

# The AFCON Sentinel

*Newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska*

Volume 25, Number 6

December 2021

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## **From the President Clear Thinking Needed**

Todd Schlechte



I really appreciated the panelists and other voices who spoke at our annual meeting. We heard much that contributed to clarity of thinking about academic freedom in elementary schools and separated real issues from non-issues. There also emerged an unplanned, useful focus on how to help people with different viewpoints find common ground.

I believe this type of conversation, and the sort of work that the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska is doing, is going to be more needed in the future. The issues that were discussed in our annual meeting are reflections of national issues and trends. They have certainly been felt this year in Nebraska, but not yet to the extent that we are likely to experience them in the future.

It is a matter of concern that little of our current public discourse is being driven by a critical evaluation of facts. A prime example has been the major onslaught against school and library books through the weaponization of “critical race theory.” While actually taught primarily at the graduate level, honest and factual efforts to educate students about our nation’s history of slavery, black suppression, and ongoing racism are labeled as “critical race theory” and criticized as divisive and inappropriate to the classroom in an apparent effort to preserve the status quo, which is a Eurocentric orientation. In more recent years, many locales have chosen to take steps towards being more inclusive, as well as having more honest discussions about United States history. Unfortunately, many are now negatively reacting to this effort and trying to get schools and libraries to take steps backward by accusing them of promoting “critical race theory” when, in fact, they are doing no such thing.

In my own field of libraries, there are an unprecedented number of attempts to remove books (<https://time.com/6117685/book-bans-school-libraries/>). Race is a primary reason, along with LGBTQIA+ content. This effort is likely to pick up steam and be more successful, as candidates are fielded to gain control of school and library boards, with agendas that stand against the principles of academic freedom and the First Amendment of the US Constitution. Two recent efforts to remove materials were stymied, in one case because a county prosecutor in Wyoming refused to prosecute library staff due to lack of a lawful reason, and in the other because a school board’s attorney in Virginia advised the board (where two school board members stated that they were in favor of burning the books in question) that its unanimous decision

to remove books was unconstitutional. In such situations, even when efforts to remove books don't meet with success, it cannot be easy for school or library staff when their environments become toxic, and one cannot blame them if they move to a friendlier environment. When the fear factor becomes high, and more pliant staff are hired, such attempts may have more success than they initially appear to have on the surface.

I think we can admit that some of what is happening is not surprising. While I personally was surprised about the sharp reactions we have been having around the subject of race after having Barack Obama as our president, that probably reflected my own naivete. On the other hand, in regard to LGBTQIA+ issues and books that engage in plain talk about sex, "It's important to acknowledge that some amount of parental shock at envelope-pushing young adult literature is understandable. As in the days when the Christian right tried to rid libraries of Judy Blume, books whose frankness about taboo subjects intrigue teenagers can horrify their elders."

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/opinion/book-bans.html>). That noted, nothing that is in children's or young adult books approaches what can be found on the internet, so this battle by concerned parents seems to be misplaced at best.

In this environment of escalating attacks and takeovers of school and library boards, what can we do? We need to really focus on our own communities. Crucially, we all must vote, and must vote carefully by finding out everything we can about the school board candidates. We also need to closely examine candidates for village or city positions (who appoint library boards and control library budgets in Nebraska). Then we can establish relationships with those people and let them know our views. We can participate in our professional organizations, and make them aware of evolving situations, so that they can become involved as appropriate. At the annual meeting, there were further suggestions, such as learning mediation tools, which can be a great method of finding common ground. And we need to report problematic situations to organizations such as our own, the ACLU, and the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual

Freedom, both for support and because they often have tools to help.

I am fully aware that we have a tough road ahead, and that anti-academic freedom tendencies are increasing in the United States. Those are the very reasons we will keep advocating for clear thinking based on facts and for the rights associated with academic freedom.

## **Academic Freedom and Parental Rights in Elementary Education**

David Moshman



AFCON has been defending academic freedom in elementary education since its founding in 1988. In fact, AFCON was originally founded in reaction to the widespread banning of schoolbooks in Nebraska and nationally in the 1980s, and has consistently maintained that academic freedom includes intellectual freedom in teaching, learning, and inquiry at all levels of education.

