

RECONSIDERATION REQUEST FORM

Review initiated by:

Date: 11-2-2016

Name Jodi Lockwood

Address 2215 Samantha Dr

City/State Dubuque Zip Code IA 52002 Telephone 563.583.7511 or

School(s) in which item is used Hempstead 580.5291 cel

Relationship to school (parent, student, staff, citizen, etc.) parent & citizen

Book or other printed material, if applicable:

Author Stephen Chbosky Hardcover Paperback X Other

Title The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Publisher (if known) Pocket Books

Copyright date 1999

Multimedia material, if applicable:

Title

Producer (if known)

Type of material (DVD, software program, etc.)

Person making the request represents: Self X Organization

Name and address of group (if applicable)

Please indicate here X if you wish to make an oral presentation to the Review Committee.

You will be informed of the date, time and location of the meeting and may be present, even if you do not wish to make a presentation.

Jodi Lockwood Signature

11-2-2016 Date

Please complete questions on reverse and submit paperwork to Superintendent's Office.

Please respond as completely as possible; provide additional information, if you wish.

1. What brought this item to your attention?

2. To what in the item do you object? (Please be specific, citing pages, scenes, etc.)

3. In your opinion, why is this item not appropriate for use at this age level?

4. Do you perceive any instructional value in the use of this item?

5. Have you reviewed the entire item? If not, what portions did you review?

6. From whom, if anyone, should the committee seek additional opinion regarding this item?

7. To replace this item, do you recommend any other material which you consider to be of equal or superior quality for the purpose intended?

I'm still researching books + will submit ideas at a later date.

see attached

Reconsideration Request Form

1. What brought this item to your attention?

My son, who is a senior at Hempstead, had been complaining about a book he was assigned in his Contemporary Lit class. He said the content was really bad. I asked to read it. He gave it to me, but he cautioned, "Are you sure you want to read it? It's really bad." I said I did, and he gave me the book and he said, "I'm sorry, Mom." I read the book that night. (Ironically, he wanted to protect me from the obscene content.)

2. To what in the item do you object? (Please be specific, citing pages, scenes, etc.)

I object to the prevalent, graphic sex scenes throughout the book, the graphic description of a drunk high school boy making his girlfriend perform oral sex against her will while a minor watches, is a shocking example (p.30-31). There are casual references made about a couple: "doing it doggie-style with sandwich bags for a condom;" there's a description of a boy named C.B. who, "got so drunk at a party that he tried to f*ck the host's dog."(p. 158-159) There are depictions of high school boys learning how to meet adult men in the city park for anonymous sex. (p.161-163) These are just a few of the many examples. Sexuality is treated in the most base way. There is no mention of STD's, but almost all characters are engaging in sex with numerous partners. There is only one consequence specifically mentioned where Charlie's sister discovers she's pregnant. She has a quick abortion and moves on to the next boyfriend.

I object to the descriptions of rampant use of alcohol and drugs. The drug use in the story progresses as the characters continue to try new ways to get high and increase their drug exploration and use throughout the story. The only caution was to Charlie after he was found asleep in the snow with his hair chopped that he had a "bad trip" and he "should probably not do acid again." (p.94-95, p 99-100, p.139) As the characters continue to use a wide variety of drugs and alcohol at almost every social gathering and sometimes while they're alone, there's no mention of any real concerns or consequences about its increase use, addiction, or long-term effects. The characters continue to abuse drugs and alcohol in this manner right up to the end of the book. It seems to be the number one coping behavior modeled for all characters throughout the book. Drug and alcohol use continues to escalate throughout the book with mention even of one student getting high with the school counselor in the parking lot. Toward the end of the book graduation parties are depicted with significant amounts of drug and alcohol abuse and, consistent with the entire book, present this as the centerpiece of how to celebrate.

I object to this being taught as a "coming of age" book implying that Charlie, a high school freshman, is "coming of age" by being exposed to these "true friends" who introduce him into the life of alcohol, drug and sexual experimentation. In today's world, this nonchalant portrayal of drugs and alcohol abuse, and unlimited sexual partners is extremely dangerous. It devalues their lives and the importance of the decisions they are making. In real life, these behaviors very often produce catastrophic results of disease, death, deep addiction, and lead to even more abuse, mental illness, depression, and hopelessness.

