

Pittsfield School District

## **CHALLENGES TO BOOKS AND OTHER LIBRARY MEDIA MATERIALS**

### **INFORMAL COMPLAINTS**

Students, parents, teachers or specialists, administration, or community members who are concerned about the appropriateness of library materials may make informal complaints in public and to library staff members. The complainant may voice an objection to the school librarian, a teacher, or the principal. In some cases, the individuals simply want their objections heard and have their concerns acknowledged, while in other situations, the person making the complaint asks school staff to restrict or remove the library resource. One important part of the informal complaint process is listening respectfully to the complainant's concerns. Although listening to a person's complaint is sometimes as far as an oral complaint goes, it is necessary for every library/media center to have a process for handling informal patron concerns. A formal complaint process often follows a verbal discussion with a library staff member, Library Media Specialist, teacher, or school principal and acknowledges the right of the individual to express a concern and have their objections formally reviewed.

Persons with a complaint about library print or digital resources should state their concerns. As part of the discussion, the school employee will explain the selection policy, selection criteria, diversity of the collection with resources from many points of view and the selection process. Each parent/guardian has the right to determine whether specific library resources will be accessible for their children.

If the complaint is not resolved informally, the Library Media Specialist or principal will explain the formal reconsideration process and provide the individual with a copy of district's library selection policy with reconsideration procedures and a request for reconsideration of library resources form. All complaints to staff members shall be reported to the building principal, whether received by telephone, letter, e-mail, or in personal conversation. No library resources should be removed or restricted from use as a result of the informal complaint. If the completed and signed formal request for reconsideration form has not been received by the principal within two weeks, the matter shall be considered closed.

### **FORMAL RECONSIDERATION**

Persons who are concerned about the appropriateness of library resources or who are unsatisfied with the response from an informal discussion, may choose to make a formal request for reconsideration of the material in question. A formal reconsideration request is a written document that is usually reviewed by an assigned library staff member or committee. In order to provide a standard method for receiving patron input, a written process for handling formal complaints is part of the reconsideration policy. This serves as a guideline when reviewing, evaluating, and processing formal reconsideration requests. Adding timeline requirements to the reconsideration process ensures that complainant concerns will be addressed in a timely fashion.

## HANDLING FORMAL COMPLAINTS

1. The complainant should be referred to the principal.
2. The concerned citizen who is dissatisfied with earlier informal discussions will be offered a packet of reconsideration materials.
3. The complainant is required to complete and submit the reconsideration form to the principal within ten business days.
4. If a completed reconsideration form is not submitted within the ten business days, the matter is considered closed.
5. Upon receipt of the form, the principal should notify the superintendent, the Library Media Specialist, and the reconsideration committee, who is appointed by the principal and consist of a teacher, building level administrator, a reading specialist or language arts teacher, and a member of the community.
6. The material in question will remain on library shelves and in circulation until a formal decision is made.
7. The Library Media Specialist will obtain copies of the material in question for review by the reconsideration committee.
8. The committee will schedule a formal meeting within ten school days after the principal receives the written request for reconsideration. The principal notifies the superintendent as to this schedule.
9. All committee members will fully review the resource before voting.
10. During the initial or subsequent meetings, the committee will make its decision by secret ballot by simple majority to retain, move the material to a different level, or remove the resource.
11. The committee's written decision will be presented to the complainant and the superintendent within five days of the decision.
12. If the complainant is not satisfied with the decision, a written appeal can be made within ten school days to the superintendent, who will appoint a committee to consider the appeal.
13. If the complainant is not satisfied with the district level reconsideration committee decision, an appeal may be made within ten days of the district-level decision.
14. The School Board decision will be final, and the superintendent will implement the decision, which will stand for five years before new requests for reconsideration of those materials will be entertained.

SAMPLE LETTER TO PERSON REQUESTING RECONSIDERATION

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

We appreciate your concern over the use of \_\_\_\_\_ in our school district. The district has a policy for selecting materials, but realizes that not everyone will agree with every selection made.

