

The AFCON Sentinel

Newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska

Volume 25, Number 3

June 2021

Special Issue

Something Happened in Papillion La Vista Community Schools

From the President Book Banning Very Much Alive Todd Schlechte

Every year the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom publishes a list of the most challenged books. The *Top 10 Most Challenged Books of 2020* represents a snapshot of what sort of books are gathering the most opposition at present, primarily in school or public library settings. Interestingly, this snapshot has changed dramatically from 2019, when eight of the ten most challenged books contained LGBTQIA+ content. In 2020 that content remained controversial, but six of the most challenged books were disputed because of sensitivities to issues of race.

One such book on the 2020 list is *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice*. According to the Office for Intellectual Freedom, this book has been challenged because it contained "divisive language" and promoted anti-police views. In Nebraska, at Papillion La Vista Community Schools, a YouTube video containing a reading of this book was removed from a resource list for teachers, without undergoing a review process first and without following the policies of the school district in dealing with challenged materials.

The Papillion La Vista Education Association produced a statement in opposition to this action:

continued on page 2

Something Happened in Our School Shee Covarrubias



"I believe that education is the civil rights issue of our generation. And if you care about promoting opportunity and reducing inequality, the classroom is the place to start. Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice."

*~ U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan,
October 9, 2009*

On April 12, 2021 the communications director for Papillion La Vista Community Schools, Annette Eyman, spoke with news stations WOWT and KETV in regards to the district decision to remove the YouTube narration of the book *Something Happened in our Town: A Child's Story about Racial Injustice*. She is quoted as saying "Where this book crossed the line was in the negative perceptions it placed on police officers, and that was not something that we were comfortable with."

continued on page 2



From the President

continued from page 1

“This sets a dangerous precedent that cedes professional discretion and pedagogical expertise to the censorship of the loudest complainers.” They also expressed this concern: “The worst consequences of the district’s response are the missed opportunities for discussion and questions that our young people deserve as they process the clear and disturbing racial injustices occurring in today’s society.” AFCON endorsed PLEA’s statement. We wrote that to us this appears a clear case of censorship and a lack of respect for the intellectual and academic freedom of students and teachers. The material was not removed for sound pedagogical reasons, but because a group of community members opposed it, which is never the proper reason for making educational decisions. As the PLEA notes, the district failed to follow its own policies in dealing with this challenge, and we would additionally note that it has thereby undermined its own academic integrity. In addition, we said that the PLEA’s statement makes extremely good points, is very well worded, and we endorse it wholeheartedly.

The PLEA and AFCON were not the only ones to oppose the removal of *Something Happened in Our Town* from the resource list. This book banning was also opposed by the Nebraska School Librarians Association and the Nebraska Library Association. In this issue of *The Sentinel*, you will find the statements from all three of these organizations. In addition, we have an article from Shee Covarrubias, a concerned parent, and an analysis from David Moshman, Professor Emeritus of Educational Psychology at UNL.

I would also like to refer you to a blogpost containing an interview with the authors of *Something Happened in Our Town* at <https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/?p=25848>. All three authors are psychologists who have worked with

children. They wanted to write a book that addresses racism in a developmentally appropriate manner. I found the blogpost quite interesting and highly recommend it.

Enjoy this issue of *The Sentinel!*

Top Ten Most Challenged Books:

<http://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>

YouTube video of *Something Happened in Our Town*:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcOhOFGcWm8>



Something Happened in Our School

continued from page 1

<https://www.ketv.com/article/school-district-teachers-union-respond-to-controversy-over-childrens-book-on-racial-injustice/36100697>

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent protests across the nation it has never been more important to educate not only ourselves but our children on the importance of social justice and the damaging impact of social injustice.

As a woman of color and a parent with a teen in the PLCS district and an incoming preschooler,

this situation reminded me that we are living in community where racial injustices, an ongoing part of the lived experiences of our family and families like ours, are seen as a problem that exists only “in other cities.” The unfortunate reality is that these problems can and do exist in both Papillion and La Vista. This is only further evidenced by the way in which the superintendent, Dr. Andrew Rikli, chose to address this situation.

