

Committee for the Reconsideration of Library Books

Section I: Conclusion Report

Committee Members

Willie Dickerson, Executive Director of Secondary Education, Chair of Committee
Sarah Jones, PTO Representative
Brian Bass, WCS Secondary School Principal
Jay Galbreath, WCS School Board member
Melissa Ralston, WCEA Representative

Structure and Process of Committee

The reconsideration committee was established by Superintendent Jason Golden in October 2022. Books were purchased and each committee member was given the books named in the complaint to read.

The complaint received from the complainant was twofold. First, there was an objection to five books being used as a part of the curriculum. Second, there was an objection to four books being a part of the library collections that students may select to read. This report addresses the second complaint.

The committee met on October 28, 2022, by Zoom to determine future meeting dates and the structure of our meetings. Following the meeting, the committee was sent a copy of the complaint that was filed with the attachments: Board policy 4.403, revised Board policy 4.403, Board policy 4.401, SOP 4.403, and the rubric for reconsideration committee. Included in the email was a list of agreed meeting dates. The committee decided to meet on November 10, November 14, December 1, and December 6 all at 3:00 p.m., December 9 at 10:00 a.m. and January 4 at 3:00p.m. We agreed to discuss Speak, Where the Crawdads Sing, and The Perks of Being a Wallflower on November 10. We agreed to have these read by November 7. Our deadline for reading Every Last Word (not asked to be removed from the library) and The Field Guide to The North American Teenager was December 1.

Due to changes in Board policy 4.403 and related state policy, the committee asked for the guidance of the legal department as to which policy we should use to guide our work. Legal met with the committee during the Nov. 10th meeting and again during our December 1st meeting. It was determined that the committee should use policy 4.403 because it was the existing policy when the complaint was received. The State Textbook committee met at the end of November to give guidance to school districts on library books. That and two subsequent meetings were postponed, and no guidance has been received to date.

Per policy 4.403, the committee met on December 6th with the complainant to hear his concerns about these books. The committee also met with the school's 10th-grade ELA curriculum team responsible for planning this assignment and selecting the books which gave students choice in the selection of an optional text. In addition to hearing from the complainant and teachers, the committee consulted with a variety of resources which included: recognized evaluative reviews of the books from several sources,

librarians in WCS, and the Secondary HS ELA curriculum specialist, who also attended several of the committee meetings.

The committee met for approximately **18+ hours in face-to-face or Zoom meetings** to complete the work. This time does not include the individual reading of the 5 books, nor does it include the compilation of the findings into the Conclusion Report.

Selection Process for Library Books in High Schools

School libraries exist to provide all students with a quality education that supports their intellectual, physical, emotional, and social development. Library Media Specialists in Williamson County Schools have been guided by local Board Policy 4.402 which for many years included the following considerations for all collections:

1. To provide materials that will enrich and support the curriculum and personal needs of the students, taking into consideration their varied interests, abilities, and learning styles;
2. To provide materials that will stimulate growth in factual knowledge, literary appreciation, aesthetic values, and ethical standards;
3. To provide a background of information which will enable pupils to make intelligent judgments in their daily lives;
4. To provide materials on opposing sides of controversial issues so that students may develop, under guidance, the practice of critical analysis;
5. To provide materials which realistically represent our pluralistic society and reflect the contributions made by these groups and individuals to our American heritage; and
6. To place principles above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in the selection of materials of the highest quality in order to assure a comprehensive media collection appropriate for the users.

They also consider the school curriculum, staff requests, student/parent suggestions, community demographics, peer-reviewed journals, national and regional award winners, and the balance within a collection. A Book Selection Team seeks out reviews from professional journals, especially noting those materials with starred reviews and noting the age of the recommended audience. They utilize respected sources of book jobbers such as Follett, PermaBound, Bound-to-Stay-Bound, and the Junior Library Guild. The librarian works within the site level budget to select and purchase books from a jobber with approval from the school principal. The books then enter the collection for circulation. Books that no longer meet the school's needs are removed from the collection when they are no longer relevant, current, of interest to students or in poor condition.

Librarians include books with sensitive content because those books can provide a safe format for parents to converse with their student about sensitive issues and because books can allow students to vicariously experience situations and prepare them for navigating their own future.

Students and parents are encouraged to discuss family standards in book selection so that the student can practice voluntary inquiry with their privilege of selecting a book for reading enjoyment and learning.

Complainant

When asked about what would you like your library/school to do about this work? The complainant checked and stated the following: Do not assign/lend it to my child; return it to the staff selection committee/department for re-evaluation; and remove books from class and library.

Recommendation of Committee

Without having clear guidance on how to determine the “level” of objectionable content or age appropriateness that would dictate the removal of a book from the library per State law; the committee recommendation is that all four books—Speak, Perks of Being a Wallflower, The Field Guide to the North American Teenager, and Where the Crawdads Sing—should not be removed from our high school libraries.

Section II: Library Book Review

Reviews taken from Booklist. Booklist is a book-review magazine that has been published by the American Library Association for more than 100 years and is widely viewed as offering the most reliable reviews to help libraries decide what to buy and to help library patrons and students decide what to read, view, or listen to.

