

A Florida school district banned 'Ban This Book.' Author says that's 'erasure of the highest order' and wants it reinstated

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Adapted by Fishtank Staff

- 1 An author whose novel about book banning was removed from a Florida school district's library shelves has asked the school board to reinstate his book, saying that its removal is "erasure of the highest order."
- 2 Alan Gratz, author of "[Ban This Book](#)," said in a letter read during the Indian River County school board meeting Monday night and obtained by CNN he was "disappointed" by the book's removal. The school district's decision to disregard a local review committee's earlier recommendation to keep it on library shelves indicates it was "motivated by politics, and not what is best for the students and families," Gratz also wrote.
- 3 "To remove these books is bad enough. To remove my book, because it dares to mention books you have already banned, is erasure of the highest order," he continued in his letter. "Every reader deserves to see themselves and their families represented positively in the books in their libraries. Studies also show that diverse books build empathy and reduce prejudice, creating a more just, more compassionate, and more peaceful world for us all."
- 4 Gratz's letter comes amid a rise in [book bans](#) in public schools and as conservative groups, including [Moms for Liberty](#), spearhead book challenges in school districts across the US.
- 5 "Ban This Book," published in 2017, is a novel about a Black fourth-grader who learns her school library has banned her favorite book because a classmate's parent argued the book wasn't appropriate for children. The protagonist pushes back by "starting a secret banned book library out of her locker," but "things get out of hand, and (the student) finds herself on the front line of an unexpected battle" over book banning, reads the author's [online synopsis](#) of the novel, which is aimed at children 8 and older.
- 6 In February, the chair of the county Moms for Liberty chapter submitted a challenge of Gratz's book to the district's book objection committee, claiming the novel "depicts or describes sexual conduct." The chapter president, Jennifer Pippin, also told CNN she challenged the book because "basically it's promoting banned books to children ages 4-12."

7 The committee reviewed the book and voted in April to keep it on school library shelves, but the Indian River County school board in May voted 3-2 to remove the book from school libraries, agreeing with Pippin that the book was inappropriate.

The right to decide what children read

8 During Monday night's school board meeting, letters were read from advocacy groups, including the National Coalition Against Censorship, supporting Gratz's book and expressing concern over its removal. Letters from authors, including Jodi Picoult, Lauren Groff, Amanda Jones and Linda Henry asking the school board to not ban books were also read.

9 Margaret Murray and Marjie Flanigan, co-chairs of Education Champions, a local group that read the letters at the meeting, told CNN they believe book bans are a distraction.

10 "We just want to get on with things and make progress. And we need to focus on encouraging reading and literacy and not banning and restricting books. That's just not healthy," Murray told CNN.

11 Every parent "has the right to decide for their own child what they want them to read or not read," Flanigan said, adding that parents shouldn't decide what books should be available for everyone.

12 "I might want my child to read it or my grandchild. But certainly, we agree that there are some books that are not appropriate for public school shelves. They're too mature content or whatever, but not the ones that are constantly being brought up and challenged," Flanigan said.

13 Some members of the school board pushed back against the letters and the term "banned," including Gene A. Posca, who said "we did not ban any single book" but took a children's library and "curated it free" of any inappropriate sexual material.

14 Jacqueline Rosario, another school board member, said the decision to remove the book "had nothing to do with politics" but "everything to do with what was appropriate."

15 "We have the legal right. Each district school board is responsible for the content of all – not some – all instructional materials and any other material used in a classroom made available in a school or in a classroom library," she said, citing a [Florida statute](#). "At the end of the day, it is the board's responsibility that if any of these items are included ... it is up to this board to take final action and vote. And we did."

16 Asked for further comment, the School District of Indian River County told CNN in a statement the board voted to remove the book from school media center shelves on May 20.

17 "It has been removed from our media center shelves, and at this time, no additional changes are scheduled," the district said.

- 18 In his letter, Gratz also said the banning of his book "is a small part of a much larger epidemic of book banning across the United States."
- 19 "This backlash is a direct result of the incredibly modest yet hard-won gains we as a publishing community have begun to make in the diversification of children's books," his letter continued. "Book banning efforts by groups like Moms for Liberty predominantly target books by, or about, traditionally underrepresented members of our communities, including people of color and people who are LGBTQ+. When books with these themes are removed, or flagged as inappropriate, it sends the message that the *people* in them are somehow inappropriate."
- 20 Pippin told CNN that "the book wasn't challenged or removed for anything that the author is claiming."
- 21 "No books have been removed in our school district because the color of skin or sexual preferences. None," she said.

'Dissent is patriotic'

- 22 While efforts to censor books have persisted throughout history, the American Library Association has [said](#) the number of titles targeted for censorship reached "the highest levels ever documented" by the organization last year.
- 23 Gratz told CNN he wrote the book to bring attention to book banning and encourage children to "stand up for the freedom to read."
- 24 "Books are windows into other worlds and other people's lives. And when we ban those books, we lose that access to learning about other people. We lose the ability for kids to develop empathy at an early age," he said. "By banning these books, the harm that we're doing is, we're closing down avenues for them to build empathy with, with other people."
- 25 Asked his message to those who are challenging books in school districts, including his book, Gratz said, "Dissent is patriotic."
- 26 "America was built on diversity. America was built as a melting pot and they're tearing us down. ... We're stronger when we work together and when we see each other as allies instead of enemies," he said.
- 27 Pippin said Gratz is welcome to his opinions on Moms for Liberty, adding the group "will continue to follow the laws that protect children from inappropriate content in schools."