3. In your opinion, why is this item not appropriate for use at this age level.

This is for college age at a minimum. The book is written at a 4th grade level (according to Scholastic) yet contains pornographic material. The book normalizes high-risk, dangerous behaviors.

According to the CDC, the following activities are considered high risk for both STD's and HIV:

- Having anal, vaginal, or oral sex without a condom (NOTE: Included in Perks of Being a Wallflower);
- Having multiple sex partners (NOTE: Included in Perks of Being a Wallflower);
- Having anonymous sex partners (NOTE: Included in Perks of Being a Wallflower)

◦ Having sex while under the influence of drugs or alcohol can lower inhibitions and result in greater sexual risk-taking (NOTE: Included in Perks of Being a Wallflower).

(Yet there was not one mention of STD's or HIV or any negative consequences for the characters who engaged in these activities outside of hurt feelings.)

- CDC estimates that youth ages 15-24 make up just over one quarter of the sexually active population, but account for half of the 20 million new sexually transmitted infections that occur in the United States each year
- Chlamydia and gonorrhea are causes of pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), which can lead to infertility.
- Most women infected with chlamydia or gonorrhea have NO symptoms (this one can prevent them from ever becoming parents.)

Another reason I feel this item isn't appropriate for assigned reading in high school is that it may cause trauma for kids who are forced to read these graphic scenes. I spoke with a counselor who was very concerned about possible negative consequences from this type of content, especially for some students. The counselor noted: "It's extremely important to create safe environments for students that include advanced warnings for abuse content. Students need the right to not be singled out as victims, the freedom to leave the room and opt out of the assignment especially if they are survivors. Most important is the necessity of parental awareness because it can be very dangerous when talking about assault and abuse as victims can be highly reactive in trying to cope. These students need environments where they're not forced to be there, or to be re-victimized by having to read of other abuses. Students can be triggered while reading graphic abuse descriptions in assigned reading materials. In addition to parental awareness, all students need to be aware of the statistics for sexual assault and abuse and some students will need help working through safety issues."

For students who have experienced these abuses, this book and/or glib comments in a 20 minute class discussion at school could be devastating or stir up great emotional trauma. Are counselors in the room when the topic of rape and abuse come up? How do victims experience reading this material at home by themselves? How are parents able to support their children when they are left unaware of the subject matter? (A class syllabus is insufficient unless parents are prepared to read each book in advance. Even the book summaries are very often insufficient.) How are those who have suffered such things cared for in the class discussion? Is Lit class the best place for all students to have the discussion for these students?

4. Do you perceive any instructional value in the use of this item?

My son's teacher has expressed that this book has been popular. However, my experience as both an English teacher and a school counselor prohibits me from overlooking the many negative aspects of this book. I think some potentially harmful assumptions are being made.

Possible assumption #1

All students share their honest feedback about the book.

Is it possible that since the book is "required" reading assigned by a trusted adult, the teacher, that even if their conscience tells them this reading material isn't beneficial to read, they feel as though they have no choice. Both of my sons were really put off and disturbed by the content. My oldest never said a thing to me when he read it a few years ago, but when I mentioned the book, he was all for me calling for its review and asked if I needed him to help in anyway. My youngest son was complaining about how bad the book was, but if I hadn't read it myself and gotten involved, he would have just "gotten through it" as well. My youngest son spoke with friends in this same class that felt the same. "This book is really messed up," was one of the responses.

Possible Assumption #2:

There are no negative consequences for students reading explicit material.

Is it possible that a student who has suffered abuse would feel re-victimized by being required to read about an actual rape - and may not ask for help? What about a young man who is trying to avoid pornography? What is the benefit for him to be assigned to read the very pornographic depictions he is trying to avoid? What about the teen who is struggling to say no to drugs and alcohol. How does a detailed description of the characters happily using and experimenting (with no real consequences) with ever new drugs and alcohol benefiting him or her? And how is the teen who is trying to have sexual restraint encouraged in his or her responsibility by reading of all the sexual exploits of the characters who seem to have limitless partners and experience no sign of negative consequences?

