve an honest and truthful reflection of our history?"

It might be because school board members can benefit by exploiting racial division and anxiety. Andrew Yeager, a third board member endorsed by Southlake Families PAC, was elected to the Carroll ISD school board on November 2. He's filling the seat David Almand vacated in July.

During the October 8 training on the book purging rubric, Carroll ISD's executive director of curriculum and instruction Gina Peddy advised teachers to "remember the concepts of [HB] 3979" and make sure they present multiple perspectives on "widely debated and currently controversial" issues.

"And make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust, that you have one that has an opposing, that has other perspectives," continued Peddy.

Clay Robison, a spokesman for the Texas State Teachers Association, characterized Carroll ISD's guidelines



as a misguided overreaction to the passage of HB 3979. “We find it reprehensible for an educator to require a Holocaust denier to get equal treatment with the facts of history. That’s absurd. That’s worse than absurd. And this law does not require it.”

On a recording of the meeting, teachers can be heard discussing Peddy’s comments. “I am offended as hell by somebody who says I should have an opposing view to the Holocaust in my library,” said one. To which another replied, “They don’t understand what they have done. And they are going to lose incredible teachers, myself potentially being with them.”

“Teachers are literally afraid that we’re going to be punished for having books in our classes,” said an elementary school teacher. “There are no children’s books that show the ‘opposing perspective’ of the Holocaust or the ‘opposing perspective’ of slavery. Are we supposed to get rid of all of the books on those subjects?”

After news coverage lambasting the ISD broke, Superintendent Lane Ledbetter made a Facebook post stating Peddy’s advice was “in no way to convey that the Holocaust was anything less than a terrible event in history.”

“As we continue to work through implementation of HB 3979, we also understand this bill does not require an opposing viewpoint on historical facts,” continued Ledbetter.

**Reported in:** *Dallas Morning News*, October 6, 2021; *The Texan*, October 6, 2021; *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, October 7, 2021; *NBC News*, October 8, 2021, and October 14, 2021.

### New Kent, Virginia

*Poet X* by Elizabeth Acevedo was removed from the New Kent Middle School (NKMS) Library after Emily White complained about it on social media. She thanked the principal for

removing it during their October 11 board meeting and expressed concerns regarding other “inappropriate” books that were still available.

*Poet X* was promoted at NKMS for National Hispanic American Heritage Month. Acevedo’s novel is about a Dominican 15-year-old in Harlem working through family conflict by writing poetry. It won the Carnegie Medal for best children’s book published in the UK in 2018, multiple Youth Media Awards, and received starred reviews from *Kirkus* and *School Library Journal*.

The school’s policy covering reconsideration of learning materials was not followed when *Poet X* was removed.

The policy requires submission of a completed reconsideration form to the school principal, so the principal can conduct a review of the materials “for their educational suitability.” The policy specifies that materials will not be “removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval” and allows for two rounds of appeals.

Superintendent of schools Brian Nichols said the process was not followed in order to quickly address White’s concerns. “This was a good learning step for us because it shows us that our process isn’t perfect.”

District 1 school board representative Wayne Meade said he was pleased the superintendent addressed the issue quickly and hopes to put in place an easier process for banning books from the school.

“We definitely need to make it easier for parents to get access to this [reconsideration] form,” said Meade. “I hope that even though we were able to get on top of this issue, that parents become more involved.”

At the board meeting, Tom Miller amplified White’s complaints about *Poet X* and felt that removing it wasn’t going far enough. “I want to know who is involved in choosing these

books. How are they going to be held accountable?” asked Miller.

Miller also said the school’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion program was a “rebranding of critical race theory” and expressed concerns that cultural competency training was required for teacher licensure.

Ross Miller, Director of Innovation and Development, said the district is considering shifting to an opt-in model for parents to restrict their children’s access to young adult materials and is looking into a process of notifying parents whenever a child checks out certain library books.

