



LIBRARIES

Nassau County, Florida

Two Nassau County parents are outraged about two books their middle schoolers brought home from the school library. The covers look harmless enough, they said, but when the parents saw the profanity and sexually explicit language inside, they called a local TV station. From paragraphs about sex, to drinking alcohol and stripping, the Yulee Middle School parents said they are furious that these books are on the shelves of the school library.

“I have in no way shape or form authorized my children to read such material, I can tell you that,” said parent Brook Todd. Todd has five kids in the Nassau County school district and one at the middle school. She said the books made her uncomfortable.

“I was reading a lot of sexual content and some things that I wouldn’t think high schoolers should have access to,” Todd said.

The two books are titled *TTFN*, meaning ta ta for now, and *TTYL*, short for talk to you later.

“It’s telling kids to rebel against parents. It’s telling them it’s OK to party, drink, cuss and do other obscene things in the book,” parent Billie Thrift said. Thrift said her twelve-year-old daughter brought the books home from school.

“She immediately didn’t want to read it, but she was scared she was going to get a bad grade because she didn’t finish reading the book she checked out,” Thrift said. Thrift said the books are part of the accelerated reading program where students log the amount spent reading and have to take tests on the books.

“Personally, I think this is what’s wrong with children today. It’s books like this and stuff being exposed to our children and it being allowed to being exposed,” said Thrift. Both parents

planned to take their complaints to the district. “I would like them to do away with this. I would like them to somehow monitor what goes into the library,” Todd said.

The parents also said after posting their concerns on Facebook, teachers from the school reached out to them saying they were concerned, too. Reported in: actionnewsjax.com, August 16.

Pasco County, Florida

A review committee’s proposal to remove Stephen Chbosky’s novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* from Pasco Middle School will stand, but only for that school, district spokeswoman Linda Cobbe said. A committee of parents, teachers and administrators had recommended that all Pasco County schools stop using a novel that some deemed “disgusting” for its explicit sexual references. A substitute teacher at Pasco Middle School had assigned the novel to seventh-graders in an advanced language arts class.

“The material is disgusting,” said Shauna Hutsell, who filed a formal complaint against the book after her son brought it home. “It needs to be pulled. No other kids should be getting this book.”

A school-based committee agreed with that point. Members suggested that the novel’s message, while good for students with troubles like the protagonist’s, exposed many children to disturbing images and information for the first time. The novel includes detailed descriptions of rape, sex and masturbation.

“You can’t get any argument from me,” principal Jeff Wolff, who has two middle school aged children, told the group.

Four high schools that have the 1999 title took it out of circulation pending the outcome of a challenge at Pasco Middle. Administrators discussed

the issue of whether one school’s materials review panel may make decisions with district-wide implications, Cobbe said.

“We are going to make it more clear and more tight, so there’s no question if it’s a school-level challenge it applies only to that school,” she said. They also plan to require that any books that don’t appear on the district’s list of approved titles go through a review process before it can be bought. Reported in: *Tampa Bay Times*, May 23, 25.

Ada Township, Michigan

Morris Micklewhite and the Tangerine Dress is a children’s book about a young boy who likes to wear a dress to school. He also wears high heels and fingernail polish. Morris finds himself isolated and ridiculed but eventually convinces his classmates that he is just a boy who happens to like to wear a dress the color of a tiger and his mother’s hair and they eventually accept him. The story aims to encourage acceptance and discourage bullying.

But one parent sees something far more sinister. “What the heck is going on?” Lee Markham asked. “This book is not just talking about accepting another viewpoint, it’s promoting another life.”

Markham is a thirty-five-year-old Army veteran who says he was discharged in 2010 after an IED blew up in his face in Afghanistan forcing him to get dental reconstruction. Markham is also the father of a nine-year-old third-grader at a Forest Hills Public Schools elementary where the book was read to class.

“We’re talking about one way to live life, but what about the other way, y’know, sorry to say it, the normal way what’s the benefit of actually adhering to societal norms,” Markham said.

“For one thing, if any of those kids weren’t thinking about wearing dresses, now they are,” Markham said.



But far from pushing any kind of agenda, Superintendent Daniel Behm said the topic was broached by students.

“This book is not part of our typical curriculum but it was chosen with the teacher and the counselor after some students kept raising questions about some people dressed differently,” Behm said.

Behm said the issue is not just about LGBT issues, but about understanding of all cultures in a district of ten thousand students. He said ignoring topics like this one will only keep the school from concentrating on its core curriculum.