In preparation for the 2021 annual meeting, the AFCON Board approved a new policy statement entitled, "Race, Sex, and Academic Freedom in Elementary Education," which was published in the October *Sentinel* and can be found on the AFCON website. I want to focus here on parental rights, a topic of current concern both nationally and in Nebraska. Parental rights are fundamental but can only be understood in relation to community rights, the role of school boards, the role of teachers, and the rights of students.

Parental rights are fundamental individual rights with respect to their own children. If a parent does not want their child to read a particular book or participate in a particular lesson, schools should and usually do make alternative arrangements for the child. Parents are, moreover, part of a community that is collectively responsible for its schools. Thus parents, like all members of the community, have a right to raise general concerns about curricular or other matters and should be taken seriously. Individual parents, however, do not have any right to control the curriculum for children other than their own.

Communities have ultimate responsibility for their public schools. Thus, all members of a democratic community have a legitimate interest in its public schools. But curriculum cannot be devised by a popular referendum determining which concepts, ideas, and perspectives most people favor and which are most strongly disfavored. Instead, collective democratic authority over school systems is properly exercised by elected school boards. In Nebraska and other states there are local school boards and also a state board of education that facilitates the work of local boards but largely respects their autonomy.

The role of school boards is to maintain schools that teach the truth about science, history, society, health, and other topics and that promote intellectual skills including reading, writing, and critical thinking. School boards are responsible for protecting the academic integrity of the curriculum, the academic freedom of teachers and students, and the rights of individual parents with respect to their own children. They must devise and defend rational decision-making processes that encourage broad input and rely on relevant expertise to generate justifiable curricular decisions.

State legislatures, I note in passing, should respect the authority of school boards over schools and refrain from curriculum decisions. Recent legislation in dozens of states to ban various topics, concepts, and theories with respect to matters of race, sex, and gender is dangerously misguided. Micromanagement of

curriculum by the state government is a major violation of the academic freedom of school systems, teachers, and students.

The role of teachers is to provide effective instruction based on an academically justified curriculum. They are responsible for teaching the truth as best they can and promoting critical thinking and intellectual development. They need the academic freedom to fulfill these responsibilities. Note that academic freedom is not an individual right in conflict with parental rights. Parental rights are primary with respect to their own children. With respect to the class and curriculum as a whole, teachers have academic responsibilities and need the academic freedom to fulfill those responsibilities.

Students of all ages have a fundamental right not to be indoctrinated. This includes a right to a curriculum determined on academic grounds rather than by political pressures or majority rule. It also includes, even in the early years of elementary school, a right to instruction that respects students' intellectual autonomy and promotes their intellectual development. Elementary schools must respect both the authority of parents with regard to their own children and the intellectual freedom necessary for teaching, learning, and inquiry across the curriculum.

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*Presented at the AFCON annual meeting, November 13, 2021. David Moshman, AFCON's policy coordinator and newsletter editor, has served on its board of directors since its founding in 1988, including four terms as president. He is a professor emeritus of educational psychology at UNL and the author of seven books, including Liberty and Learning: Academic Freedom for Teachers and Students. For questions about AFCON policy or more generally about academic freedom, contact him at [dmoshman1@unl.edu](mailto:dmoshman1@unl.edu).*

**AFCON**

[www.academicfreedomnebraska.org](http://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org)

## Testimony of a Papillion La Vista Community Schools Librarian to the PLCS School Board

Liz von Nagy  
April 26, 2021



I am speaking today because I feel I have a moral obligation to advocate for both our students of color and the school library profession. This is, of course, regarding the district's response to the reading of *Something Happened in Our Town*. There are several points of learning I believe our district can take away from this situation.

