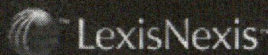


Anaya, Rudolfo - "Bless me Ultima" (see also Literature - Banned Books)



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SECTION: NEWS; Pg. 6A

LENGTH: 508 words

HEADLINE: SUPERINTENDENT APOLOGIZES FOR PULLING BOOK;
NORWOOD CHIEF HADN'T READ NOVEL OR BOARD'S POLICY

BYLINE: Ellen Miller, Special to the News, Margo Roberts of the Norwood Post contributed to this report.

BODY:

Norwood Schools Superintendent Bob Conder apologized to students, parents, staff and residents Friday for pulling about two dozen copies of the book **Bless Me, Ultima** from a freshman English class.

But 15-20 students still staged an all-day sit-in in the school gym, taking turns reading from the book, which has been recommended by first lady Laura Bush and was selected last year for Mesa County's community-read project, to protest Conder's actions.

"We stayed all day to prove the point and say it won't happen again," said freshman Skyler Hollinbech, 15. "It was a violation of our rights."

Conder said none of the students who demonstrated would be punished or counted as absent from class, and he offered to personally pay for repurchasing the books if a new committee to review content approves the book's reinstatement.

Conder didn't return telephone calls for comment. He delivered his letter of apology to the Norwood Post.

Students had planned to start the sit-in at 8 a.m. Friday, but the time was pre-empted by Conder, who called a school assembly.

Hollinbech said Conder talked to the students and then took questions - "and I'm glad he did, even though tempers flared."

The dust-up over the book, a critically acclaimed novel about coming of age in the Chicano culture, began about two weeks ago when two parents, John and Rhonda Oliver, complained about profanity in the book.

In response, Conder confiscated all of the copies of the book from the ninth-grade English classroom and gave them to the couple, who "tossed them in the trash," John Oliver said.

"We put them in the trash can and it goes to a landfill," Oliver said. "It was just our way of knowing it would be gone."

In his letter, Conder apologized for pulling the book "without enough information on the content of the book," without reading it himself and without reading the school board's policy regarding controversial issues.

That policy, Conder wrote, calls for "consideration . . . of a fair and balanced presentation of each of the major aspects or sides of the issue."

He said he has created a "broad-based" committee to review the policy on teaching about controversial issues, to review current curriculum and to make recommendations.

That committee, he said, will be asked to review **Bless Me, Ultima**.

A copy was left in the school library after the others were tossed for students "who choose to read it," Conder said.

Stephanie Adams, a 16-year- old sophomore, said Friday she was glad Conder met with them "even though he was dodging our questions. He wrote an apology and we appreciate that."

"We're going to get **Ultima** back," she said. "If we don't, we'll take it from here."

The book's author, Rudolfo Anaya of the University of New Mexico, told the Norwood Post that the freedom of democracy is learned in school systems.

"Parents have the right to monitor what their children read; however, they do not have the right to tell others what they can read," he said.

"That is un-American, undemocratic and uneducational."

NOTES:

Margo Roberts of the Norwood Post contributed to this report.

LOAD-DATE: February 5, 2005

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