



## SCHOOLS Lehigh County, Pennsylvania

Maureen and Christopher Brophy's lawsuit claims that topics such as "systemic racism," "religion," "White privilege," "police brutality," and "Black Lives Matter" are anti-Christian and discriminate against their religion.

The lawsuit also claims their son's advanced-placement physics teacher refused to teach him unless he wore a mask. The Brophys said their son suffers from a medical condition that makes it painful to view a computer screen for hours at a time or to wear a mask.

Superintendent Campbell, Emmaus High School Principal Kate Kieres, school district Humanities Supervisor Erin Murphy, AP Physics teacher Carole Wilson, District Director of Special Education Linda Pekarik, and the school district itself are all named as defendants in the suit.

The Brophys' complaints began after the book *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* by Robin DiAngelo was assigned at Emmaus High School to both their children.

DiAngelo's 2018 book describes "White fragility" as a defensive response by a White person when their race is highlighted or mentioned, or when their racial worldview is challenged. She argues White people are used to viewing themselves as the "default" race and are subsequently insulated from feelings of racial discomfort.

On February 19, 2021, Superintendent Kristen Campbell denied the Brophys' request to exempt their children from these lessons.

**Reported in: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 16, 2021.**

## Loudoun County, Virginia

During the May 11 board meeting of the Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS), residents loudly complained about COVID restrictions, equity initiatives, and critical race theory before shifting focus to book banning.

The forty-five minute public comment period was monopolized by speakers reading sentences from *Monday's Not Coming* by Tiffany D. Jackson and *#MurderTrending* by Gretchen McNeil. Parents argued that the concept of diversity was a "trojan horse" to sneak inappropriate materials into schools.

*Monday's Not Coming* was named a best book of 2018 by *School Library Journal* and received a starred review from *Publishers Weekly*. The protagonist is a girl whose best friend mysteriously disappears. The book was inspired by numerous disappearances of black girls across the US.

Among other accolades, *#MurderTrending* topped the Young Adult Library Services Association's "2019 Teens' Top Ten Titles" list. It is a dystopian novel set in a near future where the penal system has been privatized for use as a form of online entertainment. The plot revolves around Dee Guerrero, a Latina teen wrongly convicted of her stepsister's murder.

These books were included in middle and high schools throughout the district as part of their Diverse Classroom Libraries collections.

According to the district's website, these collections "reflect and honor our student population and those around them" in order to "contribute to developing student identities." The materials in them are curated by trained teams of LCPS teachers, librarians, administrators.

A formal reconsideration process following the school's policy was initiated after the meeting. Separate committees reviewed each challenged

book and submitted recommendations to Superintendent Scott Ziegler.

Ziegler announced that he would follow the committees' recommendations. *Monday's Not Coming* was removed from classroom collections at the six middle schools that held it, but retained in all high school library collections. It also remains an option for book clubs and independent reading.

*#MurderTrending* will be retained in middle and high school collections and as an option for book club study units.

Ziegler reminded parents that they may request alternate texts for any books they believe are inappropriate for their children.

The editors of the *Loudoun Times-Mirror* applauded the decision not to ban the books, writing that "Offering literature that teens actually want to read is the only hope we have of sparking a love for reading and then kindling it to a blaze."

Their editors note that "it's a teacher's job to help a student understand the sometimes-nuanced life lessons woven throughout the literature that is either assigned or made available to them."

Jack Lechelt, parent of an LCPS middle school student, said "There will always be people who try to sow division in our community, but we don't have to listen to them. Thanks to our school board for making *Monday's Not Coming* available to our students."

Upon learning the school board would not ban the books, the group that challenged them initiated efforts to recall six of the nine school board members, including the board's Chair and Vice Chair.

**Reported in: *Loudoun Now*, May 13, 2021, and July 7, 2021; *Loudoun Times-Mirror*, May 27, 2021, and July 7, 2021.**



## Carlisle, Pennsylvania

On June 17, the Carlisle Area School District board voted against a policy revision that would have barred teachers from expressing support for any political or social movement, platform, or campaign on school time and using district property.

This proposed policy concerned teacher Dorene Wilbur, who is frequently approached by Carlisle High School students during the day with questions about current events.