First, I would like to address the book itself. This book is a New York Times best seller, recommended for children ages 4-8. The authors, two of which are women with PhDs, are well respected psychologists. It was well reviewed, receiving many awards and accolades. School Library Journal wrote: "Does an admirable job showing two families' reactions to a police killing... important for library collections." ***This book was vetted properly and does follow our board approved selection policy.*** Therefore, when I heard that the district had forgone the board approved policy for challenged materials, ***which does in fact apply to library materials as evidenced by past situations (re: A Tale Dark and Grimm)***, I was crushed for our students and their rights. Pulling the book without following policy is censorship, dismissive of the school librarian's skills and abilities, and an infringement on our students' right to

information. That is wrong. Additionally, our district recognizes the Library Bill of Rights in board policy, which states:

The Board of Education recognizes the Library Bill of Rights, as drawn by the American Library Association, as applicable to the Papillion La Vista School District and the District shall

1. provide materials that will enrich and support the curriculum, taking into consideration the varied interests, abilities and maturity levels of the pupils served;
2. provide materials that will stimulate the growth of factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values and ethical standards;
3. provide background information that will enable pupils to make intelligent judgments in their daily lives;
4. provide materials that represent multiple viewpoints and/or perspectives of controversial issues;
5. provide materials representative of many religious, ethnic and cultural groups;
6. place principle above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in the selection of materials of the highest quality, to assure a comprehensive collection appropriate for the users of the library.



Secondly, I would like to address the content of the book. Police workers get to choose their profession, which is a *privilege*. Our students and staff of color do not have the choice to change the color of their skin. Issuing an apology to the police department was privileged and incredibly

invalidating for our students and staff of color. The district's words further disenfranchised people of color, directly contributing to a white-centric education system steeped in privilege. They have lived experiences and traumas that we as white people can never fully understand. ***And all of this happened during the week of George Floyd's murder trial. This Black man was murdered by police.*** I urge you to speak to our Black and Brown students. I urge you to ask them if the district's response was palatable and supportive, especially given the district's attempted focus on equity and diversity this school year. I ask you, how would you feel if you were a Black high schooler and read your response to the situation? Would you feel valued, seen, and heard?

School Librarians are highly trained professionals. One of the tenets of librarianship is that **all viewpoints and perspectives are represented in the collection.** By choosing not to follow board approved policy and using the words chosen in the district's press release, our district has both infringed on the rights of students and further widened the racial divide. This is wrong. I beg you all to please look beyond your own ideas and experiences of what police are and what they do and who they hurt, because they are surely different from people of colors' experiences. I know many have never had to speak with your children about being Black and pulled over. I know many Papillion families will never have to tell them to fear people that should be there to serve and protect. Everyone has seen the news stories of Black and Brown people being routinely murdered by people who should be public servants. I know not all cops are bad, but there is a clear and defined pattern of racism and privilege in our criminal justice system. Denying its existence and siding with folks in power with privilege is damaging to our children.

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*Presented as part of a talk at the AFCON Annual Meeting, November 13, 2021. Liz von Nagy was a school librarian in PLCS at the time Something Happened was banned. She is now a school librarian in Vermont.*



## Nebraska Library Association Statement on Golden Sower Awards Chapter Book List September 29, 2021

As you may have seen by now, the Golden Sower list of 2022-2023 Chapter Book Nominees contains 11 titles instead of the usual 10. This change came about following a set of circumstances which will be explained below.

For those that may not know, the Golden Sower nominees are chosen through the efforts of a group of volunteer readers from across the state. One of these readers objected to the inclusion of one title (*The List of Things That Will Not Change* by Rebecca Stead) due to LGBTQIA+ content. An almost-final list was released prematurely on social media and following commentary, the title was replaced on the final list with *Stella* by McCall Hoyle, the first alternate. That substitution was made without consulting the full Golden Sower Committee.

The Nebraska Library Association Executive Board became aware of the issue. Following discussion between many of the individuals involved, we have determined that we should return this title to the selection. With that, we are offering 11 titles for 2022-2023.

The Nebraska Library Association does not condone censorship, and stands with the American Library Association, Nebraska School Librarians Association, and American Association of School Librarians in that regard.

## Senator Adam Morfeld Recognized with National Intellectual Freedom Award by NCTE

Nebraska State Senator Adam Morfeld is the 2021 Recipient of the National Intellectual Freedom Award by the National Council Teachers of English through the nomination by the Nebraska English Language Arts Council—the official Nebraska affiliate of NCTE. Morfeld received AFCON’s Academic Freedom Award in 2019.

