



February 27, 2024

Statement from the Oregon Library Association’s Intellectual Freedom Committee and Parents Defending School and Libraries

RE: Canby School District Removal of *Lolita* and Restriction of Other Books – IFC Review and Findings

This statement comes from the [Oregon Library Association Intellectual Freedom Committee \(IFC\)](#) and [Parents Defending Schools and Libraries \(PDSAL\)](#). The Oregon Library Association (OLA) is a professional organization of Oregon library workers and includes the Oregon Intellectual Freedom Committee. The IFC provides expertise and support for intellectual freedom issues on behalf of the Oregon Library Association and is the professional committee with the charges to support intellectual freedom and to respond to censorship. The OLA in combination with IFC supports Oregon school and public libraries in managing challenges to materials within their library collections. Parents Defending Schools and Libraries is a 501c3 non-profit organization that serves to support parents, students, and allies in efforts to protect and support inclusive library collections.

The IFC has been involved in reviewing a formal complaint from two parents at Canby School District (Canby) that involved 35 library titles for review. As a result of this complaint, Canby [removed](#) all copies of [Lolita by Russian-American novelist Vladimir Nabokov](#) in summer 2023 as part of a review committee process that was only followed in part with their documented and adopted policy. The removal of *Lolita* and the restricted use of other library materials at Canby is at the detriment of over numerous parents who publicly voiced support for retaining all 35 titles.

In order to gain a better understanding of these events, IFC exchanged email correspondence with the Canby School Board on March 13, 2023 requesting details regarding the 35 books in question. In that email, the IFC also shared the following information with Canby:

Pulling the books without the benefit of a vote is in direct violation of the [ODE Guidance to School Districts: Addressing Challenged Materials in K-12 Education](#), which states that the items must stay in circulation during the reconsideration process. In addition,

withdrawing the books without formal consideration creates an atmosphere for inappropriate seizure and clearly amounts to censorship.

According to the [Canby School District 86 Board Policy IIA, Instructional Resources and Materials](#): “The Board believes the responsibility of the district is to:

- Provide culturally responsive materials that will enrich and support the curriculum, taking into consideration the varied interests, abilities and maturity levels of the students served.
- Provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values and ethical standards.
- Provide a background of information which will enable students to make intelligent judgments in their daily lives.
- Provide materials on opposing sides of controversial issues so that young citizens may develop, under guidance, the practice of analytical reading and thinking.
- Provide materials representative of the many religions and ethnic and cultural groups, showing their contributions to our heritage.”

The IFC believes that the restriction and/or removal of the 35 books violates each of these policy tenets.

No response from Canby was received to this email, though it had been reported all 35 titles had been removed from the library pending review of the titles.

In [May of 2023](#), Canby began their review of the titles, seeking members of the Canby community to be a part of their review committee. The IFC again reached out to the school board on June 6, 2023, offering support for their review committee. Specifically, the IFC offered the following:

[The IFC] would love to reach out [to offer] some training to the [review] committee as it is related to Intellectual Freedom as part of the committee proceedings. As well, [the IFC] would love to request some additional information on this matter, including:

- What process do you plan to take for the committee review process?
- What will the committee make-up will be?
- What district policy you are following as it pertains to the reconsideration of library materials?
- A copy of the complaint itself?

No response from Canby was ever received to this email.

Having heard no updates from the Canby School District regarding the review process or the removal of all 35 titles during that process, the IFC once again reached out to the Canby School Board on September 18, 2023, informing the school board that the IFC was an interested party in the outcome of the review committee proceedings. We asked the school board to please alert our committee when the review committee outcome would be an agenda item on a coming board

meeting. In this request, the IFC received its first and only official response from the Canby School District with a statement as follows:



How do we create a vibrant and engaged learning community dedicated to growth for all?

Memo - Book Review

Last school year, community members brought forth multiple library book titles that they wished to be reconsidered for use in the Canby School District. The district followed policy and procedure, establishing a committee to review the books. In the spring, the process concluded when the committee decided to continue use in district libraries of all books except one, "Lolita" by Vladimir Nabokov. All other review titles are available on district library shelves. Per the committee decision, four of the books are available only at the high school, and four now have content alerts. We thank the community for engaging respectfully in this process.