“When students ask a question, are teachers sort of saying ‘well, let me get back with you after I write a letter to all the parents to see if I can answer that letter for you’ I think that’s where it becomes, on a day-to-day practical level, a challenge,” Behm said.

The book has won numerous awards and has been recommended by library associations as a way to explore the topic with children. Its author, Christine Baldacchino, said the book is about more than just practicing acceptance.

“I wanted to give a voice to kids who are judged by people like Lee Markham every day just for being who they are. I want these children to know that their focus should be on being happy in their own skin (whether it be wrapped up in a tangerine dress or a pair of denim overalls),” she wrote in a statement.

Markham said he wants an apology and to have the book pulled from the shelves. The superintendent said that while he is glad to be aware that there is a person who might have a problem with this particular book, there is no reason it should be banned from the schools. Reported in: woodtv.com, May 11.

Henning, Minnesota

The Henning School Board on June 1 reversed a staff decision to remove from the district’s one library the award-winning graphic novel *This One Summer*, by Marko and Jillian Tama-ki. The board voted four to two to allow the book back in the library but under the condition that it be housed in a separate section and be available only to tenth- to twelfth-graders. They would also need signed parental permission to check it out.

Superintendent Jeremy Olson, along with the school principal and the librarian, had decided last month to remove the book after an elementary school parent raised concerns with the school about it.

The book, which among other prizes won a 2015 Caldecott Honor award, features two tween girls on summer vacation who lurch between childhood and early adolescence. The girls become aware of serious problems among the adults and older teenagers they encounter. Among the topics: unplanned pregnancy, drugs, alcohol, suicide and oral sex.

Olson had previously said that with one library for 390 students in pre-K through 12th grade, the book wasn’t appropriate. “We didn’t ban it,” Olson said. “We took it off the library shelves.” Reported in: *Minneapolis Star-Tribune*, May 27, June 2.

Rainier, Oregon

A sex education book full of illustrations depicting sexual acts created quite the controversy at a Hudson Park Elementary School in Rainier. Parents said the book was shown to their kids without their permission, and the school consequently pulled the book from library shelves.

The book in question, *It’s Perfectly Normal*, is a children’s book for ages ten and up, that talks all about changing bodies, sex and sexual health.

It includes illustrations about those things, including pages of naked teens and adults, some depicting sex acts and even masturbation.

Officials with the Rainier School District noted the title is on the state approved list of books allowed at the school, but in a letter sent home to parents the school’s principal said they had been inappropriately passed out to fourth graders in the library.

The district said a sixth grade class accidentally left the books out, where a fourth grade class found and read them. School officials added that it was an honest mistake.

However, some parents of those fourth graders said the school’s librarian showed their children the book directly, and even encouraged them to bring it home.

“Inappropriate human development and sexuality books were disseminated to students who had library. Procedures have been put into place to make sure this doesn’t happen again. All questionable books have been pulled from library shelves,” the principal wrote in a letter to parents.

The note went on to say that current policies about what books are allowed in the library were being addressed, and Hudson Park will provide parental notification when sex ed is being covered in classroom, so kids can opt out if they aren’t comfortable. Reported in: kptv.com, April 14.

SCHOOLS Northville, Michigan

Tami Carlone was dismayed when learning her daughter had been assigned to read acclaimed writer Toni Morrison’s book, *The Bluest Eye* as part of Northville High School’s Advanced Placement English course. She objects to the novel’s content, including depiction of a sexual assault. So Carlone filed a request with the district, aiming to have officials reconsider



having the work included as part of the curriculum.

“I feel it’s developmentally inappropriate,” Carlone said. “I don’t feel any child should be required to read it.” That idea inspired her and other parents to pack a Northville Public Schools Board of Education meeting in April.

Board members unanimously approved a committee recommendation that allows parents to choose between the Morrison novel or two other works this spring. “Because of your feedback, we’re giving you a choice,” board President Adam Phelps told the audience.

Officials said the book has been part of the AP English and Composition course since the early 1990s and was slated to be covered later that month at Northville High.

Published in 1970, *The Bluest Eye* revolves around the struggles Pecola Breedlove, a young African-American girl, faces living in Ohio during the early 20th century—including grappling with racial identity and sexual assault.