**Reported in:** *New Kent Charles City Chronicle*, October 12, 2021; and October 25, 2021.

### Virginia Beach, Virginia

On October 5, Virginia Beach City Public Schools board members Victoria Manning and Laura Hughes sent an email to Superintendent Aaron Spence requesting that four books be banned from the district’s schools.

The challenged books were:

- *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison
- *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe
- *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines
- *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison

Spence added two books to Manning and Hughes’ list before requesting that all six titles be pulled and reviewed for reconsideration. Hughes’ additions were *Beyond Magenta: Transgender Teens* by Susan Kuklin and *Good Trouble: Lessons from the Civil Rights Playbook* by Christopher Noxon.

Gaines and Morrison’s books are taught in 11th and 12th grade classes.

The books targeted for removal in Virginia Beach reflect the national trend to remove books discussing race or including lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning,





intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) characters and to silence Black and LGBTQIA+ voices.

Nora Pelizzari, communication director of the National Coalition Against Censorship, said that it's important for schools to make such literature available to students. She said banning books "suggests to students that there are some ideas that are too dangerous to even discuss and that there are some stories that don't deserve to be told."

The debate over the books went public during the October 12th school board meeting, when parents showed up with printouts from *Gender Queer* and read passages from the challenged books during the public comments period.

Amy Solares said "I'm not saying, 'burn [the books]. I'm saying, 'Get them out of our public school libraries.'"

Manning requested that all books in the district be reviewed and immediately removed if they contain "any pornographic material."

Superintendent Spence belatedly attempted to pump the brakes on the ban bus, offering the cautionary admonition that "what one person finds offensive, others may not," and noting that all physical and digital materials had been vetted by staff with the Department of Teaching and Learning.

During the October 26 meeting of the school board, it was announced that Kobabe's book was banned from the district. The others remain under review.

**Reported in: *Virginian-Pilot*, October 7, 2021, and October 17, 2021; 13 News Now, October 26, 2021.**

## LIBRARIES Harrisonville, Missouri

Protesters showed up at the September 21 board meeting of the Cass

County Public Library to demonstrate their objections to *It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, and Sexuality* by Robbie Harris.

Harris's book was written to inform pre-adolescent children about puberty so young individuals would understand aspects of sexual health. It received numerous accolades, including being *The New York Times* Best Book of the Year in 1995, a *School Library Journal* best book, and an American Literature Association Notable Children's Book.

Booklist recommends Harris's book for grades four through seven and called it a "caring, conscientious, and well-crafted book [that] will be a fine library resource as well as a marvelous adjunct to the middle-school sex-education curriculum."

Protesters objected to illustrations in the book they considered "pornographic" and asserted sex education materials do not belong in the children's section. It has been in the children's section of the library since 1994.

The public comments section of the meeting was spirited.

Josh Wollberg, a Baptist pastor, said "Everything about this book is horrifying. This is an absolutely disgusting book. This is written by sick individuals who are looking to groom young kids into sex."

One resident defended Harris's book, calling it "very important for parents who maybe feel like they don't have the words to talk to their children about it."

Sarah Maclean said, "Let me parent my kids, let you parent yours. We're all good."

One protester took her sign into the meeting, which read "For goodness sake just MOVE the book! Simple solution."

Christie Mangan observed that any effort to restrict access was an act of

censorship. "Where do you go from there?," she asked. "This is 2021. Kids have far more access to things on the internet than they do in a book."

The library has not made a formal decision regarding whether to move, remove, or retain the book where it is.

**Reported in: KMBC 9 News, September 22, 2021; FOX4, September 21, 2021.**

## Campbell County, Wyoming

Between August 9 and November 20, the Campbell County Public Library (CCPL) received 55 book reconsideration requests concerning 29 titles.

County prosecutors were also asked to pursue criminal charges against library staff for making certain books available. The local chapter of MassResistance has led the book banning effort. Members of MassResistance filed the criminal complaint.

