

# The Challenge of Book Challenges:

Strategies for defending students' right to read



# Introductions



Martha Hickson, Kristin Pekoll, Anne Piascik, Hilda Weisburg

## In this presentation...

- ◉ *Fun Home Challenge*
  - *Presented by Martha Hickson*
- ◉ **Selection & Reconsideration Toolkit**
  - *Presented by Hilda Weisburg*
- ◉ **When all else fails, what can ALA do for you?**
  - *Presented by Kristin Pekoll*

## Why are you Here?

- To find information about book challenges
- To learn how to create a selection policy
- I have faced a challenge and need support
- Just interested in the topic

AASL Common Belief #5:  
Intellectual Freedom is every learner's right



*“Learners have the freedom to speak and hear what others have to say, rather than allowing others to control their access to ideas and information; the school librarian’s responsibility is to develop these dispositions in learners, educators, and all other members of the learning community.”*

# 1. *Fun Home* Challenge

*North Hunterdon High School*

## The school



1,630 students

#34 *NJ Monthly*

77% to 4-year colleges

## Administrators



**Jeffrey Bender**  
*Superintendent*

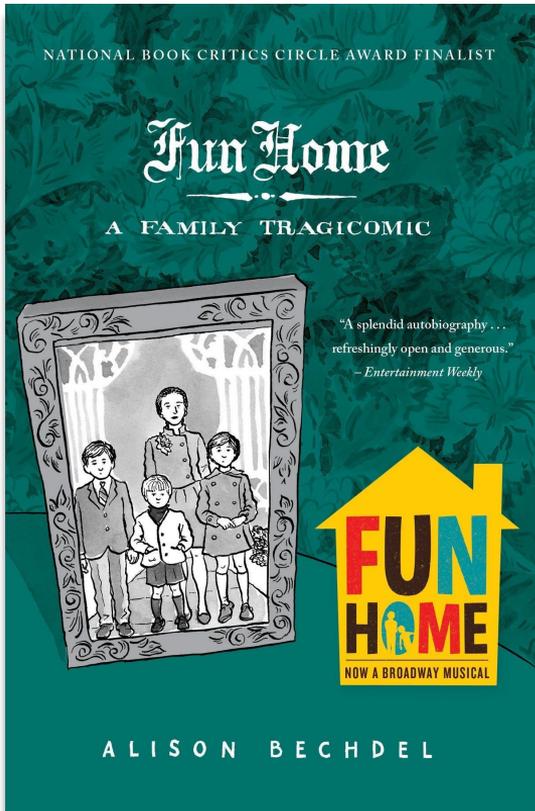


**Greg Cottrell**  
*Principal*



**Yulee Kim**  
*Assistant Principal*

## The book



“One of the very best graphic novels ever” (*Booklist*)

#3 on *New York Times* “50 Best Memoirs of the Past 50 Years”

Basis for 2015 Best Musical Tony Award winner

Bechdel: MacArthur Fellow for “redefining paradigms” in memoir

## The challenge begins



**North Hunterdon-Voorhees  
Regional High School District**  
*"Providing Success for All Students"*

<< 🖨️ 🏠 📄 ❤️

### Regulation 9130 PUBLIC COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES

All complaints and grievances addressed to the Board of Education, Board members individually, school officials, or district staff shall be handled in accordance with the following procedures.

**A. Complaints Regarding**

1. First level
  - a. The complaint
  - b. The staff member

**“Complaints about textbooks, library books, reference works, and other instructional materials used in the district will be made in writing and submitted to the Superintendent.”**

## Policy & regulation highlights

### 2530-RESOURCE-MATERIALS¶

#### Policy for Media Selection¶

The North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District Board of Education hereby declares it is the policy of the North Hunterdon Regional High School District to provide a wide range of instructional materials on all levels of difficulty, with appeal, and the presentation of different points of view and to allow the removal of allegedly inappropriate instructional materials through established procedures.

#### Objectives of Selection¶

In order to assure that the school media program is an integral part of the educational program of the school, the following selection objectives are adopted.¶

- To provide materials that will enrich and support the curriculum and the needs of the users, taking into consideration their varied interests, and learning styles;¶
- To provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards;¶
- To provide materials on opposing sides of controversial issues so that they develop under guidance the practice of critical analysis;¶
- To provide materials which realistically represent our pluralistic society and reflect the contributions made by these groups and individuals to our heritage;¶
- To place principle above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in the selection of materials of the highest quality in order to assure a comprehensive media collection appropriate for the users;¶
- To provide exposure to information technologies and techniques to enable students to participate in life-long learning skills.¶

#### Responsibility for Selection¶

Although the North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District Board of Education is legally responsible for the operation of the schools, the responsibility for media selection materials is delegated to the certificated library/media personnel.

While selection of materials involves many people, including library/media personnel, teachers, students, supervisors, administrators, and community persons, the responsibility for coordinating and recommending the selection and purchase of media rests with the certificated library/media personnel. Responsibility for coordinating the

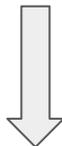
**“... the responsibility for coordinating and recommending the selection and purchase of media rests with the certificated library media personnel”**

**“[The district] supports principles of intellectual freedom inherent in the First Amendment ... and expressed in the [ALA] Library Bill of Rights and [NCTE] Students' Right to Read”**

**“In the event that materials are questioned, the principles of intellectual freedom, the right to access of materials and the integrity of the certificated library media personnel must be defended rather than the materials”**

## Selection of library media

**2530:** "... responsibility for coordinating and recommending the selection and purchase of media rests with the certificated library/media personnel"



**2530:** Criteria for selection

- Be relevant to today's world;
- Represent artistic, historic, and literary qualities;
- Reflect problems, aspirations, attitudes and ideals of a society;
- Contribute to the objectives of the instructional program;
- Be appropriate to the level of the user;
- Represent differing viewpoints on controversial subjects;
- Provide a stimulus to creativity.



## Complaints about resource materials

**2530:** "... it is the policy of the North Hunterdon Regional High School District to provide a wide range of instructional materials ... and to allow the review of allegedly inappropriate instructional materials through established procedures ... If a complaint is made, procedures as outlined in **Regulation No. 9130** will be followed."



