

Instruction

Challenged Materials

REVIEW OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Type of material (book, film, pamphlet, etc.): Book

Title of material: Cats Vs. Robots Volume 1 : This is War

Author: Margaret Stohl

Publisher: Katherine Tegen Books

Your name, address, telephone number: Rikki Richards 17900 Holke Rd (816) 200-8764

Do you have a child in the school concerned? Yes

Complainant also represents others: _____

(organization-name) _____

(other group-identify) _____

To what part of the material do you object? Cite words, page numbers: Non-Binary discussion-chapter

Why do you object to this material? Not age-appropriate. The material is not vulgar - but is not appropriate

Are you familiar with the range of materials used in the school system on this topic? No - and maybe that's part of my problem - I'd like to be made aware.

Do you approve of presenting a diversity of points of view about this material in the classroom? no, not in K-5.

Should this be withdrawn from all students? Yes _____ No X - I do think it may not belong in elements

Rikki Richards
Signature of Complainant

04.25.2022
Date

Please give/send this information to: _____

Superintendent

Address

INDEPENDENCE SCHOOL DISTRICT
CHALLENGED MATERIALS REVIEW COMMITTEE
WRITTEN REPORT

Type of Material: Book

Title: Cats vs Robots Volume 1: This Is War

Author: Margaret Stohl

Person Challenging: Katherine Tegen Books

Date of Complaint: April 25, 2022

Date of Report: June 6, 2022

Description of objectionable aspects of the Challenged Material:

The parent shared that a chapter that included a non-binary discussion (Chapter 9, pages 57-59). In that section the term “non-binary” in reference to how a person identifies, was introduced and defined. It included conversations about restroom use (“But you HAVE to be a BOY or GIRL!” “Oh, Why is that?” “Well...Oh, I know! So you know what bathroom to use!” “No, not at home, or a lot of places actually. Bathrooms can be shared by all people”), as well as a conversation about labels of boys and girls (“So you’re saving the whole BOY-versus-GIRL thing is something we just made up?” “Mostly, yes, and it even changes depending on where you’re from.”)

Rationale/Summary of Objection:

The parent felt the chapter included was not age appropriate. She noted that the material is not vulgar, but is not appropriate for the age group of her son (was her 3rd grader who was reading it).

REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION

Review Committee Recommendation:

- Retained Without Restriction:** Retain the challenged material with no changes or access restrictions.
- Retained With Restriction(s):** Retain the challenge with some condition(s) or restriction(s).
- Not Retained.** Material will not be retained or available for access.

The committee’s majority opinion was that this should not be retained in an elementary setting (K-5), but that the exclusion of the book should not extend beyond elementary level libraries.

Review Committee Vote (anonymous ballot):

3 Retain Without Restriction.

0 Retain With Restriction(s).

6 Not Retain.

Committee Comments/Rationale Summary:

Retain without Restriction:

Rationale from members who voted to retain without restriction included:

- Introducing the idea of retaining a book with restricted access could create a number of challenges for the school, district, and librarian. Many unintended consequences could arise from starting that precedent.
- The opinion that it was the parent’s job to monitor student reading. It was shared they would monitor the reading of their own students of what they felt was appropriate, but that it didn’t seem to be their place to make that decision for other parent’s children.
- When the committee clarified that this was not a “required” reading for a class or a “read aloud” given by the teacher, some members felt that students were not forced to read it, and if they didn’t like it, they could just move to something else.
- A committee member shared an experience of required reading in which several students requested to not have to partake because of the content in middle school, and they were allowed to read a different book.
- The committee noted that the number of students who are identifying as “non-binary” is increasing, with students as young as 2nd grade identifying that way.
- The members also raised a concern about setting a precedent of excluding books from the library and not knowing where the precedent would lead - which books would be requested as excluded? What guidelines would shape that?
- Members on the committee also shared that students of many ages are already exposed to this, including elementary students, through a number of ways, from siblings to books to parents.

Retain with Restrictions:

Not Retain:

The rationale of those committee members who voted to “not retain” included:

- Introducing the idea of “retain with restrictions” could create unintended consequences for the district, librarians, teachers, and administrators, and the school library, which could create extenuating complications for the purchase and review of library books, as well as possibly drawing more attention to “restricted books” from students.