Possible Assumption #3:

In order for students to have meaningful conversations about suicide, sexuality, abortion, abuse, drug and alcohol abuse and other high risk behaviors, students must be exposed to explicit or obscene material. This is obviously not the case! We don't have to view (or read detailed descriptions of) pornography to discuss the topic. The Federal CIPA (Child Internet Protection Act) which every parent and student has to sign each year, specifically prohibits the viewing of content described as obscene or harmful to minors. This child protection law is in place to create guardrails to protect our youth from viewing what's considered harmful. It is law. In the absence of a standardized rating system for our literature (as there is none), we may take some cues from what has federally been determined to be harmful images for minors:

“(1) TECHNOLOGY PROTECTION MEASURE.--The term “technology protection measure” means a specific technology that blocks or filters Internet access to visual **depictions that are--**

(A) obscene, as that term is defined in section 1460 of title 18, United States Code;

(B) child pornography, as that term is defined in section 2256 of title 18, United States Code; or

(C) harmful to minors.

(2) HARMFUL TO MINORS.--The term “harmful to minors” means any picture, image, graphic image file, or other visual depiction that--

(A) taken as a whole and with respect to minors, appeals to a prurient interest in nudity, sex, or excretion;

(B) depicts, describes, or represents, in a patently offensive way with respect to what is suitable for minors, an actual or simulated sexual act or sexual contact, actual or simulated normal or perverted sexual acts, or a lewd exhibition of the genitals; and

(C) taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value as to minors.

(3) SEXUAL ACT; SEXUAL CONTACT.--The terms “sexual act” and “sexual contact” have the meanings given such terms in section 2246 of title 18, United States Code.”

These definitions are, of course, dealing with visual images. But I would submit that reading depictions of graphic sexual acts also create images in young people's minds and that it is not without consequence. The legal definitions make an accommodation for overall literary value. I understand that some works of literature contain references that may fit the descriptions above, but the concerns are overshadowed by the value of the work of literature as a whole. Classics such as Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, would be an example of this. In this instance the language is very different. References are in poetry form and are very often couched in imagery requiring a translation. *Perks*, a book written at a fourth grade level, is no Shakespeare. With blatant descriptions such as, “then he put his penis in her mouth,” we are not dealing with literary greatness. I understand others see literary value here, but that is precisely why **an objective standard is needed** and why I refer to CIPA. Another example would be asking the question, if this book in its entirety was made into a movie, what would it be rated? The content included in *Perks* would be X-rated. I feel we need to have this discussion where we employ some sort of shared objective standards. Otherwise, common sense safeguards of avoiding obscenity applied to other areas of media are brushed aside in the name of literature and most parents are left none the wiser. A Hempstead vice principal communicated that there is no standardized rating system in place to evaluate this type of

content. This also is effectively saying that there are no objective standards and we have to just “trust the professionals” to know where to draw the line. But herein lies the problem.

The book Perks has been approved by Common Core. (As have other books for high schoolers such as The Bluest Eye which is a HIGHLY pornographic novel featuring graphic depictions of incest, rape and pedophilia. In this book, the author even goes as far as to describe the pedophilia, rape and incest as “friendly,” “innocent,” and “tender.” This Common Core book is currently in the top 10 list of most contested books in the country.) Yet it remains on the list just like Perks with plenty of professionals who think it’s great. How are parents to trust the professionals when the recommending sources, are endorsing absolute obscenity for our children! (What is the agenda, here?) Is it a public school goal to normalize any and all sexual behavior amongst adults, children, animals, whatever you can think of? Because all of those behaviors, from bestiality to rape to pedophilia to minors having anonymous sex in the park with adult men are all in these texts. Yes, we do live in a pluralistic society, but surely it’s possible to “educate” our kids without exposing them to pornographic material! We must discuss a standard of morality otherwise the discussion is a subjective matter only. I’m one parent who is sickened by what the professionals have labeled “exemplar texts for 11th graders”!