“They know me,” Wilbur said. “I’m one of the few Black educators in the system. They come to me because they want information so they can make up their own minds.”

She said that she always prefaced her opinion with the words, “I am speaking as an individual, not as a representative of the Carlisle Area School District.”

Wilbur was one of many who spoke out against the policy revision during the meeting. School board members also received emails and comments prior to the meeting from residents concerned that the proposed policy would have a chilling effect on teachers and staff, preventing them from engaging students in teachable moments.

Assistant Superintendent Colleen Friend explained the thinking behind the proposed revision. “Public schools have always been expected to walk a very fine line between educating students on relative and important topics and maintaining a school environment that is free from polarization, politics, or students that have become politicized.”

“If I understand the policy correctly, this puts a tape across my mouth,” said Wilbur during the board meeting.

Tatum Robinson-Covert, a 2020 graduate from Carlisle High School, said she was active in an effort on

campus to promote diversity and a more inclusive climate.

“Why the interest to shut down these important discussions?” Robinson-Covert asked board members. “There is a difference between trying to influence students one way or another and facilitating meaningful conversations when a polarizing event occurs.”

“This policy will not resolve or even alleviate the political divide that is present. It will only heighten it,” said Robinson-Covert. “If a politicized event occurs and no one is allowed to talk about it, that would leave students to their own echo chamber environment.”

Carlisle alumna TaWanda Stallworth said, “After all that we have been through in the past year, we owe it to ourselves, and more importantly to our students, to ensure that . . . we are encouraging our students to be critical thinkers committed to analysis.”

“If teachers are not allowed to deconstruct and analyze current politicized events, then how will students learn to formulate their own beliefs?” asked Robinson-Covert.

Board President Paula Busard made the motion to reject the revision.

“It was never the intent of the board to squelch free speech and robust discussion,” said board member Anne Lauritzen.

District board member Rick Coplen added, “We have confidence in our teachers to do the right thing.”

**Reported in: *The Sentinel*, June 20, 2021.**

## LIBRARIES Norwalk, Connecticut

Norwalk resident Mohinder Kalsi, a Sikh, requested that Norwalk Public Library reconsider the graphic novel *Guru Gobind Singh*, because in it “the

last guru is shown in the form of a cartoon and that’s very objectionable.”

He requested that the book be replaced by more appropriate materials on Sikhism.

In *Sikh Art from the Kapany Collection*, Paul M. Taylor and Sonia Dhami note that while there are acceptable visual representations of the Sikh gurus, there are also “limits aiming to separate these portraits from contexts where the images might become objects of worship.”

Vice President Patsy Brescia said during their April 8 board meeting, “This is not an easily resolved issue. To take the position of removing books from the library that other people might object to for one reason or another, that is a very serious question to be asked.”

Wishing to remain both ethical and respectful, at their May 13th board meeting, Board President Alex Knopp tasked Executive Director Sherelle Harris with researching how libraries deal with graphic depictions of religious figures.

Samantha Lee, on behalf of the Connecticut Library Consortium’s Intellectual Freedom Committee, said: “If the library were to make a decision on removing or keeping this book to accommodate a religious perspective, then it could be seen as being a proponent, and therefore in violation of the establishment cause” of the First Amendment.

Prior to the board’s September meeting, Harris provided the board with her recommendation not to remove the book. Her recommendation included the option of relocating the item to a special collection so it would only be available upon request.

At their September 9 meeting, Board President Knopp made the following recommendation: “My advice to the board is we do not remove the book from the catalogue, but also that



we do not segregate the book in a separate shelf or collection.”

Board member Ralph Bloom said “It starts with one book and can lead to another. It’s hard on the board, it’s hard on the staff when you have a segregated book. I think it’s important we give all books an equal value and not establish a precedent.”

Board members Knopp, Brescia, Ralph Bloom, Moina Noor, and Mary Mann voted in support of retaining the book; Janine Williams voted against; Sharon Baanante abstained; Thomas Cullen was not present.

Knopp said segregating a book “invites us to go down a slippery slope of having other groups or individuals that object to content in the library seeking to put that book or that media or that DVD into a special collection that has to be requested by an individual.”

