

# ACLU of Virginia

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February 11, 2013

**Via Electronic Mail**

Fairfax County Public School Board  
8115 Gatehouse Road  
Falls Church, VA 22042  
SchoolBoardMembers@fcps.edu

Dear School Board Members:

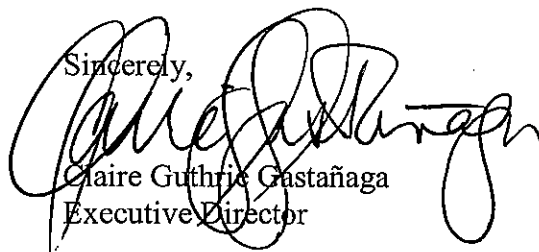
The ACLU of Virginia was pleased to learn that Fairfax County Public Schools have recently rejected two attempts at censorship in the school system, choosing instead to reinforce the values of free expression and free thought in the schools and the community.

First, we thank you for turning aside an effort to remove Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* from the English curriculum. Guiding students to read and think in outside their comfort zone is an essential aspect of secondary education. Books like *Beloved* not only teach students to appreciate classic literature, but provide them with an intimate understanding of American history and help them develop the faculties of empathy and critical thinking that are essential preparation for responsible citizenship and leadership. Thank you for continuing to provide such educational opportunities to Fairfax County students.

Second, we commend Superintendent Jack Dale for permitting the Republican Women of Clifton to hold a meeting on school property after instructional hours at which a guest speaker will air controversial ideas about Islam. When community members offended by the subject matter asked the Superintendent to rescind approval for the meeting, he denied the request. In the true spirit of the First Amendment, the Superintendent declined to deviate from a policy of equal access to school facilities. Such evenhanded treatment is the only way to ensure a vital marketplace of ideas.

We applaud both the School Board and the Superintendent for their staunch defense of free speech in these two matters.

Sincerely,



Claire Guthrie Gastañaga  
Executive Director