I suggest that in the absence of a formal rating system, discussing the appropriateness of content becomes very subjective. Scholastic rates Perks as interest level at grades 9-12, however, describes the content as “adult”. And the grade level equivalent reading level is for 4th grade. The themes/subject listed on the scholastic website are as follows: adolescent issues, high school, friends and friendship, romantic relationships. (There is no mention in the description of the book about the graphic rape, child abuse, or teaching a fourteen year old how to meet adult men in the park for anonymous sex. Are these considered “adolescent issues”?) The light-hearted book description is wholly inadequate to inform readers of the true nature of content. Does “adult” mean there may or may not be pornographic material? Again, what is an objective standard or some sort of guardrail by which parents and educators can unite knowing that we agree on some shared values and that parents aren’t just admonished to “trust the professionals.”

I’m not a book banner. I love free speech! But I believe what we’re choosing for **assigned reading** is definitely an endorsement of a book. It says a lot to kids about what we think is “good literature.” Is this truly the best we have to offer our students? I’m asking the review team to discuss, do we have any limits for what we place before our kids? If the story is interesting, but it’s couched in obscenity does it still get the green light? Where is the limit? What are the standards for what makes the cut for assigned reading. This is not about banning a book. It’s about what we **assign in class**. What are we modeling for students when of all the books we can assign, we pick this? Please make the most of this opportunity to ask if this is truly our best for students?

Schools should make every effort to accomplish curriculum goals without unnecessarily exposing kids to obscene and harmful material. This should go without saying. In the past it did. In the past, this common sense understanding was born out of our shared values that our lives, our relationships, our bodies, our time, our pursuits were all sacred. However, the creep of secularization and the relegation of all things sacred to the private sphere only, has amputated our minds from our hearts and souls. The new religion of modern culture and much modern literature is one where there are no transcendent realities, no sexual boundaries, no special protection for youth, no shame, and ultimately, no meaning. Our children bear the brunt of this new worldview as research warns of ever increasing levels of hopelessness and mental illness for children and teens as well as the upward trends in suicide. Their lives are sacred. And we should be placing material before them that affirms that fact.

To members of the Dubuque Community School District Board of Education:

As you consider policies to provide clear communication about high-risk and harmful behaviors, I'd like to share some information from several state and national health organizations. In addition, I will use *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* as an example of the many unhealthy behaviors that are currently included in the curriculum of our school district.

To be specific about the types of behaviors for which I am concerned, the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists four activities that can put a person at risk for both STDs and HIV:**

- **Having anal, vaginal, or oral sex without a condom;**
- **Having multiple sex partners;**
- **Having anonymous sex partners;**
- **Having sex while under the influence of drugs or alcohol can lower inhibitions and result in greater sexual risk-taking.**

EVERY ONE of those activities is included in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Specific examples from the text can be found in Attachment I.

We may want to believe there are no consequences when this type of material is included in a book, but the author/publisher clearly recognized the dangers and they inserted a page just before the back cover encouraging readers to be tested for HIV. The American Academy of Pediatrics has also made this correlation between exposure and behavior as noted in the following quotes from a series of Policy Statements:

The American Academy of Pediatrics recognizes the exposure to mass media (e.g. television, movies, video and computer games, the Internet, music lyrics and videos, newspapers, magazines, **books**, advertising) presents health risks for children and adolescents.

Although media is not the leading cause of major health problems in the United States, the evidence is now clear that they can and do contribute substantially to many different risks and health problems and that children and teenagers learn from, and may be negatively influenced by the media.

Evidence gathered over decades supports links between media exposure and health behaviors among teenagers. The exposure of adolescents through media to alcohol, tobacco use, and sexual behaviors is associated with earlier initiation of these behaviors.

Having this clear understanding of the direct correlation between media exposure and health behaviors, we would be doing our children a disservice if we do not recognize the negative affect books like *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* have on our children. The sexual content and heavy use of drugs and alcohol are not one-time events. They are included over and over, throughout the book.