**Reported in: *The Hour*, July 17, 2021; September 14, 2021.**

## Harlem, Georgia

After her daughter brought home the book *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier from the Harlem Middle School library, Katie Allen brought concerns to the Columbia County Board of Education regarding the reading materials available at her children’s schools.

Telgemeier’s graphic novel was inspired by events in her own life and tells the tale of various middle school crushes throughout a production of the musical *Moon Over Mississippi*.

*Drama* won a 2013 Stonewall Book Award in Children’s and Young Adult Literature and a 2013 Harvey Award for excellence in comics. *Publishers Weekly* and *The Washington Post* ranked *Drama* as one of the Best Books of 2012. It was declared a Notable Children’s Book and a Teen Top Ten by the Association of Library Services to Children (ALSC) and the

Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA).

*Drama* was also the seventh most banned book between 2010 and 2019 and appeared on the American Library Association’s (ALA) “Top 10 Most Challenged Books” Lists for 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019.

The main reasons it has been challenged historically include a depiction of an on-stage kiss between two male characters, and its inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) characters.

Common Sense Media, an organization which promotes “safe technology and media for children” assessed *Drama* as suitable for readers over 10 years of age.

Allen submitted a reconsideration application for the book in February, but the book was deemed appropriate. When Allen learned the book was also held at the Euchee Creek Elementary school, she challenged it there, and the school opted to limit its availability to fifth-graders.

While the book challenge was defeated, other policy questions remain resulting from a petition started by Allen. It requests that all “items containing themes on sexuality, homosexuality, and/or transgender ideology be removed from Media Centers and Teacher Libraries” throughout the Columbia County School District.

Barring the books’ removal, the petition requests that the school district add the following text to their media policy: “The Columbia County School District hereby informs parents that Media Centers and Teacher Libraries may provide material containing sensitive topics such as sexuality, homosexuality, and/or transgender ideology.”

Bolstered by 31 signatories to her petition, Allen addressed the board

at their June 8 meeting asking for the removal of all “sexually explicit materials” or for the placement of warning labels on books with “homosexual and transgender issues.”

Another parent, Ayman Fadel, spoke out against such labels. “Adding a ‘warning label’ to the media policy isn’t transparency, it’s an attempt to use county resources to spread unfounded . . . panic and recruit more parents to future censorship efforts.”

Fadel continued, “Adding this language into the media policy is an endorsement against gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and nonbinary people. Removing books from the library because some adults find [them] threatening to their ideology harms all students.”

Superintendent Steven Flynt responded to Allen in writing on June 17, postponing any decision on the petition.

“The mission of the Columbia County School District is to empower and inspire all learners to excel in a global society. To that end we seek to provide our students with the best education possible in a safe, positive environment,” wrote Allen. “We review our policies annually and will consider your suggestions at that time.”

**Reported in: *Augusta Chronicle*, June 8, 2021, and July 14, 2021.**

## Haddonfield, New Jersey

Pushback against an upcoming Drag Queen Story Time (DQST) event hosted by the Haddonfield Friends of the Library (FOL) led to an emergency meeting of the Haddonfield Public Library board.

DQST was scheduled as an online Zoom event limited to FOL members. It was being held as a fundraiser during the pandemic in lieu of their traditional book sale.



Library Director Eric Zino said he had been asked to confirm whether the event “would be a live sex show, or simply a reading of children’s books, with no sex acts being performed, discussed, simulated, or referenced in any way.”

Zino continued, “When we get questions, we respond in a way that we hope creates interest or support, or at the very least, understanding.” He said the emergency meeting was held “so that we can make clear affirmations [about] being a place for everybody.”

Library Board President Amy Goodworth said the board wanted to make a public statement ensuring “the board and library are for the inclusion, diversity, and equity of all community members.”

The library also created a subcommittee of FOL members focused on diversity.

At the time the emergency meeting was held, around 30 families had registered for DQST, including new members who joined FOL just to see it.

Audrey Adams, FOL co-president, said the DQST event “is a wonderful program, that it’s been vetted, that it’s been used at many other libraries as well as synagogues and schools.”

