

PROTECTING ACCESS TO BOOKS AND MEDIA IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES

Adopted by Convention Delegates April 2025

- WHEREAS, The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution protects the freedom of speech, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Tinker v. Des Moines School District* that students and teachers retain their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression in schools, and in *Board of Education v. Pico*, that school officials may not remove books from school libraries for the purpose of restricting access to the political ideas or social perspectives discussed in the books, as that constitutes an “official suppression of ideas” and violates the students’ First Amendment right to receive information and ideas; and
- WHEREAS, Censorship occurs when individuals or groups seek to limit freedom of thought and expression by trying to prevent others from saying, printing, or depicting words and images, which is done through challenges that attempt to remove, restrict, or ban materials from the school curriculum or from classroom, school, or public libraries; and
- WHEREAS, The U.S. has a long history of book bans, the number of challenges and bans has been increasing, and the process and targets have evolved: Most book bans are not spontaneous, organic expressions of citizen concern, but now come via state legislation or reflect the work of a growing number of organizations that have made demanding censorship of certain books and ideas in schools part of their mission. The targeted books include those that deal with racism and racial justice, as well as stories that center the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and people of color, or members of the LGBTQ+ community; and
- WHEREAS, All students benefit from access to diverse ideas and representation in books and media, which allow them to create connections to their knowledge and experiences, extend critical thinking beyond themselves, and provide opportunities to learn about the experiences of people who are different than they are; and
- WHEREAS, American voters and parents oppose the removal of books from school and public libraries, support librarians creating collections that include widespread offerings with varied viewpoints, and affirm the importance of giving young people access to books and not allowing individual parents to decide what books are available to other people’s children; and
- WHEREAS, The American Library Association and the National Coalition Against Censorship have developed guidelines that safeguard students’ First Amendment rights for the adoption

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of school curricula and library materials, and for handling formal complaints; therefore be it

- RESOLVED, That the West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA, and its constituent associations are encouraged to advocate for laws, regulations, policies, and programs that protect against censorship and book bans and protect free access to information and ideas in schools and public libraries; and be it further
- RESOLVED, That the West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA, and its constituent associations encourage the establishment of school system policies and processes using established best practices, to ensure the rights of educators, parents, students, and other community members to assume roles in the evaluation, selection, adoption, or removal procedures for instructional materials and school library materials; and be it further
- RESOLVED, That the West Virginia PTA, its parent association National PTA, and its constituent associations will work with educators, families, and students to provide awareness and education on censorship, supporting factually correct and historically accurate information and materials, and following best practices for challenged books; and be it further
- RESOLVED, That National PTA and its constituent associations support the perspective that age- or developmentally appropriate books, programming, and media resources should accurately reflect historical facts, inspire creativity, and encourage responsible civil discourse; and be it further
- RESOLVED, That National PTA and its constituent associations strongly urge freedom of expression, with opportunities and materials fully accessible to all students, families, and educators, allowing the realization of their full potential.

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BACKGROUND SUMMARY:

Protecting access to books and media in schools and libraries is crucial for several reasons. First, it ensures students and communities have access to a wide range of ideas, perspectives, and information. Books and media help cultivate critical thinking, creativity, and empathy by introducing individuals to different cultures, viewpoints, and experiences.

When schools or libraries censor or restrict access to certain materials, it limits students' ability to explore subjects that might challenge their assumptions, expand their knowledge, or help them develop into informed, independent thinkers. By having books and media that reflect various backgrounds, identities, and life experiences, schools and libraries create spaces where students can see themselves represented or learn about others' experiences.

Books and other media in schools are essential tools for learning and personal growth. Censorship and book bans limit students' educational opportunities by restricting access to materials that challenge them, broaden their understanding, and encourage independent thought. Laws protecting access to books ensure that education remains robust and comprehensive.

Advocating for laws against censorship and book bans ensures that free expression, intellectual freedom, inclusivity, and education remain central to our society.