The request to reconsider using the book in the curriculum, which went to a committee that included a high school administrator, English teachers and other educators, cited the controversial content. However, “following a thoughtful and deliberative process, the committee reached a unanimous decision to recommend continued use” of the book, believing that removing it “would eliminate the opportunity for deep study by our students on critical themes in our society,” Deanna Barash, assistant superintendent of instructional services, wrote in a recent letter to the complainant.

“The rich text, dialogue and depiction of life for African Americans . . . allows our students to explore and synthesize the impact poverty, classism and oppression have on individuals.” The recommendation was

presented to a district committee April 5. Members asked that administrators consider adjusting the committee review and sought a revised proposal.

Throughout the sometimes contentious board meeting many parents and others spoke out about the tough topics covered in Morrison’s book. Several racy excerpts were read aloud. Some, like Carlone, felt the material “glamorized” pedophilia and could affect students.

“We’re citizens concerned about the moral compass of our society and the direction it’s headed,” said Karen Braun, who lives outside the district.

But others advocated the artistic merit of the work.

“Now they have a forum where they can discuss these things happening in our culture,” parent Misty Woods said. “You don’t ban books. You don’t do it.”

Erica Meister, an AP literature student, pointed out that other required reading—including *The Great Gatsby* and even Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*—covered questionable behavior but has not always stoked such ire. “Why are these topics no longer acceptable when they are written about by an African-American female?” she said.

The board’s vote means that AP students and parents can choose between three works that cover themes such as oppression and poverty: the Morrison book, an essay anthology or William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, Barash said. In the future, they’ll also have a chance to review which writings identified for students, she said.

Board members said they welcomed the comments from the public. But they also recognized that *The Bluest Eye* had not been challenged before, and considering a ban opens others questions about objectionable material.

“If people ask where we draw the line—that’s a very long list of lines,”

board Trustee Sarah Prescott said. Reported in: *Detroit News*, April 13.

Chatham Township, New Jersey

Libby Hilsenrath came before the Chatham Board of Education July 18 to express concerns over the inclusion of *A People’s History of the United States*, by Howard Zinn, in Chatham High School curricula.

The book presents an alternative view of American history characterized by the influence of an elite minority over the rest of the population.

Superintendent Michael LaSusa said excerpts from the book, not the book in its entirety, have been assigned reading in US History II classes at the high school for at least fifteen years. The book is used in high school and college classrooms across the country.

Hilsenrath read a passage from *A People’s History* in which Zinn writes the US Constitution was not written by “We, the people,” but a group of “fifty privileged, white males whose class interests required strong central government.” Hilsenrath said the book flies in the face of the school district’s commitment to imparting critical thinking skills.

“Given the fact that the author himself, Howard Zinn, says his book is a ‘biased account,’ I would ask the board to consider removing the book from the US History curriculum in the high school,” she said. “Or, alternatively, add another perspective or viewpoint of American history in addition to pure, unadulterated facts in a textbook. If we truly claim to teach critical thinking, not one-way thinking, I think it’s imperative the board review whether or not this book should be included as part of the curriculum.”

Board Vice President Matthew Gillfillan said he would not be comfortable with his children reading the book in



school were it not balanced with another text with opposing views.

LaSusa said the book is counterbalanced by another perspective, that of US History textbooks. “The goal is primarily to teach about perspective, and that textbooks themselves are not necessarily objective works,” he said. “At least that’s the position of a number of historians—that just the mere historiography of a given period has value judgements that authors apply when they are working with the sources that they’re working (with).”

“So the goal with this book and others in all of the social studies courses at the high school is to teach kids how to decipher how authors are putting together sources and how narrative is being created. That’s done with all the works.”

LaSusa said after the meeting that he would use *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, by James Loewen, and a book by Booker T. Washington when he was a social studies teacher at Chatham High School to present alternative viewpoints.

“I think it’s important to expose kids to multiple perspectives and have them understand that primary sources are the critical ingredient for any historian or any critical consumer of information.” Reported in: *Chatham Courier*, July 18.

North Fayette, Pennsylvania

In response to parents’ demands that some books be removed from the West Allegheny High School reading list, about two hundred students have signed a petition asking the district not to use censorship in an attempt to shield teens from problems they may be encountering in their lives.

“You’re trying to protect the children and I see that, but you’re really sheltering them and making them ignorant to issues that actually plague

our society and are relevant right now,” student Renae Roscart, fifteen, said of the parents who had sought the removal of some books.

Renae, of North Fayette, spoke at a school board meeting as she presented the petition, which was circulated among high school students on the last two days of the school year. Signed by 208 students, the petition asks that *The Glass Castle*, by Jeanette Walls, be returned to the reading list in its entirety and that other titles that might be considered controversial remain on the list.

