

18 March 2024

## The New York City Department of Education

Dear Chancellor David C. Banks,

On March 11, 2024, *Gothamist* [reported](#) that PS 55 in Staten Island has trashed hundreds of books on ideological grounds. If true, such action amounts to unlawful censorship and violates authors' and students' First Amendment rights.

The images of the discarded books shared by *Gothamist* are deeply troubling, particularly the sticky notes on many titles that appear to state the reason they have been removed. On one book, *My Two Border Towns*, there is a note stating "Our country has no room and it's not fair" as the rationale for throwing the book in the garbage. On another title, *The Derby Daredevils*, the note says the book is "not approved" because it "discusses dad being transgender" and includes "teenage girls having crushes on another girl in class." *We Are Still Here! Native American Truths Everyone Should Know* was flagged as having a "negative slant on white people." And on the picture book *Nina: A Story of Nina Simone* there is a note saying it is not approved because "This is about how black people were treated poorly but overcame it. (Can go both ways.)" Such comments clearly reflect private bias that cannot be effectuated by a public school that is obligated to serve everyone in the community.

We recognize the outstanding work the Department has done to expand literacy and access to books across the city. Censorship threatens these efforts by diminishing our collective Constitutional rights. Students and parents have the right to make their own reading decisions for their families. Book bans infringe upon their ability to access the titles of their choosing and ultimately deprive children of the opportunity to learn from new perspectives and see themselves represented. Because school libraries play a crucial role in providing families with access to books, removing titles makes it difficult or even impossible for students to encounter information and ideas that are necessary to their intellectual development.

Based on the report, we are deeply concerned that silent or unacknowledged censorship may be going on in New York City schools. We are heartened that the NYC DOE is conducting an investigation into this incident. We hope you are able to act quickly to ensure the discarded books are returned to the shelves and respectfully request a meeting to explore ways in which we can work together to protect the First Amendment rights of NYC students in the future.

We firmly stand in support of educators, librarians, parents, students, and authors protecting the freedom to read here in NYC and in the rest of America.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of this critical issue. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Skip Dye  
Chair, Intellectual Freedom Committee  
Penguin Random House

Co-signed by: Authors Against Book Bans  
Candlewick Press  
Charlesbridge  
Hachette Book Group  
Macmillan Publishers  
Simon & Schuster  
Sourcebooks