

Gender Queer Book Review Committee – Complete Documentation Chaired by Dr. Kalia Reynolds, Asst. Superintendent (2022), WCASD

Full Disclosure: The facts presented in this writing are accurately documented with regard to the formation and decisions of the committee which was created to review *Gender Queer* and to recommend whether it should remain in WCASD’s high school libraries. The writing leaves no doubt that its author strongly opposes retaining this pornographic book in WCASD’s high school libraries. The author specifically objects to: (1) the indisputable “**stacking**” of that Committee in order to obtain the WCASD’s desired result, and (2) the irrational explanations given by the Review Committee in its recommendation that the school board retain *Gender Queer* in the HS libraries. These “AUTHOR’S OPINIONS” will be duly noted as such in the text.

Background: A WCASD resident (Mr. CM) photocopied graphic (pornographic) images from the book *Gender Queer* and asked the school board whether this book was in WCASD’s high school libraries during its 10/25/2021 meeting. When it was determined that such was indeed the case (*after an initial vehement denial by the board president*), a Review Committee was formed to determine whether *Gender Queer* should remain there.

Gender Queer Synopsis: *Gender Queer* is “**a graphic biography of a young female who wants to be male, but has to figure out how to incorporate her female body into that fantasy. It has depictions of her masturbating while pretending to be male and imagining she has a penis that’s receiving oral sex. It includes images of male homosexual behavior, which this young female wants to be a part of.**” Some of the objectionable images can be viewed at this [LINK](#).

AUTHOR’S OPINION: OBJECTIONS TO HAVING BOOK IN OUR HS LIBRARIES

- 1. It must be emphasized that the primary objection to this book is the undeniable pornographic images. The fact that they are images of homosexual sex is irrelevant.** Most opponents would object just as strongly to having books in our school libraries that contained analogous **heterosexual** images. Unfortunately, many individuals who favored retaining *Gender Queer* in our school libraries have attempted to connect the opposition to this indisputably pornographic book to prejudice and even hatred of those in the LGBTQ community. **This is categorically untrue!**
- 2. It is also unfair to label this to be “book banning” as proponents have done.** Anyone wishing to read this book can obtain it in public libraries or purchase it in a variety of bookstores. Opponents simply oppose the accessibility of pornographic books to minors in our taxpayer-funded school libraries!

Formation of Book Review Committee: A committee of 17 (16 voting) members, chaired by Dr. Kalia Reynolds, the Asst. Superintendent of the WCASD (*at that time*), was formed to review the book *Gender Queer* in accordance with stated procedures. They were to present their recommendation to the school board which would make a final decision regarding retention. The next several pages note the **relevant WCASD policy and administrative guidelines, the purposes and members of that committee**, and its **recommendation**.

Relevant WCASD Policy and Administrative Guidelines

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Policy 109.1: School Libraries

- School libraries shall be established for the purpose of promoting the cultural, social, ethical, and educational development of students and providing suitable and appropriate materials which extend and deepen the experiences encompassed in the curriculum. These objectives shall be fulfilled through the provision and maintenance of expertly selected books and other resource materials which contribute to the growth of the individual student.
- Books and other reading matter shall be chosen for values of interest and enlightenment of all students in the community.
- Every effort will be made to provide materials that present all points of view concerning the problems and issues of our times, international, national, and local, and books or other reading matter of sound factual authority shall not be proscribed or removed from library shelves or classrooms because of partisan or doctrinal approval, or disapproval.
- Censorship of books shall be challenged in order to maintain the school's responsibility to provide information and enlightenment.

109.1 AG1: Guidelines for School Libraries

- School libraries are concerned with generating understanding of American freedoms and with the preservation of these freedoms through the development of informed and responsible citizens.
- To provide materials representative of the many religious, ethnic, and cultural groups, and their contributions to our American heritage.
- To place principle above personal opinion and reason above prejudice in the selection of materials of the highest quality in order to assure a comprehensive collection appropriate for the users of the library.

906AG2: Guidelines for Complaints About Instructional Materials

- The Board, though it is finally responsible for all book purchases, recognizes the student's right of free access to many different types of books.
- That no parent/guardian or group of parents/guardians has the right to determine the reading matter of students other than their own children.