The Glass Castle is about a woman persevering after a dysfunctional childhood and includes graphic descriptions of abuse, including sexual abuse. This year was the first time the book had been on the district’s high school reading list. Concerned about its content, a group of parents requested in March that it and other titles be removed from the list.

District officials responded, saying the reading assignment was altered to require students to read only excerpts from the memoir instead of the whole text.

The change “stole our students’ chance to learn and empathize with the society they live in,” Renae told the school board June 15.

“Reading the full content of *The Glass Castle* could allow a sexually assaulted child or a child with an alcoholic parent to feel less alone and less isolated,” she told the school directors.

In addition to the petition, Renae presented the board with a flier she helped create titled “The Ugly Truth,” which cites national statistics on the number of children directly affected by alcoholism, sexual assault and mental health conditions. It also includes local poverty rates.

“How is this inappropriate for our children when they’re going through this right now? What time could be

more relevant to learn this than when they’re going through it? By cutting these particular things out, you’re pretending that these statistics don’t exist. You are pretending that sexual assault and alcoholism isn’t something that youths encounter. And that is a problem,” Renae said.

Renae’s flier said that “lack of communication” could be contributing to a culture in which rape is prevalent and suicide rates are increasing. In March, the parents who objected to some of the books argued that the content of the books could be the cause of depression and anxiety in teens.

Board president Debbie Mirich indicated the district would look into the matter.

“We always appreciate hearing student voices. It’s always important to us,” superintendent Jerri Lynn Lippert said after the meeting.

West Allegheny serves about 3,300 students from Findlay, North Fayette and Oakdale. The high school has an enrollment of about 1,000. Reported in: *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, June 24.

Round Rock, Texas; South Burlington, Vermont

The day before Kate Messner was scheduled to speak to students about her latest novel, *The Seventh Wish*, the author received a troubling message from the school’s administrators: Don’t come.

Though the librarian at the Vermont elementary school had specifically requested Messner’s appearance, the invitation was rescinded when someone at the school grew concerned that students were not prepared to handle one of the novel’s threads, a subplot about heroin addiction.

Messner was dismayed, to say the least. “When we decide a book is inappropriate for a school library because it deals with a tough subject, we’re telling kids in that situation that their



problems can't even be talked about," she said.

The cancellation of Messner's appearance happened on the heels of the Round Rock Independent School District's decision to cancel author Phil Bildner's appearances this coming fall at eight of its elementary schools. A district spokesman said Bildner, who has visited the Texas school district for the past seven years, made inappropriate remarks to students about challenging adult authority during his presentations last year. But Bildner believes the real reason is an objection to some of the books he recommended to students last fall, including Alex Gino's novel, *George*, which describes a fourth-grade student's gender transition.

After Messner blogged about the withdrawal of her invitation to speak in South Burlington, an elementary school librarian from a different state e-mailed her to say she had *The Seventh Wish* on her order list, but removed it after learning it addressed opioid addiction. "Maybe there are some liberal communities out there that totally embrace telling children every possible bad thing that could happen to them in their life," the librarian wrote in an e-mail to Messner, "but once that innocence bubble is popped they can never unlearn those things or remove those images. I want some more hours of sprinklers, mud pies, and running around with light sabers."

When the school librarian requested Messner's visit in January, she was sent an advance copy of the book and a letter written by Messner explaining that the novel contained an "honest but age-appropriate look at the effect heroin addiction has on families." Messner is not sure the letter—or her book—were read until just before her scheduled visit.

"I don't think this was censorship, but I do think there was a breakdown in communication," Messner said.

Since the initial cancellation, the principal assured Messner that the school library will shelve *The Seventh Wish*, and e-mailed parents to let them know that the South Burlington Community Library and Phoenix Books, an independent bookstore in Burlington, would host an event with Messner on June 28. Reported in: *Publishers Weekly*, June 22.

Chesterfield, Virginia

Titles like *Eleanor and Park* and *Out of the Easy* might have made their way onto lists of best books for teenagers, but they also raised the ire of a group of Chesterfield parents. Calling the books "pornographic" and filled with "vile, vile, nasty language," Midlothian's Shannon Easter was one of the parents raising objections to books that were placed on Chesterfield County Public Schools' summer reading lists for middle and high school students.