The IFC did respond to this official statement, offering concerns regarding the removal. Specifically, there was a vocal parent group in the Canby community that supported the retention of library materials, for which their appeal process was essentially removed. In order for a parent to appeal the decision, the decision would have to be public and known, neither of which were clear in this process. Additionally, the IFC is still unclear as to the status of the remaining 34 books in question though we have been told by Canby administrators that the following restrictions have been placed on some titles:

Below are the titles reviewed and the decisions of the committee.

1. *A Court of Mist and Fury* (Court of Thorns and Roses series; bk. 2), by Maas, Sarah J.

The committee voted to **restrict** use to eleventh and twelfth grade.

2. *A Court of Silver Flames* (Court of Thorns and Roses series; bk. 5), by Maas, Sarah J.

Restrict use to eleventh and twelfth grade only.

3. *A Court of Thorns and Roses* (A Court of Thorns and Roses series; bk. 1), by Maas, Sarah J.

Continue the use.

4. *A Court of Wings and Ruin* (A Court of Thorns and Roses series; bk. 3), by Maas, Sarah J.

Restrict use to eleventh and twelfth grade only.

5. *Allegedly*, by Jackson, Tiffany

Continue the use.

6. *Beloved*, by Morrison, Toni

Continue the use.

7. *Beyond Magenta*, by Kuklin, Susan

Continue the use.

8. *Breathless*, by Niven, Jennifer

Continue the use.

9. *Crank*, by Hopkins, Ellen

Continue the use.

10. *Eleanor & Park*, by Rowell, Rainbow

Continue the use.

11. *Empire of Storms* (Throne of Glass series; bk. 5), by Maas, Sarah J.

Continue the use.

12. *Fade*, by McMann, Lisa

Restrict use by adding a content alert.

13. *Heartstopper, Vol. I*, by Oseman, Alice

Continue the use.

14. *Heartstopper, Vol. II*, by Oseman, Alice

Continue the use.

15. *Homegoing*, by Gyasi, Yaa

Continue the use.

16. *I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter*, by Sanchez, Erika

Continue the use.

17. *Impulse*, by Hopkins, Ellen

Restrict use by adding a content alert.

18. *Lolita*, by Nabokov, Vladimir

The committee voted to have **no further use**.

19. *Looking for Alaska*, by Green, John

Continue the use.

20. *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl*, by Andrews, Jesse

Continue the use.

21. *Monday's Not Coming*, by Jackson, Tiffany

Restrict use by adding a content alert.

22. *My Friend Dahmer*, by Backderf, Derf

Continue the use.

23. *None of the Above*, by Gregorio, I. W.

Continue the use.

24. *Out of Darkness*, by Perez, Ashley Hope

Restrict use to high school only.

25. *Perfect*, by Hopkins, Ellen

Continue the use.

26. *Sold*, by McCormick, Patricia

Continue the use.

27. *The Art of Racing in the Rain*, by Stein, Garth

Continue the use.

28. *The Bluest Eye*, by Morrison, Toni

Continue the use.

29. *The Glass Castle*, by Walls, Jeanette

Continue the use.

30. *The Handmaid's Tale: A Graphic Novel*, by Atwood & Nault, Renee

Restrict use to eleventh and twelfth grade only and by adding a content alert.

31. *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Atwood, Margaret

Continue the use.

32. *The Nowhere Girls*, by Reed, Amy

Restrict use by adding a content alert.

33. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, by Chbosky, Stephen

Continue the use.

34. *The Truth About Alice*, by Mathieu, Jennifer

Continue the use.

35. *Water for Elephants*, by Gruen, Sara

Continue the use.

In an attempt to gain information regarding the many missing elements, the ACLU with Parents Defending Schools and Libraries submitted a public records request via the Freedom of Information Act (FIOA) in October 2023.

Furthermore, PDSAL started a [Fight for the First campaign](#) in the fall, gathering signatures from community members requesting all materials be returned to circulation. As of February 26, 2024, 563 signatures from concerned individuals have been received, requesting the return to circulation of all titles, including *Lolita*. As a reminder, the request to remove these materials was on behalf of just two individuals.

