

Good evening. Board Chair Thompson, Vice Chair Bain, Trustees, Superintendent Arnold. I am here tonight to speak in support of three books, *Pay it forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde, *The Fault in our Stars* by John Green and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. I would like to thank you for tabling these books until the teachers who use these books in their classrooms and I could be here to address any questions you may have regarding them.

Regarding *Pay it forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde, I'm not sure where the concerns lie for this book. In looking back at some of the comments made regarding the book, most references were to the adult version. The book in use in the middle schools is the Young Reader's Edition which edits out language and any inappropriate material that may be in the adult version. I have just finished reading the book and I came across no foul language or anything inappropriate within the pages of this book. I found it to be an uplifting story despite the tragedy that plays out near the end. The book is based on a true story about an extra credit assignment given to middle schoolers by a new teacher and the results of one particular student's attempt to change the world for the better. Some of the themes running through this book are: Perseverance, Kindness, Hope, Generosity, Forgiveness and Acceptance. I found this to be a book that would make kids think about their place in the world and how they can help make a difference.

Regarding *The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson, both books are used only by our 8th grade Honors ELA classes and have been used in our school for quite some time: *Speak* since 2017 and *The Fault in Our Stars* since 2019. These books are used for Lit Circles, which means only some in the class will read them as others may choose a different book. And parents are given the choice to Opt In or Opt Out of the reading of these books. Both books are set in the real world, with storylines that many teens face today.

*Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson is the story of a teenage girl who was assaulted at an end of summer party and who calls the police, but ends up fleeing the scene before they arrive. As she begins her Freshman year in high school, she is shunned by her friends as they learn she is the one who called the police. The story, however, is not so much about the assault (it is only mentioned twice and then only in the briefest of terms) but more about the impact it has on the main character and her unwillingness to speak up. It is definitely a good book to use for character study because of how she reacts and responds to those around her, especially her family, as they are blind to her pain. But it is her Art teacher who helps her find her voice allowing her to speak up and finally tell someone what happened.

*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green is the story of two teenagers battling cancer who meet up at a teen cancer support group. The book addresses the complexities of living with cancer in the 21st century and captures the emotions and physical struggles faced by the two main characters who are dealing with this illness. Not only does the story follow the two as they get to know one another and find friendship and love despite the significant challenges they face from their diagnoses, they learn to lean into each other which makes them both realize they are not alone in their battle. Some of the themes touched on in this book deal with: Life and Death, Coming of Age, Moral Values, Insensitivity, and Courage.

The books do deal with more mature themes and subject matter which is why they are used only for our Honors ELA classes. Both books have won numerous awards and continue to be very popular

among the middle and high school set. They encourage conversations about difficult topics and make our students think. I have read all three books, *Speak* and *The Fault in Our Stars* I have read numerous times, and all of these books are appropriate for classroom use at the middle school level.

The teachers who have used these books or wish to use them - Karla Hegbloom, Franki Myers, and Kate Herold - are here this evening as well to answer any questions you may have regarding these books.

Thank you.