“He was nominated for his tireless work in support of Intellectual Freedom/Academic Freedom issues on both the local and state levels of government,” stated NELAC State President Stephanie Shearer. “Senator Morfeld has championed many a bill, creatively developing legislation in support of numerous intellectual and academic freedoms and we are proud of his work and efforts on behalf of education and felt this was a good way to acknowledge and thank him.”

### Nebraska Links

Plan to put the governor in charge of K-12 education in Nebraska

[https://omaha.com/news/local/education/petition-drive-aims-to-eliminate-nebraska-board-of-education-give-governor-k-12-oversight/article\\_e828b5c0-4888-11ec-86d3-23645d27c5e4.html](https://omaha.com/news/local/education/petition-drive-aims-to-eliminate-nebraska-board-of-education-give-governor-k-12-oversight/article_e828b5c0-4888-11ec-86d3-23645d27c5e4.html)

Lawsuit against UNL by a Christian student group claims discrimination in allocation of student fees for refusing to support a speech by former UNL philosophy professor Robert Audi, author of many books on epistemology, ethics, and related philosophical topics and editor of the prestigious *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, now in its third edition.

[https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/christian-student-group-sues-unl-for-discrimination-in-student-fee-policies/article\\_0f556430-1c3b-51fb-913e-b16604ee78ca.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/christian-student-group-sues-unl-for-discrimination-in-student-fee-policies/article_0f556430-1c3b-51fb-913e-b16604ee78ca.html)

Follow-up article

<https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/unl-denies-discriminating-against-christian-group->

[says-it-has-provided-funds/article\\_fcc8ceda-0f3f-5a0c-a707-ef84bcc5227e.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/unl-denies-discriminating-against-christian-group-says-it-has-provided-funds/article_fcc8ceda-0f3f-5a0c-a707-ef84bcc5227e.html)

Ricketts responds to lawsuit against UNL  
[https://omaha.com/news/state-and-regional/crime-and-courts/ricketts-calls-on-unl-to-address-concerns-raised-by-religious-discrimination-lawsuit/article\\_0647363a-38d5-11ec-b3e9-7b61dfa835cb.html](https://omaha.com/news/state-and-regional/crime-and-courts/ricketts-calls-on-unl-to-address-concerns-raised-by-religious-discrimination-lawsuit/article_0647363a-38d5-11ec-b3e9-7b61dfa835cb.html)

Detailed article on the process of developing sex education standards and the decision to suspend that process

[https://omaha.com/news/local/education/why-were-nebraskas-sex-ed-standards-halted-emails-offer-behind-the-scenes-look/article\\_e9cbac36-209f-11ec-baed-2713bc5c1aae.html](https://omaha.com/news/local/education/why-were-nebraskas-sex-ed-standards-halted-emails-offer-behind-the-scenes-look/article_e9cbac36-209f-11ec-baed-2713bc5c1aae.html)

State Board of Education will look over the process and consider improvements

[https://omaha.com/news/local/education/after-health-standards-controversy-nebraska-education-board-will-troubleshoot-what-went-wrong/article\\_b1a67f10-3cc5-11ec-9b98-47882d69cf69.html](https://omaha.com/news/local/education/after-health-standards-controversy-nebraska-education-board-will-troubleshoot-what-went-wrong/article_b1a67f10-3cc5-11ec-9b98-47882d69cf69.html)

Genoa Indian boarding school gets local and national coverage

<https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/digital-project-expands-access-to-genoa-indian-school-history/>  
<https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/students-make-emotional-visit-to-former-indian-boarding-school/>  
<https://news.unl.edu/newsrooms/today/article/genoa-indian-school-project-gains-media-attention/>  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/17/us/native-american-boarding-school-deaths-nebraska.html>

UNL removed from AAUP censure list

[https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/unl-removed-from-aaup-list-of-censured-universities/article\\_74293d6b-db21-55f0-99ac-b81d2cb40175.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/unl-removed-from-aaup-list-of-censured-universities/article_74293d6b-db21-55f0-99ac-b81d2cb40175.html)

Follow-up analysis in the AAUP publication *Academe* on the U of N Regents 5-3 vote against banning critical race theory

<https://www.aaup.org/article/holding-line-against-attacks-critical-race-theory-nebraska>

University of Nebraska President Carter responding to criticism from the governor and some Regents of the new UNL diversity plan: “Here’s what we will not do. We will not impose critical race theory, nor any theory, upon students. We will not hire candidates based on their skin color. We will not close our doors to any qualified student. We will not limit the free, robust exchange of ideas on campus – one of the most cherished ideals in higher learning.”