**9130:** "... a complaint about instructional or resource materials should be **addressed to the Superintendent.**"



**9130:** "In the case of complaints about instructional or resource materials, the initial **complaint must be set forth in writing** ... No challenged material may be removed from the curriculum or from a collection of resource materials except by action of the Board of Education, and no challenged material may be removed solely because it presents ideas that may be unpopular or offensive to some."



**9130:** "Within ten working days of the receipt of the complaint form, the **Superintendent shall appoint a review committee** ... The standards used by the committee will be those set forth in **Policy No. 2530.**"

## Whose challenge is it anyway?



### *Fun Home* Under Fire in New Jersey

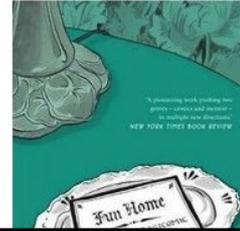
May 29, 2018

By Patricia Masticolo

*Fun Home* is under attack again, this time in a New Jersey High School. Steve DiSturco and Mark Bisci, two parents of students at Watchung Hills Regional High School, [want the award-winning graphic novel removed from the 12th grade curriculum](#) due to “the sexually explicit nature.”

Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* is a graphic novel memoir of the author’s childhood, particularly focused on her relationship with her closeted gay father Bruce. As Alison grows older and realizes that she is a lesbian, she and Bruce are both forced to confront how his repression may have affected her own self-image and the way that she dealt with her sexuality. *Time* magazine named it the best book of 2006, describing it as “a masterpiece about two people who live in the same house but different worlds, and their mysterious debts to each other.”

The book was assigned to various senior English sections this spring, and DiSturco wants it removed from the curriculum before his child becomes a senior in the fall. He added, “We also don’t want children to be singled out or feel that would not be in the best interest for children or the community,” referring to the opt-out policy for students who feel the work isn’t appropriate for them. DiSturco said he’ll do what’s necessary to prove to the Board that



**“... two parents of students at Watchung Hills Regional High School, want the award-winning graphic novel removed from the 12th grade curriculum due to ‘the sexually explicit nature.’”**



Sent up a flare

# Report Censorship

Defend the  
Public's  
Freedom

Report 

[www.ala.org/challengereporting](http://www.ala.org/challengereporting)



## Meeting w VP

*Up policy. Saw [unclear] in charge of committee to choose library materials. I had to read the policy to her.*

*Asked me "what if an administrator wanted it?" Told her the applies. No one*



**"I had no idea [there was a Board policy]."**

**"I thought it might be a good idea to read the book so that I know what we're talking about."**



Sent up more flares

NATIONAL [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] COALITION  
AGAINST [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] CENSORSHIP



National Council of  
Teachers of English®



# Meeting w Principal



**"It's a good read."**

**"I had no idea this would be such a big deal."**



## Fun Home Removed Without Review in NJ High School Library

January 30, 2019

By Patricia Mastricolo

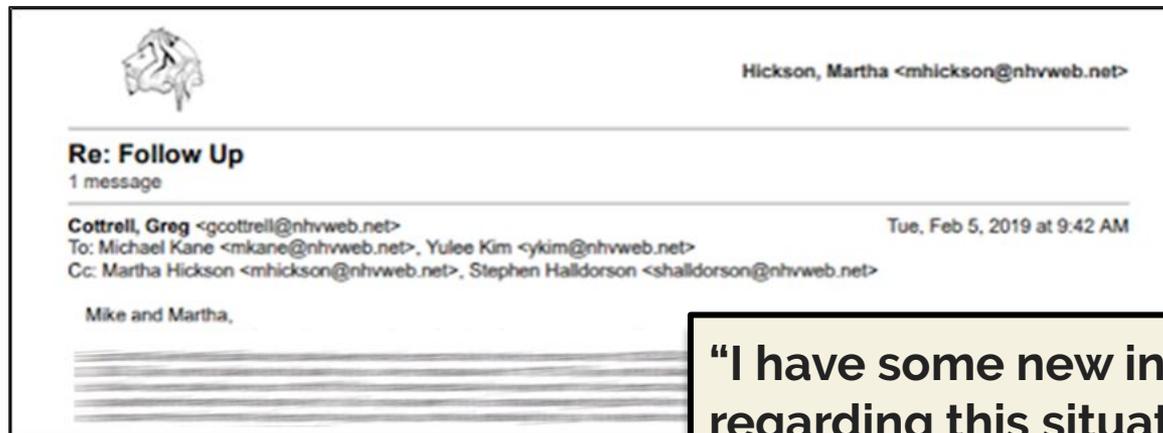
Information is coming to light that the award-winning graphic memoir *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel, has been removed from a high school library in New Jersey without following the appropriate procedures for challenging instructional materials. The removal occurred after administrators learned about another challenge to the graphic novel in the same state, most likely the recent complaints in Watchung, NJ. Back in May, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund in collaboration with National Coalition Against Censorship as part of the Kids' Right to Read Project supported the administration as they ultimately decided to keep the graphic novel in their curriculum – putting students and their own education experience over the complaints of a few parents in the district.

With this most recent removal, it seems that the policies regarding challenges to resources were not followed, because the book was removed without a written complaint, committee meetings, or adhering to curriculum guidelines. According to the district's policies, complaints about instructional or resource materials (which includes textbooks, library books, reference works,





## Not the message I expected



“I have some new information regarding this situation ”



## A written complaint

**To:** Martha Hickson  
**From:** Greg Cottrell  
**CC:** Mike Kane, Yulee Kim  
**Date:** 2/7/19  
**Subject:** Fun Home Book Permission

It has come to my attention that the illustrations on page 214. It is also having "adult content". As a school do not access adult content. Based on this information, I am directing permission is received to acknowledge "adult content".

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Greg Cottrell'.

Greg Cottrell  
Principal  
North Hunterdon High School

**" ... I am directing you to make this book available to students only after parent permission is received ... "**



# Following orders



By order of NHHS principal Dr. Cottrell

NATIONAL BOOK CRITICS CIRCLE AWARD FINALIST

*Fun Home*

A FAMILY TRAGICOMIC

"A splendid autobiography... refreshingly open and generous."  
— *Entertainment Weekly*

**FUN HOME**  
NOW A BROADWAY MUSICAL

ALISON BECHDEL

**cannot be read without  
signed permission from a parent**

Permission slips available  
at the Circulation Desk

**"[If students want to read it] they can buy a copy of the book for \$10 on Amazon."**



# Meanwhile ...

## Courier Post

PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

### New Jersey becomes second state in nation to require that schools teach LGBT history

Hanan Aditya, North Jersey Record | Published 12:47 p.m. ET Feb. 7, 2019 | Updated 2:35 p.m. ET Feb. 7, 2019

New Jersey has become the second state in the nation after California to adopt a law that requires schools to teach about LGBT history in a move hailed by civil rights groups as a step toward inclusion and fairness.

