



Position Statement on the Freedom to Read in Maine Schools

January 9, 2023

The Maine Association of School Libraries (MASL) and the Maine Council for English Language Arts (MCELA) wish to affirm our support for the Freedom to Read in Maine Schools. We address this letter to any schools considering rating the books in their school's libraries and classroom libraries according to the content, subject matter, and ideas in those books.

MASL and MCELA have learned that some Maine school districts may be considering applying "ratings" to books in their school libraries; we believe strongly that that would be an unwise course of action. The practice of rating books violates students' and parents' freedoms and could cause harm to students who identify with historically underrepresented groups. Our organizations are divisions of the American Library Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. Our opinion on this matter is informed by the guidance of those organizations, which have issued position statements regarding the Freedom to Read that specifically warn against rating books. Those statements can be found here: <https://ncte.org/statement/rating-books/> and here: https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/advocacy/statements/docs/AASL_Labeling_Practices_Position_Statement_2021a.pdf

Rating, labeling, or in any other manner restricting student access to books in libraries and classroom libraries is detrimental to the experience of Maine students. We urge school districts to consider the following points:

1. Maine schools have a duty to serve all their students, inclusive of their race and skin color, abilities, religion, national origin or ancestry, gender (including gender

identity and expression), and/or sexual orientation.¹ Rating books that feature characters who exhibit any of those protected identities or content related to those identities pathologizes them by “red flagging”² them or labeling them as “controversial” or “inappropriate.” Thus, labeling of books in such a manner causes harm to students who identify with those identities.

2. Rating books requires that some individual or group makes a “value-judgment”³ about the content of the books. This is highly problematic. Who will get to decide what is harmful or controversial? Why should their opinion of the book’s content have more value than someone else’s?
3. MASL and MCELA believe that parents should have the right to determine what their own children read and have access to. Removing access to certain books takes this right away from parents by eliminating their ability to choose books for their own children.
4. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop has written about the power of reading. She asserted that books act as “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors” which allow students to see themselves and affirm the value of their identities and also to develop empathy for others’ experiences.⁴ Limiting students’ access to books because of the content of those books also limits their ability to see themselves reflected in the books they read and to develop an understanding of other people’s identities and experiences. This runs counter to the goals of Maine schools and our learning standards, which require students to experience literature that represents a diverse range of experiences.⁵

MASL and MCELA urge all Maine schools to refrain from limiting students’ right to read and to maintain school and classroom library collections that allow students to “explore interests safely and without restrictions.”⁶

¹ Maine Title 5, Chapter 337-B: <https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/5/title5ch337-Bsec0.html>

² NCTE Position Statement Regarding Rating or “Red-Flagging” Books
<https://ncte.org/statement/rating-books/>

³ ALA Position Statement on Labeling Practices, p. 2
https://www.ala.org/aasl/sites/ala.org.aasl/files/content/advocacy/statements/docs/AASL_Labeling_Practices_Position_Statement_2021a.pdf

⁴ In Praise of a Scholarly Force: Rudine Sims Bishop <https://library.ncte.org/journals/LA/issues/v85-2/6175>

⁵ Maine Department of Education 2020 Reading Standards
<https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/content/ela/standards/reading>

⁶ ALA Position Statement on Labeling Practices, p. 1