



To: Superintendent Kent Pekel, Ed.D., and the Directors of the Rochester School Board  
From: Rochester Pride  
Date: January 10, 2025

Subject: Harmful Impact of Removing "The Rainbow Parade" from Elementary School Media Centers

Dear Superintendent Pekel and Members of the Rochester School Board,

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding Dr. Pekel's decision to remove the book "The Rainbow Parade" from the shelves of Rochester Public Schools' elementary school media centers. While we acknowledge and appreciate Dr. Pekel's stated commitment to inclusivity and his personal understanding of the importance of representing LGBTQIA+ lives, we believe that this decision will ultimately be detrimental to the very students you seek to protect, particularly those who identify as LGBTQIA+ or have family members who do.

While Dr. Pekel's memo expresses support for including books that celebrate LGBTQIA+ lives; the removal of "The Rainbow Parade" contradicts that statement. It sends a message that LGBTQIA+ representation is acceptable only when it conforms to specific, narrow standards deemed "appropriate" by a single individual, effectively silencing certain voices and experiences.

LGBTQIA+ children, like all children, deserve to see themselves and their families reflected in the books they read. "The Rainbow Parade" is fundamentally about the joy and importance of being true to oneself and celebrating diversity. It offers a positive and celebratory portrayal of an LGBTQIA+ event, providing crucial validation and affirmation. Removing it from the shelves limits student's access to literature that reflects their lived experiences, making them feel isolated and invisible. This decision will continue to perpetuate the idea that being openly LGBTQIA+ and expressing yourself as such should still be considered widely shameful and only take place behind closed doors.

For non-LGBTQIA+ children, books like "The Rainbow Parade" offer opportunities to learn about and develop empathy for people from diverse backgrounds. Removing this book limits their exposure to different family structures and experiences, hindering their ability to become understanding and accepting adults.

The near-unanimous recommendation of the library materials review committee to keep the book on the shelves demonstrates that a diverse group of professionals, including librarians and

educators, found the book to be age-appropriate and valuable. Overruling their expertise based on a narrow interpretation of "appropriateness" undermines their professional judgment and the established review process.

In response to a concerned parent who opposed this book ban, Dr. Pekel cited chatgpt as a source that helped to inform his opinion about why this book was inappropriate based on depictions of leather outfits. It is disappointing that as an educator, Dr. Pekel chose to rely on chatgpt rather than listening to the professional judgment of his staff and the lived experiences of members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Additionally, Dr. Pekel sharing that he grew up with a gay father, in a time when having a gay parent was widely considered shameful, does not absolve him of his own personal bias that is being shown in this decision.

Dr. Pekel's decision to overrule these qualified professionals sets a dangerous precedent, suggesting that any book depicting or discussing LGBTQIA+ themes might be deemed "inappropriate" based on his sole discretion. This could lead to a chilling effect, where librarians and educators self-censor and avoid selecting books that represent LGBTQIA+ lives for fear of controversy, further limiting access to inclusive literature.

The mission of our schools should be to create inclusive and supportive learning environments where all students feel safe, valued, and represented. Removing "The Rainbow Parade" from the library shelves undermines this mission and sends a harmful message to LGBTQIA+ children and their families. We urge you to reconsider this decision and reinstate "The Rainbow Parade" to the shelves of our elementary school media centers. We should be working together to ensure that all our students have access to a diverse range of books that reflect the beautiful tapestry of human experience, including those of LGBTQIA+ individuals. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

The Rochester Pride Board of Directors

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