



Lowell Area Schools

Library Media Services

Frequently Asked Questions

How do libraries impact children?

One of the essential experiences that libraries provide is an opportunity to develop a love of books and reading. While most adults agree that libraries play a critical role in our children's literacy skill development, we will never agree on the appropriate books and themes for which audience. It is indeed a parent's right to revoke their child's access to a title; however, it is beyond their reach to expect the district to pull the title from shelves based on only that parent's opinion. Parents should not regulate what is appropriate for other readers or other parents. From experience, we know that books can help readers explore and deal with circumstances from a fictional standpoint they might encounter in their own lives.

Does the LAS School Board have a policy guiding the purchasing of library books?

Yes, the LAS School Board policies guide purchasing all classroom materials. The library is a classroom within each school and follows all LAS School Board policies. The specific LAS School Board policies that address library books include:

- ❖ **2210 - CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT - APPROVED COURSES** The Board directs that the curriculum of this District allows for the development of individual talents and interests as well as recognizes that the learning styles of students may differ; utilizes a variety of learning resources to accomplish the educational goals; provides for multicultural education by including, at each level, courses or units which help students understand the culture and contributions of various ethnic groups comprising American society, including, but not limited to Euro-Americans, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Hispanic-Americans, and Native-Americans.
- ❖ **2240 - CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES** The Board of Education believes that the consideration of controversial issues has a legitimate place in the instructional program of the schools. Properly introduced and conducted, the consideration of such issues can help students learn to identify important issues, explore fully and fairly all sides of an issue, weigh carefully the values and factors involved, and develop techniques for formulating and evaluating positions. For purposes of this policy, a controversial issue is a topic on which opposing points of view have been promulgated by responsible opinion or is likely to arouse both support and opposition in the community. The Board will permit the introduction and proper educational use of controversial issues provided that their use in the instructional program: 1) is related to the instructional goals of the course of study and level of maturity of the students; 2) does not tend to indoctrinate or persuade students to a particular point of view; 3) encourages open-mindedness and is conducted in a spirit of scholarly inquiry. The Board recognizes that a course of study or certain instructional materials may contain content or activities that some parents find objectionable. If, after a careful, personal review of the program lessons and/or materials, a parent indicates to the school that either content or activities conflicts with his/her religious beliefs or value system, the school will honor a written

request for his/her child to be excused from particular classes for specific reasons.

- ❖ **2260 - NONDISCRIMINATION AND ACCESS TO EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY** Any form of discrimination or harassment can be devastating to an individual's academic progress, social relationship and/or personal sense of self-worth. As such, the Board of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation or gender identity), disability, age (except as authorized by law), religion, military status, ancestry, or genetic information (collectively, "Protected Classes") in its educational programs or activities. Equal educational opportunities shall be available to all students, without regard to the Protected Classes, age (unless age is a factor necessary to the normal operation or the achievement of any legitimate objective of the program/activity), place of residence within the boundaries of the District, or social or economic background, to learn through the curriculum offered in this District. Educational programs shall be designed to meet the varying needs of all students. In order to achieve the aforesaid goal, the Superintendent shall: Curriculum Content- review current and proposed courses of study and textbooks to detect any bias based upon Protected Classes, ascertaining whether or not supplemental materials, singly or taken as a whole, fairly depict the contribution of both genders, various races, ethnic groups, etc. toward the development of human society.
- ❖ **2266 - DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT STUDENT POLICY** The District is committed to maintaining a learning environment in which all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, free from discrimination and harassment. The District shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation or sexual identity, age, religion, height, weight, marital or family status, disability, military status, genetic information, or any other legally protected category in its programs and activities, including employment.
- ❖ **2270 - RELIGION IN THE CURRICULUM** Based on the First Amendment protection against the establishment of religion in the schools, no Board employee will promote religion in the classroom or the District's curriculum. The Board acknowledges the degree to which a religious consciousness has permeated the arts, literature, music, and issues of morality. The instructional and resource materials approved for use in the District's schools frequently contain religious references or concern moral issues that have traditionally been the focus of religious concern. That such materials may be religious in nature shall not, by itself, bar their use by the District. The Board directs that professional staff members employing such materials be neutral in their approach and avoid using them to advance or inhibit religion in any way. Students should receive unbiased instruction in the schools, so they may privately accept or reject the knowledge thus gained in accordance with their own religious tenets. The Board acknowledges that it may not adopt any policy or rule respecting or promoting an establishment of religion or prohibiting any student from the free, individual, and voluntary exercise or expression of the student's religious beliefs. However, such exercise or expression may be limited to lunch periods or other non-instructional time periods when students are free to associate.
- ❖ **9130 - PUBLIC COMPLAINTS** For information about the process for addressing concerns about specific library materials, please see the detailed procedure at the end of this document. [Jump to that section.](#)

Are library books the same as teachers' classroom books?

No, library books are purchased or donated through the library program and are not the same as teachers' classroom libraries. Questions regarding teachers' classroom libraries should be directed to the teacher.

