

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE RECONSIDERATION COMMITTEE

The policy of this school district related to selection of learning materials states that any resident of the district may formally challenge instructional and library materials used in the district’s educational program. This policy allows those persons in the school and the community who are not directly involved in the selection of materials to make their opinions known. The task of the Reconsideration Committee is to an informed decision on the challenge. The meetings of the committee may be subject to the open meetings law.

The most critical component of the reconsideration process is the establishment and maintenance of the committee's credibility in the community. For this purpose, the committee is composed of a combination of community members and licensed employees as detailed in 605.3R1. The community should not, therefore, infer that the committee is biased or is obligated to uphold prior professional decisions.

The presence on the Committee of a school media specialist and an administrative staff member will assure continuity from year to year as well as lend professional knowledge of the selection process. Student members are essential since they are the closest to the student body and will be immediately affected by the decision of the committee.

The reconsideration process, the task of this committee, is just one part of the selection continuum. Material is purchased to meet a need. It is reviewed and examined, if possible, prior to purchase; it is periodically reevaluated through updating, discarding, or reexamination. The Committee must be ready to acknowledge that an error in selection may have been made despite this process. Librarians and school personnel regularly read great numbers of reviews in the selection process, and occasional errors are possible.

In reconsidering challenged materials, the role of the committee, and particularly the chairperson, is to produce a climate for meaningful discussion of disparate views. The committee should begin by finding items of agreement, keeping in mind that the larger the group participating, the greater the amount of information available and, therefore, the greater the number of possible approaches to the problem.

The committee may, at its discretion, hear an oral presentation from the complainant to the committee to expand and elaborate on the complaint. The committee may listen to the complainant, to those with special knowledge, and any other interested persons. In these discussions, the committee should be aware of relevant social pressures which are affecting the situation. Individuals who may try to dominate or impose a decision must not be allowed to do so. Minority viewpoints expressed by groups or individuals must be heard, and observers must be made to feel welcome. It is important that the committee create a calm, nonvolatile environment in which to deal with a potentially volatile situation. To this end, the complainant will be kept informed of the progress of the complaint.

The Committee will listen to the view of all interested persons before reaching a decision. In deliberating its decision, the Committee should remember that the school system must be responsive to the needs, tastes, and opinions of the community it serves. Therefore, the Committee must distinguish between broad community sentiment and attempts to impose personal standards. The deliberations should concentrate on the appropriateness of the material. The question to be answered by the Committee is, “Is the material appropriate for its designated audience at this time?”

The Committees final recommendation will be (1) to remove the challenged material from the total school environment, (2) to take no removal action, or (3) to agree on a limitation of the educational use of the materials.

The Committee chairperson will instruct the secretary to convey the Committee’s recommendation to the office of the Superintendent. The recommendation should detail the rationale on which it was based. A letter will be sent to the complainant outlining the Committee’s final decision.

Adopted: 03/03/1986  
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