



CITY OF West Linn

January 24, 2023

Dear West Linn-Wilsonville School District Administration, School Board and Faculty,

The West Linn Public Library greatly values our partnership and collaboration with the West Linn-Wilsonville School District in serving our children and families and is honored to be included in discussions around the importance of literature in our community.

Like educators, public librarians spend much time considering how we can best serve our community in our respective role. Public libraries are community spaces to gather, discover and learn. We consider it our duty to provide our residents with materials that have wide ranging opinions and ideas, and we take seriously the right of each individual to access information. This is why we are concerned and troubled when we hear of books being potentially banned or restricted in our school libraries.

Recently there has been both a local and national trend to target books by and about the LGBTQIA community, BIPOC people, and other marginalized groups. Historically these groups have been underrepresented in published literature. There have been great strides in children's and teen publishing over the past few years to include works by authors and illustrators who create and educate from these lived experiences. This is a positive achievement we should be encouraging and celebrating, rather than considering to limit or ban.

Reading books can be very personal. When children read books about someone different from them, they learn to see others as fully human and value differences. Recognizing the humanity in others builds compassion and helps to prevent hatred, bullying, and bigotry. Reading books can also be a validating experience. When kids who are underrepresented and marginalized in their communities read books about characters like them, they feel validated and seen. They receive the message: you belong. As educators, librarians and administrators, we all understand the importance of culturally responsive teaching. Rudine Sims Bishop, professor emerita of education at The Ohio State University and pioneer of the importance of multicultural literature states: "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part."

Student's First Amendment rights in schools have been repeatedly addressed and clarified by the Supreme Court of the United States. In *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, a 1969 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court held that students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." Thirteen years later in 1982, in *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District v. Pico*, the Court noted the "special characteristics" of the school library, making it "especially appropriate for the recognition of the First Amendment rights of students," including the right to access information and ideas. **Legal precedent and established best practices guide school boards and administration to act with the constitutional rights of students in mind, recognizing the harm in eliminating access for all based on the concerns of any individual or faction.**



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The American Library Association provides a comprehensive interpretation of the Library Bill of Rights, as it pertains to access and resources provided in public school libraries:

The school library plays a unique role in promoting, protecting, and educating about intellectual freedom. It serves as a point of voluntary access to information and ideas and as a learning laboratory for students as they acquire critical thinking and problem-solving skills needed in a pluralistic society. Although the educational level and program of the school necessarily shape the resources and services of a school library, the principles of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights apply equally to all libraries, including school libraries. Under these principles, all students have equitable access to library facilities, resources, and instructional programs.

Book challenges are certainly not new and in response to ongoing requests, we have adopted robust policies and procedures to ensure an inclusive collection and uphold the ideals of intellectual freedom. We first provide an opportunity for patrons to express their concerns to staff about a specific title with a simple conversation. As a resource we point to our Collection Management Policy which outlines how and why our professional staff select materials. If next steps are needed, we provide a Request for Reconsideration form. This double sided document with directed questions asks them to read the material in its entirety and think critically as they express their concerns. Once completed, the form is reviewed by Library Administration and a response may or may not be provided.

With a policy and procedure in place, there is a transparent way for patrons and library staff to have a respectful and expedient dialogue around materials. This creates a pathway that preserves the integrity of the collection process and allows for individuals to be heard. Another benefit is that it honors and defends the skills and expertise of trained professionals and helps in maintaining trust between administrators and staff. We encourage you to find a path forward that supports the selections of your teacher-librarians while allowing an efficient process for concerns to be officially registered and noted.

We look forward to more courageous conversations and collaborations. The City of West Linn is united with you in creating learning communities for the greatest thinkers and most thoughtful people... for the world.

In partnership,

Doug Erickson
Director of Library & Community Services

John Williams
City Manager