

## New Castle Takes Assertive Stand Against Book Bans

📅 March 29, 2023   👤 Abby Luby   📍 New Castle

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In a strong move supporting freedom of expression, the New Castle Town Board last week unanimously adopted a resolution opposing book bans at a work session where specific language was discussed at length.

“We put education at the center of a lot of our values,” said Town Supervisor Lisa Katz. “The Town Board believes that the freedom to read and explore different ideas is a fundamental human right, and censorship has no place in our community.”

A first for Westchester County, the New Castle book ban resolution addresses a growing national movement to ban certain books from public and school libraries. Most books aggressively targeted to be banned have been about sexual identity, race and racism. Groups such as Moms for Liberty claim “parental rights.”

Banning books in schools has gone hand in hand with objecting to teaching equity and diversity ideas and practices in public schools. The national group Turning Point USA has a “School Board Watchlist” of districts that are “teaching racialization in the classroom.”

Nine Westchester school districts that are on that list include Somers, Croton, Irvington, Mamaroneck, Mt. Vernon, New Rochelle, White Plains, Yonkers, and Yorktown.

Last year Somers 10th grade English teacher Allison Ferrier was briefly suspended after assigning her student to read “Me and White Supremacy” by Layla Saad, a book exploring white privilege and supremacy.

Sixteen books were under scrutiny by the Mahopac Central School District libraries in 2022. Of those were “The Hate U Give” by Angie Thomas and “Looking for Alaska” by John Green. The board of education eventually allowed Thomas’ book to remain in circulation only at the high school library and the eighth-grade section at the middle school. Green’s book was made available only at the high school library.

Requesting removal from library shelves are such classics as “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” and “To Kill a Mockingbird.”

According to PEN America, the 100-year old organization advocating for freedom of expression, book bans in 2022 in the United States occurred in 138 school districts in 32 states which represent 5,049 schools with a combined enrollment of nearly 4 million students.

The most banned authors include Nobel laureate Toni Morrison and winners of the Booker Prize, the John Newbery Medal, the Randolph Caldecott Medal and the National Book Award for Young People’s Literature.

PEN also reported the most frequently banned books countrywide were “Gender Queer: A Memoir” by Maia Kobabe (banned in 41 districts), followed by “All Boys Aren’t Blue” by George M. Johnson (banned in 29 districts) and “Out of Darkness” by Ashley Hope Pérez (banned in 24 districts). Last year these books were among others reviewed by a book review committee for the Yorktown High School Library that considered removing them from the library shelves. Ultimately the committee left the choice up to the students.

Before the New Castle town board voted on the resolution, council member Holly A.F. McCall, who drafted the initial resolution, reminded the board that the upcoming popular 10<sup>th</sup> annual Chappaqua Children’s Book Festival on Sept. 30 will feature authors whose books have been banned in other states.

On its Facebook page, the Chappaqua Children’s Book Festival thanked the town for adopting the resolution.

“The festival is proud and grateful for the Town of New Castle, NY’s statement against book bans,” the post stated. “We believe we are one of the first towns in New York to have done this.”

On Saturday the Village Bookstore of Pleasantville joined the general conversation with a Facebook post of its own.

The proprietor noted how their teenage son is reading “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood for English class, and mentioned a Martin County, Fl. parent requesting the school take 90 books off the shelves.

“We have had meaningful conversations about this book which is a departure from the nonfiction titles my son prefers,” the post stated. “It is one of my favorite books and it has been great to hear his take on this story almost 30 years since I first encountered it. If you’d like to browse banned books, come see our display in the store.”

David L. Hudson Jr., a professor at Belmont University College of Law and a First Amendment law expert, said book bans violate the First Amendment “because they deprive children or students of the right to receive information and ideas.”

The language in the New Castle resolution echoes that sentiment by stating that the “removing and banning books from public access may lead to government censorship and the erosion of our country’s commitment to freedom of expression” and that the town “supports and respects the rights of all residents to access a variety of books in schools, in libraries, in bookstores, online, and elsewhere.”

Katz said by opposing book bans New Castle was promoting intellectual freedom, diversity, and inclusion.

“We want to ensure that our residents have access to a wide range of perspectives and ideas, even if they may be controversial or unpopular,” she said. “Our commitment to intellectual freedom is a testament to the values of our community and our belief in the power of knowledge and ideas to shape our world.”

### Abby Luby

Abby is a local journalist who has reported on breaking news for more than 20 years. She currently covers community issues in The Examiner as a full-time reporter and has written for the paper since its inception in 2007. [Read more from Abby's editor-author bio here.](#) [Read Abby's archived work here:](#) <https://www.theexaminernews.com/author/ab-lub2019/>