



Declaration Regarding School Media Center and Classroom Library Materials

August 22, 2023

WHEREAS the School District of Manatee County has a large and diverse student population which includes members of various racial, sexual, cultural, linguistic, (non)religious, political, socio-economic, mental health, physical health, and learning ability statuses;

WHEREAS the School District of Manatee County's mission is to "educate and develop all students today for their success tomorrow" and its vision is to "be an exemplary student-focused school system that develops lifelong learners to be globally competitive";

WHEREAS it is understood that any school or classroom library should include a wide variety of age-appropriate and level-appropriate materials that are of interest and importance to the student populations it serves;

WHEREAS media collections should represent a diversity of authors, interests, life experiences, and topics so that all students are represented in the literature offered in the media center and classroom libraries;

WHEREAS state and district standardized test scores (such as FAST) show that the majority of students in this district are not currently at or above grade level reading levels and therefore a variety of efforts are urgently required to improve this metric;

WHEREAS many School District of Manatee County students are taking college-level classes through Dual Enrollment or Advanced Placement opportunities, and are able to work jobs, sign up for the military, emancipate from their parents, marry, vote, and are capable of reading and intelligently discussing mature and/or politically and socially controversial topics;

WE THEREFORE ask the School District of Manatee County to develop policy that does as follows:

- Encourages media specialists and educators to select an engaging and diversified selection of media materials that reflects the interests of their student body;
- Supports and protects educators who choose to participate in publicly celebrated reading initiatives that encourage and promote the joy of reading in our youth;
- Commits to providing library materials that reflect true and diverse life experiences from a range of authors and perspectives;
- Protects parents' rights to allow their child access to any materials deemed appropriate by a professional certified educator or media specialist;
- Protects parents' rights to restrict their own child's access to educational material by providing an opt-out procedure through the FOCUS Parent Portal;
- Provides a clear procedure to challenge and to "challenge the challenge" of media materials; and
- Ensures designated media review committees will be diverse, and include media specialists, educators, administrators, current or recently-graduated students, parents, and community members; and provides audio recordings of committee meetings on the school or district website, as well as detailed written outcomes of challenges, and tracking of challenger categories.