- To some, the chapter seemed placed in the book specifically to bring this content to light for the reader.
- A concern shared by some members of the committee was that nothing on the book jacket or description of the book denotes that it contains a discussion on gender or non-gender identification (identifying “non-binary” and a character stating that the idea of labels for “boys and girls is just made up”). Even parents who monitored their student’s reading would not be aware that this book contained said material unless they read the book first.
- A point was made regarding a student who reads the book and doesn’t talk to anyone (parent, teacher) about the content. They would be getting a very specific message regarding this topic, which is complicated and can be life-altering, without alternate views or without processing with parents.
- It was the committee’s majority opinion that this book be excluded only from K-5 libraries but that the exclusion should not extend to middle or high school libraries.
- There existed a common understanding on the committee that “non-binary” identification is a reality of our culture and impacts students as young as 2nd grade in our district. Members of the committee felt that while exposure to these complicated ideas are inevitable, it would be best suited for older students, and the approach of keeping a book with restrictions could overly-complicate the library purchase and monitoring system and stymie the growth of the library collection. The majority voted to NOT RETAIN for Kindergarten - 5th grade elementary buildings, but not extending that exclusion beyond elementary.

May 25th: 3:30 PM

Attendees: Cindy Grant, Denise Fears, Reuben Walcott, Joe Armin, Dale Herl, Claire Dowling, Angy Hill, Aimee Bolt, Bruce Gibbs, Andrea Binnicker, Mikealene Evans

Notes and Minutes:

- Team introduced themselves
- Reviewed the members of the committee and the make up of members
- Reviewed process of Board Policy: 20 days from appointment of the committee, read the request for reconsideration, meet, review written request for reconsideration, read the questioned material, evaluate and prepare a written report of findings and recommendation to the superintendent, Committee recommendations
- Discussed disbursement of books to employees and community members
- Board member has a form that we will utilize for guiding questions that will walk us through the process
- Deputy Superintendent asked for any questions from committee members - no questions were asked. She explained next steps and that coordinating the next meeting would come from Annette Miller
- Dr. Herl and Dr. Grant excused themselves from the meeting so the committee could talk and plan for our next meeting.
- Board Member to coordinate how to choose a date: proposed the 27th to meet but a number of members were not able to meet then. We need to be able to complete our recommendation by June 6th (20 days from the appointment of the committee) - AB is a member who is unable to meet until June 5th (Sunday in the evening). After talking through, we decided to meet via Zoom on Sunday. We all should have the book by Thursday, June 26th and all will have it read prior to the meeting. Denise Fears will reach out to Annette Miller to set up a Zoom meeting on Sunday, June 5th to the committee.
- Team decided for Sunday, June 5th at 6:00 PM.
- Meeting ended 3:48

June 5th, 2022: 6:00 PM

Attendees: Denise Fears, Reuben Walcott, Joe Armin, Claire Dowling, Angy Hill, Aimee Bolt, Bruce Gibbs, Andrea Binnicker, Mikealene Evans

Notes and Minutes:

- Meeting started at 6:14 - had troubles getting the initial meeting going.
- Denise Fears reviewed the form with the committee that we will walk through together during this discussion.
- Description of the questionable content
- Types of decisions: retained without restriction, retained with restriction, not retained
- Andrea B. asked if this was required reading - it was not: just a book to check out of the library

- Bruce G. asked how the parent came to know about the book. Joe A. shared that her son had checked it out of the library to read and she got it as well so she could read the book and talk with her son about it. There was nothing to alert her that this book had any controversial content, and she got to that chapter before her son did
- Reuban asked if any other books in the library are similar or have similar content - Joe shared that a number of books touch on a number of heavier topics (racism,etc) but he wasn't aware of anything specifically like this content.
- Angy H. shared that in middle school they have many books that may contain what some may view as inappropriate content or language - mentioned graphic novels. She also shared that an increasing number of students at middle school have identified as non-binary. She shared that this is one of the only books that has specifically addressed it that she is aware of. She said as a parent she wants to be in charge of what her child reads, but is not being in charge of what other parents' children read
- Andrea B: shared that her child had a required reading of a book that some students found objectionable and they were allowed to read something different and it wasn't a major deal.
- Bruce G.: shared that as he was reading and looking over it,the majority of the book was fine, but when he came across the chapter 9 it seems like that chapter seemed a bit out of left field - you wouldn't be able to know that this book would contain this content by looking at the cover or reading random pages: It seemed like a parent or student would know this book would contain this 'heavy" type of content for an elementary student. Looking it up on Wikipedia led to a number of other sites and gender dysphoria and other things that seemed very "heavy". It seemed like the author had an agenda. He agreed with the parent that this was questionable material.
- Asked if the district allows students to be identified - Denise said we do with parental consent and that the youngest was 2nd grade.
- Angy Hill shared that she reads with her child as well. She said the book is convoluted and noted that the author does have a non-binary child. She also said she had a hard time with the mechanics of the writing.
- Mikealean shared that the chapter was not needed - it seemed out of nowhere.
- Joe A. shared that it did seem like the chapter was placed to start a conversation and the questions for him were 1) are parents ok with these conversations to get started in elementary and 2) how would parents know this book had that type of content?
- Denise Fears shared that she liked the book and the chapter in question seemed fairly succinct. She liked how the author did share that it wasn't "good vs bad" guys, but that both sides had good and bad.
- Denise asked what this would look like with a parent review section - Joe Armin shared that it would take a notice on the book so that the librarian would be able to see it and then reach out for parent notification.
- Claire D. asked if the parent restricted path could begin a review of each book purchased or if it could lead to having more types of notifications. Claire shared that it could also lead to students wanting to read this book because it was banned. A number of unintended consequences could arise from retaining with restrictions.