[https://journalstar.com/opinion/columnists/local-view-building-for-the-future/article\\_f2d00678-4c13-5a1f-878d-3e4232411cb1.html](https://journalstar.com/opinion/columnists/local-view-building-for-the-future/article_f2d00678-4c13-5a1f-878d-3e4232411cb1.html)

Related article on responses to new UNL diversity plan

[https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/unl-s-diversity-plan-critical-to-maintain-state-universitys-growth-nus-president-says/article\\_d91938a6-f888-5889-aec8-fcd31b1191f6.html](https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/unl-s-diversity-plan-critical-to-maintain-state-universitys-growth-nus-president-says/article_d91938a6-f888-5889-aec8-fcd31b1191f6.html)

### National Links

Expert testimony from professors in a voting rights lawsuit was forbidden by administrators at the University of Florida who were concerned it would anger the governor by undermining the government’s position.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/29/us/florida-professors-voting-rights-lawsuit.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/04/us/florida-professors-lawsuit.html>

Analysis of Florida issue from Eugene Volokh  
<https://reason.com/volokh/2021/10/31/univ-of-florida-blocks-professors-expert-witness-work-in-case-against-florida-government/>

Statements about Florida issue from the Academic Freedom Alliance

<https://academicfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AFA-letter-to-UF-on-expert-testimony-prohibition.pdf>

<https://academicfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Second-AFA-Letter-to-the-University-of-Florida.pdf>

November 5: U. of Florida reverses course, but lawsuit in progress

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/after-scathing-criticism-u-of-florida-will-let-professors-testify-against-the-state>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/05/us/voting-rights-florida-professors-testify.html>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/11/08/uf-says-professors-can-be-paid-experts-theyre-suing-anyway>

Problem not solved

<https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2021/11/24/u-florida-denies-outside-influence-adopts-new-conflict-policy>

Bans in many states have broad chilling effects on teaching about race

[https://journalstar.com/ap/national/race-related-topics-touchy-for-teachers/article\\_5cf546a2-43dd-5f51-bdba-40b2410596a9.html](https://journalstar.com/ap/national/race-related-topics-touchy-for-teachers/article_5cf546a2-43dd-5f51-bdba-40b2410596a9.html)

*Educational Gag Orders: Legislative Restrictions on the Freedom to Read, Learn, and Teach*

This is a very long and detailed report from PEN America about 2021 legislative efforts to restrict teaching about race, sex, and gender. If you only have time for two sentences, here they are: “The teaching of history, civics, and American identity has never been neutral or uncontested, and reasonable people can disagree over how and when educators should teach children about racism, sexism, and other facets of American history and society. But in a democracy, the response to these disagreements can never be to ban discussion of ideas or facts simply because they are contested or cause discomfort.”

And here’s one example of the effect of these new laws: “a school administrator in Southlake, Texas, advised teachers in October that, as they went through their curricula, to ‘just try and remember the concepts of [House Bill] 3979, and make sure that if you have a book on the Holocaust, that you have one that has opposing – that has other perspectives.’”

<https://pen.org/report/educational-gag-orders/>

Excellent summary of an important recent case in which a prestigious public lecture by an expert on climate change was canceled because his views about affirmative action, which were expressed elsewhere and not part of the talk, were deemed unacceptable.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/20/us/dorian-abbot-mit.html>

Opinion piece on broader implications of the cancellation

<https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2021/11/08/dorian-abbot-case-could-have-broad-negative-repercussions-opinion>

On the banning of schoolbooks: “This spreading moral panic demonstrates, yet again, why the left needs the First Amendment, even if the veneration of free speech has fallen out of fashion among some progressives. Absent a societal commitment to free expression, the question of who can speak becomes purely a question of power, and in much of this country, power belongs to the right.”

