

## OSSTF/FEESO Statement on Book Bans, Democracy, and Public Education

Public education plays a fundamental role in building and sustaining a society able to collectively confront and overcome the myriad challenges we currently face. From income inequality and climate change to the rise of authoritarian and hate-fueled movements, we need a robust public education system now more than ever. Public education is deeply incompatible with censorship. This is particularly true of censorship in the form of efforts to ban or restrict access to books and other materials that celebrate diverse lives and histories, namely those of Black and racialized communities, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities.

The *Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation* (OSSTF/FEESO) represents over 60,000 education workers and teachers across Ontario. We are committed to public education, freedom of expression, and the right of every student to see themselves, their lived experiences, and their communities reflected in their classrooms and their school libraries through literature that celebrates diversity, reflects the lived experiences of all learners, and challenges all forms of oppression. We are very concerned with the increasingly organized efforts to ban a growing list of books and other learning materials. Censorship robs students of the opportunity to learn how to navigate an increasingly complex world where difference is – and should be – the norm rather than the exception. Censorship hinders the ability of students to think critically about the world around them by not allowing them to be exposed to diverse and even conflicting perspectives. Moreover, banning books sends a clear signal to students about whose lives are worth celebrating and whose lives are undesirable or, at worst, disposable. This is anathema to the principles of public education.

**Therefore, OSSTF/FEESO strongly supports the right of all students be free to read and be exposed to the widest possible range of cultures, histories, and perspectives and strongly opposes all campaigns and efforts to ban or restrict books**

### Note

Notwithstanding OSSTF/FEESO's belief in the importance of the professional judgement of teachers in selecting teaching materials and developing library collections, all Ontario teachers must comply with the duties of a teacher which are set out in s.264(1) of the *Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2. These duties include using and permitting to be used as a textbook, only books which are approved either by the Minister of Education or approved by the School Board, as set out in the *Act*.