As I researched this situation I had the opportunity to speak with both the Superintendent and the President of the school board. Those discussions did not leave me feeling any better about this situation. Not only did Dr. Rikli justify his decision by saying this YouTube narration was not properly vetted according to the district’s curriculum vetting process, he also took the extraordinary step to send a public written apology to law enforcement on behalf of the entire district for the way in which they were represented.

Addressing social justice issues is very uncomfortable in so many aspects of our daily lives. These are subjects that are sometimes frowned upon in the workplace, ignored in some homes and, as in this case, avoided in schools at almost any cost. Children spend so much of their time in school that this is one place that these subjects should especially be discussed.

It has always been my belief that the education system has a duty to equip all children to be fully functioning adults who can navigate the world in a way that will not only allow for, but encourage growth in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive way. This starts with educating our children on issues that they will see undoubtedly in the media and hear about from friends and/or family, and that many will experience firsthand.

Social–Emotional Learning is an area that is included from Pre-K all the way through 12th grade as part of guaranteed and viable curriculum. SEL screeners for PK-12 include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. In the current age of social media it is the tendency of both adults and youth

to find out the world’s happenings via that platform. That said it is even more important that curriculum and supplemental material like *Something Happened in Our Town* are provided as resources to our students starting at the elementary school level.



This specific book was thoughtfully written by 3 child psychologists geared toward ages 4-8. It includes supplemental pages to assist caregivers, parents, and educators on the best, age appropriate ways to discuss its content following presentation of the book. How can it be justified that this is inappropriate at the elementary school level?

The position that PLCS has taken by way of the Superintendent is that the portrayal of law enforcement, in addition to the lack of vetting, was the driving force behind this decision. In my research I discovered that 7 of the top 10 most challenged books of 2020 are in the district’s high school libraries and some are in fact part of the curriculum. The committee that added *Something Happened in Our Town* to a compiled list of proposed supplemental materials did so based on reasonable academic grounds. To remove it because it was deemed offensive to a specific group not only undermines education, it also violates academic freedom.

After all of the research I have done into this issue it is clear to me that the impetus for Dr. Rikli’s actions was a small group of parents who took offense at the way in which law enforcement was characterized. If a small group of parents are able to influence what material is being provided to students for educational purposes based on their personal comfort level, how can we as parents and educators trust that this will not happen again? How do we know it has not already happened, just without the media attention?

In the May 11th newsletter from the National Education Policy Center there are at least 8 states (one of which is our neighbor Iowa) that are seeking to make it illegal for educators to teach about how racial discrimination manifests itself. It is not far reaching to assume that this could be on the horizon for Nebraska.

We owe it to our children and future generations to ensure that school districts both locally and across the state are not able to unilaterally make these decisions based on personal biases. Our world is getting more and more diverse every year and to not equip our children to be able to navigate that world is setting them up to fail. Educating our children on the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion and social justice not only sets them up to succeed but it also promotes a more just and democratic society.

Shee Covarrubias is a parent in the Papillion La Vista Community Schools. She is a tireless advocate not only for her children but for the education of all children statewide.



Statement from the Intellectual Freedom Round Table of the Nebraska Library Association (May 2021):

The Intellectual Freedom Round Table of the Nebraska Library Association (NLA), and the association as a whole, is troubled by the recent decision by Papillion La Vista Community Schools to remove *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard from an instructional resource list. The Papillion La Vista Community Schools administration bypassed its own established

policies regarding challenged instructional materials by not consulting teachers, providing alternative activities, or requesting a review board to assess the material. NLA is concerned that this sets a dangerous precedent whereby school administrators dictate what course materials are permitted, censoring the ideas and facts that they disagree with based on their personal or political viewpoints.

NLA endorses the Papillion La Vista Education Association's statement opposing Papillion La Vista Community Schools' decision. Additionally, after a review of the book, NLA recommends *Something Happened in Our Town* for educational and personal use. This decision is based on the value that this material provides with the story as presented, the qualifications of the authors, and the extensive resource list provided within the book itself for parents and educators.

