



Reconsideration Committee Report & Recommendations

May 2, 2013

District Policy 2250 specifies:

If a request for reconsideration of library materials cannot be resolved through informal means among interested parties, a Request for Reconsideration of Library Resources form is completed and forwarded to the assistant superintendent for teaching and learning, who may appoint a review committee that includes the curriculum leader for the library media program, and might include a representative from multicultural education department, school social workers, and/or others as appropriate. The superintendent is an ex officio member of this committee. The reconsideration committee:

- A. Examines the challenged material in the context of District 97 School Library Media: Materials Selection Policy.*
- B. Seeks critical reviews to determine the appropriateness of the item in the library collection.*
- C. Evaluates the material as a whole rather than passages or sections taken out of context. And removes the material if it is deemed inappropriate, even in context.*
- D. Discusses the challenged item with the complainant at any point in the process as appropriate.*
- E. Prepares a written report detailing the committee's decision.*

While Policy 2250 deals specifically with library materials, the district uses it to address issues associated with other materials in our schools that may be considered controversial or offensive in nature.

Request for Reconsideration

On April 16, 2013, a group of current and future middle school parents/guardians submitted a request for a reconsideration of the book *Monster* written by Walter Dean Meyers. *Monster* is included in the April/May curriculum for all seventh grade students at Percy Julian Middle School and Gwendolyn Brooks Middle School. These parents/guardians based their request on their belief that the content of the book is vulgar, upsetting, rude and not age-appropriate for middle school children.

When the district received this request, the district immediately began the reconsideration process outlined in the policy mentioned above. The first step in the process was to form the committee that would complete the reconsideration process. This committee was comprised of the director of teaching and learning, the assistant superintendent for human resources, the administrator of the multicultural department, a middle school assistant principal, a teacher-librarian, a sixth grade

language arts teacher and an eighth grade language arts teacher. The superintendent served an ex officio member of the committee and was consulted throughout the process.

The second step in the process was for the members of the committee to read the book, which they received on April 19, 2013. The third step in the process was for the committee to meet to review the reconsideration requests, further discuss/examine the material in question and prepare a report of its findings/recommendations. This meeting was held on May 1, 2013.

Below are the concerns listed by the parents/guardians as well the committee's notes, findings and actions taken:

1. The adult nature and content of *Monster*.

Action taken: The committee reviewed recommended reading levels from a variety of book review/journals including:

- School Library Journal - Grades 7 and up
- Kirkus Reviews - Ages 12-14
- Mackin Educational Resources - Grades 7-12
- Follett (our catalog system) - Grades 7-12
- Barnes and Noble, Amazon and Scholastic indicate appropriateness level for ages 12-14

The themes addressed in the book are also deemed appropriate for seventh grade students and include:

- Teenage protagonist
- Peer relationships, trust, social identity, tolerance, justice, injustice, human strength, morality
- Life experiences of a urban youth

2. The use of foul, slang, derogatory language.

Action taken: Text was reviewed with language in context and determined to be relevant and purposeful. Language was also compared to other works of literature.

- Use of "slang" (and description of how kids are dressed) is used to show contrast between characters

3. Depictions of graphic violence.

Action taken: The specific scenes identified were reviewed and determined to be cursory, not graphic. There were also no additional instances of graphic violence identified in the rest of the novel.

- There were no graphic descriptions of violence
- Graphic implies describing an event in great detail – there were no events that fit or align with this description

4. The lack of rich, challenging language.

Action taken: Vocabulary was reviewed and found to include an extensive list of challenging words and concepts.

- Rich language was found throughout the novel, including 28 words that involve courtroom language
- The text complexity is increased by the use of dialect

- The use of stage directions, multiple perspectives, and non-sequential action add to the complexity of the novel
- Street and prison vernacular comprise a very small percentage of novel

5. The negative stereotypes of minorities.

Action taken: The committee found the topic of stereotypes to be a central focus of the book. The committee felt that, rather than the reinforcement of negative stereotypes, the novel is focused on the ability to discern truth compared to exaggeration.

- The theme of justice and injustice are appropriate for cognitive level of seventh grade students

Parent Request

The parents/guardians request that the book *Monster* written by Walter Dean Meyers be removed from the curriculum for all District 97 students.

Reconsideration Committee Recommendation

After reading and discussing *Monster*, the Reconsideration Committee closely reviewed the concerns of the parents/guardians and is making the following recommendations:

1. The book *Monster* should not be removed from the seventh grade general curriculum based on the following reasons:
 - Alignment with the following Common Core State Standards:
 - Reading Literature 1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
 - Reading Literature 2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.
 - Reading Literature 3: Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).
 - Alignment with the Essential Questions:
 - Is it our differences or our similarities that matter most?
 - What is the secret to reaching someone with words?
 - The book *Monster* was won multiple awards
 - 2000 Michael L. Printz Award for Excellence in Literature for Young Adults
 - 1999 National Book Award finalist
 - 2000 Coretta Scott King Author Honor Book
 - 2000 Edgar Allan Poe Award nominee, Best Young Adult
 - 1999 Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book
 - 2000 L.A. Times Book Award nominee
 - 2000 ALA Best Books for Young Adults
 - 2000 ALA Quick Pick for Reluctant Young Adult Readers
 - 1999 New York Public Library Book for the Teen Age
 - 1999 Notable Children's Book, The New York Times
 - 2000-2001 Maryland Black-Eyed Susan Book Award nominee in high school category
 - 2002 Booksense 76 list
 - 2002 Kentucky State Award Nominee
 - Booklist Editors' Choice
 - BCCB Blue Ribbon
 - Heartland Award for Excellence in YA Literature Finalist

- "Fanfare:" The Horn Book Honor List
 - New York Times Notable Book of the Year
 - PW Best Books of the Year
 - Riverbank Review Children's Book of Distinction
 - Awarded Outstanding Achievement in Books Honor by Parent's Guide to Children's Media
- *Monster* has been used with Oak Park middle school students for the past four years and teachers have found:
 - *Monster* offers the opportunity to analyze text for characterization/point of view as well as rich themes (morality, human strength and courage, and change).
 - The text is told in multiple formats as a drama, narration and through diary/journal entries, and provides multiple viewpoints or vantage points to take in the story and content.
 - It is a high-engagement book for students, not just based on content, but on the format and delivery as well. It allows students to be a part of the reading experience through the use of drama.
 - It provides an opportunity to discuss social and emotional issues in an appropriate setting.
 - The book provides a good source for identifying arguments and evidence.
2. Ensure that all teachers have fully read the book in advance and understand the rationale behind its selection and use in class.
 3. Create a curriculum guide that includes all of the books that will be read by students, as well as the themes addressed in each book. This guide will be shared with parents/guardians at the beginning of the school year.
 4. Assign students an alternate text if their families submit a formal request in writing.

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