As a member of our Board of Education, I am asking you to provide a means by which parents can be informed just before our children are exposed to these types of high-risk behaviors. A vague statement

such as “mature content” included in a handbook or a statement during the registration process is not sufficient. The American Academy of Pediatrics has made it clear that this type of media exposure is placing our children at risk and it’s imperative that parents are informed contemporaneously so that discussions can be had within the home. I hope that the school is also providing education about the consequences of these high-risk types of behaviors. Working together, parents and educators have a much better chance of mitigating the negative effects. **As members of our Board of Education, you are in the position to make sure communication is both specific and timely.**

The importance of a strong partnership between schools and home is confirmed by this direct quote from an article titled *Research Spotlight on Parental Involvement in Education – NEA (National Education Association) Reviews of the Research on Best Practices in Education*:

When schools engage families in ways that improve learning and support parent involvement at home and school, students make greater gains. When schools build partnerships with families that respond to parent concerns, honor their contributions, and share decision-making responsibilities, they are able to sustain connections that are aimed at improving student achievement.

I feel your involvement as our Board of Education is absolutely critical because of some disturbing attitudes that were communicated in a meeting I attended between Mrs. Lockwood and an assistant principal at Hempstead High School. During that meeting, Mrs. Lockwood requested a partnership between the school and home, specifically asking for this type of communication. Very early in the conversation, the assistant principal suggested to Mrs. Lockwood that she should consider homeschooling. This dismissive and disrespectful solution was jaw-dropping.

A second and more disturbing comment raised a huge red flag for me in terms of transparency. When Mrs. Lockwood specifically asked for communication about sexual content, the assistant principal commented they couldn’t do that or parents would not give the material a chance. **How can parents make the best decisions for their children if our administrators are purposely withholding information from us?** Later in the conversation, the assistant principal explained that trying to communicate every type of offensive material would be nearly impossible. She went on to state that one parent might be offended by racial issues, while another by religious issues. I understand her argument and that is why **I am specifically requesting that the schools communicate not about offensive material, rather material that is exposing our students to high-risk behaviors similar to those listed above and illegal sexual behaviors such as rape, sexual assault and pedophile.**

Please understand I am a proud member of the Dubuque Community School District. My first son graduated from Hempstead last year and I have two more sons currently in the district. Until now, I have never had qualms about raising my children in the Dubuque community public education environment and hope that with transparency I will continue to feel this way.

As a mother of three teenagers, I know where the ball bounces if they engage in unwise sexual activity. But so often young people don’t have that long-term perspective and they think, “It won’t happen to me.” So, as I bring closure to my concerns, I’m going to share some statistics from our very own state. HIV and

STDs are not just problems in California or New York, they are devastating the lives of young people right here in the heartland. These statistics come from the Iowa Department of Public Health:

- The number and rate of sexually transmitted diseases is on the rise in Iowa. This rise is seen in gonorrhea, chlamydia, and syphilis. The Iowa rates are highest among these groups :
 - Females
 - 15-24 year olds
 - Racial minorities
- Among high school students in Iowa who were sexually active, 61.4% did not use a condom during last sexual intercourse
- 2,369 people were living in Iowa with HIV as of December 31, 2015, and there were 124 new HIV diagnoses, which included adults and adolescents.
- While the ten most populous counties in Iowa (including Dubuque) account for 49% of the population of Iowa, 74% of persons living with HIV/AIDs were residents of those 10 counties.
- Gonorrhea and chlamydia continue to be highest among young people. Approximately 10,700 cases of Chlamydia were reported in Iowa, but the estimate of true infections is well over 20,000 because according to the CDC, approximately 53% of all infections are not reported since most people with chlamydia are asymptomatic, they have no symptoms and have no clue they should be seeking treatment.
- Here's the devastating part about chlamydia, when left untreated, it can lead to serious consequences including pelvic inflammatory disease and ultimately infertility. So ten years down the road when a young woman is ready to start a family, she realizes that those risky behaviors presented in a high school classroom as normal and acceptable behavior, will now prevent her and her husband from becoming parents.

We know our children are already being bombarded by high-risk behaviors in other types of media and further exposure to them through books in the classroom compounds the problem. If students are provided information about consequences and parents are given the chance to further support those educational outcomes, there is a much better chance of mitigating these high-risk behaviors.