It is essential for our communities to recognize and understand that systemic racism and discrimination exist in our country. NLA asserts that an essential first step toward true racial equality involves engaging in difficult, but honest conversations. Resources like *Something Happened in Our Town* should be accessible by educators and parents if these conversations are to be meaningful. The NLA respectfully requests that Papillion La Vista Community Schools reconsider their harmful decision.

Statement from the Executive Board of the Nebraska School Librarians Association (May 2021):

The Nebraska School Librarians Association would like to put forth this statement regarding Papillion La Vista Community School district's decision to remove *Something Happened in Our Town* without regard for school board reconsideration policy 6405.

Schools have a responsibility to represent a broad range of viewpoints in their curriculum that reflects the multiplicity of views, beliefs, and opinions in the community and not just the views and beliefs of those who are the most vocal or the most powerful.

Decisions about the availability of materials in the school – including removing or restricting students' access to books – should be done according to written selection and reconsideration policies. Such policies and procedures are vital to preserving free inquiry and the First Amendment right to read within the school and its library. Further, they offer important procedural and substantive protections for the student's right to access materials, the faculty's integrity and professional responsibilities, and the principles of free speech and freedom of information. Most importantly, written selection and reconsideration policies prevent any one person from subjectively blocking all students from accessing materials simply because they don't like them or because they fear public controversy.

Disregard for board policy and the reconsideration process opens a door to a path of restricted access for all students based on the wishes of a vocal few. Parents and guardians do have the right to make decisions regarding access for their own children and can request restrictions or alternate materials through current policies. Community members are also welcome to submit concerns to the school district and have those concerns go through the board approved reconsideration process.

Many school districts in Nebraska recognize the American Library Association's *Library Bill of Rights* as a guiding foundation for selection and access to resources for all students. The removal of titles without due process can not only violate board policy but the rights outlined in the *Library Bill of Rights*. School librarians are uniquely certified and trained professionals who can thoughtfully develop diverse collections and provide valuable insight during selection and reconsideration of materials.

It is our sincere hope that this statement will encourage further conversations which allow for a more proactive and equitable solution when concerns arise regarding instructional materials.

The [Papillion La Vista Education Association's statement on the situation](#), which was endorsed by AFCON, can be read in its entirety here.



Academic Freedom in Papillion La Vista Community Schools

David Moshman

People often think of academic freedom as a special right of college professors. But academic freedom is not limited to professors. Academic freedom is the intellectual freedom to do academic work, including freedoms of teaching, learning, and inquiry. These freedoms have been undermined by recent administrative actions banning the book *Something Happened in Our Town: A Child's Story About Racial Injustice* from the Papillion La Vista Community Schools (PLCS).

Despite claims that *Something Happened* had not been properly “vetted,” it seems clear that the PLCS superintendent unilaterally assured police and others that the book is not and will not be available in PLCS because it presents an unacceptable view of police. This preemptive administrative ban bypasses proper selection and reconsideration processes, which are crucial to ensuring that books are selected on academic grounds by teachers and other experts and that requests for reconsideration are also evaluated on academic grounds, taking into account the role of the book in the overall curriculum.

The problem is not just the violation of process. The PLCS curriculum and libraries include many books that could be deemed negative or offensive in their portrayal of some racial, ethnic, religious, professional, or other group. If a book has been selected on academic grounds, banning it because it includes ideas that some find offensive or upsetting violates academic freedom and undermines education. In a public school, moreover, despite broad discretion to make pedagogical decisions, banning a book because of objections to its viewpoint likely violates the First Amendment.

The primary victims of this book banning are the students whose opportunity to explore ideas is limited to works approved by the police.

Some argue that the book is not appropriate for elementary school students. But *Something Happened* was published by Magination Press, a project of the American Psychological Association that specializes in books addressing emotional, personal, and social issues in ways young children can understand. And *Something Happened* does this well. For example, it is easy for children, or even adults, to slip into an us/them mindset, such as minorities vs. police, in which everyone feels pressured to choose a side. The book promotes better conceptual understanding by reminding children there are Black police.