Easter—who has one child enrolled in the county school system and two others who are home-schooled—initially began her campaign last summer by researching the books on Midlothian High's summer reading list. Using websites like nonprofit Common Sense Media and Plugged In, the entertainment arm of conservative Christian organization Focus on the Family, Easter deemed some of the books on the reading list to be inappropriate. She said that four titles on last year's list for Midlothian High were removed after she contacted the school's administration.

This May, when Easter and other parents requested Midlothian High's 2016 summer reading, they were informed that the high school would not be issuing one and that the school would instead use a countywide summer reading list. The parents found several titles on the 2016 reading lists objectionable, including Rainbow

Rowell's *Eleanor and Park*, a love story between two misfit teenagers in Nebraska.

The book has received multiple accolades as the young adult or teen book of the year for 2014 and was one of the American Library Association's Michael L. Printz Award honor books.

One of the books taken off of the revised middle school list is *Tyrell*, by Coe Booth, about an African-American teen living in a homeless shelter.

Easter also took issue with the original middle school list's inclusion of *Dope Sick*, by Walter Dean Myers. The book is about a young man who has been shot during a drug deal and is on the run from the police. Myers has won the Coretta Scott King Book Award for African-American authors five times.

"It's a very disparaging book that does not help eliminate racism," Easter says. "It separates and divides. It's trash."

Easter also finds fault with the original list's Kimani Tru series, saying the books' inclusion of issues like teen pregnancy and abortion aren't appropriate for middle school consumption. These books are not found on the revised lists.

After contacting the school system this year, Easter said the middle and high school summer reading lists were pulled from the Internet and revised, no longer containing the words "suggested" and "recommended." The updated lists for middle and high schools were revised to state that the school system "does not endorse any specific titles on these lists. Not all parents will consider all of the books on these sites to be appropriate, so parents are encouraged to visit these sites for reviews to determine which books are appropriate."

The lists include books that Easter doesn't find objectionable; however, she continued to take issue with the



links to other organizations' book lists now included on the CCPS lists. The links connect to pages from Scholastic, James Patterson's Read Kiddo Read and others, which contain books that Easter considers pornographic.

"You can get right back to all this trash in two links," Easter said.

Speaking at a School Board meeting, the county's chief academic officer, Donna Dalton, said that the school system had revised the book lists to address concerns of parents. Previously, the list had included recommendations from CCPS librarians.

"Instead, we are pointing our middle and high school students and their parents toward lists to national websites that review books," Dalton said. "These include Scholastic, Read Kiddo Read and Young Adult Library Services."

"We hope that we are proactively addressing concerns raised by our parents over sensitive reading materials," Dalton said.

The summary of the updated reading lists reads, "Summer reading is more about practicing the enjoyable habit of reading than it is about challenging students academically."

To this, Easter objects. "I'm not paying them tax dollars to entertain my children, and if I were paying them to entertain my children, I certainly wouldn't want them doing it with pornography," Easter says. "We are focused on getting the pornography off of the reading list and out of the hands of our kids."

In response to the controversy, state Senator Amanda Chase said the books on the original lists were "pornographic" and "trash." She said that librarians who continued to recommend books that were inconsistent with CCPS' "core values" should be "dismissed" after a warning and that the offending books should be removed from school libraries.

"Most parents, if they actually read excerpts [of these books], would have grave concerns," said Chase. "Whenever we start introducing kids to what I would say is explicitly pornographic material, I question the appropriateness of that material, especially when it conflicts with the core values that CCPS puts forward. As a parent, that's not something that I want my kids reading."

Chase, a Republican, said she supported a General Assembly bill that would have required public schools to notify parents before using sexually explicit books in school. The bill passed both houses of the legislature before it was vetoed by Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe.

"At the very least, there should be parental notification," Chase says. "It's embarrassing, honestly. If parents want to talk about it at home with their kids, that's one thing, but why would you have that at school?" Reported in: *Chesterfield Observer*, June 22, 29, July 20.

STUDENT PRESS Langhorne, Pennsylvania

Access to post and edit content to the online version of *The Playwickian*, the student newspaper at Neshaminy High School in Langhorne, was revoked for more than a month after student editors decided not to publish the word *Redskin* in a news article, despite being directed to do so by the school's principal.

The Playwickian's editor in chief, Tim Cho, has teamed up with the Philadelphia-based law firm Levine, Sullivan, Koch & Schulz to protest the actions taken by the Neshaminy High School administration. A letter they sent, dated June 6th, states that the school's administration violated Cho's federal and state constitutional rights.

