

OPINION: Old Rochester Regional School District Parents Speak Out Against Book Banning

The following was submitted to use from a group of parents in the Old Rochester Regional School District.

As members of the Old Rochester Regional School District community, we are speaking out against the efforts to suppress, demonize and ban books from our district's school libraries. These attempts target books by and about LGBTQ+, Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color. These groups are underrepresented in books in our schools, despite recent school district efforts to provide greater access to books which reflect the diverse makeup of our community. These achievements should be celebrated, not impeded.

A parent has a right to decide which books their own children may read, but no single parent or community member has that right over another's child. Access to books and information is integral to a healthy democracy, economic growth and a more compassionate society.

Engaging in reading builds empathy. When kids read books centered on someone different from them, they learn to see others as fully human. Recognizing the humanity of others creates a community of compassion and prevents hatred, cruelty, bullying and bigotry.

When our young scholars, who are minorities in their communities, read books elevating characters like them, they feel validated and seen. They receive the message: You matter.

Attempts to ban books highlighting underrepresented kids sends

them the message: You shouldn't exist; your story doesn't matter and we don't want our kids to empathize with you. This is a dangerous message which can result in grave consequences, like depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation. No child should feel like they are unworthy and undeserving of love and respect.

We hope for a positive future, free from fear and prejudice; where all of us work together and support each other to create and foster a diverse community built on common ground. Sharing our unique stories and identities is the best way to build that common ground.

We stand with our dedicated educators, teachers, librarians and all those who seek to better the lives of our kids. Education should be about expanding minds and broadening perspectives, not narrowing thoughts.

We ask the Old Rochester School District School Committee Members and those in power to reject these divisive, hate-mongering attempts to limit whose stories are worth telling and emphatically remind them of the values of intellectual freedom enumerated in the district's own policy IJJ/IJK/IJKA/IJL/ILM listed below:

The Old Rochester School Committees subscribe in principle to the statements of policy on library philosophy as expressed in the Library Bill of Rights of the American Library Association. The principles of intellectual freedom expressed in the Library Bill of Rights are inherent in the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. In the event library materials are questioned, the principles of intellectual freedom shall be defended.

As a concerned member of our community, We invite you to join me in opposing the proposed banning of reading materials from our school libraries. Signing the letter provided in the link below will ensure your voice is heard when the letter is

shared with School Committee members (inclusive of a list of signatures) at the District Meeting scheduled on October 19, 2022. Please comment “signed” upon completing the form provided. Thank you.

Sign the letter HERE:
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScQnJnjM4RaB44F3UdsrXsQae1GvCpcuIEHt8eBuenhwRCGLw/viewform?fbclid=IwAR2z2dbqsDa6qGhA9HR2xPJc4PgN0vJdlMWlNsEyUk45c0d5L1PZc4Ru-Dw>