Gov. Phil Murphy, a Democrat who promised to promote equality for gay and transgender people during his campaign, signed the bill Thursday. Among those celebrating the news was Jaime Brueschhoff, of Verona, whose 12-year-old transgender child Rebekah spoke in support of the bill in Tonlon in December.

"This bill is so important for our young people," Bruschhoff said. "They need to see examples of themselves in the things they are going to read today. We know representation matters."



The rainbow flag was risen at Bergen County Plaza in Hackensack. (Photo: Marco Georgiev / NorthJersey.com)

**"... a board of education shall adopt inclusive instructional materials that portray ... the political, economic, and social contributions of persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people ..."**  
**- NJ SR 1569**



## Following the policy

### Complaint about resource materials

1 message

**Martha Hickson** <mhickson@nhvweb.net>

Wed, Feb 13, 2019 at 11:00 AM

To: Jeffrey Bender <jbender@nhvweb.net>

Bcc: mkane@nhvweb.net, shalldorson@nhvweb.net, ledwards@nhvweb.net

Mr. Bender:

[Redacted text]

**“As outlined in board policies 2530 and 9130, I am directing this complaint to your attention.”**



Happy Valentine's Day!

**RE: Complaint about resource materials**

1 message

Jeffrey Bender <jbender@nhweb.net>

To: Martha Hickson <mhickson@nhweb.net>

Cc: Greg Cottrell <gcottrell@nhweb.net>

Thu, Feb 14, 2019 at 3:30 PM

mergacs@nhweb.net

Ms. Hickson,



**“The district could be accused of debauching the morals of minors if we were to allow free access to this material.”**



# Release the hounds!

- American Library Association
- Natl Coalition Against Censorship
- ACLU of NJ
- American Booksellers for Free Expression
- Authors Guild
- Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice
- Comic Book Legal Defense Fund
- Garden State Equality
- Lambda Legal
- Natl Council of Teachers of English
- PEN Childrens & YA Books Committee

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

A project of the National Coalition Against Censorship  
**CO-SPONSORED BY**  
 American Booksellers for Free Expression  
 Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

February 19, 2019

Jeffrey Bender, Superintendent  
 North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District  
 1445 Route 31  
 Annandale, NJ 08801

Sent via Electronic Mail to: [jbender@nhvweb.net](mailto:jbender@nhvweb.net)

Dear Superintendent Bender,

Our coalition of advocates for freedom of expression in education is concerned by reports that administrators have restricted student access to the graphic novel *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, by Alison Bechdel in both high school libraries in your district, North Hunterdon and Voorhees.

In the interest of preserving intellectual freedom and equal protection in your district, **we urge you to respect your students' constitutional rights and return *Fun Home* to library shelves where all who choose to read it may do so.** We also encourage you to familiarize your administration with the relevant district policies in order to ensure that **future decisions about instructional materials are based on pedagogical motives, rather than ideological ones.**

We understand that administrators from both schools requested to inspect *Fun Home*. After that inspection, administrators objected to images on a single page and circumvented district policies by restricting the book's circulation to only those students with parental permission.

Our legal system recognizes images, like words, as First Amendment-protected symbolic expression. Graphic novels like *Fun Home* combine visual art with literary and cinematic techniques for educationally rich storytelling. **Disregarding the book's educational value and restricting students' access to *Fun Home* before review by a board-sanctioned reconsideration committee to determine its educational suitability does not comport with First Amendment imperatives and is constitutionally suspect.<sup>1</sup>**

The Supreme Court has long established that the First Amendment limits public school officials' discretion regarding the suppression of library books because "students must always remain free to inquire, to study, and to evaluate, to gain new maturity and understanding"

<sup>1</sup> See *Monteiro v. Tempe Union High School District* (9th Cir. 1998) (recognizing the First Amendment right of students to read books selected for their "legitimate educational value," even if offensive to some parents and students).

**ALA**AmericanLibraryAssociation  
 Office for Intellectual Freedom

February 15, 2019

Jeffrey Bender  
 Superintendent,  
 North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District  
 1445 Route 31  
 Annandale, NJ 08801

Dear Mr. Bender,

I'm writing on behalf of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom. We wish to express our deep concern regarding the proposed restrictions on the availability of the graphic novel *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* by Alison Bechdel in the high school libraries.

Decisions about the availability of materials in the school library – including removing or restricting students' access to books – should be done according to written selection and reconsideration policies. Such policies and procedures are vital to preserving free inquiry and the First Amendment right to read within the school and its library. Further, they offer important procedural and substantive protections for the student's right to access materials, the faculty's integrity and professional responsibilities, and the principles of free speech and freedom of information. Most importantly, written selection and reconsideration policies prevent anyone from subjectively blocking all students from accessing materials simply because he or she does not like them or fears public controversy.

Under the best professional standards, selection and review policies ask administrators, board members, and faculty to set aside their personal beliefs and evaluate the work in light of the objective educational standards outlined in the district's curriculum development policy. Passages or parts of the work are not to be considered out of context, and the work's value should be weighed based on the reviewer's evaluation of the work as a whole. Challenged materials should not be restricted or removed from the library except upon the recommendation of the reconsideration committee or upon formal action of the school board after thorough review and all perspectives are considered.

Because the decision to restrict students' access to *Fun Home* was made unilaterally, the students, parents, and faculty affected by the decision were never given the opportunity for a fair hearing to voice their views or raise their concerns. In addition, the Supreme Court and other federal courts have concluded that the First Amendment imposes limitations upon the discretion of school officials to remove library books from school libraries when the motivation for removing the book is disapproval of the social perspectives, political ideas, or opinions expressed in the book. See *Board of Educ. v. Pico*,



## Going public

**NATIONAL COALITION AGAINST CENSORSHIP**

What We Do Resources News About Us Co

### NEW JERSEY HIGH SCHOOLS RESTRICT ACCESS TO FUN HOME |

Administrators at both high schools in North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District in New Jersey have restricted student access to the graphic novel *Fun Home: A Family Manicure*, by Alison Bechdel. NCAC urges the district to preserve intellectual freedom and equal protection, and to respect students' First Amendment rights, by returning *Fun Home* to library shelves.