In summary, I am requesting two specific policies related to students' exposure to illegal sexual behavior (e.g., rape, sexual assault, and pedophilia) and high-risk sexual behavior as delineated by the CDC:

1. Parents will receive notification immediately preceding exposure to these behaviors
2. Students will be educated about the consequences of these behaviors (e.g., physical, emotional, social and legal).

Thank you for taking the time to read my concerns, I trust you will find a way to communicate with parents and students as exposure to high-risk and illegal behaviors occur.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Johnson

Excerpts of High-Risk Behaviors contained in *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

Starting on p 12 Charlie accidentally walks in while his sister is having sex with a boy.

And I opened the door to the basement, and my sister and this boy were naked. He was on top of her, and her legs were draped over either side of the couch. And she screamed at me in a whisper. "Get out. You pervert!"

This was the sister's first sex partner, but after she gets pregnant and has an abortion, she moves on to another guy. This is just one example of the multiple sex partners included in the book.

On p 30 it gets more graphic and much more disturbing. Charlie witnesses a boy sexually assault a girl by forcing her to perform oral sex, both are presumably drunk.

Every ten minutes or so, a drunk girl or boy would stumble in my room to see if they could make out there or something. Then, they would see me and walk away. That is, except for this one couple.

This one couple, whom I was told later was very popular and in love, stumbled into my room and asked if I minded them using it. I told them that my brother and sister said I had to stay here, they asked if they could use the room anyway, with me still in it. I said I didn't see why not, so they closed the door and started kissing. Kissing very hard. After a few minutes, the boy's hand went up the girl's shirt, and she started protesting.

"C'mon, Dave" "What?" "The kid's in here."

And the boy kept working up the girl's shirt, and as much as she said no, he kept working it. After a few minutes, she stopped protesting, and he pulled her shirt off, and she had a white bra on with lace. I honestly didn't know what to do by this point. Pretty soon, he took off her bra and started to kiss her breasts. And then he put his hand down her pants, and she started moaning. I think they were both very drunk. He reached to take off her pants, but she started crying really hard, so he reached for his own. He pulled his pants and underwear down to his knees.

"Please. Dave. No"

But the boy just talked soft to her about how good she looked and things like that, and she grabbed his penis with her hands started moving it. I wish I could describe this a little more nicely without using words like penis, but that was the way it was.

After a few minutes, the boy pushed the girl's head down, and she started to kiss his penis. She was still crying. Finally, she stopped crying because he put his penis in her mouth, and I don't think you can cry in that position. I had to stop watching at that point because I started to feel sick, but it kept going on, and they kept doing other things and she kept saying "no." Even when I covered my ears, I could still hear her say that.

High-risk behaviors continue on p 44 when Charlie watches two of his friends having anal sex with each other while under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

When most people left, Brad and Patrick went into Patrick's room. They had sex for the first time that night. I don't want to go into detail about it, because it's pretty private stuff, but I will say that Brad assumed the role of the girl in terms of where you put things. I think that's pretty important to tell you. When they were finished, Brad started to cry really hard. He had been drinking a lot. And getting really stoned.

No matter what Patrick did, Brad kept crying. Brad wouldn't even let Patrick hold him, which seems rather sad to me because if I have sex with someone, I would want to hold them. Finally, Patrick just pulled up Brad's pants, and said to him. "Just pretend you're passed out."

On p 158, a guy and girl are on a deserted golf course having unprotected sex.

"they're just about to 'do it' when Parker realizes he forgot the condoms. They're both naked on this putting green. They both want each other. There's no condom. So, what do you think happened:

"They did it doggie style with one of the sandwich bags!"

On p 161, there is a scene in a park where men and boys anonymously go to hook-up

One night Patrick took me to this park where men go and find each other. Patrick told me that if I didn't want to be bothered by anyone that I should just not make eye contact. He said that eye contact is how you agree to fool around anonymously. Nobody talks. They just find places to go. After a while, Patrick saw someone he liked. He asked me if I needed any cigarettes, and when I said no, he patted my shoulder and walked away with this boy.

There are many other examples of high-risk behaviors in the book, but I chose these particular passages because they are the exact behaviors that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warn about.