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Hart High School committee votes to remove book from library

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Committee decides 'This Book Is Gay' is inappropriate for students

A complaint was made against a book found at Hart High School's library for being inappropriate, and a committee then voted to remove the book from its library after deliberation, according to district officials.

David LeBarron, director of curriculum and assessment for the William S. Hart Union High School District, said this was not a book ban – only that the committee decided not to carry the book in the library.



According to LeBarron, a complaint was made against “This Book Is Gay,” which then began the process for a committee to be formed and determine whether the book is appropriate for students on campus.

“We have written in our board policies on how to handle complaints that come in about books in our library, and that’s what Hart High School did,” LeBarron said. “They followed that process and produced, which requires they put a committee together, analyze the book and see if it fits, and of course, appropriate for students in grades nine through 12.”

“This Book Is Gay,” written by Juno Dawson, is a young adult non-fiction book on sexuality and gender. According to the book, Dawson takes a “conversational approach discussing stereotypes, coming out as LGBT, the ins and outs of gay sex, how to flirt and more.”

LeBarron said the complaint was filed earlier in the school year. The Hart High School committee was formed soon after and the decision was made to remove the book from the library on Sept. 15.

The process to review a book begins once a complaint is submitted by a parent, student or employee. Then the principal organizes a committee, which would include the principal, a parent, the librarian, department chair and another teacher from the school site, LeBarron added.

LeBarron was unable to disclose how the vote was split, just that the overall opinion of the committee was for the book to go.

“The issue was not that the book was dealing with sexuality, but the issue was of the images [illustrations, the photos, the comments] and the stories told were just overly graphic that crossed the line for the book,” LeBarron said.

“So, again, it wasn’t the issue that the book was helping students or giving information on sexuality, the issue was the graphic support the author put in along with that information,” he added.

According to LeBarron, a student could be included on the committee when reviewing and determining the “appropriateness” of a book. However, it’s not required by board policy. In this case, a student representative was not included when the committee was formed, he added.

Sarah Delawder, whose child attends a junior high school in the Hart district, found out about the committee’s decision and found it appalling to remove a book from the library.

In the past, the Hart district removed or paused books from mandatory reading lists for classes such as “To Kill a Mocking Bird” and “Huckleberry Finn” due to concerns about their content. In that instance, the district later “unpaused” them and the books could then be used,

again, for learning opportunities.

“They were discussing whether or not to require them as required reading within a course” Delawder said. “They were taking the time to review whether all students should be required to read those, verses this case, which is a parent wanting to remove a book from the library for student voluntary access.”

According to Delawder, who serves as a director of curriculum for a charter school in the Santa Clarita Valley, as a parent, she doesn’t agree with the committee’s decision for a number of reasons.

“There is a difference between forcing a student to read something in a classroom that makes them uncomfortable, that doesn’t coincide with their personal beliefs,” Delawder said. “But what parents don’t have the right to do, and what schools, I believe, don’t have the right to do is take voluntary access away from kids to young adult books that are written for a teenage audience that are reflective of the students who attend that school.”

The Hart High committee removed “This Book Is Gay” from its library only, as the book can possibly be found on other high school campuses unless it went through the same process, LeBarron said.

Students who bring the book to campus can read it for their personal reading, or if a student wishes to write a report on it for an English class, and they get to pick their books, they are welcome to use it, he added.

“This is called a level one complaint,” LeBarron said. “If someone wanted to appeal it, they’re welcome to contact the school. They would need to submit a written request challenging this decision and then it would move onto a committee at the district level.”

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