



# NEWS IN BRIEF

*Some cases of censorship are only reported briefly via social media or board meeting minutes. When substantive media reporting regarding a challenge is lacking, the case will be reported here.*

## Hillsborough County, Florida

During the public comments section of the May 18, 2021, school board meeting of the Hillsborough County Public Schools, a parent complained that providing access to “the graphic explicit cesspools of sexual perversity” that is Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* exposed students “to the sexual fantasies of a pedophile.” She demanded that the book be removed from the extended reading list.

Pecola Breedlove, a character in Morrison’s novel, is the victim of incestuous sexual violence. The title refers to Pecola’s belief that she would be free from abuse and racism if she had blue eyes.

Morrison won the 1993 Nobel Prize for Literature and *The Bluest Eye* was part of the reason she received this accolade. Morrison also won a Pulitzer Prize for her novel *Beloved*.

*The Bluest Eye* was one of 13 books donated to the district by Chelsea’s One World One Family Task Force. The books were selected from a list vetted by the district’s Equity and Social Justice (ESJ) Committee. Their work is evaluated by the Board of Education’s Diversity, Belonging, Equity, and Inclusion (DBEI) committee.

**Reported in: Hillsborough County Public School Board Meeting Minutes, May 18, 2021.**

## Bremen, Indiana

On March 12, 2021, Purple for Parents Indiana posted a notice to Facebook informing parents of Bremen Public School students that they had

identified two books “containing obscenity in your high school library.”

Purple for Parents said they’d notified the librarian and superintendent regarding *All the Rage* by Courtney Summers and *Looking for Alaska* by John Green, however no formal request for reconsideration ever seems to have been submitted.

Purple for Parents promised to post notifications for parents regarding additional “obscene material” they find in school libraries going forwards.

(See: *Journal of Intellectual Freedom & Privacy*, v.6 iss.4: For the Record: Carmel, Indiana).

**Reported in: Facebook, Purple for Parents Indiana, March 12, 2021, at 10:09 AM.**

## North Scott, Iowa

Books purchased for every elementary school in the North Scott Community School District as part of a teacher-written Scott Regional Authority grant were pulled by superintendent Joe Stutting for review, following a complaint about critical race theory posted by the United Parents of North Scott Facebook group.

The books were for grades K-6 and included selections from Book Source’s contemporary multicultural perspectives and Black lives matter collections.

According to Stutting, the books would be reviewed by building principals and the curriculum director and a list of approved titles would be presented to the school board.

Stutting said that if a parent wants to challenge any book that the administration chooses not to add to school libraries, they can do so using the district’s reconsideration policy, which he said has “been around for decades.”

Sadly, Stutting seems to have understood the decades-old challenge process exactly backwards. It allows parents to request reconsideration of

materials which were added to the collection in order to potentially have them removed, not to consider titles from an unpublished list that were excluded from school libraries by administrators.

According to a youth services librarian, the policy has never previously been used in this way, nor has the superintendent previously injected himself in the process of approving book acquisitions at the title-level.

The school board does not publicly post their minutes and the full title list is not known. According to news coverage and social media posts, it included:

- *The ABCs of Black History* by Rio Cortez
- *Bedtime Bonnet* by Nancy Amanda Redd
- *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson
- *Drawn Together* by Minh Lê
- *I am Every Good Thing* by Derrick Barnes
- *One Shadow on the Wall* by Leah Henderson
- *The Proudest Blue* by Ibtehaj Muhammad
- *This Book is Anti-Racist* by Tiffany Jewell
- *Woke: A Young Poet’s Call to Justice* by Mahogany Browne

**Reported in: Quad-City Times, June 7, 2021.**

## Grand Rapids, Michigan

*My Footprints* by Bao Phi, a picture book about a Vietnamese American girl who’s bullied because of her ethnicity and same-sex parents, was being considered for a schoolwide read aloud at Pine Ridge Elementary in the Forest Hills Public School District.

“Books are being read in the schools that are normalizing and



celebrating homosexuality, transgender, LGBTQ+,” proclaimed a December 6 post on the Facebook page of a group trying to recall Forest Hills school board members. The post went on to encourage parents to email the principal and ask him to pick a different title.

The book was put on hold and a different title was selected. Superintendent Dan Behm said the decision had nothing to do with the main character having two moms.

**Reported in: WOODTV, December 10, 2021.**

### Muskegon, Michigan

After receiving a complaint from a parent on November 21, the Reeths-Puffer School District removed Alex Gino’s *Melissa* (previously published as *George*) from elementary school libraries.

Alex Gino’s children’s novel is about a young transgender girl struggling to be herself while the world sees her as a boy. Among numerous accolades, it won a Stonewall Book Award, a California Book Award, and a Lambda Literary Award.

The parent wrote on Facebook that his 11-year-old daughter “chose a transgender book, not truly understanding what she chose” and was “having a hard time understanding/relating” to it.

Superintendent Steve Edwards said that after a parent expressed concern regarding its content, the district decided *George* “should not be an optional book for the primary or elementary grade” and removed it from all libraries serving K-6 children.