MassResistance, formerly the Parents' Rights Coalition and the Article 8 Alliance, was founded in Massachusetts. It opposes same-sex marriage and actively organizes protests against drag queen story hours, critical race theory (CRT), sex education, and sex change operations for minors.

MassResistance became active in Gillette this summer after the CCPL made a Facebook post promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) materials in their teen section for Pride Month.

Local MassResistance member Hugh Bennett called the Facebook post "a slap in the face to people who don't want their children exposed to this nonsense of gender identity."

Arthur Schaper, organization director of MassResistance, said Campbell County residents reached out in the second week of July and "we helped them organize and grow." The local chapter now has over 150 members.



Once established, MassResistance began organizing protests against the library for “promoting the LGBTQ lifestyle to young people.”

In September, MassResistance paid for ads on a dozen billboards in Gillette warning of “inappropriate youth books” and “LGBT indoctrination” at the library.

MassResistance members have attended all library board and county commission meetings since the chapter formed in July.

At the September 8 commission meeting, Susan Sisti lamented that a determination had been made to retain two of the challenged books. She added that books on witchcraft, satanic rituals, drinking blood, and eating toads are also inappropriate for young readers.

“A group of citizens has come to you and you don’t care about this most horrible, vile, erotic porn that belongs in an adult bookstore,” said Sisti.

Ed Sisti, relationship unknown, said “There’s an 800-pound gorilla in the room and it’s called socialism. It’s everywhere and it’s in our library.”

During a September 27 meeting between the Campbell County Commissioners and the CCPL, Commissioner Del Shelstad complained the library was progressing through the reconsideration requests they’d received too slowly.

Shelstad also said he had personally filed a reconsideration request for *This Book is Gay* and that it was denied. He said he read *This Book is Gay* and the problem with it “has nothing to do with the fact that it’s about gay,” but rather that it was “garbage.”

Shelstad said, “My suggestion is that we don’t fund the library. If that means closing it, then we close it.”

CCPL Executive Director Terri Lesley said the sheer volume of

requests for reconsideration they’ve received was startlingly high and that it was “actually very unusual for a public library to receive this many challenges in a small time frame.”

Lesley explained that the reconsideration process takes time and that, “This time is needed to review the challenged material, gather reviews, and write a little information to the patron about the decision.”

Lesley said that by policy, the maximum amount of time to process and respond to a request for reconsideration and move through a board appeal process is 120 days. Since they received their first formal challenge on August 9, all responses have been issued in about 30 days.

“We have a lot of challenges to respond to,” stated Lesley. “It takes a lot of work to go through a challenge, it doesn’t happen instantly. The merits and faults [of a book] are both weighed in our decision. It is absolutely our top priority.”

Lesley said in seven weeks, the library received 35 reconsideration requests by 14 people for 18 titles and sent out 16 responses. All 16 stated the challenged books would remain in the library in their respective sections.

Susan Sisti said she was filing 13 more challenges this week.

Shelstad said the library needed to work faster. “This is creating division in our community, we need to take action on this.”

Lesley said “We are trying to be the force of reason, trying to work through these things using the policy we have in place—review these books and do our due diligence.”

Commission Chairman Bob Maul followed with, “If we are going to provide what the citizens of this community desire, then we need to think a little bit more like a redneck.”

Lesley said the library’s operant philosophy is “that we have a balanced

collection and that we can’t take sides. We want to have the book there and for the patrons to make their own decisions. That’s where we stand.”

Shelstad then argued that books should be at least as difficult to acquire as guns.

“I own a gun store. A 10- or 12-year-old comes into my store and wants to buy a gun, they can’t. Why? Because it’s not appropriate for that age. Why do we have to look at our library and say it’s open to anything no matter what it is? I fundamentally think that is wrong,” said Shelstad.

Library board members explained to Shelstad how library cards work and that children require a parent-approved card in order to check out items.

At the September 28 Campbell County Commission meeting, Bennett accused library leadership of “committing sexual intrusion on minors.”