After administrators learned about a challenge to *Fun Home* in another New Jersey district ([likely this one](#)), administrators from both schools requested to inspect the book. Objections were raised to images on a single page (of 233 pages), and in violation of district policies, the book's circulation was subsequently restricted to only students with explicit parental permission.

North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District Policy safeguards against the arbitrary denial of students' First Amendment rights by requiring that an official review of objective criteria determine access to materials, not the subjective viewpoint of individual administrators. On Jan. 31, 2019, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed legislation requiring boards of education to include instruction, and adopt instructional materials, that accurately portray political, economic, and social contributions of LGBTQ people. It appears that district policy—and state law—were disregarded in this case and that no official review has taken place.

NCAC's Abena Hutchful noted that

*Decisions like this must have a pedagogical basis, not an ideological one. LGBTQ stories are already sadly under-represented in schools. Restricting books like Fun Home further stigmatizes and marginalizes LGBTQ youth and fosters an atmosphere of intolerance.*

*Fun Home* has been heralded as "a pioneering work" in the comics and memoir genres. Bechdel's memoir offers teen readers a safe place to examine questions related to personal identity, family relationships, and the need to face the truth in their own lives.

In recommending the novel for young adult readers, *Booklist* notes that "the very few incidental sex scenes" are "non-prurient" and that "the family story rings utterly and movingly true."

Should some parents believe their children are not yet mature enough to appreciate the literary and artistic value of the book, they should guide their own children's reading choices without infringing the rights of all other students. *Fun Home* should remain accessible to all those who seek inspiration from its pages.

Read the full letter to the school district below.



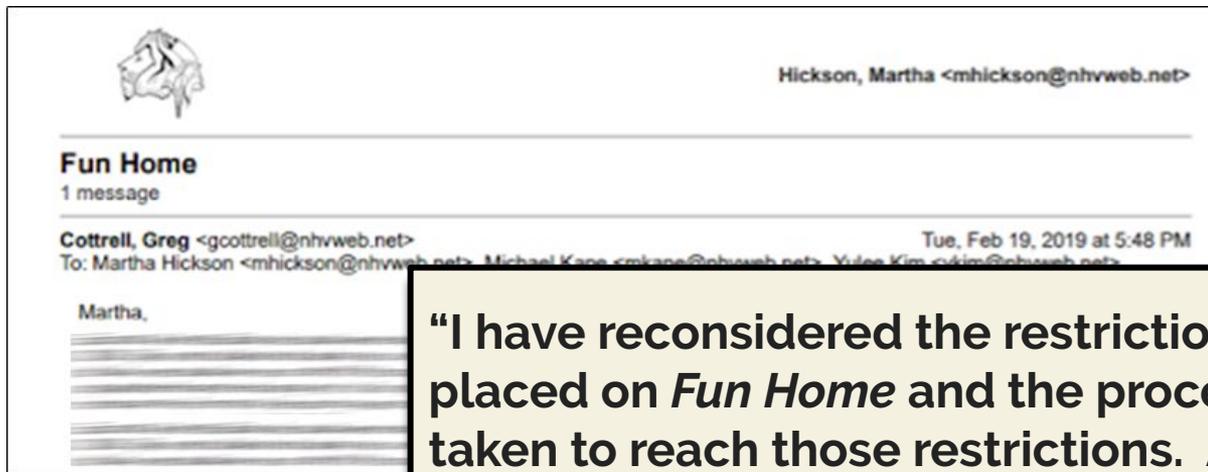
## Alerting our allies

### Advocacy Alliance Brainstorming Tool

Book title Fun Home		Author Alison Bechdel					
Book themes Coming of age, LGBTQ, identity, family life, feminism, mental health							
Audiences most interested in book LGBTQ community, artists, feminists, creative writers, mindfulness group, theater kids							
What individuals or groups will be concerned about or affected by removal or restriction of the book? These are potential allies who can help you advocate for students' right to read.							
Within the school		Within the community		Social & political influencers		Library & Intellectual Freedom advocates	
Name	Contact info	Name	Contact info	Name	Contact info	Name	Contact info
Gay Straight Alliance	Beckins@thwsh.net	GLBT of Hunterdon County	Matthew@glbt-hd.com	GLAAD	rlmoran@glaad.org	American Library Association Office of Intellectual Freedom	<a href="http://www.aia.org/colib/challengingsupport">http://www.aia.org/colib/challengingsupport</a>
Art Honor Society	msadmsa@thwsh.net	Garden State Equality	Doc.armstrong@hatterdonliberty.org	Anderson Cooper	@andersoncooper Instagram	National Council of Teachers of English Intellectual Freedom Center	<a href="http://www2.ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center/">http://www2.ncte.org/resources/ncte-intellectual-freedom-center/</a>
National English Honor Society	ethorson@thwsh.net	Pride Center NJ	President@pridecenter.org	Andy Cohen	@andycohen Instagram	National Coalition Against Censorship	<a href="https://nccac.org/report-censorship-page">https://nccac.org/report-censorship-page</a>
Amnesty International	aworld@thwsh.net	NIHS Parent Advisory Committee	marci@nihs.com	Cynthia Nixon	@cynthianixon Instagram	Comic Book Legal Defense Fund	<a href="http://info@cbldef.org">info@cbldef.org</a>
Northern Lights Lit Mag	lisa@thwsh.net	Politically Incorrect Book Club	politicallyinc@nihs.com	Elon <del>Doan</del>	@theelondoo Instagram	NJ Association of School Librarians	<a href="http://njasl.org">njasl.org</a>
Thespian Club	rmcc@thwsh.net	Hatterdon Review	equation@hatterdonlib.com	Elton Page	@eltonpage Instagram	Hunterdon County Librarians Association	<a href="http://hclibrarians@googlegroups.com">hclibrarians@googlegroups.com</a>
Mindfulness Club				Rachel Maddow	@rachelmaddow Instagram	NJ Library Association	<a href="http://njlibmembers.org/intellectualfreedom">http://njlibmembers.org/intellectualfreedom</a>
				Robin Roberts	@robinroberts Instagram	ACLU-NJ	@aclunj Instagram
				Rose O'Donnell	@rose Instagram	Lambda Legal	212-609-8585 (ask for Legal Help Desk)
				Alison Bechdel	@alisonbechdel Twitter	American Association of School Librarians	<a href="http://aask@ala.org">aask@ala.org</a>



Victory!



