

## **RUT Education Committee Minutes**

### **2 /6/24**

**Attending:** Julia Lavine - Chair, Julia Lanter, Pat Yosha, Sue Mayo, Misty Crompton, Nancy Zajano

Welcome to new member, Sue Mayo, a second grade teacher from Brentwood.

#### **I. NH Legislature Update (Pat)**

Pat provided a list of current bills before the legislature and prompted a discussion of which ones to support and which to oppose. This led to a discussion of actions the Education Committee could take to support DEIJB, which is under fire in many venues. **Suggested committee actions are highlighted in yellow.**

- A. HB 1162: Relative to teaching discrimination in public schools and in public workplace (Removal of language of HB2). SUPPORT
- B. HB 1311: Schools boards must reconsider library materials. OPPOSE
- C. HB1206: Prohibiting educator indoctrination and no outside sources for professional development courses. Many doctors, psychologists, and other professionals spoke in opposition at the hearing. OPPOSE
- D. HB 1419: Prohibit obscene materials harmful to students. (Similar to SB523.) OPPOSE
- E. SB 341: Parents rights: (This is an anti-DEI and anti LBGTQ+ bill; most testifying at hearing were in opposition.) OPPOSE
- F. HB 1185: Sexual Education – Rules of what words and pictures may and may not be included in the lessons; school nurses must teach all lessons; unwieldy in its details. OPPOSE

The question arose if the last three bills were an appropriate topic for the Racial Unity Team since they don't focus on racism. Others responded it is appropriate because the bills are all about censorship and if we don't take on this work it would reinforce white supremacy and limit exploration of important topics in schools.

**Julia Lavine asked if this committee should address these topics via the book banning issue either with a public statement or another panel.**

Pat Yosha noted that the ACLU case against HB 2 (“divisive language” portion of budget bill) is proceeding and that a decision should be coming soon. (SAU DEIJ director Andres Mejia is one of the plaintiffs.) The ACLU brief is 60 pages long and its main argument is that the legislative language is vague and serves only to confuse teachers, not to enlighten them.

Julia Lanter reported that the NH library association is tracking HB 1308 being heard in the Family Law Committee. This bill requires librarians to monitor patrons, and for those under 18, they are to keep track of who the children talk to and what books they are reading. Representative Gaby Grossman of Exeter is on this committee.

Julia suggested that RUT could help in SAU 16 by funding replacements of any books taken out of the public libraries, which is happening by stealing the books off the shelves, not by going through the process of challenging or banning books. We could start this in the libraries in the SAU 16 area and spread this approach to other communities. This would be a way to help the situation without giving the extremist more tools. They won't be able to complain about the use of public funds for the replaced books because the funding would come from a private source.

Pat noted that there are many stories of teachers being fired for using books about race or LBGTQ+. Should the committee join national efforts in support of these teachers and note on our website that we are doing so? [See attachment from African American Policy Forum.]

Given LitFest is coming up April 5-6, 2024, ask if we could do a panel to discuss teachers being targeted for using books about race or LBGTQ+. If program is set, ask if we could do a panel next year titled "Book Banning." Or ask if we could set up a table at this year's event to discuss the issue with participants. Pat Yosha will contact Renay Allen about these options.

Pat reported that there is an effort resulting from the Dover case (where the School Board unanimously rejected the challenge to a library book) to transfer control over this issue from the local level to the state level. At the moment the attacks are focused on schools rather than on public libraries.

Julia Lanter noted that it's better to sound "neutral" rather than "left leaning" in our choice of language to be more effective in creating change.

Pat suggests offering a panel to discuss the topic, including representatives of the NH ACLU, NH-AFT, NH-NEA, Julia Lanter from Exeter Public Library, and perhaps teachers and administrators who have left the profession, not current employees who may be subject to repercussions for participating. Julia Lanter suggested we add the kid's voice asking how the censorship is affecting them, or speaking about a book they have read that is being challenged and what they got out of reading it. [See link to article from Teachers College press on students' reactions to reading "disturbing" books:

[file://localhost/.%5D https://www.tpress.com/blog/young-people-read-disturbing-books?fbclid=IwAR0OsSCOXI6wgrNZIgmZscE9fwag2U1NcmYPyRkp3ru8saer1FFO-06HYH0](https://www.tpress.com/blog/young-people-read-disturbing-books?fbclid=IwAR0OsSCOXI6wgrNZIgmZscE9fwag2U1NcmYPyRkp3ru8saer1FFO-06HYH0)]

We might also have an essay contest with cash prizes around the topic "Books that saved my life." The contest could include the stipulation that the essays can be used by RUT for programming.

Misty suggested we offer a “book talk” to discuss current books addressing this topic. Misty has one coming out in which 22 educators share “*Stories from Censorville*.” Misty and another NH teacher are included in the book.

**II. Education Committee page on RUT website – not discussed**

**III. Possible future actions – see above for highlighted items and share ideas with each other over email**

- a. a strong statement reiterating our stand on book banning; and support of DEI. Pat provided a suggested statement but it was not directly discussed.
- b. join national campaign of support for teachers who have been fired for teaching banned books. See above and first attachment.

**IV. DEIJ Directors’ dinner – not discussed, although there was some mention of a template being sent around to select a date for the dinner.**

**Next Education Committee meeting date: March 13, 2024**

Respectfully submitted  
Nancy Zajano, 2-14-24