Recognizing the value of this book, schools across the nation have added it to their curricula and libraries, and PLCS should do the same. But this requires that teachers and librarians have the academic freedom to do their jobs. Many may be reluctant even to raise the issue for fear of retaliation from an administration that has already rejected the book.

Ultimately, the primary victims of this book banning are the students whose opportunity to explore ideas is limited to works approved by the police. This violates student freedoms of learning and inquiry and undermines the academic integrity of the school system.

Respect for the academic freedom of students also includes respect for their freedom to determine and express their own beliefs, even in the earliest years of school. Students will differ in their interpretations and conclusions about matters of race and justice as they encounter these at all levels of education in classes including history, literature, social studies, and civics. They should be free to express their ideas and discuss them with each other. Parents are of course free to communicate their own ideas and values to their own children, who will ultimately decide for themselves what to believe and what to do.



What do we expect children to learn from *Something Happened*? The message of the book is to notice injustices and take action. When a new student named Omad “from a country far away” is passed over for a student game, the two protagonists, a Black boy and a White girl, both insist that he be included.

That’s a good message for all of us. Faced with the banning of *Something Happened*, we should insist that PLCS clarify its book selection and reconsideration policies and commit to following those policies, with full respect for the academic freedom of its teachers, librarians, and students. I’m hoping *Something Happened* will soon be available in PLCS, and that students will have the opportunity to discuss what happened in their school.

David Moshman, editor of The AFCON Sentinel, is a professor emeritus of educational psychology at UNL, where he taught cognitive and developmental psychology.

The Right to Education as the Base for the Universal Declaration

Dr. Bob Haller

Advocates for alternatives to the public school system in a State cite Article 26(3) of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* to claim that parental “choice” has a positive value in a State’s fulfillment of the *Right to an Education*. But one effect of prioritizing parental “choice” is to deprive their children of the features of the Education promised their children in Article 26(1) and (2). When a State also allocates public funds to these alternatives, there is a danger that the public schools will be less effective in fulfilling these mandates, and the community loses the advantage of the shared experience of learning about and living under human rights that these sections of Article 26 provide for.

An illustration of how prioritizing Article 26(3) has affected educational policy in the U.S. can be found, for instance, in the blog by Joe Nathan, Director of the *Center for School Change*, entitled *School Choice Isn’t Just Something Parents Want, It’s a Human Right*. <https://www.unite4education.org/global-response/education-a-choice-or-a-right/> Nathan calls the mandate of Article 26(1)(2) a “progressive view of education,” but does not claim at any point that he has supported this “view” in any of the choices he created for parents to exercise their “human right” on. Instead he describes how the UN Declaration was for him “AN INSPIRATION” that encouraged him to create options that increase educational choice.

As a policy leader in the Minneapolis public school system, he is proud that it expanded school “choice” by supporting first a “post secondary option” and then “new non-sectarian public schools” that were understood as supporting the “central principle” that states must lose their “exclusive franchise” to create and finance new public schools. That led him to advocate for a system of “vouchers” for low-income students to attend other than public schools. He concludes that the “school choice programs” he helped create for Minneapolis is “entirely consistent”

with Article 26 of the UDHR because it enhances the “parental right to choose.”



This refocusing of UDHR Article 26 on “Choice” is apparently happening around the world, not just in the U.S. In an article entitled “Education: A Choice or a Right?”,

<https://www.unite4education.org/global-response/education-a-choice-or-a-right/> Frank Adamson of *Education International* notes that the U.N. has set as a Sustainable Development Goal to be reached by 2030 “to ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education” as mandated by Article 26(1). He notes, however, that many countries have not delivered “on their UN treaty commitment” and instead have placed their “responsibility on the family to figure out the best option for their child instead.”

Adamson claims that schools who compete with each other in an educational “Marketplace” create “education systems based on contrasting values” where families choose schools, either from a variety of low-cost private schools or from private and religious alternatives to public schools. It is not clear that a variety of schools based on “contrasting values” can all claim to fulfill the promise of education as a human right. He suggests that, more effectively, it is countries that seek to provide “a free, equitable, quality education” and invest in “teachers and infrastructure” who consequently have much better “outcomes on international assessment” and “smaller differences between students.” He thus recommends that “countries employing market-based approaches” should offer instead a “proven pathway to better outcomes.”