Who chooses which books are added to the school libraries?

- ❖ Numerous people and organizations are involved in choosing books for our school libraries: student and teacher requests, curriculum needs, bestseller lists, literary award winners, local authors, Michigan books, professional book reviews, Kent County school librarians, school library assistants, and numerous “top reads” websites (including but not limited to Barnes and Noble, Good Reads, School Library Journal, Scholastic, Booklist, Common Sense Media, and Amazon). This process creates a balance of library book purchases and suggestions. Book recommendations by students and teachers are primarily approved and ordered.
- ❖ Books received as donations are subject to the same LAS School Board policies as any books purchased. Financial contributions are typically accepted, and the library staff will choose the books to order with the donated funding. Books received as gifts are reviewed to ensure they meet the LAS Collection Development Policy guidelines.

What resources are used to help find age-appropriate books for the school libraries?

All of the resources noted in the previous question are resources used to find new book titles to order for our school libraries. The basic guidelines are generally to have books rated by professional reviewers and publishing companies for the grade levels and ages for which each book is appropriate. Because it is only possible to read some books before we purchase them for our school libraries, we rely heavily on these recommendations.

What age levels are books divided into, and for which grade levels are they appropriate?

- ❖ Books are generally divided by grade levels and ages for which they are appropriate. Before we order each book, we will check both of these numbers. Books are typically recommended for grades K-3, 3-5, 4-6, 5-8, or 9 and up. Books are also rated by Juvenile or Young Adult (YA) using the BISAC (Book Industry Standards and Communications) rating system. Juvenile is intended for children ages 0-11; preschool-grade 6). YA is intended for children ages 12-18, grades 7-12. Please note that there are exceptions to these guidelines based on the book's contents. Having a foolproof method for each book is impossible because students' maturity levels, interest levels, and background knowledge differ considerably even within the same ages and grades.
- ❖ Consider that each school library must provide books for all ages, interests, and maturity levels within that school. For example, when looking at Alto or Murray Lake elementary schools, the library must have books for lower maturity PreK-aged students while also providing material for high reading and mature level 5th grades. That is well over ten different reading grade ranges alone. It is a complicated balancing act requiring all involved to help students choose the best books.
- ❖ Another interesting issue at elementary schools is parents requesting higher reading level books for their children reading at middle or high school reading levels. While this would not be too difficult to accomplish, books written for students reading at a 6.5 or 7.5 level are commonly written for a middle school maturity level. In general, elementary school parents do not usually want their elementary children to read more mature content.
- ❖ While parents need to be involved and help choose what their child reads, it is also important to remember that parents would not know what is best for other students to read.

As a parent or guardian, how can I monitor what my child reads from the LAS libraries?

- ❖ The best way to monitor what your child is reading is to take an active role in their education and book choices. For younger children, read their library books with them. Know what books your child likes and what they learn in their current curriculum. Have thoughtful conversations about the literature your child is reading and encourage them to find challenging yet interesting books at their reading level to continue to learn and grow. For older children, ask what book they are reading and discuss their library books. Encourage your child to read about topics that interest them and suggest books you feel they may enjoy. Read some books together as a family and have book circles to sharpen their listening and conversation skills, spark their imagination, and expand their child's knowledge of the world around them. The intimate experience of reading together can yield important lessons about behavior, feelings, and strengthening your relationships.
- ❖ Parents may log in to their child's Destiny or Sora library accounts at any time and see what library books/materials are currently checked out and a complete history of library checkouts.

If I have a concern regarding a library book my child is reading, what should I do?

If you are concerned about a library book your child is currently reading, don't hesitate to contact our school librarian, Mrs. Beachler, via email at cbeachler@lowellschools.com.

If I would like to prohibit my child from reading a specific library book, author or subject, what should I do?

- ❖ If a parent would like specific book titles restricted from their child's access, please email Christine Beachler, Director of Library Media Services, at cbeachler@lowellschools.com. Please include your child's name, the school building they attend, the classroom teacher's name, and the specific book title(s), author(s), or main theme topic(s) being requested as restrictions.
- ❖ Please note that students with parents who implement restrictions on their library accounts will, in turn, not have access to eBooks on Sora, as those can not be individually restricted.
- ❖ Parents should understand that we will do our best to implement main topic restrictions for their child by reading the summaries provided by book publishers. However, our library staff has not read every book, so it is not possible for us to know the exact content of all books. We ask parents with main topic restrictions to understand that this system is not perfect and allows for some degree of latitude.
- ❖ Parents may also request the restriction of all library books if they feel that is the best option.
- ❖ When library staff cannot determine if a title violates a restriction and have not read the book completely, they will send all available reviews and information to the parent for final determination regarding checkout or restriction.
- ❖ If a book makes a student uncomfortable, they can simply return it and select another.

I have seen some excerpts from LAS books posted on social media by other parents, which I find alarming. Why do we have books like that in our collection?