**Reported in: WOODTV, December 10, 2021.**

### Novi, Michigan

A petition started by Parents4Novi-Together which objected to topics such as “race” and “gender identity,

sexuality, and ideological activist behavior(s)” in the curriculum.

Thirteen books as well as the short story “Super Human” by Nicola Yoon and the poems “The Cost of Being a Girl” by Denise Frohman and “If a Princess Tries to Kidnap Your Daughter” by Carlos Andres Gomez were cited by the petition as being inappropriate for use in schools.

Challenges to the books spilled into the public comments sections of the March 18, 2021, and April 8, 2021, meetings of the Novi Community School Board.

Students and alumni organized to protest the actions called for in the petition and speak out in defense of diverse and inclusive reading materials and lessons.

The books targeted were:

- *A is for Activist* by Innosanto Nagara
- *Alan Cole is not a Coward* by Eric Bell
- *All are Welcome* by Alexandra Penfold
- *Antonio’s Card/ La Tarjeta de Antonio* by Rigoberto Gonzalez
- *A Day in the Life of Marlon Bundo* by Jill Twiss
- *The Family Book* by Todd Parr
- *I am Perfectly Designed* by Karamo Brown
- *Love is Love* by Marc Andreyko
- *Melissa* (previously published as *George*) by Alex Gino
- *The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane* by Kate DiCamillo
- *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag* by Rob Sanders
- *Sparkle Boy* by Lesléa Newsman
- *Red: A Crayon’s Story* by Michael Hall

**Reported in: *The Wildcat Roar*, March 19, 2021; Novi Community School Board Minutes, March 18, 2021 and April 8, 2021.**

### Edgerton, Minnesota

At the March 23 meeting of the Edgerton Public School District board, parents complained about Angie Thomas’s *The Hate U Give*, which is part of the 9th grade curriculum.

*The Hate U Give* is a young adult novel narrated by a Black teenager who witnesses a White police officer shoot and kill an unarmed Black man during a traffic stop.

Thomas’s book has also won numerous awards, including a 2018 Michael L. Printz Award, three Goodreads Choice Awards, the 2018 William C. Morris Award for best debut book for teens, the 2018 Indies Choice Award for Young Adult Book of the Year, and it was a 2018 Coretta Scott King Book Award honoree.

The curriculum committee voted to retain the book. The school board voted unanimously at their June 22 meeting to go against their recommendation and remove the book from the freshman curriculum, citing its inclusion of profanity and its omission of the viewpoint of the police officer as justification.

**Reported in: Office for Intellectual Freedom challenge report; Edgerton Public School District board meeting minutes, March 23, 2021, and June 22, 2021.**

### Wayzata, Minnesota

The principal of Wayzata High School withdrew Jonathan Evison’s *Lawn Boy* from the school library based on his personal dislike of it and without following the district’s policy for reconsidering instructional material.

Evison’s semi-autobiographical coming-of-age novel explores themes of poverty, racism and sexual identity. It won a 2019 Alex Award, given by the Young Adult Library Services Association to adult books that have special appeal to young adults.



District policy requires that a committee of educational professionals and community members review any challenged material and stipulates that the person challenging the book cannot serve on the committee.

The policy also states that educational suitability should be the primary concern while reviewing material and that the committee's decision can only be overturned by a vote of the school board.

**Reported in: *National Coalition Against Censorship*, January 18, 2022.**

### Binghamton, New York

The Binghamton Police Benevolent Association demanded an apology from the Binghamton City School District (BCSD) after *Something Happened in Our Town* was read to elementary school students.

In a written response, BCSD said the book is appropriate for ages 4 to 8 and stated that “the book includes conversations around racial bias and injustice against African Americans, [and] the concepts are focused on the importance of treating everyone fairly. As the book shares, ‘there are many cops, Black and White, who make good choices.’”

The district ultimately apologized to the police union, stating “In no way does this book represent our thinking or beliefs about our police.” They also stated, however, that the book has not been removed from the curriculum.

**Reported in: *WICZ*, April 19, 2021.**

### Hastings, New York

Teaching of Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in eighth grade English classes in the Hastings-on-Hudson school district was suspended when a student

objected after a teacher read a racist joke from the book.

The narrator of the book responds to the joke with “That was the most racist thing I'd ever heard in my life.”

*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is a semi-autobiographical novel about Junior's life on the Spokane Indian Reservation and attending a nearly all-White public high school. It explores themes of poverty, racism, alcoholism, and bullying.

Alexie's book won numerous awards including the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and the Odyssey Award for the best audiobook for children or young adults.

The parents of the student said the book has educational value, but they felt the material wasn't presented appropriately and their child, who was the only Black student in the class, felt isolated and marginalized.

A letter signed by 10 English teachers protested the district's censorship of the book and said “The book's frank presentation of bigotry, discrimination, substance abuse, and other ‘adult issues’ can make teaching it challenging, but we continue to teach the novel precisely because of these challenges.”