"I suppose the administration has underestimated us," said Cho, a

Neshaminy senior, on why he believes school administrators have taken such bold actions against *The Playwickian* staff.

Student editors were directed by Neshaminy High School Principal Robert McGee to publish an article with the term *Redskin*, after the student author and then-co-managing editor, Jessica McClelland, filed and won an appeal of the editors' decision to redact the word.

Cho said the editorial board's decision not to publish the word *Redskin*, which is also the school's mascot, in the article was based on an 8-1 majority vote and in accordance with a 2013 policy established by the newspaper.

The Playwickian received national attention when its editorial board decided not to publish the word *Redskin* in 2013, after deciding it was a racial slur against Native Americans. Other newspapers have also stopped using the word.

Most Neshaminy students, however, are either not opposed or don't have an opinion on the school's mascot name, said Cho, citing the school's large student population and football culture as reasons why.

"People talk about tradition, but they don't talk about [the] history" behind the tradition, he said.

The article at the center of *The Playwickian's* latest controversy was about Neshaminy's annual Mr. *Redskin* competition, considered for publication in the newspaper's May online-only edition, a month after the event. Some of the newspaper's editors did not want it published for that reason.

Eishna Ranganathan, former *Playwickian* co-managing and co-news editor, said the newspaper's May edition is online only because the staff takes that month to prepare for its June graduation print issue.

In mid-April, the majority of *The Playwickian's* editors did decide



to publish the article with the word Redskin redacted, printing it as “R-----,” in accordance with its editorial policy—and the Associated Press stylebook’s guidelines for redacting obscenities and profanities.

That same day the article was removed from the website and editors’ administrator privileges were revoked by school administrators, Cho said. Administration later uploaded the article to the newspaper’s website with the word Redskin intact, Cho said.

This move is in violation with the district’s own publications policy, known as Policy 600, which gives student editors the right to redact the word Redskin or not publish stories that use it. Their decisions can be appealed, as was the case for the Mr. Redskin article, and the principal has to review all of the newspaper’s content before it is published in print or online.

Policy 600 was revised in 2014 after *The Playwickian* editorial board voted fourteen to seven the previous year to ban the word Redskin from its pages. The policy now dictates that “no student shall be disciplined for editing or editorial decisions, including the deletion of the word ‘Redskin’ from any article or editorial or for objecting to its use in any advertisement.”

Cho and his legal team are requesting that school administrators publish the article with the word Redskin redacted and restore Cho’s administrator privileges on the website.

The paper’s staff has been feeling the blowback of their decision to ban the word Redskin since the beginning, said Ranganathan, who was a freshman at Neshaminy in 2013. For the past two years, *The Playwickian*’s budget has been cut, she said. Last academic year the newspaper operated on a slim \$2,000, an amount the editors unsuccessfully sought to double through the crowdfunding site Indiegogo. And

Cho expects funds to be cut in half again soon.

Administration told the newspaper’s staff that they cut its budget in an effort to digitize the publication, Ranganathan said. Then they cut web access, she added. “I would say the ball is in the administrator’s court now,” Ranganathan said. Reported in: splc.org, June 13.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES San Bernardino, California

San Bernardino Valley College has halted production on a play based on December’s terrorist attack in that city. The announcement came after some of the victims’ family members objected to the concept.

“Please accept our deepest apologies for any pain or hurt we may have caused during the planning stages of launching a fall production called *SB Strong*,” Diana Z. Rodriguez, college president, wrote in a letter to San Bernardino County residents. “Our faculty are very sympathetic to the sensitive nature of their work and are considering a new theme for our fall production. We will not be doing *SB Strong*.”

Rodriguez said that “wider community input” will be sought if such a project is considered in the future, to ensure that the victims of the attack at the Inland Regional Center aren’t dishonored or misrepresented. At the same time, she said that academic freedom was not abridged in the decision to pull the play.

“Although we encourage originality on the part of our faculty and cannot censor their academic work, we also highly value the community’s input into the work we do,” she wrote. “We strive to be an institution that excels in bridging cultural gaps and providing improved access to rewarding careers and professional opportunities. We could never seek to exacerbate the

profound grief with which our community still lives.”

Matie Manning Scully, chair of performing arts at the college, said she did not believe the play’s cancellation raised concerns about academic freedom, although it was to have been part of the instructor’s fall play production class.