Where the Crawdad Sings

Booklist (July 2018 (Vol. 114, No. 21))

Owens’ (Secrets of the Savanna, 2006) first novel is a leisurely, lyrical tale of a young woman growing up in isolation in the 1950s and 60s, in a marsh on the North Carolina coast. Kya is abandoned by her troubled mother when she is only six. Soon after, her four, much-older siblings leave, as does her alcoholic father a couple of years later. As Kya matures and teaches herself to be a naturalist, she is torn between two slightly older boys: kind, observant Tate and rascally, attractive Chase. Chase dies falling from a fire tower in his twenties, and the investigation of his possible murder, which alternates with the story of Kya’s coming-of-age, provides much of the novel’s suspense. Because the characters are painted in broad, unambiguous strokes, this is not so much a naturalistic novel as a mythic one, with its appeal rising from Kya’s deep connection to the place where she makes her home, and to all of its creatures.

Speak

Booklist (Vol. 96, No. 2 (September 15, 1999))

Gr. 8-12. Having broken up an end-of-summer party by calling the police, high-school freshman Melinda Sordino begins the school year as a social outcast. She’s the only person who knows the real reason behind

her call: she was raped at the party by Andy Evans, a popular senior at her school. Slowly, with the help of an eccentric and understanding art teacher, she begins to recover from the trauma, only to find Andy threatening her again. Melinda's voice is distinct, unusual, and very real as she recounts her past and present experiences in bitterly ironic, occasionally even amusing vignettes. In her YA fiction debut, Anderson perfectly captures the harsh conformity of high-school cliques and one teen's struggle to find acceptance from her peers. Melinda's sarcastic wit, honesty, and courage make her a memorable character whose ultimate triumph will inspire and empower readers.

Field Guide to the North American Teenager

Booklist (November 15, 2018 (Vol. 115, No. 6))

Grades 9-12. For Norris Kaplan, Austin, Texas—location of his mother's new professor gig—is the antithesis of his true home in Montreal, Canada. Gone are hockey hooligans and routinely spoken French, replaced by relentless heat and the ubiquitous orange of the UT Longhorns. Compounding these differences is the fact that Norris is a black Haitian Canadian kid stuck in cowboy country. He resolves to build a barrier of snark to keep everyone out until he can get back north, where he hopes to reunite with his estranged father. However, Norris doesn't count on falling head over heels for the devilishly mysterious, soulful, and fiery Aarti Puri. Philippe's protagonist is as acerbic as they come, tossing one-liners at breakneck speed. His repartee with other characters, especially his closest friends Liam and Maddie, is hilarious and engaging. These friendships are the most interesting aspect of the book, even

over the love story, which has a few twists along the way. Readers looking for a diverse, fun, coming-of-age tale need not look any further than this fantastic debut.

Perks of Being a Wallflower

Booklist (Vol. 95, No. 12 (February 15, 1999))

" Dear friend, I am writing to you because she said you listen and understand." In his letters to a never-identified person, 15-year-old Charlie's freshman high-school year (1991-92) and coming-of-age ring fresh and true. First-novelist Chbosky captures adolescent angst, confusion, and joy as Charlie reveals his innermost thoughts while trying to discover who he is and whom he is to become. Intellectually precocious, Charlie seems a tad too naive in many other ways, yet his reflections on family interactions, first date, drug experimentation, first sexual encounter, and regular participation in Rocky Horror Picture Show screenings are compelling. He vacillates between full involvement in the crazy course of his life and backing off completely. Eventually, he discovers that to be a whole person who knows how to be a real friend rather than a patsy, he must confront his past--and remember what his beloved, deceased Aunt Helen did to him. Charlie is a likable kid whose humor-laced trials and tribulations will please both adults and teens.

Every Last Word

Booklist (June 1, 2015 (Vol. 111, No. 19))

Grades 9-12. Stone's third YA novel is a thoughtful romance with a strong message about self-acceptance. On the surface, Samantha McAllister has it all—success in the pool as a competitive swimmer and a group of popular friends. But inside she struggles with a secret that she fears could unravel everything: her purely obsessional OCD. At the start of junior year, Sam meets Caroline, who helps her manage her obsessions and draws her into the secret Poet's Corner, where she meets AJ, whom she falls hard for, and who is equally falling for her. But now that she has found her tribe, does she need to keep up the ruse of being “normal”? This sensitive novel boasts strong characterizations and conflicts that many teens will relate to. She deftly grounds Sam's OCD support system with both her mother and therapist and gives readers an endearing romantic lead to root for. A twist toward the end will surprise many readers, yet what follows falls perfectly in line with the story's hopeful message. Eminently readable.

Relevant Tennessee Law

- TCA § 49-6-3803 Materials Review for Age-Appropriate Instructional Materials Act of 2022

Relevant U.S. Supreme Court Cases

- Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, 393 U.S. 503, 89 S.Ct. 733, 21 L.Ed.2d 731 (1969).
- Abrams v. United States, 250 U.S. 616, 40 S.Ct. 17, 63 L.Ed. 1173 (1919)
- Brown v. Louisiana, 383 U.S. 131, 86 S.Ct. 719, 15 L.Ed.2d 637 (1966)
- Bd. of Educ. v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982)
- Miller v. State of California, 413 U.S. 15 (1973)