Regarding the books to be read at the event, Adams said, “The trustees picked some favorites that we’ve read in our own families.”

Miss Brittany Lynn is the drag queen persona cultivated by Ian Morrison, who operates DQST as an offshoot of the Drag Queen Story Hour program created by Michelle Tea in 2015.

Morrison said that it’s not the first time he has encountered pushback and protests.

“Any time someone hears Drag Queen Story Time is happening, people don’t even bother to do research.

It’s aggravating. People complain before they experience it, and that’s the worst,” said Morrison.

Morrison completed extensive background checks in order to offer DQST to Philadelphia libraries, schools, parks, and museums. The program was recognized by Philadelphia Family Magazine as the “best community builder of 2019.”

Morrison said “We’re not trying to push an agenda. We read books for all communities and all cultures” to children at an age when they are “open to learning about new cultures [and] new lifestyles.”

“Kids need to know that they’re all original people; that they’re their own person,” said Morrison. “Kids are open to love, diversity, and acceptance. Any kind of hatred is taught, and we’re the exact opposite of that.”

Melissa Gira Grant identified the knee-jerk protests to events like DQST as part of a cable news-driven propaganda machine that also builds support for anti-trans legislation.

“The horrifying and almost immobilizing reality is that none of this had to be true to work. . . . There is no drag queen conspiracy,” wrote Grant. “Trans kids, however, are at risk of being denied life-saving care, losing their families, and facing systematic exclusion from education and athletics, under the cover of law and ‘child protection.’”

In contrast to this, Zino, Goodworth, and Adams are working to position the public library as a space of affirmation, openness, and light.

Despite the complaints, the FOL’s DQST event went on as scheduled.

“We hope but we cannot promise that experiences [in the public library] are going to be positive and that people can and do have a way to access what they want or need, free from judgment, or bias, or stereotypes,

and absolutely with their dignity affirmed,” said Zino.

**Reported in: *Los Angeles Blade*, May 19, 2021; *New Republic*, May 4, 2021.**

## Williamsport, Pennsylvania

On June 2, Lycoming County Commissioners Tony Mussare and Scott Metzger reproached the James V. Brown Library for having a “Celebrate Pride Month” sign and display in the children’s area.

Mussare said he asked Barbara McGary, Library Executive Director, to remove the displayed books from the children’s section. “Our children are confused enough,” Mussare said.

“Why are these books on display?” asked Metzger. “I’m asking them to be taken off display.”

The books were on display to celebrate Pride Month, held every June in commemoration of the 1969 Stonewall uprising in Greenwich Village. Pride Month promotes the dignity, equality, and increased visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/ questioning, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people.

Both Mussare and Metzger insisted their actions were not made in opposition to the LGBTQIA+ community nor were they an attempt at censorship.

The fact that they sought to leverage their power as elected officials to prevent children from seeing or accessing LGBTQIA+ materials at their local public library is at odds with their claim.

Lycoming County’s third commissioner, Rick Mirabito, took a more inclusive stance. He said sharing books like *Julian is a Mermaid* and *Jack (Not Jackie)* with children was not an attempt to indoctrinate them, but to create a community of tolerance.



“We are elected to represent everybody. Our personal beliefs can’t get in the way of upholding the law,” said Mirabito. “When we hide books, we are saying, ‘You folks are second-class citizens.’ Intolerance often escalates into violence, even death.”

In response to the verbal objections by Mussare and Metzger, McGary said that the library has a core value of welcoming and valuing everyone and showing them respect.

McGary stood firm, refusing to remove materials or displays without

following the established process for doing so. She shared the library’s policy and procedures regarding challenges to materials and displays with all three county commissioners. No formal written complaint was ever filed.

In an opinion letter to the *Williamsport Sun-Gazette*, McGary said “The Library celebrates Pride Month to welcome and honor our LGBTQ+ community of all ages in Lycoming County. Community members, in order to feel welcome, must see themselves reflected in the award-winning

books, materials, and displays we offer.”

McGary indicated she had received overwhelmingly positive support from the community after the story broke about the two commissioners’ objection to the library’s pride display.

**Reported in: *Williamsport Sun-Gazette*, June 9, 2021, and June 15, 2021.**