In a different way, a State needs to attend to the guidance provided by Article 26(2), which specifies the goals that a school system is to achieve. It may seem to some that this list ignores the usual school curriculum in favor of the “development of human personality”, “tolerance and friendship among all nations” and “the maintenance of peace.” But the wording of Article 26 will be relevant to any curriculum because a school must be an institution where the full range of Human Rights are granted to staff and students, making it a model of a community governed by the Declaration. The curriculum may be identified in the catalogue by the discipline being taught: language, history, science, arts and so forth. At the same time, the working practices of a school will be identical to those of a State committed to Human Rights.



If you run through the Rights enumerated in the UDHR you quickly see that schools have adopted its Articles without so acknowledging. Schools deal with “free and equal” students who are “endowed with reason and conscience.” Thus, as called for in UDHR Article 2 schools will aim to remove all forms of “distinction” which might favor one student over another. Article 3 directs the school to protect the life and security of students. Article 18 grants “freedom of thought, conscience and religion” while Article 19 in application would protect the “academic freedom” of students and teachers. Article 21 supports school boards made up of local citizens and suggests that students could take part in the governance of their schools. Schools give students the opportunity to engage in the cultural and scientific life of the Community (Article 27). Schools help to enact Article 25 by providing

meals and computers for a child whose family cannot do so.

These are the Rights that most directly apply to schools. It is not surprising that the other rights enumerated also govern school activities—by providing for “recess” during the day (Article 22). More importantly, you can go back to the Preamble, where you will read that “every individual and every organ of society...shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms.”

That assigns to Article 26 a central responsibility for the creation of a society which is based on Human Rights. The mandates of Article(26)(02) are thus an important element of the Declaration: if schools do not make them central to their purpose, where will they be explicitly present in the lives of citizens in waiting? The answer is, “in every organ of society” which reinforces the essential teaching of the schools. If the schools have focused on the development of personality, the value of Human Rights and the necessity of peace, that will be the implicit aim of other features of the society.

My conclusion is that a society in which Human Rights are the basis of government must be a society of free people who have been afforded the opportunity to learn respect for their fellow citizens and for the ideologies and institutions that respect human rights. The paradox that a free society is created by a compulsory institution would make us defend universal education which produces a robust citizenry and valuable understanding of our life and our world. A government that turns over responsibility for this system to private agents undermines a Human Right which is the base on which all Rights are built.

This is the third and final in a series of three articles by AFCON’s own Dr. Bob on the right to education in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Bob Haller, professor emeritus of English at UNL, will serve his fourth term as president of AFCON in 2022.

Updates on Proposed Nebraska Health Education Standards

Senators write letter attacking proposed health education standards

https://omaha.com/news/local/education/senator-s-weigh-in-ahead-of-hearing-on-proposed-nebraska-health-standards/article_4ec207f6-92f8-11eb-b6aa-6b139b5516a9.html

State Board of Education April 2 hearing on standards (LJS and OWH)

https://journalstar.com/news/local/education/controversial-proposed-health-ed-standards-generate-hours-of-testimony-much-of-it-in-opposition/article_fb93cff6-a4e5-562e-b27c-d5f46a954f9d.html

https://omaha.com/news/state-and-regional/govt-and-politics/nebraska-school-health-standards-on-gender-identity-sexuality-spur-flood-of-comments/article_ed806862-93f5-11eb-a9f3-534fbd71736a.html

May 7 hearing in Kearney

https://omaha.com/news/local/education/hearing-on-proposed-nebraska-health-standards-that-teach-gender-identity-goes-almost-4-hours/article_5ca88738-ac6f-11eb-a14d-03f48945f7ac.html

