



Buckeye Valley Local School District

Where Tradition Meets Innovation

Buckeye Valley Local School District
679 Coover Road Delaware, OH 43015
740-369-8735

Aug 12, 2022

David Carey
Deputy Legal Director
American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio Foundation
1108 City Park Avenue, Suite 203
Columbus, OH 43206

Dear Mr. Carey,

I am writing in response to your letter dated July 14, 2022 concerning the events surrounding the visit by Mr. Jason Tharp to Buckeye Valley West Elementary. I assumed my role as Superintendent effective August 1, 2022 and immediately began gathering information so that I could respond to your letter and the concerns raised therein.

In your letter, you urged three actions to be taken by the district. I will address each of the actions you urged below.

First, you urged that "BVLS reverse its ban on Mr. Tharp's book, and replace any copies that were removed from the library at Buckeye Valley West."

I want to assure you that there is no such ban in place regarding Mr. Tharp's book. It is true that we don't have a copy of "It's Okay to Be a Unicorn!" in our library inventory, but that is because we have never had a copy in the collection. The one library-bound copy that our media specialist used in preparation for the author visit was actually borrowed from the Delaware County library system and remains in their collection.

We believe that there are copies of the book in question in individual teacher classroom libraries within the building. Additionally, Mr. Tharp sold as many as 400 copies of his books to BV West elementary students, staff and family during his visit to our school, so we have reason to believe that his book is indeed widely available to many students, staff and parents. We do have three other books by Mr. Tharp in our library collection and will quite likely see other works of his added over the years as part of our normal refresh and expansion of our collection(s).

Your second and third requests were closely related to one another.

Secondly, you urged that we “adopt and enforce a policy preventing discrimination on the basis of viewpoint in library book acquisition and retention, where the book contains no age-inappropriate content” and Thirdly, and closely related, you urged that BVLS “adopt and enforce a similar policy with regard to guest speakers.”

The Buckeye Valley Local Schools use as the template for our district policies updates the model policies developed by the Ohio School Board Association (OSBA). We believe that there already exist several district policies that relate to the concerns you raise in your second and third request.

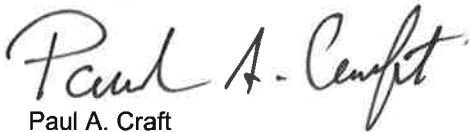
Specifically, policies INB, IFD, IB, IIA, IIAA, and IIAC provide guidance on the selection of curriculum and educational materials, academic freedom, etc.

The district leadership will continue to review policy templates from OSBA that may apply to these types of situations. However, the request that the board establish that there be no “discrimination on the basis of viewpoint in library book acquisition and retention, where the book contains no age-inappropriate content” seems problematic. Making judgments about content is something that we trust that our educational professionals can and should do in the course of their duties. Would eliminating viewpoint discrimination mean that an age-appropriate holocaust denial book would be something that we would have to accept? Or a guest speaker providing an age-appropriate flat-earth theory presentation? The second and third order effects of adopting the language urged is something that I am uncomfortable recommending to our board.

With that said, the BVLS administration commits to ensuring that our library collections and guest speakers will be selected with a view toward expanding the worldview, education and experiences of our students in ways that prepare them for success in an increasingly interconnected world and in alignment with our district mission and the district Portrait of a Graduate developed by a broad range of our district stakeholders.

In conclusion, I want to acknowledge that the situation regarding this author visit could and should have been handled in a more deliberative and collaborative way. We are glad that the actual visit seemed to go extremely well. As a parent of a Buckeye Valley West 4th grade student who attended the third of Mr. Tharp's three presentations, I can tell you that my own child enjoyed his presentation and message. In my new role as the Superintendent for the Buckeye Valley Local Schools, please rest assured that my team, the board of education, and I will work hard to ensure that all students, families and staff, and any visitors invited into our schools, feel welcome, safe and respected going forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul A. Craft". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Paul A. Craft
Superintendent
Buckeye Valley Local Schools