“I have reconsidered the restrictions placed on *Fun Home* and the process taken to reach those restrictions. At this time you may put *Fun Home* back on the shelves without restrictions.”



## Round 2: Board changes policy

### Procedure for Reconsideration of Materials

The North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District Board of Education supports principles of intellectual freedom inherent handled in the accordance with ~~First Policy Amendment No. of the Constitution of the United States 9130~~ and expressed in the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association and Students' Right to Read of the National Council of Teachers of English. In the event that materials are questioned, the principles of intellectual freedom, the right to access of materials and the integrity of the certificated library/media personnel must be defended rather than the materials.

If a complaint is made, procedures as outlined in ~~Regulation No. 9130~~ will be followed.

Issued: 1 May 2001

Revised: March 19, 2019

**“The Superintendent shall be responsible for selection and maintenance of all resource materials.”**

### Removes references to:

- Intellectual freedom
- First Amendment
- ALA Library Bill of Rights
- NCTE Students' Right to Read
- Librarians



# Community mobilizes

NH-V Intellectual Freedom Fighters

Home What happened Updates Next steps Resources

## NH-V Intellectual Freedom Fighters

Raise your voice to urge the North Hunterdon-Voorhees Board of Education to restore its commitment to intellectual freedom and the First Amendment

Home

What happened

change.org Start a petition My petitions Browse Membership

### NH-V BOE please restore your commitment to the 1st Amendment

Christina Russonello started this petition to North Hunterdon/Voorhees Board of Education

518 have signed. Let's get to 1,000!

Earlier this year, over a complaint about a book in the library, the BOE changed its bylaws to remove the practice of having a committee made up of librarians, teachers students, and community members evaluate resource materials. The new policy leaves the decision to ONLY 1 person, the superintendent. The old policy was in place for 18 years, it was praised by 1st Amendment advocates and demonstrated a commitment to intellectual freedom. One man can not provide fair representation of all points of view and be free of any bias. The freedom of expression and the right to read must be protected and we ask for reinstatement of the old policy.

First name

Last name

Email

Washington, 07862 United States

Display my name and comment on this petition

Sign this petition

By signing, you accept Change.org's Terms of Service and Privacy Policy, and agree to receive occasional emails about campaigns on Change.org.



# Advocates respond

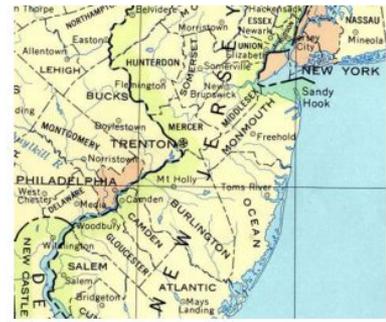


## Policy Change in NJ School District Paves Way for Censors

April 19, 2019  
By Patricia Mastricolo

Earlier this year, two high schools in the North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District in New Jersey restricted access to Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* against their own policies. The restriction was overturned at the end of February after CBLDF, co-sponsors of National Coalition Against Censorship's Kids Right to Read Project (KRRP) wrote a letter to Superintendent Jeffrey Bender defending Bechdel's acclaimed memoir and the students at North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District's right to read. Shortly after this victory, policy 2530 was rewritten in a very restrictive way, removing mentions of creativity, relevancy to the world we live in, and changing drastically the decision making hierarchy to only involve one person: Superintendent Bender.

### The Original Policy



A project of the National Coalition Against Censorship  
CO-SPONSORED BY  
American Booksellers for Free Expression  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

April 24, 2019  
Jeffrey Bender, Superintendent  
North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District  
1445 Route 31  
Annandale, NJ 08801  
Sent via Electronic Mail to: [jbender@nhvweb.net](mailto:jbender@nhvweb.net)

Dear Superintendent Bender,

We write to express our concern that recent changes to Policy 2530, which govern the selection of instructional materials in classrooms and libraries, will heighten the risk of censorship in North Hunterdon-Voorhees district. This concern is aggravated by the fact that the policy changes were adopted shortly after the graphic novel *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic* was returned to library shelves over your personal objections. We urge you to adopt policies designed to bolster rather than undermine free expression protections in your District. We are writing to offer you guidance in the design of such policies.

The original policy 2530 played a significant role in safeguarding NHV students' right to a broad and censorship-free education by entrusting trained librarians with book selection. This delegation of responsibility assured book selections were credibly rooted in sound pedagogical reasoning, rather than subjective opinion.

As worded, the current policy vests absolute authority in the sole person of the Superintendent to select and remove books without a review of their educational merits. This change may lead to a perception that decisions about instructional material will be made based on your subjective opinion, rather than pedagogical goals. That perception is further supported by the fact that these amendments immediately followed your effort to remove *Fun Home* based on opinion about a single page, rather than a review of the book as a whole.

We strongly recommend that you restore credibility to the book selection process by delegating responsibility to librarians and teachers.

We also recommend that you reiterate your dedication to free expression. The new policy omits all references to free expression, including the Library Bill of Rights and NCTE Students Right to Read statements, which buttressed your district's commitment to intellectual freedom.

We hope you will consider the aforementioned points and our attached guidelines in rethinking the recent changes to Policy 2530.



## Librarians meet w BOE president

North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District  
April 30, 2019 Board of Education Meeting Hand Carry  
04302019-1

Members of the North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District  
Community:

At the March 2019 Board of Education meeting, changes were approved to Policy 2530. In recent weeks, there have been multiple concerns raised by members of the community and other interested parties and I want to address those concerns and the actions we are taking as a result.

These changes were adopted as policy recommendations from the community. Our district policies have been in the process of being revised over several years to streamline and standardize with those policies of other public school boards throughout New Jersey. Policy development is a valuable service by off-loading the painstaking work of ensuring policies remain up to date and in compliance with New Jersey law and state regulations.

