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October 4, 2017

Mike Thomas, Superintendent  
Timothy W. Alexander, Board Chair  
Paul N. Gainey, Board Vice-Chair  
Crystal Bush, Board Member  
Charles K. Farmer, Board Member  
Dwayne Rollison, Board Member  
Dixie District Schools  
16077 NE 19 Highway  
Cross City, FL 32628

Dear Superintendent Thomas, Chairman Alexander, Vice-Chair Gainey, and Board Members of the Dixie District Schools:

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Florida Library Association (FLA). We have become aware of the directive from Superintendent Thomas, dated September 8, 2017, to Dixie District School Directors and Principals which bans the purchase of or use of any textbooks, library books, classroom novels, or other instructional materials that contain “profanity, cursing, or inappropriate subject matter.” This directive is extremely broad and, if carried out, will result in the removal of important learning resources which will restrict Dixie County student access to high quality, popular, award-winning literature. We urge you to reverse this decision.

The directive is so broad it is likely to result in the removal of a large number books throughout the school district and would have a profound and chilling effect on future purchases. Who will determine what constitutes inappropriate subject matter? Who decides what is profane? These books have been collected over time by educational professionals and staff based on board-approved procedures. Removing these books using overly broad guidelines that do not consider their educational value will significantly damage the integrity of the collection and will keep quality books out of the hands of students.

The Dixie County School District already has three policies in place which guide the selection and/or removal of instructional materials: the District Adoption of Instructional Materials policy, the Educational Media Materials Selection policy and the Challenged Materials policy. If there is concern about a title being used in the schools, the school district should follow its own policies and procedures. The decision to remove these books based on your personal values and your

collective assumptions of the values of the community, violates the school district's own policies and is a violation of the First Amendment rights of your students.

Students have a First Amendment right to read and receive information, and should not be deprived of opportunities to read and enjoy quality literature due to the opinions of one person or a small group of school administrators. In order for children to learn how to think for themselves they need access to books that are thought-provoking and entertaining, and that also address real-life situations that are occurring in their lives. This means that some of the books will contain subject matter which will be too mature for some readers, but for the right reader that book can help make sense of a difficult situation. Discounting the value of an entire book because it includes a curse word, or deals with a mature situation would be a disservice to the students of Dixie County.

School officials are bound by constitutional considerations, including a duty not to discriminate against unpopular or controversial ideas. The U.S. Supreme Court has cautioned that, "Local school boards may not remove books from library shelves simply because they dislike the ideas contained in those books..." *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982). This constitutional duty applies with particular force in the school library, which, unlike the classroom, has a "special role...as a place where students may freely and voluntarily explore diverse topics." *Campbell v. St. Tammany Parish School Board*, 64 F.3d 184, 190 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1995).

The Florida Library Association urges you to follow existing school district policies, support the selection decisions of your teachers and media specialists, and stand up for your students' right to read the books that will give them the best education possible.

Sincerely,



Robin Shader, MLS  
President, Florida Library Association