



September 11, 2023

Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the 3 million members of the National Education Association, who are devoted to teaching and nurturing students across America, we appreciate this opportunity to submit comments for the committee's September 12 hearing, "Book Bans: Examining How Censorship Limits Liberty and Literature."

Across the country, certain politicians and groups continue to distract and divide citizens by banning books, particularly books that represent marginalized and oppressed people, and imposing "gag orders" on educators who are committed to teaching the truth. Those who want to censor what students read and what educators teach are hoping that targeting inclusive curricula, stoking fears, and sowing discord in communities will bring them closer to their ultimate goal: discrediting and dismantling public education and public-school educators.

The [PEN America Index of School Book Bans](#) lists more than 2,500 instances of book bans across the country from June 2021-June 2022, affecting more than 1,600 titles. In its report, PEN America noted:

"Many Americans may conceive of challenges to books in schools in terms of reactive parents, or those simply concerned after thumbing through a paperback in their child's knapsack or hearing a surprising question about a novel raised by their child at the dinner table. However, the large majority of book bans underway today are not spontaneous, organic expressions of citizen concern. Rather, they reflect the work of a growing number of advocacy organizations that have made demanding censorship of certain books and ideas in schools part of their mission."

The report noted that banned books are most often those that look honestly at history and the difficult events that have shaped America, or tell stories of the struggle for self-acceptance in hostile or oppressive circumstances. The censored books include:

- *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, a graphic novel depicting the experience of the author's father, a Holocaust survivor
- *Walk Two Moons*, by Sharon Creech, about a girl of Native-American heritage coping with the disappearance of her mother
- *The Bluest Eye*, by Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison, about a young African American girl's struggle to appreciate her humanity in a culture that devalues her
- *Separate is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and her Family's Fight for Desegregation*, by Duncan Tonatiuh, about a family's efforts to desegregate California schools

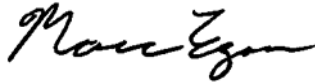
Students as well as educators bear the consequences of censorship: Just last month, the Cobb County school board voted 4-3, along party lines, [to fire Georgia teacher Katie Rinderle](#) because her fifth-grade students chose a book from her shelf called *My Shadow is Purple* for their morning "read-aloud." After a parent complained the next day, the principal summoned Rinderle to tell her the book was too divisive. Rinderle

predicts that teachers will increasingly censor themselves “in fear of not knowing where the invisible line will be drawn.”

We cannot prepare young people to succeed in our diverse nation and interconnected world by removing books from library shelves and curricula and censoring what educators, based on their expertise and experience, teach. We prepare students for the future by planting the seeds for lifelong curiosity and growth, and nurturing the skills of discernment and reasoning. ***All students must be free to learn, free to read, and free to be who they are.***

We appreciate this committee’s focus on the alarming rise in censorship. At the same time, we urge all elected leaders to focus on other issues that are crucial to the success of students, including ensuring that they have the individualized support they need, safeguarding the learning environment by keeping guns out of schools, and addressing educator shortages. If you join with parents and educators, we can support learning by seeing that students across our great nation—no matter their race, background, sexual orientation, or gender identity—have the resources, one-on-one attention, and well-rounded curricula they need and deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marc Egan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Marc Egan
Director of Government Relations
National Education Association