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Jaclyn Peiser is a reporter for *The Washington Post*. The article appeared in March 2022.

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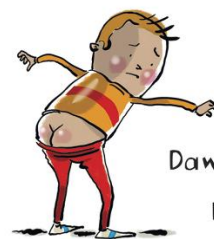
An assistant principal read the children's book *I Need a New Butt!* to second-graders. He was fired.

When a guest who was scheduled to read to second-graders¹ over Zoom² this month didn't show up, Toby Price, the assistant principal³ at a Mississippi elementary school, improvised.

Price's boss at Gary Road Elementary School suggested Price read to the students, so he reached for one of his favorite children's books: *I Need a New Butt!* written by Dawn McMillan and illustrated by Ross Kinnaird.



"It's a funny, silly book," Price, 46, said in an interview with *The Washington Post*. "I'm a firm believer that... if kids see that books can be funny and silly, they'll hang around long enough to see all the other cool things that books can be."



Dawn McMillan
Illustrated by
Ross Kinnaird

The students "thought it was hilarious," Price recalled. But the superintendent⁴ for the Hinds County School District near Jackson, Miss.⁵, did not, and about an hour after the event, Price was placed on administrative leave⁶. Two days later, on March 4, he was fired.

The superintendent, Delesicia Martin, who did not respond to *The Post's* request for comment, wrote in Price's termination letter⁷ that he "showed a lack of professionalism and impaired judgment⁸" because "the topics described in this book were inappropriate."

Now, Price is fighting to overturn the district's decision. His efforts have garnered⁹ overwhelming support, he said, with parents, current and former students, and strangers speaking out and donating to a GoFundMe¹⁰ so he can pay for a lawyer and continue to support his family.

Price's firing is the latest flash point¹¹ over books in schools, though most of the conflicts have been over those that reference race and sexual orientation. In November, the American Library

¹ (her) 7-8 årige

² online videokonferenceplatform

³ *assistant principal*: viceskoleinspektør

⁴ skoledirektør

⁵ Mississippi, delstat i USA

⁶ *was placed on administrative leave*: blev fritaget for tjeneste

⁷ *termination letter*: afskedigelsesbrev

⁸ *impaired judgment*: dårlig dømmekraft

⁹ opnået

¹⁰ platform, der giver folk mulighed for at indsamle penge

¹¹ *flash point*: stridspunkt

25 Association called the rate at which books are being challenged¹² “unprecedented¹³.” In several states where new laws are dictating how teachers discuss race in schools, many educators are scared they could lose their jobs over one misstep.

Price said he fears his situation could set a “scary precedent”¹⁴ for teachers in his district. He worries educators will wonder if they have to get approval for every book they read to their students. [...]

30 The events leading to Price’s firing began March 2, when he organized a Zoom event for second-graders at the Byram, Miss., elementary school. The gathering was to celebrate *Read Across America Day*, [...] a day dedicated to encouraging children to read. The plan was to have a special guest read a book to them.

35 When the guest did not arrive, Price’s boss asked him to read to the students. Price said the second-graders loved the book, which is about a boy who thinks he needs a new butt after noticing his has a large crack.

Fifteen minutes after the event, Price said, the principal at his school called him into her office. According to Price, she told him that he shouldn’t have chosen that book and that parents might complain. Soon after the meeting, he said, he was told the superintendent wanted to see him at the 40 district office immediately.

“They kind of just let me have it¹⁵,” Price said. “She said, ‘Is this the kind of thing you find funny and silly? Fart and butt and bulletproof butts?’ And I said, ‘Yeah, I did until I walked in.’”

On March 4, Price was called back to the district office and fired, he said.

45 Price said he was blindsided¹⁶ by the sudden decision, noting that he has never had any disciplinary issues. Not only does he love working with children, but he also has a family to support, he said. [...]

Since the firing, Price said, he has not been allowed back into his office to collect his personal items. [...]

50 Price said he hasn’t heard of any complaints about the book from parents and noted that members of the parent-teacher organization wrote to him offering their support. Former students have also spoken out, including one who wrote a thread on Twitter about how “amazing” Price was at his job.

“The man absolutely loved reading and actively encouraged it,” the former student wrote. “Even lending books from his own office for kids to read.” [...]

Price said he doesn’t regret his decision to read *I Need a New Butt!*

“Kids need silly books,” Price said. “The world is too harsh a place.”

55 As of early Friday, the book was No. 6 on Amazon’s children’s book *Best Sellers* list.

(2022)

¹² (her) indberettet til censur

¹³ uden fortilfælde

¹⁴ set a “scary precedent”: udvikle sig til et ”skræmmende eksempel”

¹⁵ let me have it: gav mig klar besked

¹⁶ chokeret