- Reuben shared that he was concerned about the very specific content regarding non-binary seemed hidden within the chapter.
- Bruce shared a quote from the text regarding “labels for boys and girls are made up” - he felt that wasn’t true and that he struggled with the hidden agenda that seemed specifically placed in the book. He went on to clarify that, because he stated that labels are put on boys and girls in ways that *are* wrong. He noted parts in the book where the character identified as non-binary is stereotyping girls (“bad at science, want to be a mommy, love pink”). He further clarified that “labeling” or stereotype boys and girls and what they are good or interested in doing, or not good at doing, does happen and its wrong, but the character who identifies as non-binary is the one lableing in that instance and he felt that was manipulative. He also shared that when the one who responds to “So you’re saying the whole boy versus girl thing is something we made up?” with the answer “Mostly yes, to (Javi) gender is just a way to put people in one of two pre-defined boxes. Bruce shared that he would have to respond that gender is not mostly made up, and that we can have boys and girls, it doesn’t have to be boys versus girls.
- Denise shared that this most likely wouldn’t be the only book review, so it’s important that we consider precedent. We don’t want to set up librarians and the district for work that isn’t manageable (reading every book purchased).
- Andrea B. shared that she has read some questionable books and she agrees with a number of points, but isn’t sure we can make the decision to not allow others to read the book
- Angy Hill shared that she thought the author was using that chapter to show her expression. She said she couldn’t say that the author had a hidden agenda. She shared she didn’t feel that as though the author made the entire book around that point.
- Denise Fears shared she appreciated that the non-binary character was an adult and not a child
- Rueban asked about a student in a classroom that reads the book and doesn’t share it with any adults - this could lead to a single exposure from one source with a very direct message without another view shared with the student (like a parent or teacher).. He said it was very concerning that the idea or about 90% of the idea is opinion based.
- Denise shared that in Massachusetts the number of students identifying as non-binary has tripled - she also noted that the Midwest was different from the east coast.
- Angy was sharing that she felt it was the job of the parent to monitor the reading and she wasn’t comfortable with a librarian deciding what student could or could not read.
- Joe A. shared that a number of students that are younger (2nd, 3rd) could still read that book. He also shared that he framed the context of what books should or should not be allowed in the classroom - are there any books that shouldn’t be allowed in the library? He said he believes there are books that are clearly not appropriate in an elementary classroom or library that exist.
- Andrea asked if there were any guidelines that help teachers decide which books get purchased and brought into schools. Claire Dowling said that there are reviews and lists she looks through and she reads up on books, but there aren’t specific guidelines. Andrea said that this is probably heading that way (providing guidelines) for the district at some point, as this will most likely not be the only book to be challenged

