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Facts about library books in Duval County Public Schools

👤 [Tracy Pierce and Lauren Ricks](#) / 🕒 February 17, 2023 / 📁 [District](#)

(Editor's note: This post will be updated regularly to reflect the most recent number of books that have been reviewed and approved.)

Feb. 17, 2023 – Books about Roberto Clemente and Hank Aaron from the Essential Voices collection are among approximately **10,000 books** that have been reviewed and approved through the new state-required book review process.

This review process and the status of library books were the subject of conversation and misinformation that appeared in media and social media over the last few weeks.

Much of this misinformation was due to two separate but interdependent topics:

1. The purchase of almost 1,300 books from Perfection Learning (including almost 180 books from their Essential Voices Collection)
2. The current effort to review all media center and classroom library books, which is now required under state law.

This Team Duval News article will address both topics comprehensively to help clarify the misinformation that has spread.

Topic One: Books from Perfection Learning

1. The district purchased almost 1,300 titles in 2021. When we received that order, more than 1,100 titles went directly to the classrooms.
2. The order included almost 180 book titles from the Essential Voices collection, which we purchased to increase diversity of writers, characters, topics, and viewpoints in our classroom libraries.
3. When we received those books, we quickly became aware that the delivery included titles we did not order. We collected those books from schools and held them in district storage until our media specialists and others could review them. (Note: We have two media

specialists at the district level, and their primary responsibility is to support school instruction).

4. When we reviewed the books, we sent 105 titles from this diverse collection to classrooms last fall.
5. We sent 47 book titles back to Perfection Learning. Fourteen of these were sent back because we didn't order them. Others returned were titles that we ordered but upon review, we determined they would not comply with new legislation or were not appropriate for elementary aged children.
6. We held 27 titles as we awaited state guidance to determine the appropriate grade levels and placement (classroom library or media center) for these books.
7. Media specialists received training from the Florida Department of Education in January 2023 after returning from winter break.
8. As of February 13, 2023, all 27 of those titles have been reviewed and approved for designated grade levels, including the books about Roberto Clemente and Hank Aaron.

Topic Two: State-required review of classroom libraries

1. State law now requires that every book in our classroom libraries and school media centers be reviewed by certified media specialists.
2. Since the law passed, our small team of certified media specialists (about 54 across all schools and the district) have taken on the task of reviewing more than 1.6 million titles.
3. Based on state training on multiple laws dealing with gender and racial ideology in books, we are reviewing for three things:
 - a. Material which could be considered pornographic is not allowed. State trainers reminded our team throughout their presentation that this is punishable as a third-degree felony and that reviewers should "err on the side of caution."
 - b. Material which could be considered instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity is expressly forbidden in state law for students in grades K-3.
 - c. Material that could violate Florida Statute 1006.31(2)(d) and 1003.42(3) which, among other requirements, includes material that might describe a person or people as "inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously, solely by virtue of his or her race or sex."

(Sidenote on item c. above: Since Dr. Greene arrived in 2018, the district has invested more than \$1 million in classroom books from diverse authors and about diverse groups of people. Our goal was—and continues to be—to put books in the hands of children in which they can see themselves and learn from a broad array of perspectives. What that now means is that we have thousands of titles that we must review to ensure our teachers do not unintentionally violate Florida Statutes.)

4. We did direct teachers to temporarily reduce their classroom library collections to titles that were previously approved while waiting for media specialists to curate a more expansive list of approved titles. However, at no time should a classroom have been without reading resources. At all times, students should have had access to state approved books, already approved civics literacy books, Benchmark Advance small group books, Reader's Theatre, and extensive online resources in our curriculum.
5. We did have a small number of principals interpret directions and guidance more intensely, out of an abundance of caution. We have provided additional guidance to those leaders and they have appropriately adjusted their message to teachers. In their defense, the state training also stressed the accountability of the school principal with respect to the books and materials made available to students.

6. We informed principals clearly that media centers should not be closed. However, because we need all certified media specialists to review books, hours of media centers open to students, along with the availability of media specialists to support teachers, has been considerably reduced in some schools.
7. Through this process, we now have almost **10,000** book titles approved for classroom use, including aforementioned books about Roberto Clemente and Hank Aaron. In addition to our 2021 order from Perfection Learning, we already had multiple titles in classroom libraries and media centers about these historic figures, as well as dozens of books about Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks and other icons of the Civil Rights movement.
8. Another new requirement is creating a searchable, online database of all elementary classroom library books for each of our schools so that parents and the public can see all titles available to students. We also have a process and a committee that will review books if they are challenged by a member of the public. All of this is required by law and adds to the effort and time it will take to comply with the law.

Duval County Public Schools will continue this intensive process of reviewing books both to comply with state laws and to ensure teachers and school leaders do not have to worry about jeopardizing their career because a book may be construed to be in violation of Florida law.

As an educational institution, the district's main goal is this: To help children learn to read.

There are thousands of books we can use to do that, and the district will take the time and make the effort to ensure our students and teachers have access to a diverse, legally compliant set of books.

CATEGORY DISTRICT



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