

School officials have broad discretion to establish curricula and decide what materials to include in their classrooms and libraries. However, parents, special interest groups and others sometimes attempt to impose their personal beliefs on the public school system and demand the removal of educational materials.

These are some general considerations school administrators should take into account when such a challenge arises:

1. Removing, redacting, or restricting access to any content simply because of opposition to the views expressed in it raises serious First Amendment concerns.¹ As state actors, public school officials could be subject to legal action if they make decisions based solely on distaste for the viewpoints expressed.
2. The difficult subjects that often prompt objections to books – violence, traumatic histories, race, religion, sexuality, etc. – are important to the lives of students, and can be addressed with sensitivity within a classroom environment under the guidance of trained educators.
3. Not everyone will like every book in the library or classroom. Parents have a right to decide what their own children read but school administrators have a responsibility to uphold all students' freedom to read and cannot limit educational materials to those approved by a specific individual or group.
4. Successful challenges to educational material often energize special interest groups and bring additional challenges, thus burdening the school administration.

¹ Local school boards may not remove books from school libraries simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books and seek by their removal to "prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion." *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853, 868-69 (1982)(plurality opinion) (citing *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 642)

In view of these principles, we offer the following guidelines for handling challenges:

1. Follow established policy.
2. If your school does not have a written policy, develop policies and procedures to ensure that decision-making does not violate the First Amendment by discriminating against viewpoints.
3. Invite those who object to specific materials to a discussion with teachers and librarians who can explain the materials' educational value.
4. If they continue to object to the materials, request the submission of a complaint form.
5. Establish a committee to review the educational merits of the materials at issue. The review committee should include a diverse group of professionals: educators, librarians and administrators.
6. The committee should be guided by the same criteria that were used for the selection of the material, prioritizing pedagogical value: In considering the value of a book, for instance, it should look at the book as a whole, not words and passages taken in isolation; "age appropriateness," when invoked, should refer to students' levels of reading and comprehension, not to what some parents subjectively believe is fit for a particular age group.
7. The Board has the final decision-making power and responsibility. It should take into account the recommendation of the committee, but also recognize that it may be found liable for violating the First Amendment if it discriminates against particular viewpoints.
8. If possible, offer individuals who object to assigned materials the option to opt out and offer their children alternative readings.

For additional support, consult NCAC's [Policy Guidelines for Administrators](#).

Direct support can always be requested by emailing ncac@ncac.org or visiting us at ncac.org