Office for Intellectual Freedom

February 26, 2018

Anne Bryan, Chair
Beaverton School Board
16550 SW Merlo Road
Beaverton, OR 97003

To the members of the Beaverton School Board;
Board Chair Anne Bryan, Susan Greenberg, Eric Simpson, Donna Tyner, LeeAnn Larsen, Becky Tymchuk, and Tom Colett;

We are writing on behalf of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom and the Oregon Library Association to express our concern about the recent decision to ban the novel *Stick* by Andrew Smith from the Beaverton Middle School libraries and freshman and sophomore high-school classroom library collections.

As we understand it, one parent filed a formal complaint about the language in this novel. Upon thoughtful review by members of your education community, the administration, and parents, the unanimous recommendation was to retain the title. The Deputy Superintendent for Teaching & Learning, Human Resources and Information & Technology overruled the committee and restricted access to only juniors and seniors in the high school.

An ALA Best Book for Young Adults, *Stick* is a fast-paced, unsettling portrayal of abuse and brotherly loyalty. Reader reviews on Amazon.com say, “This is a tale of the ugliest and most beautiful moments in life wrapped up in one 13-year-old boy, and it’s incredible” and praise the book as “a transformative and hopeful coming of age gem” and “Uncomfortably Awesome.” VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates) reviews say, “Dark, painful, but ultimately hopeful, this is not a book for everyone, but in the right reader’s hands, it will be treasured.”

While the book may be above the maturity and reading level of some students, its value for young adults has been recognized by leading professionals. Like any book in the school and classroom library, *Stick* may not be right for every student. Not all students will be ready for – or interested in – reading this book. But the school library in particular has a responsibility to meet the varied interests, abilities, and maturity levels of all pupils served. Some pupils will be interested in and developmentally ready to read this book; those students’ rights to borrow and access it should not be denied due to the objections of one person in the district.
Preserving students’ right to access books like *Stick* is especially crucial if the school library is to serve its role in encouraging a lifelong love for reading. School libraries serve to encourage and support literacy by offering students the opportunity to read and explore ideas independently. Independent reading from a broad range of materials is a vital part of the learning process, and should be preserved without any restrictions, as it allows for choice and exploration beyond the curriculum.

We strongly encourage you to follow the guidance provided by the U.S. Supreme Court, which has held that public school officials may not remove books from school library shelves simply because they disagree with the views or ideas expressed in the books. In *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982), the Supreme Court stated,

> "First Amendment rights, applied in light of the special characteristics of the school environment, are available to students," and should be vigorously enforced in the context of the school library and the realm of voluntary inquiry, where "students must always remain free to inquire, to study and to evaluate."

Any decision on whether to limit a student’s access to materials is most appropriately made by a student’s parents, who are best equipped to know and understand their child’s intellectual and emotional development. But those parents should not be given the power to restrict other students’ ability to read and learn from the book.

For this reason, we strongly encourage you to reaffirm the importance and value of the freedom to read by returning *Stick* by Andrew Smith to the Beaverton School libraries and classrooms where it belongs. By allowing students the ability to choose this book as an independent reading choice, you will send a powerful message to students – that, in this country, they have the right to read what they choose and the responsibility to think critically about what they read, rather than allowing others to think for them.

Sincerely,

James LaRue  
Director  
American Library Association  
Office for Intellectual Freedom

Buzzy Nielsen  
President  
Oregon Library Association