

An Open Letter to the Central Bucks Community from a Texas Librarian

I am writing an open letter to the Bucks community about the library/materials selection policy.

I wanted to share insights as a Texas librarian, since your policy seems to resemble the Texas Education Agency policy and you may be unaware that most districts in Texas are NOT adopting that policy due to its many flaws. It is a very challenging policy to implement as well, from a practical standpoint, which is also why most Texas schools did NOT adopt it. (I am only aware of two that have adopted it.) So it seems unusual that a school district in Pennsylvania would think this is a quality policy to adopt.

As just an FYI, in Texas, actually, the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) normally writes all district policies, and almost all Texas schools use their policy, called EF Local, for instructional materials; one which complies with the Supreme Court ruling and other state laws.

I recently saw your policy online and read it. I'm sure you have excellent staff in your own district advising you how unfeasible it is. While of course parents deserve the right to determine materials for their own child, this policy goes far beyond that, and effectively will censor materials for your students, especially high school students.

The policy's steps for levels of review of materials, parental review, and so on, make it a very laborious and cumbersome process at best. Librarians and teachers are critical resources for student literacy, and taking all the multi layered levels of approval in this process means a lot of time taken away from working directly with students who still are in great need post Covid.

Lastly, one has to wonder "whose voice" is being represented in this policy? Has there been any attempt to determine the actual impacts on a library collection and whose voices will be removed? The district should be writing policy that serves ALL students, much like the Texas TASB EF Local policy does.

There's also a false assumption baked into this policy that all students have access to books outside the school, at home. They do not. Students may not have the income, nor might their parents. They may not have transportation, or a family library card.

It is a slippery slope when districts begin responding to concerns over a few books by changing long standing state and local policies without the rigor required. And there are professionals (librarians and teachers) who are very knowledgeable in this area. We would hope the district would rely on their expertise. Surely, if a new field were needed for the football team, or new wrestling mats needed, wouldn't the coach's advice be critical to that decision? And if the coach indicated something wouldn't work, surely you would listen to the expert you paid to give you that advice.

Censorship will never put a district on the right side of history, nor will partisanship. In the moment, it may seem important, but our children's education shouldn't be politicized. And in future history, these efforts by a few districts to censor their students' educational experiences will be condemned.

Surely Bucks County should follow the lead of districts all over Texas in rejecting this poor policy, examining best practices both in PA and around the country with the help of their librarian experts, and adopt the best possible policy. Every district wants to be excellent. That is how you model excellence - by trusting your experts, finding best practices around the country that coalesce, and by providing leadership that supports what schools are really supposed to be about, intellectual curiosity and learning.

I hope you reconsider this flawed policy, which so many Texas schools have decided not to use.

A Texas librarian