“It’s my understanding that [she] decided this on her own,” Scully said. “She’s a very tenderhearted woman to get this sort of negative response, I think she came to this decision on her own.”

A local newspaper ran a story about the plan to produce a “devised” play about the San Bernardino shootings, in which an ensemble cast would research and conduct interviews with local residents about their responses to the attack to create an original play. Later in the week, some people in the area, including family members of victims, voiced their concerns about the idea to college officials. Some said they wanted to see a script before the project moved ahead, others said it was simply too soon, and others still said it was poor judgment to dramatize the event at all.

“As the father of one of the 14 people killed, I am aghast at the suggestion that you’d want to profit from Daniel’s death,” Mark Sandefur wrote in a letter to the college, referring to his late son, Daniel Kaufman. “What incredibly bad taste you show. I can’t imagine who thought this was a good idea.”

Because there was no script, no one was citing anything specific about the play except its concept.

Pavel Bratulin, spokesperson for the college, said via email that faculty members had received concerns “sent directly to them that the production would lack support from many family members and friends of victims.”

Since this was “one of the key voices the faculty wanted to hear from and



involve in the production, they decided not to move forward with it this semester,” Bratulin said. “The decision was made by faculty out of consideration for the families of victims who shared their concerns. Our academic freedom policy encourages independence of thought and originality, so the decision could have only been made at the faculty level.” Reported in: insidehighered.com, August 1.

Hanover, New Hampshire

Dartmouth College President Phil Hanlon on May 15 denounced the removal of a bulletin-board display in honor of slain police officers, calling the action “an unacceptable violation of freedom of expression on our campus.”

In memory of police officers killed in the line of duty, the Dartmouth College Republicans arranged the exhibit, titled “Blue Lives Matter,” in the Collis Center. The next morning the posters, which gave statistics on law enforcement deaths and hailed the country’s “everyday heroes,” were replaced by fliers that read “You cannot co-opt the movement against state violence to memorialize its perpetrators #blacklivesmatter.”

Participants in the protest group Black Lives Matter claimed responsibility on social media, saying the play on their name undermined efforts to curb police violence.

“The unauthorized removal on Friday of a student display for National Police Week in the Collis Center was an unacceptable violation of freedom of expression on our campus,” Hanlon said in the statement, which also appeared on the college website. “Vandalism represents a silencing of free exchange, rather than open engagement.”

The bulletin-board incident was the latest in a string of race-related disputes on campus. In November, Black Lives Matter activists staged a protest in

Baker-Berry Library after unidentified individuals removed parts of their own display, which commemorated African-Americans slain by police.

Unsubstantiated reports of violence at the protest, as well as first-hand accounts of abusive and racially charged epithets, led to a backlash against the activist movement, and Hanlon at the time released a statement that appeared to criticize the demonstrators. The college president also promised punishment for any students found to have misbehaved during the protest, a promise that he renewed for this latest incident. Reported in: *Valley News*, May 17.

New Brunswick, New Jersey

Rutgers University officials removed a controversial art piece depicting a Jesus on a dartboard from a campus library in April after receiving complaints that the exhibit was offensive, school officials said. The piece, which shows a figure of a crucified Jesus stabbed with four darts, was part of an exhibit in the Art Library on Voorhees Mall in the heart of the New Brunswick campus.

Some Rutgers students and alumni turned to Facebook to post photos of the art piece, called “Vitruvian Man,” and demand it be taken down.

“It is surprising that a state university would allow this. I asked them to take it down because I found it disrespectful and they refused,” Rutgers alumna Natalie Caruso, of Elmwood Park, said Wednesday in a Facebook post on the Rutgers University Class of 2016 page that drew hundreds of comments and shares.

Other commenters defended the piece and the university’s right to display it. “It’s art, it’s an important statement. Also it’s hilarious. We don’t have to cater to the wills of the Church or any denomination of Christianity or

religion,” Joe Buchoff, a Rutgers student, wrote on Facebook.

Campus officials removed the art piece from a prominent spot hanging on a wall near the circulation desk, library officials said. Instead, the piece was moved to the other side of the room and placed on its side on the lower shelf of a glass exhibit case with other art pieces. By that afternoon, a library spokeswoman said the piece was taken out of the exhibit entirely.

“The artwork in question was removed from the exhibit because it did not meet Rutgers University Libraries policy, which requires art exhibitions and their pieces to be based on university events, curricular offerings and topics of interest to the university community,” said Jessica Pellien, director of communications at Rutgers University Libraries.

