



HEMPFIELD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

ADMINISTRATION

COMMITTED TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

April 5, 2022

A recent topic around the country and at Hempfield Area School District (HASD) is book challenges. Recently at HASD, following a parent's request that two books be considered for re-evaluation or removal from the high school library collection, the administration implemented the approved procedures as outlined in the District's policy.

The policy includes an informal and formal challenge if needed as explained below:

- First, an "informal" meeting with the parent, principal, and school librarian is required to discuss the concerns, the District's selection process, and the value or intended educational purpose of the book.
- If the parent is not satisfied with the response, a "formal" challenge may be initiated. This includes forming a committee of librarians, administrators, a teacher, a parent, and a student. The parent challenging the book is a participant as well. Each committee member reads the book in its entirety and prepares to respond to questions pertaining to the book's purpose, authenticity, appropriateness, and content.

In the recent challenge of two books at HASD, the result was the committee approved both books to remain available in the high school library collection.

Following the outcome, several board members requested the policy be reviewed to determine if any modifications could be made to address the concerns about the make-up of the committee raised at recent board meetings. The policy committee met March 11, 2022, and is considering modifying the committee members to include more parents and possibly students.

Here are some of the suggestions that were made during the policy committee meeting on March 11 as a means of finding common ground on this issue:

- One suggestion was to have books "of concern" located in a specific section of the library. The challenges of this suggestion is that the decision of what book is "of concern" to some is subjective, and it is impossible for librarians to read each and every book of the collection. High school librarian Mrs. Nicky Owens stated, "what one person considers inappropriate may be a beloved classic to another." Students who may wish to read a book may feel shamed by seeking a book from a designated section on a particular topic, perhaps on an issue that a student may deal with on a daily basis. Additionally, students have access to an eBook and audiobook collection as well as print. The system does not restrict access to a title for one student, but rather removes the title from access for all students.
- Another suggestion was to have parents choose to restrict their children from selecting books. A challenge for this is the high school library is an open area in which it would be impossible to police which students may pick up or check out a book—which again no librarian can read each and every book to identify which may be considered offensive to some.

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On Monday, April 4, 2022, a presentation was provided to the school board explaining the qualifications of the librarians and the processes of building a book collection. The librarians shared how parents can access the titles and descriptions of library book collections at each of the schools and the benefits of having shared conversations with children regarding book selection.

So where do we go from here? First and foremost, The Hempfield Area School Board of School Directors is NOT banning books. Rather, the process of policy development is being used to consider potential “common ground.” Any modifications will require consideration of remaining true to the following statement within the current policy: “No parent/guardian has the right to determine instructional reading, viewing, or listening material for students other than his/her own children.”

A future policy committee meeting will be scheduled to finalize the committee participants for future book challenges. In order for a policy like this to be changed, the policy must first be included on a board meeting agenda and approved for 30-day public review. Following the review period, a second motion is included for school board approval, as amended.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tammy S. Wolicki". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'T' and 'W'.

Dr. Tammy S. Wolicki
Superintendent of Schools