Book Review Committee for *Gender Queer*

The committee's purpose, meeting dates, and members are shown below. Mr. CM originally brought the complaint to the WCASD but since work responsibilities prohibited him from attending the meetings, Ms. Jenifer MacFarland attended in his place.

At the time the committee met, Wesley Hiester was a freshman in the WCASD and is a biological female who identifies as a male (*trans*-male). Jeannine Hiester, Wesley's mother, was one of two parents on the committee. Dr. Kalia Reynolds was the Asst. Superintendent of the WCASD. Except for Wesley, his mother, another student (Ella Prieto), community members (Diane Masar and Jenifer MacFarland), and one school board member (Dr. Kate Shaw), the remaining 10 of the 16 total voting members were district employees [either administrators (5, including Reynolds), principals (1), teachers (1) or librarians(3)].



West Chester Area School District
Book Review Committee
Gender Queer: A Memoir

Committee Purpose

The initial internal committee met on December 13, 2021 in response to a book complaint submitted in December; this meeting resulted in forming a book review committee. The book review committee met on February 22, 2022 and March 3, 2022 to discuss the high school library book, *Gender Queer: A Memoir* by Maia Kobabe, in light of the Board policies and points of challenge in the submitted complaint.

- Review 906AG2: Guidelines for Complaints about Instructional Materials
- Review 109.1AG1: Guidelines for School Libraries
- Read the book - *Gender Queer: A Memoir*
- Consider the book with the expectations of the policies given the presented points of challenge
- Share feedback with the committee and present a recommendation to the superintendent

February 22 Meeting slides
March 3 Meeting slides

Committee Members

This committee is a representative group of diverse stakeholders that are a part of the WCASD.

Name	Role
Jeannine Hiester, Mr. CM	WCASD Parents
Diane Masar, Jenifer MacFarland	WCASD Community Members
Wesley Hiester, Ella Prieto	WCASD Students
Mike Marano	WCASD High School Principal
Kristen Barnello, Rebecca Eberly, Tammi Florio, Dawn Mader	WCASD District Administrators
Kara Bailey	WCASD Teacher
Caitlin Boyle, Adrienne Matjasic, Rita Vandergast	WCASD Librarians
Kate Shaw	WCASD Board Member
Kalia Reynolds	WCASD Superintendent Designee

Two Questions Regarding Committee Selection, Operations and Biases

Question #1: Did the selection of members truly represent a diverse group of objective stakeholders?

Dr. Kate Shaw was the only school board member on the committee. The following is an excerpt from her remarks after the school board's vote [LINK](#)

Excerpt: “*I sat on this committee, participated in the conversations on this committee, and I want to make it very clear that this committee was not monolithic. There were many opinions expressed in this committee both in full conversation and in small groups. So I don't want anybody to think that this committee was rigged or stacked with people who are going to automatically vote to approve this book. That is NOT true!*”

AUTHOR'S OPINION: Upon examining the “credentials” of the selected members

Dr. Shaw's statement is, in a word, unbelievable. This Review Committee was NOT IN ANY WAY a “representative group of diverse stakeholders.” This is evidenced by information enumerated below.

1. There were **ten WCASD educators (employees) on the Committee**. It is a virtual certainty that most, if not all, of them were heavily invested in, and strongly supported DEI issues which would surely translate to a vote for retention of *Gender Queer*.
2. **Wesley Hiester**, a student member of the committee and self-proclaimed *trans*-male, publicly praised *Gender Queer* prior to the school board's vote and implied that this book had saved his life. Wesley's vote would unquestionably be for retention.
3. **Wesley's mother, Jeannine Hiester**, was selected to be one of the two parents on the Committee. Why was this mother of the child who indicated that reading *Gender Queer* had saved “his” life chosen to serve on the Committee of the thousands of other parents available in the WCASD community?
4. **Diane Masar**, one of the two community members, said in the Public Comments prior to the vote that **not keeping the book in our libraries would be an “act of violence.”** No one making such an extreme statement could possibly have objectively reviewed this book.