“The process that the libraries use to determine how artwork is selected for inclusion in an exhibit takes into consideration freedom of expression as well as the criteria listed above. We have concluded that the policy and process the libraries use to select artwork for exhibitions was not followed,” Pellien said.

Pellien did not elaborate on how or why the artwork was put on display without the proper approvals.

The dartboard Jesus art piece was one of dozens of unusual art pieces displayed around the three-story library. The other pieces included a stack of coins covered with a condom (titled “Tower of Babel”), a milk carton with a photo of Holocaust victim Anne Frank on the back (titled “Cute Kids Make Good Advertising”) and a Rutgers diploma hanging from a real estate sign (titled “The Bullfighter Extends His Cape”).

The names of the artists were not included with the artwork. Rutgers officials did not identify the artist who created the dartboard Jesus piece or



whether he or she is a student or faculty member. Reported in: nj.com, April 21.

Stout, Wisconsin

Anti-censorship groups have appealed to the University of Wisconsin-Stout not to remove or relocate two eighty-year-old paintings that depict First Nations people and French fur traders. UW-Stout Chancellor Bob Meyer said the paintings were being relocated for display under “controlled circumstances” because of student complaints.

Meyer said Native American students feel the paintings symbolize a time when their land and possessions were taken from them. The school is moving the paintings because of their potential for harmful effect and because they could reinforce racial stereotypes.

Anti-censorship groups responded to the decision, including the National Coalition Against Censorship, which was contacted by a UW-Stout professor.

“Shrouding or moving the painting does not educate anyone or stimulate any learning or dialogue. American history and representations of that history can be ugly and offensive,” said Stout English and philosophy professor Timothy Shiell. “But hiding them doesn’t change the past or the future.”

NCAC contacted Meyer on August 5 and urged his administration to reconsider.

Cal Peters created the paintings in 1936. The six foot by eighteen foot murals were commissioned under the Works Progress Administration and depict a French fort and fur traders with Native Americans canoeing the Red Cedar River.

The earliest news reports on the issue said UW-Stout planned to place the paintings into storage. That news prompted a series of complaints from conservative commentators and right-wing politicians about “political correctness.”

But the decision to relocate the paintings also brought reaction from more serious sources, like the NCAC. It said historical work like Peters’ paintings provides an opportunity to engage with and reflect on the lasting and important questions raised by these traces of historical memory. “At a time when the lingering effects of systemic prejudice and racism continue to be felt this is of particular importance,” NCAC said.

Later, after the university announced plans not to remove but to relocate the paintings, NCAC director of programs Svetlana Mintcheva said, “Encounters with an often brutal history are part of the educational process, censoring stories that don’t feel good is not. What’s worse is the disrespectful and patronizing assumption that future students need to be shielded from these historical realities.”

Meyer told Wisconsin Public Radio the decision was not based on political correctness or censorship. He said, “So, we want to make sure that, really, what we decorate our hallways with and what we put in our hallways is consistent with our values to try to attract more Native Americans to the university.” Reported in: *Wisconsin Gazette*, August 25.

BOOKSTORE Ashland, Oregon

After fourteen years of business in Ashland a bookstore that sells banned and censored books will be closing its

doors this fall. The owner of “Shakespeare Books and Antiques,” Judi Honore, said a dispute with the Oregon Shakespeare Festival has not only hurt her bottom line, it’s also affected her personal life.

“I’ve been told I’m racist,” Honore said.

Eddie Wallace Associate Director of Communications for OSF sees it differently and says they’re not the reason she’s shutting her doors. “All I can say is it’s an interesting piece of fiction that she is writing,” Wallace responded.

The dispute between Honore and OSF began this summer when a controversial book cover in the store’s window display was called into question. According to Wallace, four actors with OSF asked Honore to move *Little Black Sambo*, about a young Indian boy, from the front window.

“I said ok, great, come in, and we’ll move it together,” agreed Honore.

But OSF executives soon wrote her, saying they had instructed their staff not to patronize the bookstore for any festival related goods or services. According to Honore, the move hurt her business driving down sales significantly in August.

“The festival withholding business from the store is not the reason for Judi encountering economic difficulties,” said Wallace. Still Honore said she stands by her decision to display the book and others like it.

“My position is that I stood up for my rights, I stood up for what I feel is right.” Even though she says she probably could wait to see if the store will bounce back, she’s now canceled her lease saying the stress and emotional toll on her personal life isn’t worth it. Reported in: kobi.com, September 1.