

PROTECTING ACCESS TO BOOKS AND MEDIA IN SCHOOLS AND LIBRARIES

- 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 of school curricula and library materials, and for handling formal complaints; therefore be it
- Resolved, That 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 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 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.

Rationale for the Resolution

The constitutionally protected right to receive information and ideas is increasingly threatened in the United States. State legislation, school boards, parents, and some organizations are increasingly demanding censorship and banning of books and other media from classrooms and school and public libraries. These challenges specifically target books that deal with gender, race, racial justice, and the lived experiences of marginalized groups, including Black, Indigenous, and people of color, or members of the LGBTQ+ community.

National PTA has acknowledged that all students benefit from inclusive curricula and need access to information in school and public libraries to experience the diversity of ideas. PTAs must also take action. Local and state PTA leaders and members have asked for direction. Children, youth, parents and our community partners depend on PTA leadership. A majority of Americans oppose book banning. It threatens democracy and civil discourse, further isolates marginalized populations and stagnates society. We must advocate for laws and policies that ensure free access to information, freedom of choice and freedom of expression. Further, we must protect educators and students' rights to teach and learn from a wide variety of books and viewpoints; and to think for themselves.