



Understanding Censorship in New Jersey's Public Schools

This is New Jersey.
We don't ban books here.

Background

Distract and divide.

That's the go-to strategy some will employ to incite fear and ignite change. Right now, politically motivated opportunists are using this strategy in local school districts to create chaos, change common-sense and inclusive school policies, and motivate voters. These unwarranted attacks are rarely based on facts and are a brazen attempt to undermine inclusive school environments.

When it comes to banning books and curricula, the loudest voices **do not** represent what parents want for their students. Instead, the loudest voices are too often held by political extremists who are attacking public schools in the name of winning more votes and pushing a false version of reality onto children.

The books and curricula that are most often attacked are the books and curricula that represent the true and sometimes unflattering elements of our country's and state's history.

How to talk about it:

Fortunately, we know that parents overwhelmingly reject an extremist approach to public education. Parents and educators agree that historically accurate, inclusive curricula result in the safest learning environment for all students and people, regardless of their personal beliefs or life experiences.

When talking to parents about book or curricula banning, remember:

- Censorship is never the answer.
- Our country's greatest strength is our richly diverse population and our collective willingness to learn from our differences and come together, despite those differences.

- Children—no matter their color, background, or ZIP code—deserve an honest and accurate education so they can learn from our past mistakes and forge a better future.
- Banning books is never about protecting children; it is always about erasing our history and distorting reality. It's often about inciting fear and motivating voters.
- Everyone benefits when students learn to better understand the lives, cultures, beliefs and experiences of different people.
- Classroom educators work with state and local district officials to develop age-appropriate, culturally relevant curricula, which includes a thorough and well-established book selection process, that provides our children with an education that imparts honesty about who we are, integrity in how we treat others, and courage to do what's right.
- Students deserve the freedom to read more books that are as diverse and complex as the society in which we live. When we have books that include characters of all races, genders and backgrounds, students discover their own voices and learn from the stories and voices of others.
- When some politicians or community leaders attempt to ban books, censor lessons, or erase people from the history books, they deprive students of an honest and accurate history that enables them to learn from the mistakes of our past to help create a better future.

Actions you can take:

- Contact your local education association's president and NJEA field representative to ensure you, your local, and your community have the support you need to properly address the challenge. You can find your UniServ field rep and their contact information [here](#).
- Talk to parents and people in your community. There is no stronger partnership than that of educators and parents. Answer any questions with accuracy and honesty.
- Monitor local social media pages and groups. Political extremists tend to push misinformation and disinformation on local Facebook groups to manufacture fear and outrage. Being present on these pages can help you understand what mistruths are being spread.
- Report any instances of book or curricula challenges to the NJEA Center for Honesty in Education at njea.org/edhonesty.
- Attend a board of education meeting. Let the students, educators, and like-minded parents know they have your support by speaking at a local board meeting. Before

you go to a meeting, always prepare what you're going to say ahead of time. It's a good idea to recruit friends to join you, too, as there is power in numbers. Remember, you do not need to live in a town to speak at a board meeting.

Resources:

- [New Jersey Association of School Librarians](#)
- [NJEA's Center for Honesty in Education](#)
- [Intellectual Freedom: Issues and Resources](#)
- [Library Bill of Rights](#)
- [Challenge Support](#)
- [Filters and Filtering](#)
- [Schools and Minors Rights](#)
- [Banned and Challenged Books](#)
- [Office for Intellectual Freedom](#)

New and of interest:

- How much does a book challenge cost? <https://bookriot.com/book-censorship-news-march-4-2022/>
- Navigator Polling – More Than Three in Four Americans Oppose Banning Books in Public Schools <https://navigatorresearch.org/more-than-three-in-four-americans-oppose-banning-books-in-public-schools/>
- Data for Progress – Voters Do Not Support Banning Books From School Curriculum <https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2022/2/18/voters-do-not-support-banning-books-from-school-curriculums>
- Librarians Decry GOP Moves to Ban Books in Schools (Texas) <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2022/01/13/librarians-decry-gop-moves-to-ban-books-in-schools>
- Book bans are back in style <https://www.axios.com/a-book-purge-surge-35989d99-cfdf-4c5e-b9fd-daa857c50079.html>
- NJEA Statement on book bans <https://www.njea.org/njea-officers-book-bans-hurt-students/>
- A Tennessee School Board's Ban of 'Maus' Speaks to a Much Larger Problem <https://www.kveller.com/a-tennessee-school-boards-ban-of-maus-speaks-to-a-much-larger-problem/>
- Some resources on book challenges https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jY6fuZ3AeyViTk6jLbrdPUxMi37G2IKtTgZ_yqaOnGo/e/dit?fbclid=IwAR2qL7eyf1_XCoX-y43jHTbxN1_axzLq1J_gwNtle22HEMqJCI5Me8bSHFI
- American Library Association: Voters Oppose Book Bans in Libraries <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/voters-oppose-book-bans-libraries>
- NPR: Book bans and the threat of censorship rev up political activism in the suburbs <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/21/1087000890/book-bans-and-the-threat-of-censorship-rev-up-political-activism-in-the-suburbs>
- Efforts to ban books jumped an 'unprecedented' four-fold in 2021, ALA report says <https://www.npr.org/2022/04/04/1090067026/efforts-to-ban-books-jumped-an-unprecedented-four-fold-in-2021-ala-report-says>

- *NJ high school board votes against recommendation to ban LGBTQ+ book*
<https://www.nj.com/hunterdon/2022/01/nj-high-school-board-votes-against-recommendation-to-ban-lgbtq-book.html>