- Clarification shared by Denise that this is only for K-5 consideration for this book: do not retain, retain with restrictions, retain with no restrictions
- Claire asked if the case involved had books in multiple schools, would our decision on this be binding - it would apply to all other schools under the excluded designation.
- When asked for her opinion, Aimee shared that her opinion had been covered and she was fine.
- Denise shared that if we were to do this with restrictions, we would have to define what those restrictions would be: only for fifth graders, only with parent consent, etc
- Denise shared that once the decision does come out, the view could be that the district is against those that identify as non-binary, which is not the case and the not the question we are answering tonight. Bruce agreed and said this is the current state of the world unfortunately.
- Claire shared that it's a difficult decision to make - shared that we could either keep it and do nothing or get rid of it. The idea to have it with restrictions could have a number of unintended consequences that make it more extremely challenging for teachers and monitoring.
- Angy Hill said she agreed that she didn't want to do it with restrictions. She shared too that she felt like it's the parents job to monitor and she wouldn't want someone else to make that decision for her child. Angy also shared that she was concerned that if this restricted, what it could lead to with other things being requested by parents to be excluded.
- Aimee shared that she worried about setting a precedent and when does it end? Either decision we make sets a precedent and when and where does it end?
- Vote was 6 votes to not retain the book, 3 votes to retain with no restrictions, and 0 votes to retain with restrictions:
- Rational needs to include that this is based only for K-5 and not for middle school or high school consideration. Denise shared that she would share the form with Joe A. to submit the form to the district
- Joe shared that he appreciated the perspectives from everyone and that the parents and the students are who he was thinking about. Also shared that if this was about a K-12 exclusion for the book his decision may be different.
- Joe shared that all on the committee have access to these notes and all notes should be kept confidential - only committee members are allowed on the discussion on the zoom, so we want to be sure that we keep all notes strictly confidential.
- Bruce G. shared again that we will all have access to the notes and all notes need to be kept confidential.
- Meeting ended at 7:20

BOARD OF EDUCATION
School District of Independence
Tuesday, June 14, 2022

THE MEETING WILL BE HELD AT CENTRAL OFFICE, 201 NORTH FOREST AVENUE.

6:00 P.M. – Regular Board of Education Meeting

CALL TO ORDER

I. Approval of Agenda.

II. Request of District Citizens or Employees.

III. Consent Agenda (Action)

The matters listed under Item III. Consent Agenda, are considered to be routine by the Board of Education and will be enacted by one motion. There will be no separate discussions of the items. If discussion is desired, that item will be removed from the Consent Agenda and will be listed as the first item under the appropriate section of the Regular Agenda.

1. Minutes of Board Meeting – May 10, 2022

2. Approval of Bills (III. 2.)

Authorize the transfer of monies from the Incidental Fund to the Teachers Fund to meet the Teachers Fund obligations for the month and further approve the June 14, 2022 list of bills totaling \$16,160,208.35 as printed.

3. Personnel Recommendation #21.

It is recommended that the: (III. 3.)

Certificated personnel requests for leaves of absence, resignation, or retirements be approved as listed;

Certificated personnel listed on the enclosed attachment be employed for the 2021-2022 school year; and

Certificated personnel listed on the enclosed attachment be employed for the 2022-2023 school year.

IV. Superintendent's Report/Miscellaneous.

V. New Business.

1. Approval of District July 1, 2022 Insurance Renewals.

2. Approval of Membership in the CSDGKC for 2022-2023.

3. Approval of MSBA Membership Dues for 2022-2023.

4. Approval of the Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Draft Plan (SRCPS).

5. Approval to Award Multiple Bids for Nutrition Services.

6. Approval to Award Operating Systems Software Program for Nutrition Services.

7. Approval to Increase Breakfast and Lunch Prices for Students and Adults.

8. Approval of Challenged Materials Review Committee Recommendation.

9. Approval to Purchase PowerSchool Renewal for FY23.

10. Approval of Declaration of Surplus Items.

11. Approval to Schedule 2022-2023 School District Budget Hearing.

VI. Motion to Adjourn to Closed Session (Mo State Statutes 610.021)

The Next Regular Board of Education Meeting is Scheduled for Tuesday, July 12, 2022.

Agenda Item #: V. 8.

Subject / Title: Approval of Challenged Materials Review Committee Recommendation

Action Required Information Only (check one)

Description of Issue:

Background and rationale for this program / item

The Administration received a parent's request challenging a library book as inappropriate for elementary students. The Administration followed Board of Education Policy and Regulation 6241 and a Review Committee of nine people was appointed in accordance with Board Policy. The Committee met and reviewed the book **Cats vs Robots Volume 1: This is War**. The Committee's recommendation is that this book be excluded from Kindergarten through Fifth Grade (elementary schools) libraries but not to extend the exclusion to middle and high school libraries.

Desired results

The book **Cats vs Robots Volume 1: This is War** is to be excluded from Kindergarten through fifth grade school libraries.

Personnel

Challenged Materials Review Committee

Resources

N/A

Reviewed and Recommended:


Superintendent

6/7/22
Date

Motion for Board Action:

The Board of Education approves the recommendation from the Challenged Materials Review Committee that the book **Cats vs Robots Volume 1: This is War** will be excluded from Kindergarten through fifth grade (elementary schools) libraries but not to extend the exclusion to middle and high school libraries.

Motion: _____

Second: _____

Board Action: Approved Not Approved Postponed (check one)