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/12/opinion/book-bans.html>

Academic freedom at the University of Illinois at Chicago Law School: “It is embarrassing to have to say it, but the antiracism movement needs to regard truth as its friend.”

<https://www.chronicle.com/article/yes-this-is-a-witch-hunt>

Academic Freedom Alliance issues statement on compelled speech

<https://academicfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/AFA-Statement-on-Mandatory-Statements-on-Values.pdf>

*Understanding Academic Freedom*, a new book by Henry Reichman, former chair of the national AAUP Committee A on Academic Freedom and Tenure and a regular contributor to its *Academe* blog

<https://jhupbooks.press.jhu.edu/title/understanding-academic-freedom>

A new book argues that most parental objections to teaching about evolution are really objections to having their children indoctrinated in atheist ideology, which is something schools can and should (and mostly do) avoid.

<https://ncse.ngo/creationism-usa-bridging-impasse-teaching-evolution>

Research on anti-racist education is halted and then resumed

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/11/24/professors-urge-ut-austin-lift-pause-antiracist-study>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2021/11/29/ut-austin-ends-inquiry-antiracism-study-children>

Researcher resigns following threats of violence in response to research on pedophilia

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/11/18/old-dominion-puts-scholar-pedophilia-leave>  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/11/29/controversial-scholar-pedophilia-resigns-old-dominion>

### **Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska Board of Directors Meeting**

Via Videoconference

October 9, 2021

Present:

Peggy Adair, secretary, legislative liaison  
John Bender, representing UNL Faculty Senate  
Kari Bulgrin, representing Nebraska School Librarians Association  
Nancy Comer, representing Nebraska State Literacy Association  
Bob Haller, president-elect, chief baker, director at large  
Laurie Thomas Lee, representing ACLU Nebraska  
Dave Moshman, newsletter editor, policy coordinator, executive vice secretary  
Wyatt Packard, representing Nebraska Library Association  
Todd Schlechte, president, webmaster  
Rod Wagner, treasurer, representing Nebraska Center for the Book  
Vicki Wood, director at large

### **MINUTES**

President Todd Schlechte called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Haller, to approve minutes of the AFCON board meeting held on September 11, 2021. Motion carried on a voice vote.

TREASURER’S REPORT: Wagner reported balance on hand as of October 9, 2021, is \$3,137.62. Treasurer’s report will be filed for audit. The board discussed AFCON’s usage of PayPal’s services and PayPal’s alleged discriminatory practices in Israel. The board



agreed by consensus to postpone further discussion until after the annual meeting. Moshman, Schlechte and Haller volunteered to research the allegations and report findings to the board.

NEWSLETTER: Articles for the next issue of the *Sentinel* are due by November 24, 2021.

POLICY COORDINATOR: Moshman, expatriated to Texas, reported Nebraska Governor Ricketts recently made the front page of the Houston Chronicle. Ricketts and his security detail flew to Texas for a 30-minute photo op on the southern border of the United States.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT and ANNUAL MEETING: Schlechte presented a tentative agenda for the annual meeting. Discussion followed. Board members anticipate a large audience due to the timeliness of the topics and the ability for people to attend remotely. A motion was made by Moshman, second by Bender, to authorize Schlechte to spend up to \$200.00 to increase Zoom participant capacity for the meeting. Motion carried on a voice vote.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:  
Nebraska Center for the Book: Wagner reported the annual meeting will be a live event, on October 23, at the Nebraska History Museum in Lincoln.

Nebraska State Literacy Association: Comer reported the annual Literacy Festival will be a virtual event and will be held on February 24 -25, 2022.

Nebraska Library Association: Packard reported the NLA conference will be held over two days, with remote sessions on October 13 and in-person events on October 14.

Nebraska School Librarians Association: Bulgrin reported School Librarians Day will be Saturday, October 15.