The revisions to Policy 2530 were not intended to place sole authority for resource materials in the hands of the Superintendent. However, in letters from concerned groups and community members that have been received, the language does not clearly and specifically identify the role of the selection process and does not go far enough to reinforce the objective to preserve intellectual freedom. To address those concerns, I have met with members of the North Hunterdon High School and Voorhees High School to discuss and address concerns raised over the past several weeks.

North Hunterdon-Voorhees School District has not changed its objective to preserve intellectual freedom. It has not placed unilateral authority for resource material selection in any person's hands. Resource material selection will continue to be a shared responsibility in the school with approval by the Board of Education upon recommendation by the Superintendent, all in the interests of the welfare and educational quality of the district. The process for any and all expenditures that take place in accordance with Policy 2530 will be clarified in these regards.

Also, the path for removal of specific materials from the library based on complaint or other challenges has not changed. That process is defined in Policy 9130 and detailed in Regulation 9130. Those remain unchanged, and detail the process by which any complaint is evaluated by a review committee, which makes a recommendation to the Board of Education.

**“... the adopted language does not clearly and specifically identify the role of the Library Media Specialists in the selection process and does not go far enough to reinforce the objective to preserve intellectual freedom.”**



# Board meeting: Missing person

  
**I'M WITH THE BANNED**  
RESTORE 2530

  
i support intellectual **FREEDOM**  
RESTORE 2530



Photo by Claire R. Knapp

The specter of book censorship raised its head at North Hunterdon and Voorhees High schools last week, attracting a huge turnout of teachers and residents to the Tuesday, April 30, meeting of the high school District Board of Education meeting.

## School book ban draws crowd to board meeting

Book policy changes due at May 21 meeting

By **CLAIRE R. KNAPP**  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

**CLINTON TWP.** – The specter of book censorship raised its head at North Hunterdon and Voorhees high schools last week, attracting a huge turnout of teachers and residents to the Tuesday, April 30, meeting of the High School District Board of Education meeting.

The Board of Education was expecting a reasonable turnout of residents as a public hearing on the 2019-2020 District Budget was being held. The bud-

**>> RELATED STORY**  
For our story on the North Hunterdon-Voorhees high school budget, please see page 7.

get hearing was the first order of business, but when the public hearing was opened for comment, not a single person in the standing-room-only crowd of nearly 50 stepped up to the podium. Not until after the \$60.5 million budget had been unanimously adopted did anyone in the audience have anything to say.

**Book Ban**  
The “banning” of one book in particular earlier this year, Alison Bechdel’s graphic memoir “Fun Home,” had set off the first storm of protest.

Objectors to the book’s initial removal claimed it was due to its LGBTQ topic. Originally removed from the purchase list, the administration later approved the purchase at the end of February. Then the board adopted a policy change at its March meeting, referred to as Policy 2530, which changed the

PLEASE SEE BOOK, PAGE 2

“I view the removal of *Fun Home* as part of a worrying tendency across the country to characterize LGBTQ stories – particularly LGBTQ coming of age stories – as more adult, controversial, or school inappropriate than similar stories about cis gender, heterosexual individuals. This sends a damaging message to our queer and questioning youth that their identities and experiences are too adult, controversial, and inappropriate to be freely expressed in school.”  
– *Emma Ettinger, concerned citizen*



## Policy restored ... and improved!

### Regulation 2530 LIBRARY RESOURCE MATERIALS

#### Definition

"Library Resource Materials" are all those sources of information for the use of students that have not been designated as textbooks and generally must be shared by individual students. Resource materials include reference books, fiction and nonfiction books, maps, audio and audio-visual materials, electronic resources, pamphlets, periodicals, pictures and online references.

#### Procedures for Selection of Library Resource Materials

In selecting resource materials for school media programs, the certificated library/media personnel, sometimes in conjunction with staff, will:

1. evaluate the existing collection;
2. assess curricula needs;
3. examine materials and consult reputable, professional sources;
4. Solicit recommendations from faculty and students.

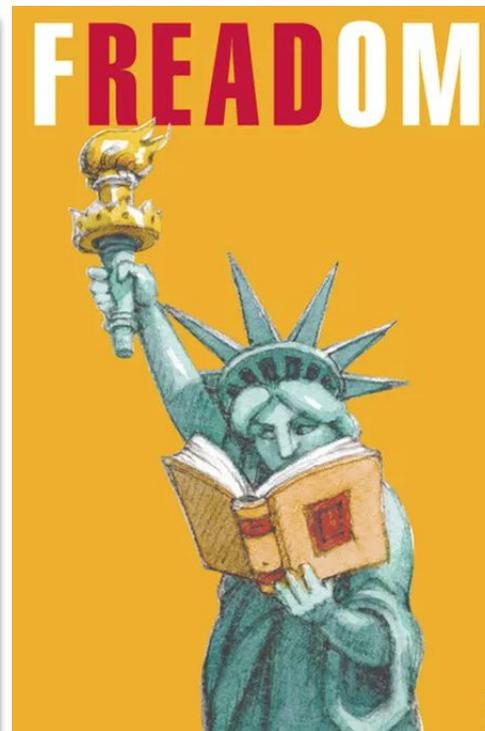
All recommendations will be forwarded to the Principal or designee of the Schools, who after review will submit to the Board of Education for recommended selection without following the required steps in [Poli](#)

**“Neither the Principal nor the Superintendent shall reject any individual recommended selection without following the required steps in Policy 9130.”**

Sep  
17

## Let intellectual freedom ring!

"The North Hunterdon-Voorhees Regional High School District Board of Education **supports principles of intellectual freedom** inherent in the **First Amendment** of the Constitution of the United States and expressed in the **Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association** and **Students' Right to Read of the National Council of Teachers of English**. In the event that materials are questioned, the principles of **intellectual freedom**, the right to access of materials and the integrity of the certificated library/media personnel must be defended rather than the materials. Any complaint about library resource materials shall be handled in accordance with Policy No. 9130 and Regulation No. 9130."



