

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair and Members
Knox County Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Jon Rysewyk, Superintendent

DATE: May 26, 2026

RE: *Roots* Decision

I am writing to inform you that I have made the decision to return *Roots* by Alex Haley to circulation in KCS school libraries—effective immediately.

The initial decision to remove *Roots* from circulation was in no way a commentary on the historical, cultural, or literary value of the novel. Under state law—specifically the Age-Appropriate Materials Act (AAMA)—districts are obligated to restrict library access to material or content deemed inappropriate under the statutes listed in [T.C.A. § 49-6-3803](#). As you know, a passage of *Roots* was recently elevated to our district review committee to assess the potential presence of content deemed inappropriate under the law.

While I firmly believe the the district review committee applied the parameters established in the AAMA consistently and in good faith—using the same process they have applied to every book reviewed under the guidelines of the 2024 amendment—the May 12, 2026 determination to remove *Roots* has weighed heavily on me, as I know it has on many members of our community.

On Friday, May 15, our senior staff shared that we planned to work with the Law Department to determine what options, if any, might be available for reconsideration under state law. I also spent last week consulting independently with a number of attorneys to review the content identified for AAMA consideration. The goal of these conversations was to broaden my perspective and understanding of the law, and specifically its application to *Roots*.

Like our staff, the legal experts I consulted with have wrestled seriously with this question. The AAMA requires staff to apply the criminal definitions for “nudity, descriptions or depictions of sexual excitement, sexual conduct, excess violence, or sadomasochistic abuse” as defined in [T.C.A. § 39-17-901](#) when evaluating the appropriateness of a book for library circulation. While the definitions provided appear straightforward in nature, there were discrepancies even among the legal experts I consulted regarding their interpretation of the relevant sections of the Tennessee Code and the referenced terms as they applied to *Roots*.

Removing any book from circulation is—and should be—an immense decision. Our intent will always be to err on the side of access, which is the decision I have made with regard to *Roots*.

This has been a complex and layered decision. As a result, staff will be prepared to present at the June 1 Board Work Session on the AAMA and how the law has and will be applied moving forward.

In the meantime, I want to remind you that there are multiple opportunities available to parents or guardians—as well as members of the Knox County community—who may have concerns regarding library materials. Board Policy I-212 outlines the process through which books may be formally challenged, regardless of AAMA considerations. Our school librarians also work closely with parents and guardians, and are always willing to make student-specific accommodations regarding access to books or materials in school libraries.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to you and to the Knox County community for participating in this important conversation. Decisions like these should always be made with gravity and intentionality, and that is exactly what this opportunity has provided.