After reviewing the information provided, IFC found that the district is deficient in their review policies for reconsideration of library materials, and that the removal of access to this content amounts to censorship. Specifically, IFC finds Canby's process and outcomes are lacking in the following ways:

1. Failure to follow their review process which clearly states materials are to stay in circulation while under review;
2. Lack of transparency regarding the policies Canby followed to review school library materials;
3. Lack of transparency in objective review criteria;
4. Lack of transparency in the review committee make-up and objective decision making authority;
5. Lack of transparency in review committee decision making and timeline;
6. Lack of transparency of final review decision and outcomes;
7. Lack of transparency regarding community opportunities to appeal the removal;
8. Failure to offer an appeal process to the decision; and
9. Failure to communicate policy decisions and impact to school district stakeholders.

It is therefore the IFC's recommendation to Canby to establish, without delay, the following policies and guidelines:

1. Collection Development and Materials Selection Policy for School Library Materials. This should include at a minimum:
 - a. Objective criteria for selection of library materials
 - b. Acknowledgement that materials are to remain in library circulation while under review
 - c. A statement acknowledging the intellectual freedom rights of their stakeholders
 - d. Objective criteria for the deselection of library materials
 - e. Removal of any applied ranking systems
 - f. Adherence to the intended audience of a title provided by publisher, author and professional reviews
2. Request for Reconsideration of Library Materials Policy. This should include at a minimum the following:
 - a. Process for stakeholders to submit a formal request for review

- b. Timeline for responding to the request
 - c. Training to committee members regarding intellectual freedom
 - d. Objective determination of committee make-up for reviewing the request documents
 - e. Committee objective standards for reviewing materials
 - f. Committee standards should match Collection Development and Materials Selection Policy criteria
 - g. Procedures for notifying all stakeholders of the review committee decision
 - h. Procedures for stakeholders to submit an appeal to the final decision
 - i. Timeline for stakeholders to request a second review of title
3. Transparency in decision making including but not limited to:
- a. Clear and open communication with requesting parties
 - b. Clear reporting of the case including: objective establishment of case facts, review process, and objective decision making.

It is further recommended by the IFC to Canby that fair selection and withdrawal criteria exist that do not create unequal access to information for students. This includes honoring the information requests and needs of the community, including the large number of individuals who request the return of all materials to unrestricted library circulation, including *Lolita*.

In closing, the IFC holds that Canby did not have clear, objective, or consistently applied policies or procedures for the determination to remove *Lolita* from their library collections. IFC found that Canby did not follow their documented processes and procedures during the review of these titles. IFC found that Canby has unduly restricted access to information for their students by removing materials while in their review process, restricting access to some titles, and the removal of *Lolita*. IFC found that Canby did not allow for transparency of these proceedings with their community which resulted in removal of an appeal opportunity with their community.

The IFC asks Canby School District to formally return *Lolita* to library shelves and to remove any restrictions applied to the other 34 titles that underwent this review process.

As provided by the [American Library Association's definition of censorship](#), the ALA shares the following:

“Censorship is the suppression of ideas and information that some individuals, groups, or government officials find objectionable or dangerous. Would-be censors try to use the power of the state to impose their view of what is truthful and appropriate, or offensive and objectionable, on everyone else. Censors pressure public institutions, like libraries, to suppress and remove information they judge inappropriate or dangerous from public access, so that no one else has the chance to read or view the material and make up their own minds about it. The censor wants to prejudge materials for everyone. It is no more complicated than someone saying, ‘Don’t let anyone read this book, or buy that magazine, or view that film, because I object to it!’”

If any Canby community stakeholder, including Canby student, parent, teacher, volunteer, staff member, or parent association would like to take further action regarding this and future material review policies and decisions, please contact the following:

- Canby School District Board Members:
<https://www.canby.k12.or.us/en-US/board-of-directors-3309f476>

If any Canby community member has been personally impacted by the Canby School District decision to remove this material and feels their civil liberties have been impacted, please contact:

- ACLU of Oregon legal team at intake@aclu-or.org

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