Sixth Circuit on Academic Freedom after Garcetti

Professor Meriwether of Shawnee State University (a public institution) initially refused a request from a transgender student to address her as female, claiming this was contrary to his views about matters of sex and gender, and proposed that he would simply use her name rather than any gendered term. She later rejected this proposal and he then proposed that he would address her as female but include a statement of his views on sex and gender in the syllabus to avoid any misunderstanding. When the administration forbid him to include such a statement, Meriwether brought a lawsuit claiming that his academic freedom was abridged in violation of the First Amendment. The District Court dismissed the case on the grounds that, under the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Garcetti*, job-related speech has no First Amendment protection. The Sixth Circuit disagreed and sent the case back for trial:

“Meriwether alleges that Shawnee State’s application of its gender-identity policy violated the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment. The district court rejected this argument and held that a professor’s speech in the classroom is never protected by the First Amendment. We disagree: Under controlling Supreme Court and Sixth Circuit precedent, the First Amendment protects the academic speech of university professors. Since Meriwether has plausibly alleged that Shawnee State violated his First Amendment rights by compelling his speech or silence and casting a pall of orthodoxy over the classroom, his free-speech claim may proceed.”

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/03/29/appeals-court-sides-professor-who-repeatedly-misgendered-trans-student>

Academic Freedom Alliance

Here’s more on the new Academic Freedom Alliance, which just formed in April 2021. They don’t know that AFCON has been their Nebraska affiliate since 1988. But their focus is exclusively on the rights of college faculty, whereas we have a much broader conception of academic freedom. <https://academeblog.org/2021/03/17/the-academic-freedom-alliance-a-qa-with-keith-whittington/>

More on Race and Censorship

A book challenge in Florida

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2021/05/10/ghost-boys-police/>

And more book challenges

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/11/opinion/censorship-domestic-violence-book.html>

The larger pattern of book challenges

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/books/american-library-association-banned-books.html>

Four states restrict teaching about race

<https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/four-states-have-placed-legal-limits-on-how-teachers-can-discuss-race-more-may-follow/2021/05>

Censoring student expression about race

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/09/us/black-lives-matter-shirt-oklahoma-school.html>

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

Via Videoconference
April 10, 2021

Present:

Peggy Adair, secretary, legislative liaison
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
Todd Schlechte, president, webmaster, representing Nebraska Library Association
Rod Wagner, treasurer, representing Nebraska Center for the Book
Farley Adair, guest participant, representing all creatures great and small

MINUTES

President Todd Schlechte called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Wagner, to approve minutes of the AFCON board meeting held on March 13, 2021. Motion carried on a voice vote.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Wagner submitted the treasurer's report via email. Balance on hand as of April 9, 2021, is \$2,966.57.

NEWSLETTER: Deadline for articles to be published in the June edition of the *Sentinel* is May 24, 2021.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Adair submitted via email an update on 2021 legislative bills pertinent to academic freedom. Discussion followed. Adair will continue to monitor bills as they move through the process and will report any notable actions to the board.

ANNUAL MEETING: The board discussed ideas for annual meeting topics, including how "fake news" affects academic freedom, a current Supreme Court case regarding student speech rights off-campus, and the controversy surrounding establishing new health curriculum

standards in Nebraska schools. The board will wait to see how these issues develop before making a final determination on the annual meeting topic.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Schlechte sent a letter on behalf of AFCON to the Nebraska State Board of Education in support of proposed curriculum standards on health education.

POLICY COORDINATOR: Moshman submitted via email a discussion of a case before the Sixth Circuit regarding a professor's free speech rights in the classroom. Moshman also provided more information on the newly-formed Academic Freedom Alliance, a group focused on the academic freedom of college faculty.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS:

Nebraska Center for the Book – Wagner reported nominations are open for "One Book One Nebraska." Nominations may be made on the Nebraska Center for the Book website. Deadline is June 15, 2021.

Wagner also reported the annual Nebraska Book Awards competition is open for entries on the Nebraska Center for the Book website. Deadline is June 30, 2021.

Nebraska Library Association - Schlechte reported the NLA is planning for a hybrid conference in October, with a virtual pre-conference meeting, one virtual conference day, and one in-person conference day.

