



SUPERINTENDENT UPDATES

October 20, 2023

Good afternoon,

Consistent with my belief that you need to hear news about our district from me rather than the news, I wanted to alert you to a news story that will come out later today.

There will be a news story on WOOD TV about a lawsuit that was filed against the district. I wanted to alert you so that you would not be surprised.

An anonymous group filed a lawsuit challenging some of the books that we have in our school media centers. We have a wide variety of material in our media centers that address the wide variety of student needs and interests. Not every book is for every student. But students and their parents can make those choices.

Rockford Public Schools' library offers a wide variety of books, which may appeal to different students based on their age, maturity, interests, or personal struggles. Although not every book will be of interest or appropriate for all students, none of the books on our shelves are unlawful or "pornographic," as the anonymous Plaintiffs have claimed. In fact, all of the books that this anonymous group has challenged have earned literary awards or accolades. This includes *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison, who won a Nobel Prize for her work. The plaintiffs asked for a restraining order to remove the books from our media centers which the judge denied.

I want to assure you that the Rockford Public Schools have not violated the Revised School Code and "Plaintiffs calling the books in question pornography does not make them so." We are confident that Rockford Public Schools has complied with its legal obligations, consistent with the First Amendment.

More importantly, we believe that in our media centers we have books that meet the wide variety of needs of our students and have policies that allow students and parents to make choices consistent with their beliefs and preferences.

Additionally, we do have a process through which interested community members and parents may raise concerns with materials in our library and through which parents may restrict the books that their own children may read. We are disappointed that, although the Plaintiffs are aware of these policies, they chose to file a lawsuit instead.

If you have questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

Steve

Dr. Steve Matthews
Superintendent
Rockford Public Schools