- ❖ All books legally must be considered as a whole. It is not appropriate to evaluate a book for inclusion in the library collection based on a small excerpt, regardless of how it may appear to some.
- ❖ School libraries serve a diverse population that affirms the identities and lives of children and youth. The books reflect their experiences, offer a view of the world beyond their own experiences, and build empathy and understanding of multiple perspectives.

- ❖ It has been reported on social media that the LAS libraries have pornography. Pornography is not a legal term and has no legal criteria in literature; it is generally a visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct that is intended to elicit a sexual response. **There is no pornographic material in any LAS library collection.**
- ❖ The legal term to evaluate books with mature content AS A WHOLE is "obscenity." A work is deemed obscene/not obscene by applying the "Miller Test for Obscenity" based on a court case 1973. The Miller test is known as a three-prong test, and the work must meet ALL THREE criteria to be considered obscene:
 - Does the work, as judged by "the average person, applying contemporary community standards," taken as a whole, appeal to the prurient (inappropriately sexual) interest?
 - Does the work depict or describe, in an explicit, "patently offensive way," sexual conduct or excretory functions as defined by state laws?
 - Does the work, taken as a whole, lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value?
- ❖ LAS follows this legal test to review every book in our libraries when found to contain mature content. A minimum of two staff members will read and evaluate each book based on the three-prong test. We do not have any books in our collections that are deemed obscene.
- ❖ The LHS Library maintains a list of titles containing mature content, suggested for seniors or other students with parental permission. These books are integrated into the regular collection by genre and author's last name. This list is publicly available on Destiny as a resource list for each school. The books have no external labels identifying mature content. Students have limited browsing time and are continuously supervised in libraries, preventing adequate time for accidental exposure to specific content within novels. Our students generally demonstrate integrity when selecting materials, with any exceptions addressed by library staff.
- ❖ If any parent would like to restrict their Senior student from checking out these titles, the same process should be followed as above for implementing restrictions on your child's library account.

I have seen on social media that there are LAS books that are recommended for students in specific grade levels within a building. Why is that?

- ❖ Each school library serves different grade levels, ages, and maturity levels. Books are generally specifically ordered for particular age groups or grade levels. Books a kindergarten student might find interesting are not likely the same ones a 5th-grade student would find interesting, yet the same library collection must meet all those needs.
- ❖ Books with more mature content are recommended for the oldest age group of students in that school building. At Lowell High School, books recommended for seniors to check out may not be age-relevant for freshmen.
 - Please direct any questions about library policies or procedures to Christine Beachler or her supervisor, Steve Gough (Director of Teaching and Learning), to ensure you receive accurate and complete information. Information circulating on Facebook and other unofficial social media channels may not be reliable and should be verified through official district sources.

If I would like a specific library book to be reconsidered by the LAS Reconsideration Committee, what should I do?

- ❖ An informal request for reconsideration of a library book should be directed to Christine Beachler, Library Media Director, Lowell Area Schools. Submissions should be made via email to cbeachler@lowellschools.com or in writing and mailed to the school. Christine Beachler and the building principal reviewed an informal request. Various resources will be used, including but not limited to Common Sense Media, other Kent County school libraries, KDL, LAS curriculum guides, professional book reviewer recommendations, and other relevant resources with information on the specific book title. After the informal review, Christine Beachler or the school principal will respond with their decision.
- ❖ A formal request to reconsider a library book should be made through the district library media specialist following LAS School Board policy 9130.
- ❖ If the request, suggestion, complaint, or grievance relates to instructional materials such as textbooks, library books, reference works, and other instructional aids used in the District, the following procedure shall be followed:
 - A. The criticism is to be addressed to the media specialist in writing, and shall include the following:
 - author;
 - title;
 - publisher;
 - the complainant's familiarity with the material objected to;
 - sections objected to by page and item;
 - reasons for objection.
 - B. Upon receipt of the information, the media specialist shall, after advising the principal of the complaint and upon the Superintendent's approval, appoint a review committee which may consist of:
 - one (1) or more professional staff members;
 - one (1) or more lay persons knowledgeable in the area.
 - C. The Superintendent shall be an ex officio member of the committee.
 - D. The committee, in evaluating the questioned material, shall be guided by the following criteria:
 - the appropriateness of the material for the age and maturity level of the students with whom it is being used
 - the accuracy of the material
 - the objectivity of the material
 - the use being made of the material
 - E. The material in question may not be withdrawn from use pending the committee's recommendation to the Superintendent.
 - F. The committee's recommendation shall be reported to the Superintendent in writing within ten (10) business days following the formation of the committee. The Superintendent will advise the complainant, in writing, of the committee's recommendation and notify the LAS Board of Education of the action taken or recommended.

No challenged material may be removed from the curriculum or from a collection of resource materials except by the action of the LAS Board of Education. Challenged material will not be removed solely because it presents ideas

that may be unpopular or offensive to some. If the LAS Board of Education concludes that material will be removed from our circulation, a written statement will detail the reasons for that decision.

Who should I contact if I have questions or concerns regarding the school library program?

All questions and concerns regarding the library media program should be made to Christine Beachler, Library Media Director at cbeachler@lowellschools.com.

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