# libguides.nhvweb.net/njasl19challenge

libguides.nhvweb.net

North Hunterdon High School  
**LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER**

READ, RESEARCH, & RELAX @ *your* LIBRARY

Library / Pathfinders / NJASL 2019: The Challenge of Book Challenges / Home

## NJASL 2019: The Challenge of Book Challenges: Home

We strive to build diverse and inclusive library collections, but what happens when censors try to ban those materials? Panelists share strategies and resources to defend students' right to read. Participants will learn to prepare a Challenge Emergency Kit

Home Fun Home challenge Challenge tips Challenge Emergency Kit

**INCLUDE**

**The Challenge of Book Challenges:  
Strategies for defending students' right to read**

NJASL 2019 Fall Conference  
December 9, 2019

Martha Hickson, North Hunterdon High School  
Kristin Pekoll, ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom  
Anne Plascik, Morristown High School  
Hilda Welsburg, NJASL AASL Liason

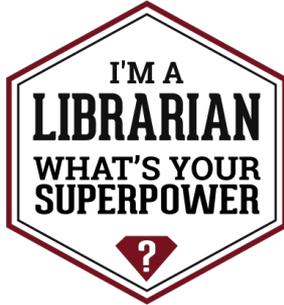
*"The school library represents all members and their place in a global learning community by establishing and maintaining a collection of reading and information materials in formats that support the diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of the range of learners and their communities."*

AASL. "Shared Foundation II. Include." National School Library Standards. American Library Association, 2018, p. 77.

# Be ready

## Embrace your power

- Union
- Tenure
- Research skills
- Profession
- First Amendment



## Know your stuff

- Contract language
- Policies
- Past challenges
- Collection

<b>Contract Crosswalk Organizer</b>				
It's your job to select reading materials, and it's your responsibility to defend intellectual freedom. Use this organizer to collect the language that documents your role.				
School/District documentation				
Contract	Job description	District policies & regulations		
<i>Record language that describes your role in selecting materials and upholding board policies</i>	<i>Record language that describes your role in selecting materials and upholding board policies</i>	<i>Record below the passages from the district's policies and regulations that describe your role and the criteria and processes for materials selection and reconsideration</i>		
National/Professional documentation				
AASL Common Beliefs	AASL National School Library Standards	AASL School Library Evaluation Checklist	Future Ready Librarians Framework	ALA Code of Ethics
<i>The Common Beliefs that define the qualities of effective school librarians and dynamic school libraries include intellectual freedom</i>	<i>The Shared Foundation of AASL directs librarians to "build a collection that reflects the diverse global community"</i>	<i>The School Library Evaluation Checklist addresses the librarian's collection development responsibilities</i>	<i>Under the banner of Literacy, the Future Ready Librarians Framework calls for librarians to inspire and support the reading lives of both students and teachers</i>	<i>The American Library Association has codified principles to guide ethical decision making. Article 2 addresses censorship</i>
"5. Intellectual freedom is every learner's right: Learners have the freedom to speak and hear what others have to say, rather than allowing others to control their access to ideas and information; the school librarian's responsibility is to develop these dispositions in learners, educators, and all other members of the learning community."	"Create: The school library represents all members and their place in a global learning community by establishing and maintaining a collection of reading and information materials in formats that support the diverse developmental, cultural, social, and linguistic needs of the range of learners and their communities."	"Include-Building Level: Resources are selected according to principles of intellectual freedom, and provide learners with access to information that represents diverse points of view in a pluralistic society."	"Creates inclusive collections that acknowledge and celebrate diverse experiences and provide instructional opportunities to empower learners as effective users and creators of information and ideas."	"2. We uphold the principles of intellectual freedom and resist all efforts to censor library resources."

## Report

- Get it in writing
  - Materials reconsideration form
    - Please share yours with me:  
[mhickson@nhvweb.net](mailto:mhickson@nhvweb.net)



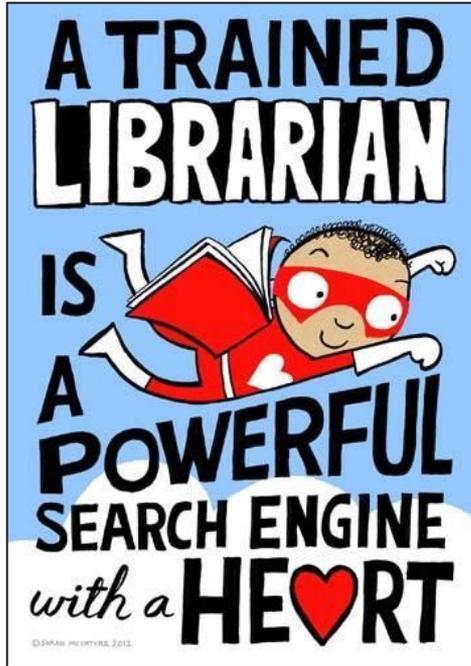
OFFICE FOR  
*Intellectual Freedom*  
American Library Association

NATIONAL [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] COALITION  
AGAINST [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] CENSORSHIP



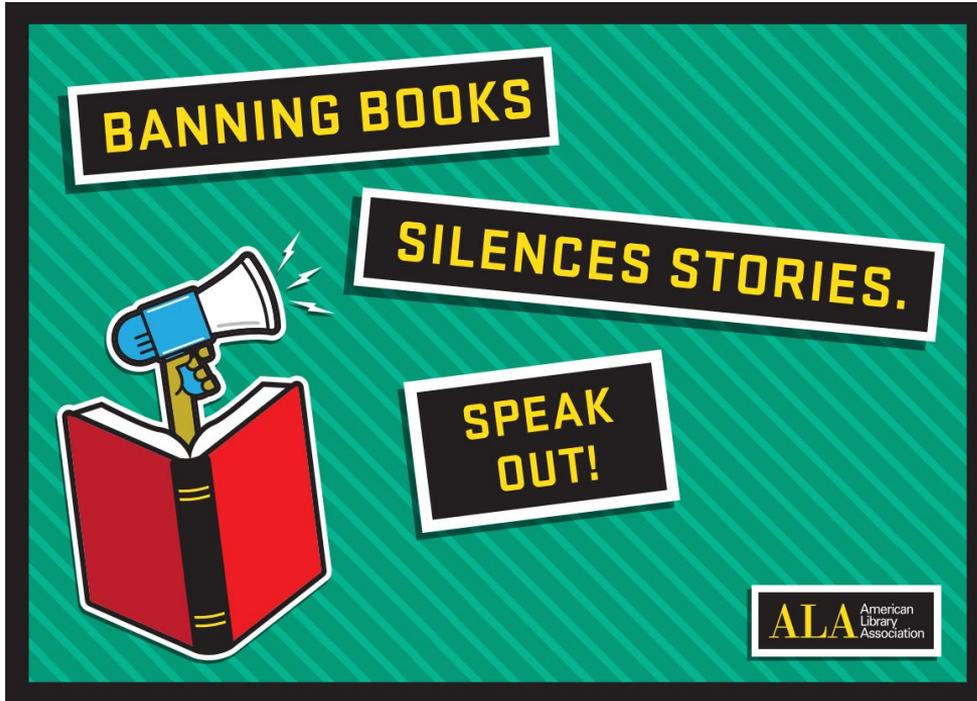
National Council of  
Teachers of English®