There being no further business, the AFCON board meeting adjourned at 11:14 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Peggy Adair, secretary

## **Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska Annual Membership Business Meeting**

Via Videoconference  
November 13, 2021

Present:

Peggy Adair, secretary, legislative liaison  
Nancy Comer, representing Nebraska State Literacy Association  
Shee Covarrubias, communications coordinator  
Bob Haller, director at large, president-elect  
Laurie Thomas Lee, representing ACLU Nebraska  
Dave Moshman, policy coordinator, newsletter editor, executive vice secretary  
Wyatt Packard, representing Nebraska Library Association  
Todd Schlechte, president  
Rod Wagner, treasurer, representing Nebraska Center for the Book  
Vicki Wood, director at large  
And others, for a total of 24 participants

### **MINUTES**

President Todd Schlechte convened the meeting at 11:54 a.m.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Lee, to approve minutes of the October 17, 2020, AFCON annual membership business meeting. Motion carried on a voice vote.

ANNUAL TREASURER'S REPORT: Rod Wagner reported balance on hand as of November 12, 2021, is \$3,141.87

NEWSLETTER: Articles for the December edition of the *Sentinel* are due by November 24, 2021.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: President Todd Schlechte presented a written report of AFCON activities for the 2021 year.

Schlechte reported the AFCON board selected Shee Covarrubias as the recipient of the 2021 AFCON Academic Freedom Award. Schlechte formally presented the award to Covarrubias during the AFCON annual meeting, which was held immediately prior to the AFCON annual membership business meeting.

Vicki Wood thanked President Schlechte for leading AFCON through a tumultuous year. Schlechte thanked the board for all of their efforts during the year.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT: On behalf of the nominating committee of Vicki

Wood, Dave Moshman, and Laurie Thomas Lee, Wood presented the following slate of officers for 2022: president-elect, Vicki Wood; treasurer, Rod Wagner; and secretary, Peggy Adair. A motion was made by Covarrubias, second by Lee, to approve the nominating committee report. Motion carried on a voice vote.

There being no further business, the AFCON annual membership business meeting adjourned at 12:08 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,  
Peggy Adair, secretary

### **President's Report for 2021** Todd Schlechte

Highlights of 2021 AFCON activities include:

1. Submitted testimony in support of the adoption of LB88, which would have promoted student free speech in student journalism at both the K-12 and university levels. AFCON Board members also contacted state senators on the issue at the various stages of passage. Unfortunately, the strength of the opposition grew over time, and the bill overcame one filibuster only to succumb to a second.
2. Submitted testimony in opposition to LB36, which would have required the display of "In God We Trust" in every school, in a "prominent place." This bill remained in committee.
3. Submitted testimony in opposition to LB282, which would have removed some obscenity prosecution protection for K-12 teachers and public library staff. This bill remained in committee.
4. Submitted public comment to the State Department of Education asking that they make any changes to the proposed health standards in the light of scientific evidence, not solely on the force of public opinion. The original standards were revised and then shelved indefinitely.
5. AFCON endorsed the Papillion La Vista Education Association's Statement opposing the removal by the superintendent of *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice* from a resource list. The Nebraska Library

Association and the Nebraska School Librarians Association also released statements condemning this action. AFCON produced a special issue of its newsletter (June) with an introduction to the issue at hand, an article by concerned parent Shee Covarrubias, an analysis by David Moshman, and copies of the statements by the LVEA, the NLA, and the NSLA.

6. Testified against a resolution proposed by Jim Pillen of the UN Board of Regents that the "Regents of the University of Nebraska oppose any imposition of Critical Race Theory in curriculum." The resolution failed to pass on a 5-3 vote.
7. Held a highly attended annual meeting with the title "Race, Sex, and Academic Freedom in Elementary Education." The numbers were due in large part to John Bender's offer of extra credit to his students.
8. Our highly deserving winner of the Academic Freedom Award was Shee Covarrubias.
9. Bob Haller will be assuming the role of President for 2022.

I would like to thank everyone for their effort this past year!

### **JOIN OR RENEW**

*Rod Wagner, Treasurer*

*AFCON now accepts PayPal! Use PayPal to join or renew. We offer two ways to pay: you can use the PayPal button on our website <https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/join-afcon.html> or send us a check payable to AFCON at 3901 S. 27th St., #47, Lincoln, NE 68502. Memberships are \$120 for organizations and \$15 for individuals.*

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