

Letter of Concern

From: Todd H. Gazda, Ed.D., JD

TO: Bonnie Manchester

CC: [18 others]

Date: Wed, Nov 27, 2019 at 9:12 AM

Hi Bonnie.

I have received your letter and packet regarding library books in circulation that some staff at Baird find concerning. I have included them in this email as well so that they are aware of the process we have in place to ensure such concerns are addressed.

Also, since my name is mentioned in the document you provided, seemingly in support of your concerns (or at least one), I thought it was important to clarify that conversation.

When you brought your first concern to me, I stated in the course of that conversation that I understood your concern, not that I shared it. The conversation raised some questions for me that I most certainly wanted to look into further. Additionally and by way of further clarification, when twice during the course of that conversation you asked if I felt that the book was inappropriate, I declined to respond to your question both times. The reason for that was that I do not formulate an opinion or make a decision on the basis of another person's assertions without an investigation of my own. With respect to books, that is particularly the case when I've only been shown excerpts and haven't reviewed the complete work.

As an example of this, the second book you showed me photo copied excerpts of because you felt that it was inappropriate I decided to buy and read on my own. That book, "Kiss Number 8", provided a very different picture when those excerpts were read in context.

Although an avid reader, I do not typically read graphic novels particularly those geared towards teenage girls. However, by halfway through the book I found myself absolutely riveted. The work did an exceptional job of dealing with a complex and yes controversial issue.

Was there alcohol and cigarette use in the book? Yes. However, in neither instance was it displayed as a good thing. The main character got sick after drinking and had consequences imposed. The character who smoked cigarettes ended up throwing the pack on the ground while crushing it saying they were disgusting'

Does the main character kiss other teens and explore her sexual identity? Yes. Do I think that the book was appropriate for middle school? I don't know. However, I do know that we have a process to answer that question which involves a committee of educators appointed to make that determination so that no one person's values or beliefs (even mine) determine what is or is not appropriate.

As Becky outlined when you met with her last week, we have a school committee approved process to utilize when individuals have concerns about the suitability of books used in our schools. Typically we find that parents utilize this process, but nothing precludes it from being used if a teacher has a concern about books being utilized by a colleague in their class or as in this case in circulation in the library collection.

As the procedures articulates, and Becky explained to you, please fill out the appropriate form which Becky provided to you for each of the books that you are concerned about. Then, as outlined in the policy I will appoint a committee comprised of a school committee member, administrator, (in this case Stacy), a librarian (in this case Jameson) and two teachers. This group will review the material identified on the forms and make a determination as to whether or not it meets the parameters of our school committee policy for the selection of library material and is, or is not, appropriate for the middle school library. The committee will then submit a written report of the findings, reasoning and ultimate decision.

I am disappointed to hear that this situation has created tension and division among the staff at the Middle School. The Middle School staff has worked too hard over the last 4 years to heal past divisions and come together as a staff and school community. I only hope we can use the process outlined in our school committee policy to resolve this situation and move forward in a productive manner.

As soon as you submit the forms I will pull that committee together and begin the process.

Sincerely,

Todd

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