



October 20, 2021

Dear Superintendent Spence and Virginia Beach Public Schools' School Board Members,

The Virginia Library Association has been closely following the recent book challenges in your school libraries and curriculum. As supporters of the intellectual freedom of all people – including students – we are surprised at the vitriol pointed at these titles by some members of your board.

Developing a collection for a school library is a process, one that is worked on every day by your collection specialists. They evaluate thousands of titles each year, looking to ensure their accuracy, timeliness, value, and connection to the curriculum (including but not limited to the VA Standards of Learning.) As an association of 4800+ librarians and library staff in the Commonwealth, we understand the education, training and competencies of your school librarians and staff and support them as educators and materials selectors.

VBCPS makes public your policies and procedures for the Reconsideration of Challenged Materials available and clear via your website. Policy 6-8, regulations 7-12.1, 6-61.2 and 6-4.1 all apply to the current situation. We highly recommend that you respect and follow your own procedures. The public statements from members of your board suggesting disciplinary action for librarians are troublesome and do not correspond with your own policies.

Virginia Beach is not the first school system in Virginia or the country to experience a challenged book. However, removing books without proper consideration is censorship and a violation of student's First Amendment rights. We recommend you review the Supreme Court Case *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868-69 (1982).

As librarians who study and track intellectual freedom challenges around the nation, we often see a "bump" in challenges following the American Library Association's Annual Banned Books Week (September 26-October 2 of this year.) Ironically, a week that is set aside to emphasize the dangers of banning books can be manipulated by some into showcasing the exact behaviors we are trying not to model for our students.

We encourage you to follow the regulations, policies and procedures you have established, and we offer our assistance and expertise should you need any support while doing so.

Respectfully,

The Virginia Library Association Executive Committee

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