

OAK PARK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL DISTRICT 97
Oak Park, Illinois

May 11, 2010

FYI: Reconsideration Committee Recommendations

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 which includes the curriculum leader for the library media program, and may include department of multicultural education, 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 with library materials, the District does not currently have a policy that specifically pertains to other materials used in schools that may be controversial or offensive in nature. Therefore, two recent requests for reconsideration of instructional materials were evaluated under the policy outlined above. Members of the Reconsideration Committee were the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, a curriculum coordinator, the Multicultural Department administrator, 3 elementary principals, two teacher-librarians, a language arts specialist, and a classroom teacher. The Superintendent was also an ex officio member of the committee and was consulted following each meeting. The committee met twice, on April 15 and April 22, to review the reconsiderations requests and to examine the materials in question.

Request 1:

A group of parents at Beye Elementary School requested the review of materials used in a staff development presentation for Beye staff members during Fall 2009. Concerns listed were:

1. The material presented was of an offensive nature to some families due to its presentation of various family structures
Action Taken: The materials were gathered by the Assistant Superintendent for storage at the Central Office until the issue was resolved.
2. The materials (a video and instructional guide) were not appropriate for the age range of students at Beye
Action Taken: An internet review of the materials was conducted by the Assistant Superintendent to determine the background of the materials and the age-range detailed by the publisher.
3. The materials were produced by an organization with a distinct agenda concerning personal sexuality
Action Taken: The organization that produced the materials was researched by the Assistant Superintendent.
4. The materials were being made available for staff members to use with students in classroom settings
Action Taken: As noted above, the materials were removed from both Beye Elementary and the Multicultural Center to avoid check-out by staff for use with students.
5. Portrayals of various families were stereotypical and offensive
Action Taken: The materials were reviewed by the Reconsideration Committee in regard to these details.

The parents requested that the video “That’s a Family” and accompanying instructional guide be removed from Beye Elementary and the Multicultural Center at Julian. In addition, the parents requested that associated materials also be reviewed and removed.

Following a viewing of the video and the instructional guide, the following recommendations were made by the Reconsideration Committee:

1. While the video touches on themes about family situations encountered in Oak Park and provides background on various family structures, the nature of the video and instructional guide dictates that they shall be removed from the Beye library and placed in the principal’s office to prevent general usage.
2. The video and instructional guide shall be placed in a Restricted Use section of the Multicultural Center away from regular check-out materials.
3. The video and instructional guide may be checked out from the principal or Multicultural Administrator for use by families who may wish to use the materials with their children at home.
4. School staff members may check out the materials for use with specific small groups (NOT entire classes of children) only if:

- a. A letter is sent home outlining the material to be covered and its purpose. Parents shall have the right to remove their child(ren) from this instruction.
 - b. A discussion and training on the materials to be used is provided to the staff member by the principal, Multicultural Center Administrator, and/or social worker.
 - c. The materials are only used for a student or small groups of students who may have a specific need in viewing the materials as recommended by a teacher, the nurse, the social worker, or the principal.
 - d. The materials shall not be used for entire classes of students.
 - e. Additional support for the themes presented is provided to the staff member and the student(s), either individually or in small groups, by the school social worker.
5. The library books examined by the committee are deemed to be useful within a school library and may be retained within the school collection. The books reviewed were:
- *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* -Tomie dePaola
 - *Of many Colors* - Gail Kaeser and Peggy Gillespie
 - *One Dad Two Dads Brown Dad Blue Dads* -Johnny Valentine
 - *Heather Has Two Mommies* - Leslea Newman
 - *Pinky and Rex and the Bully* -James Howe
 - *Lucy's Family Tree* -Karen Halvorsen Schreck
 - *Felicia's Favorite Story* -Leslea Newman
 - *King and King* -Linda de Haan & Stern Nijland
 - *And Tango Makes Three* -Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell
 - *The Daddy Machine* -Johnny Valentine
 - *Antonio's Card* -Rigoberto Gonzalez
 - *The Sissy Duckling* -Harvey Fierstein

Request 2:

A family at Holmes Elementary requested the review of the book “Jump Ship to Freedom” because of the use of a derogatory word (nigger) toward African-Americans used repeatedly in the early pages of the book. The book is currently on the 5th grade literature grid for use by teachers in the classroom and has been on the grid for several years. The book was challenged several years ago, with the decision made to retain it at that time. This book has also been challenged in other schools across the country due to the use of this derogatory word.

Following discussion about the implications of using this book in regular classroom instruction, the original recommendation of the committee was to identify the book as containing offensive language through the use of a sticker and requiring a teacher to send a letter home prior to the use of the book in a class. However, due to the age of the book and the availability of other novels to convey the same historical message and following

conversations with Superintendent Collins, it is now recommended that “Jump Ship to Freedom” be retired from the literature grid prior to the start of the 2010 – 2011 school year and replaced with the novel “Charlie Skedaddle” or another suitable historical novel dealing with slavery and the plight of African-Americans in the early days of the colonization of North America.

Next Steps:

Unless the Board of Education wishes to discuss these recommendations at a future meeting, the parents will be notified of the recommendations from the committee within the next few days. Also, the development of a policy dealing with the reconsideration of instructional materials not located in District media centers should also be undertaken in the near future.

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