There being no further business, the AFCON board meeting adjourned at 10:47 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Peggy Adair, secretary

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

Via Videoconference
May 8, 2021

Present:

Peggy Adair, secretary, legislative liaison
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
Todd Schlechte, president, webmaster, representing Nebraska Library Association
Rod Wagner, treasurer, representing Nebraska Center for the Book
Vicki Wood, director at large
Shee Covarrubias, guest
Dave Herbener, guest
Wyatt Packard, guest

MINUTES

President Todd Schlechte called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

MINUTES: A motion was made by Moshman, second by Wagner, to approve minutes of the AFCON board meeting held on April 10, 2021. Motion carried on a voice vote.

TREASURER'S REPORT: Wagner submitted the treasurer's report via email. Balance on hand as of May 6, 2021, is \$3,019.73

SPECIAL ITEM: Guest speakers presented background information and current status of events surrounding the apparent banning of *Something Happened in our Town* in the Papillion La Vista public school district. AFCON board members and guests discussed possible strategies and next steps.

NEWSLETTER: The AFCON board agreed by consensus to devote the June issue of the *Sentinel* to the systemic problems exposed by the censorship of *Something Happened in our Town* in Papillion La Vista public schools. Editor Moshman requested articles be submitted as soon as possible, and no later than May 20, 2021.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Adair submitted via email an update on 2021 legislative bills pertinent to academic freedom.

ANNUAL MEETING: The board discussed "censorship and academic freedom in elementary schools" as a possible topic for the annual meeting. The board discussed holding the annual meeting in conjunction with Banned Books Week in September.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT: Schlechte reported he has been working with a number of organizations to develop a coordinated response to the Papillion La Vista public school censorship issue.

POLICY COORDINATOR: Moshman reported Westside High School administrators possibly overreacted to a student reenactment of the murder of George Floyd. Moshman indicated the circumstances are murky, and he will report if anything further develops.

Moshman reported the US Supreme Court is close to ruling on whether a student can be punished for social media content written and posted off school grounds.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS: Nebraska School Library Association – Kari Bulgrin reported the NSLA has posted an advocacy tool kit on their website to use as a guide for advocating against a proposed change to Rule 10 that could substantially reduce the number of school librarians.

Nebraska Library Association - Schlechte reported the NLA has developed a statement in response to the situation in Papillion La Vista public schools. The statement has been approved by the NLA executive board and should be released sometime next week.

There being no further business, the AFCON board meeting adjourned at 11:37 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Peggy Adair, secretary



AFCON

www.academicfreedomnebraska.org

The Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska was founded in 1988 to promote intellectual freedom in Nebraska education and research, including freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas.

*** **

AFCON Board of Directors

Todd Schlechte, President and Webmaster
Robert Haller, President-elect
John Bender, Immediate Past President
Peggy Adair, Secretary and Legislative Liaison
Rod Wagner, Treasurer
David Moshman, Policy Coordinator and
Newsletter Editor
Kari Bulgrin
Nancy Comer
Laurie Thomas Lee
Vicki Wood
Linda Parker, ex officio, Archivist

From the AFCON Constitution, Article I:

The purpose of AFCON shall be to promote academic freedom in Nebraska, defined as intellectual freedom in educational and research contexts. This includes freedoms of belief and expression and access to information and ideas. In pursuit of this general goal, AFCON shall:

1. support application of the First Amendment in academic contexts, including schools, colleges, universities, and libraries.
2. educate Nebraskans in and out of academic settings, citizens and professionals, parents and students about the meaning and value of intellectual freedom, intellectual diversity, mutual respect, open communication, and uninhibited pursuit of knowledge, including the role of these ideals in academic contexts and in democratic self-government.
3. assist students, teachers, librarians, researchers, and others confronted with censorship, indoctrination, or suppression of information or ideas in academic settings.
4. act as liaison among groups in the State of Nebraska that support academic freedom.

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 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.

<https://www.academicfreedomnebraska.org/join-afcon.html>

The AFCON Sentinel is the newsletter of the Academic Freedom Coalition of Nebraska, published bimonthly in February, April, June, August, October, and December. Unless otherwise indicated, articles represent the views of the authors.

Editor: David Moshman
email: dmoshman1@unl.edu