

FLORIDA SCHOOLS PULLED HUNDREDS OF BOOKS LAST YEAR

Florida school districts axed about 700 books from school libraries in the 2023-2024 school year, according to a Florida Department of Education list. PEN America, a free speech advocacy group, estimates that over 4,500 books have been removed from Florida school libraries since July 2021. [...]

The book removals follow a law that allows parents or local residents to push for the removal of any book that “depicts or describes sexual content” or is “pornographic.” The office of Florida’s Republican Governor Ron DeSantis has previously said the law “protects children from indoctrination” and gives parents “the ability to object to inappropriate materials.”

Florida has been at the forefront of a national clash over how race, history and sexuality can be taught in school. In August, a group of major publishers, authors and parents sued Florida education officials, alleging that the law that allows local residents to limit what books are available in school libraries violates the First Amendment.

Kasey Meehan, a spokesperson for PEN America, told The Washington Post the list proves books are being banned in Florida – which the state’s Department of Education has repeatedly denied and calls the “book ban hoax.”

“We are concerned that narrow, ideological viewpoints are having an outsized influence to remove access to books that are critical for students in schools,” Meehan said. “These books offer students an opportunity to see themselves and also learn and empathize with others.”

Sydney Booker, a spokesperson for the state’s Department of Education, told The Post that the book removals from school libraries do not constitute a ban.

“There are no books banned in Florida, and sexually explicit materials do not belong in schools,” she wrote in a statement. “Once again, far left activists are pushing the book ban hoax on Floridians. The better question is why do these activists continue to fight to expose children to sexually explicit materials.”

Books with LGBTQ+ characters, such as “Gender Queer” and “All Boys Aren’t Blue,” were removed in some districts. Books that feature themes of teenage depression and sexual assault, including “Thirteen Reasons Why” were also removed in some districts.

The graphic novel adaptations of Anne Frank’s diary and George Orwell’s “1984” were also removed in some districts, as were multiple works by horror writer Stephen King.

One way for books to be removed from school shelves under Florida law: Parents and local residents can read aloud passages from books they seek to challenge at school board meetings, and if the board halts the reading because of explicit content, the school must “discontinue use of the material.” [...]

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