To help you understand the selection process we are sending you copies of the district's:

Instructional goals and objectives

Materials selection policy statement

Procedure for handling formal complaints

Request for reconsideration of material form

If you are still concerned after you review this material, please complete the enclosed Request for Reconsideration of Material form and return it to me. You may be assured of prompt attention to your request. If I have not heard from you within two weeks, we will assume you no longer wish to file a formal complaint.

Sincerely,

Principal

Date

SAMPLE REQUEST FOR RECONSIDERATION OF MATERIAL FORM

The school board of the Pittsfield School District, SAU # 51, has delegated the responsibility for selection and evaluation of library/educational resources to the school library media specialist/curriculum committee, and has established reconsideration procedures to address concerns about those resources. Completion of this form is the first step in those procedures. If you wish to request reconsideration of library resources, please return the completed form to the library media specialist or principal.

Pittsfield School District

23 Oneida Street

Pittsfield, NH 03263

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Do you represent yourself? \_\_\_\_\_ Or an organization? Name of organization \_\_\_\_\_

Resource on which you are commenting:

\_\_\_ Book (e-book) \_\_\_ Movie \_\_\_ Magazine \_\_\_ Database

\_\_\_ Audio Recording \_\_\_ Digital Resource \_\_\_ Textbook \_\_\_ App

\_\_\_ Newspaper \_\_\_ Game \_\_\_ Streaming Media \_\_\_ Other

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Author/Producer \_\_\_\_\_

Is the resource part of the curriculum, library collection, or other?

\_\_\_\_\_

What brought this resource to your attention? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Have you examined the entire resource? If not, what sections did you review?

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What concerns you about the resource? \_\_\_\_\_

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Are there resources you suggest providing additional information and/or other viewpoints on this topic? \_\_\_\_\_

What action are you requesting the committee to consider?

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## RECONSIDERATION COMMITTEE

Under the best professional standards, reconsideration policies ask those charged with reviewing a challenged book or other resources to evaluate the work in light of the objective standards outlined in Policy IJJ. Listed below are some considerations for Reconsideration Committee members:

Bear in mind the federal obscenity law Citizen's Guide to U.S. Federal Law on Obscenity (justice.gov.) Consider if the material is suitable to be read aloud at a school board meeting. Compare the material in question to the material that is blocked by filters on all school software.

Read or view all materials referred to you including the full text of the material in question (unless the primary problem is with visuals) - available reviews, and notices of awards, if applicable. Consult various websites which provide ratings for parents and teachers similar to the rating system used for movies/DVD's like [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org); Rated Books; [www.book looks.org](http://www.book looks.org) to assess age appropriateness.

Challenged materials should not be removed from the collection while under reconsideration unless the challenge is primary visuals, in which case the material being challenged should be moved to a different location.

Passages or parts of the work in question should not be pulled out of context. The values and faults should be weighed against each other and the opinions based on the materials as a whole as well as against other possible substitutes which would meet the academic goals.

In order to prevent a tie vote, the principal should recruit an odd number of members for the committee.

While it may be prudent to state what area/role a committee member represents in the makeup of the committee, the personal identification of each member should remain anonymous to protect the objectivity of the deliberation.

The reconsideration committee meeting may be closed depending on state law and local practice. While public comments may be useful, those comments should be directed to the principal or media specialist.

The committee's recommendation is to be an objective evaluation of the material within the scope of the media center's selection policy.

The committee's report, presenting both majority and minority opinions, should be presented to the administrator, as directed in the reconsideration process, with a recommendation to retain the material in its original location, to relocate the material, or remove the material

Establish a procedure for communicating the committee's recommendation to the administrator and to the person who made the formal reconsideration request. For example, the committee communicates its decision to the principal, who then communicates the decision to the person who made the challenge.

SAMPLE RECONSIDERATION COMMITTEE REPORT

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Author/Producer \_\_\_\_\_

Has every member of the committee read the material entirely? \_\_\_

If not, why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Resources consulted: (policies, articles, reviews, etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

Reconsideration committee recommends: \_\_\_\_\_

Justification and comments: (include majority and minority positions)

Signatures of Reconsideration Committee Members:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Note: This report is forwarded to: \_\_\_\_\_

First Reading: August 3, 2023  
Adopted: August 17, 2023