“There are a lot of laws in existence that make what’s being done in this library felony behavior,” said Bennett. He suggested the commissioners look up the definition of “intrusion.”

“I think that you guys should be on notice that you’re fighting a losing battle and the longer you resist, the worse it’s gonna be,” menaced Bennett.

On September 29, Hugh and Susan Bennett filed a criminal complaint with the Campbell County Sheriff’s Office asking that charges be brought against library employees for disseminating and promoting obscene material.

The allegedly obscene material listed in the complaint are: *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson, *How Do You Make a Baby* by Anna Fiske, *Doing it! Let’s Talk About Sex* by Hannah Winton, *Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg, and *Dating and Sex: A*



*Guide for the 21st Century Teen Boy* by Andrew P. Smiler.

Wyoming statute defines obscene material as “that which the average person would find encourages an excessive interest in sexual matters, depicts or describes sexual conduct in a patently offensive way, and lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.”

*Dating and Sex* was written by a therapist, distributed by the American Psychological Association, and has won multiple awards.

*Sex Is a Funny Word* is a critically acclaimed and award-winning children’s book discussing sex, gender identity, privacy, safety, respect, and protecting yourself against unwanted sexual touch and abuse.

*Doing It* is the critically acclaimed first book by the award-winning vlogger Hannah Witton. *Booklist* said, “This highly accessible title offers much for young adults. Empowering, modern, and judgment-free.” *School Library Connection* called it “a must-have for libraries serving young adults.”

*How Do You Make a Baby* was recommended by *School Library Journal* for kids K-4. They describe it as “an informational and fun treatment of what can be a difficult subject. Readers will appreciate the humor and straightforward presentation. Recommended for general purchase.” The couples and babies depicted are racially diverse, and same-sex couples are represented.

*This Book is Gay* received numerous awards, a starred review in *Booklist*, and is currently on three separate Amazon bestseller lists. A review in *The Guardian* said “*This Book is Gay* makes you feel confident and comfortable with yourself, regardless of sexuality.”

On October 5, the Weston County Attorney Michael Stulken was

appointed as a special prosecutor after Deputy Campbell County Attorney Sean Brown informed the commissioners’ that his office could not ethically investigate a criminal report filed against the library as they are a subsidiary of the county and a client of the Campbell County Attorney’s Office.

On October 18, the Campbell County Board of Commissioners stopped allowing public comments about CCPL during their meetings. This decision met with criticism, including by state representative Scott Clem, who characterized the speech prohibition as a First Amendment violation.

On October 25, the library board upheld library staff’s appealed decision to retain *This Book is Gay* in the teen section.

Stulken On October 27, Stulken wrote to Campbell County Sheriff Scott Matheny that under Wyoming Law, the disputed books were not obscene and having them in the library’s children and teen sections did not constitute engaging in “sexual intrusion.”

“I cannot ethically bring criminal charges if the facts surrounding a certain matter are not supported by probable cause,” Stulken wrote.

Lesley expressed relief and hoped it meant the library could start to move on. However, she recognized that the turmoil she’s been engulfed in since July “is bigger than our library. This is a political movement and we just happen to be caught in here.”

The titles of some challenged books at CCPL have not been publicly released, but they’re known to include:

- *Doing it! Let’s Talk About Sex* by Hannah Witton
  - *Heartstopper* by Alice Oseman
  - *Jane Against the World: Roe v. Wade and the Fight for Reproductive Rights* by Karen Blumenthal
  - *Music from Another World* by Robin Talley
  - *Sex Plus: Learning, Loving, Enjoying Your Body* by Laci Green
  - *My Body My Choice: The Fight for Abortion Rights* by Robin Stevenson
  - *How Do You Make a Baby?* by Anna Fiske
  - *Jack (Not Jackie)* by Erica Silverman
  - *Rainbow: A First Book of Pride* by Michael Genhart
  - *A Quick Easy Guide to Queer & Trans Identities* by Mady G. and Jules Zuckerberg
  - *This Book is Gay* by Juno Dawson
  - *Trans Mission: My Quest to a Beard* by Alex Bertie
  - *The V-Word: True Stories About First-Time Sex* by Amber J. Keyser
  - *Mary Wears What She Wants* by Keith Negley
  - *Meena* by Sine van Mol
  - *Sex is a Funny Word* by Cory Silverberg
- (See: Journal of Intellectual Freedom and Privacy, v.6 iss.2: *Censorship Dateline: Libraries*)
- Reported in: *Powell Tribune*, August 26, 2021; *U.S. News and World Report*, November 20, 2021; *Cowboy State Daily*, October 18, 2021; *County 17 News*, September 9, 2021; September 28, 2021; October 4, 2021; October 6, 2021; and October 7, 2021; *Gillette News Record*, September 28, 2021; *ABC News*, October 1, 2021; *Associated Press*, October 28, 2021; *Reason*, October 5, 2021.**
- *The Babysitters Coven* by Kate Williams
  - *The Black Flamingo* by Dean Atta
  - *Dating and Sex: A Guide for the 21st Century Teen Boy* by Andrew P. Smiler



## MUSEUMS

### Kansas City, Missouri

On September 1, an exhibit examining Kansas City's contributions to the gay rights movement was removed from the State Capitol building's Missouri State Museum in Jefferson City. It was scheduled to remain up for four months, but was removed after less than two days.

The exhibit, "Making History: Kansas City and the Rise of Gay Rights," was created by historians at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Before the exhibit was taken down, Republican state representatives Brian Seitz and Ann Kelley said they opposed its display in the Capitol. A state employee also complained that the exhibit went against "family values."

Kelli Jones, a spokeswoman for Governor Mike Parson, said in a statement that the exhibit organizers had violated a state law requiring them to coordinate with the state's Board of Public Buildings (BPB). The Board consists of the governor, the lieutenant governor, and the attorney general.

John Cunning, former director of the museum, said he was "befuddled" by the state's rationale. He oversaw the museum for 24 years.

"Never in that time did I have to get permission from the Board of

Public Buildings to put up an exhibit," said Cunning. He stated he "never had any dealings with the board."

Openly gay State Senator Greg Razer called the decision to remove the display "unacceptable." and said the governor's statement "seemed like a convenient excuse."

Razer expressed concern about the message state authorities would send to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) youth. "I want them to know that this is a beautiful, vibrant, accepting community that wants you here. Stunts like this don't help," said Razer.

The Missouri Department of Natural Resources (DNR), which runs the Missouri State Museum, said it would relocate the exhibit to the Jefferson Landing State Historic Site and reopen it on September 4.

The Missouri State Capitol Commission is coordinating the exhibit's new location instead of the Board of Public Buildings.

"We apologize for the way this unfolded," said DNR director Dru Buntin. "We agree the history of all Missourians is an important story that needs to be told."

The National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) sent a statement to Gov. Parson regarding the exhibit's removal. "It is apparent that the

removal was motivated by hostility to the viewpoints expressed in the exhibit. This act of censorship flies in the face of the state's First Amendment obligations."

The statement continues that, "For at least the last two decades, no exhibit has been approved by the Board [of Public Buildings], nor removed because the Board had not given its approval. That suggests that the absence of Board approval was not the real reason but a pretext for an act of viewpoint discrimination."

NCAC urged the governor to return the exhibit to the State Museum. "As a public space open to exhibiting artwork, state-owned spaces are ruled by the free speech clause in the First Amendment. This means that government officials cannot arbitrarily or systematically impose their prejudices on a curated exhibition simply by labeling works 'inappropriate' or 'contrary to family values.'"

Razer said if some legislators are uncomfortable with discussions about LGBTQIA+ rights, "that is their problem to overcome." He added, "We can't brush over the parts of history that we don't want to see."

**Reported in: *The New York Times*, September 4, 2021; National Coalition Against Censorship, September 16, 2021.**