## Research



- Read the book
- Reviews
- Ownership at other schools
- Prior challenges
- Case law
- Related issues/legislation

## Reach out



- School
  - Students
  - Teachers
  - Clubs
- Community
  - Parents
  - Organizations
- Influencers
  - Celebrities
  - Politicians
- Profession
  - Librarians
  - Intellectual freedom advocates



# Fun Home

A FAMILY TRAGICOMIC

*Thanks! Thank you for your  
valiant defense!!*

ALISON BECHDEL



A MARINER BOOK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT  
BOSTON NEW YORK



*“Fighting these censors is truly a matter of life and death. If one lonely, afraid, suicidal queer kid in Utah or South Carolina gets his or her hands on Fun Home and it shows him or her that their complicated feelings are not unusual and that there is a place in the world for them, then we have a moral duty to fight the censors with all our might.”*

PEN America – The Freedom to Write

## 2. Selection and Reconsideration Policy Toolkit

*For Public, School & Academic Libraries*

<http://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit>





*“The Library is a Growing Organism”*  
*S.R. Ranganathan (1931)*

## Who Needs a Policy?

- ◉ Every library
  - Academic
  - Public
  - School: public, private, charter, independent, international
- ◉ Comprehensive written policy to guide library resource
  - Selection
  - Deselection or weeding
  - Reconsideration

## How Often Should It Be Reviewed?

- ◉ The most valuable selection policy is current
- ◉ Review & revise regularly
  - Frequent review makes policy familiar to library staff

## Who is Involved?

- ◉ Policy approved by library's governing board or other policy-making body
- ◉ Disseminated widely for understanding by all stakeholders

## Basic Components

- Mission
- Support for Intellectual Freedom
  - [ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill](http://ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill)
- Objectives
- Responsibility for Selection
- Selection Criteria
- Acquisitions Procedures
- Gifts and Donations
- Collection Maintenance and Weeding
- Selecting Controversial Materials
- Policy Revision
- Reconsideration

## Reconsideration Procedure

- Guiding Principles
- Statement of Policy
- Formal Reconsideration
- Sample Letter to Complainant
- Reconsideration Committee
  - Sample Reconsideration Committee Report

### 3. When All Else Fails, What Can ALA Do for You?

*You are not alone.*

# ALA American Library Association



*MISSION: “To provide leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services and the profession of librarianship in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all.”*

# *Library*

---

# BILL *of* RIGHTS

The American Library Association affirms that all libraries are forums for information and ideas, and that the following basic policies should guide their services.

**I** Books and other library resources should be provided for the interest, information, and **enlightenment of all people** of the community the library serves. Materials should not be excluded because of the origin, background, or views of those contributing to their creation.

**II** Libraries should provide materials and information **presenting all points of view** on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval.

**III** Libraries should **challenge censorship** in the fulfillment of their responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

**IV** Libraries should cooperate with all persons and groups concerned with **resisting abridgment of free expression and free access to ideas**.

# CONEJO VALLEY SURING SCHOOL DISTRICT Materials Selection/Reconsideration Policy

## Selection Philosophy:

The main objective of our selection procedure is to provide students with a wide range of educational materials of various levels of difficulty and in a variety of formats, with diversity of appeal, allowing for the selection of many points of view.

The main objective of the library is to make available to students and faculty a collection of materials that will support the curriculum and meet the needs of the faculty and the needs of the students. The library should provide a range of individual needs, abilities and learning styles, emphasis on providing background material, in a variety of levels and types to supplement the curriculum, and encourage individual intellectual curiosity, creativity, and imagination, and provide materials on controversial issues to help students develop critical thinking skills.



# Challenge Support

**Report  
Censorship**

Defend the  
Public's  
Freedoms



[www.ala.org/challengereporting](http://www.ala.org/challengereporting)

**ALA** American Library Association  
Office for Intellectual Freedom

November 7, 2017

Mike Dunn, President  
Conejo Valley Unified School District  
1400 E. Janss Rd.  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

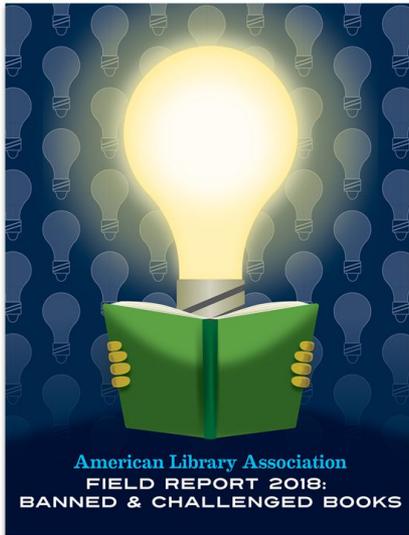
Dear Mr. Dunn and Conejo Valley USD Board Members:

I am writing, again, on behalf of the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) to express our concern about the proposed Selection and Evaluation of Instructional Materials policy with an "opt-out" amendment that includes red-flagging (or black-marking) materials that may contain themes that some parents deem controversial. We believe that identifying books as "not appropriate" without requiring re-approval of materials can only frustrate and discourage...

## Tailored for YOUR Needs

- Listening
- Grassroots Outreach
- Professional & Emotional Encouragement
- Research
- Talking Points for Specific Audience
- Media Consultation
- Formal Letter from ALA
- Blog/Social Media Reinforcement
- Confidential

## But Why?



### RAISE AWARENESS

The data draws national attention to the harms of censorship and highlights the value of free and open access to information.





You are not alone.

*"Censorship  
thrives in silence;  
silence is its aim."*

Jamie LaRue





*Questions?*

Autographed by Alison Bechdel



WHAT  
WOULD  
HAPPEN IF  
WE SPOKE  
THE  
TRUTH?

ALISON BECHDEL



 acrl 2019  
peer reviewed