A letter signed by district department chairs said the district's decision to remove the book from the curriculum without conferring with teachers “is insulting and the precedent it establishes is very, very dangerous.”

The board of the Hastings Public Library also issued a statement condemning the district's actions.

Adrian Forman, another middle school English teacher, resigned in protest of the district's handling of the situation on February 17. “Free speech is in my blood; it's part of who I am,” said Forman. “You don't just jerk the

book away half way through. That doesn't resolve anything.”

**Reported in: *Rockland/ Westchester Journal News*, March 4, 2021.**

### Hudson, Ohio

Members of the local chapter of Moms for Liberty challenged four books held by the Hudson High School Library.

At the January 24 meeting of the Hudson Board of Education, Superintendent Phil Herman announced that *A Girl on the Shore* by Inio Asan would be withdrawn from the collection due to its high volume of sexual content and the fact that the ordinary acquisition process was not followed when it was added to the collection.

*Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison would be retained because of its educational and literary value and for shedding “positive light” on members of marginalized groups.

*Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe was still undergoing committee review, though Herman recommended that it be retained for its educational value and because “it provides all students with valuable insight and unique perspective into issues faced by members of the LGBTQ community.”

*Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews was also challenged, though at a later date than the other titles and no update was provided during the meeting.

**Reported in: *Akron Beacon Journal*, January 27, 2022.**

### Proctorville, Ohio

On November 15, Fairland Local Schools held a meeting for parents and students to voice their concerns about the removal of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* from the curriculum.

Students said teachers were no longer allowed to distribute copies



of the book and argued that the topics of racism, classism, and mental health discussed throughout it were more important than the one sexually explicit passage it contains.

School board president Gary Sowards said that the book was still available, but students would need parental permission to check it out from the library.

**Reported in: WSAZ, November 16, 2021.**

### West Chester, Pennsylvania

A parent at the November 22 board meeting of the West Chester Area School District alleged that the school board was distributing pornography to minors because *Gender Queer: A Memoir* was in two of the high school libraries.

*Gender Queer* 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. It 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.

The superintendent removed the book from circulation before a formal review of it began.

On March 12, 2022, Jennifer MacFarland, the parent who challenged *Gender Queer*, submitted a "right to know" application to the board requesting data on the number of LGBTQIA+ students in the district and the number of times LGBTQIA+ students had been referred to guidance counselors in the past 20 years. Both requests were denied.

MacFarland also requested circulation records for the book. This request was granted in part and MacFarland was provided with the raw

number of times the book had been checked out from high school libraries. Further details were withheld to protect students' privacy.

On March 28, the board voted 8-1 to follow the review committee's recommendation and retain *Gender Queer* in their high school libraries.

**Reported in: West Chester Area School District board meeting minutes, November 21, 2022; Daily Local, March 13, 2022; The Philadelphia Inquirer, March 29, 2022.**

### El Paso, Texas

Parents of students in the Socorro Independent School District (ISD) recently complained that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky was "pornographic" and should be removed from the curriculum.

Elda Marmolejos said the book contained themes which were inappropriate for high school. "It talks about sex, drugs, alcohol, [and] minor abuse," said Marmolejos. She also objected that it contained a scene "where two boys are having sex."

Marmolejos also complained that she was not required to sign a parental consent form before the book was assigned to her child.

Socorro ISD policy allows parents to submit a formal request for reconsideration of instructional material. No such request has been received at this time. However, the district announced they would be reviewing parent notification procedures for when books with mature content are used in class.

**Reported in: WANE, December 15, 2021.**

### Loudoun Virginia

On October 29, 2021, a parent submitted a formal request for the reconsideration of *The Black Flamingo* by

Dean Atta from Loudoun county middle school libraries.

The book had been recommended to her child by another student and she was concerned it "might encourage drug use," and that reading it in middle school presented a "premature introduction to gender dysphoria."

*The Black Flamingo* is the coming-of-age story of a mixed-race gay man, written in verse. It one the 2020 Stonewall Book Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature and was one of Kirkus's "Best YA Books of 2020."

A review committee was formed to decide if the book will remain in the district's middle school libraries.

**Reported in: Office for Intellectual Freedom challenge report.**

### Sheboygan Falls, Wisconsin

On October 18, the Sheboygan Falls Memorial Library received an email request to reconsider *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe from the Wisconsin Public Library Consortium's Overdrive ebook collection.

*Gender Queer* 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. It 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.

The complaint stated that library materials "affirm or glorify LGBT behavior" and that "of the 157 books in Libby [the library's ebook platform] under the subject LGBTQIA+ nonfiction, only one appears to caution against LGBT behavior."

On October 31, the individual again complained about *Gender Queer*



and added a request to reconsider a second ebook title, *365 Sex Positions: A New Way Every Day for a Steamy, Erotic Year* by Lisa Sweet.

At the library's November 9 board meeting, the patron presented their case for reconsideration and after discussion, the board voted to retain both titles.

**Reported in: Office for Intellectual Freedom challenge report.**