



ACLU of WI Applauds Belleville Book Decision School Board Votes Unanimously to Keep Challenged Book in English Curriculum

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BELLEVILLE, WI – The American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin applauds the Belleville School District in their unanimous decision to keep a challenged book in the ninth grade English curriculum. Tonight the school board demonstrated patience and courage to recognize the importance of both due process and the need for relevant and contemporary literature in the classroom. Over 200 community members attended the hearing: the majority wore green "Keep the Book" stickers in a show of support.

"It was inspiring to watch the Belleville community speak out against the book challenge and in support of their teachers," said Community Advocate Stacy Harbaugh. "In the end, board members all agreed that peer-reviewed, modern selections of fiction are appropriate for their ninth graders and that options are available for parents who want alternatives for their children to read. We're glad the board did the right thing to keep the book."

The book in question was "Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes" by Chris Crutcher, a work of young adult fiction that depicts teens who face contemporary problems including bullying. Tonight, the Belleville School District's Board of Education heard testimonies from a parent who challenged the book's place in the English curriculum on the basis of her religious beliefs and from District Superintendent Dr. Randy Freese who defended the selection of the book by addressing the claims made by the book challenger. Students spoke in favor of the book and parents asked the board to keep the book as a part of their children's education. The hearing was the final step in a long series of appeals to English teacher Peg Kruse, the school's curriculum review committee, the superintendent and finally to the full board.

"The parents and the students who stood by their teachers deserve applause and recognition too" added Harbaugh. "During this challenge process, the book was being closely read, parents were talking to their children about their education, and students were learning about intellectual freedom. What a great learning experience for all."

The ACLU works to defend First Amendment principles, such as supporting students and parents who want to defend an inclusive public school curriculum: authors have the right to free expression in what they write and all of us share the right to read books. We support Belleville Schools in keeping "Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes" because all of their students should have an effective education that gives them the tools for critical thinking, including works of contemporary literature that is relevant and compelling to teens.

Read the full ACLU of Wisconsin Madison Area Office summary of the school board hearing on the [Cap City Liberty blog](#). On Twitter, many related posts from @ACLUofWisconsin, Channel 3000's @News3David and others were tagged: #belleville #bookban #keepthebook #stayingfatforsarahbyrnes

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