I don't doubt that the Committee discussed the book at length, nor do I doubt that varying viewpoints were presented during these discussions. The Committee might not have been “monolithic” in that there of course were variations to some degree, however minimal. However, considering the above information, it should be obvious to any rational individual that the majority of the Review Committee was unquestionably stacked with those who would ultimately vote in accordance with the district's desired outcome which was to retain *Gender Queer*. For an intelligent and skilled school board member such as Dr. Shaw to insist otherwise not only lessens her credibility but is an insult to those of us who are quite capable of checking most of the members' credentials.

Question #2: Were procedures followed that enabled all voices to be heard?

One member of the Review Committee, Ms. Jenifer MacFarland, left no doubt as to her extreme dissatisfaction with the procedures and operations of the Review Committee. Her comments were read by Mr. CM during the **Public Comments on Agenda Items** prior to the vote on *Gender Queer* at the 3/28/2022 WCASD board meeting.

Note: When Mr. CM (one of two committee parents and the original objector to having *Gender Queer* in our HS libraries) could not attend the meetings due to work conflicts, Ms. Jenifer MacFarland attended the Feb. 22 and March 3 meetings in his place. Although there are 17 members listed, Mr. CM. and Ms. MacFarland had a single vote, so technically there were 16 votes allotted for the decision. Her statement is given below.

Ms. MacFarland's Statement Documenting her Extreme Dissatisfaction with Committee Procedures and Operations

"After introductions, the February meeting set committee norms. The usual norms were transcribed on a white board, but one norm WAS MISSING, so I asked for it to be added. Some on the committee objected, but I insisted that DATA be considered as well.

The norms were set and the meeting was ended. I sent a follow up e-mail to Dr. Reynolds requesting data critical to the discussion.

I also advised that I would be happy to provide an overview of brain and human development for the committee to ensure a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. There was no response until February 28th, which was an invitation to discuss the issue in person, but the scheduling did not work. The request for the data WAS IGNORED.

At the March meeting, a meeting agenda was provided on PowerPoint. We quickly reviewed the norms and went to slide 4 – allegedly Webster's definition of the word "pornography", which by the way – is completely different from the one I copied here from WebsterDictionary.net:

Por`nog´ra`phy

1. Licentious painting or literature; especially, the painting anciently employed to decorate the walls of rooms

devoted to bacchanalian orgies.

2. (Med.) A treatise on prostitutes, or prostitution.

3. obscene pictures, writings, drawings, motion pictures, videos, or the like intended primarily to cause sexual arousal and having little or no artistic merit; also, the content of such materials.

While the Pornography definition slide was SHOWN – it WAS NOT DISCUSSED. Also, not shown nor discussed, was the next slide labeled "Obscenity Factors" – as we moved directly to a Quick Write on Padlet (the next slide) on what our initial thoughts and rationale were.

After the quick write, Dr. Reynolds began to move on to small groups, but I objected – saying that a FULL DISCUSSION of the issue could not be held until the group had some understanding of child and brain development. After the small group discussion, students presented data, and then I proceeded to share the information I had. When I was done, Dr. Reynolds went directly to voting on the recommendation to the board.

*THERE WAS NO LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION – OF ANYTHING – AS STATED IN THE SLIDES THERE WOULD BE. **WHY NOT**?*

How was the group to make an informed, educated decision on something WITHOUT ANY DISCUSSION of district policy, Webster’s definition of Pornography, or a discussion of the book itself and how it relates to both?

This was a very poorly run meeting with a clear agenda to rush this book through the committee and recommend it to the board for approval. Indeed, the last item on the circulated agenda was “confirm recommendation” – and this was BEFORE the committee met.

...and that, my friends, was the intention all along, wasn’t it?”

Dr. Kalia Reynolds' Explanations of Committee Procedures and Ultimate Recommendation to Retain Gender Queer

Note The context of Dr. Reynolds' explanations can be understood by viewing the video at this [LINK](#)

Dr. Reynolds discussed Policy 109.1 for school libraries (as noted previously on p.2 above). She said: *"We wanted to know that books and other reading materials would be chosen for the value of interest and enlightenment of all students in the community and that we would make every effort to provide materials that provide all points of view concerning the problems and issues of the times."*

Reynolds also noted that the committee discussed censorship and that it is the *"school's responsibility to provide information and also enlightenment."* She said *"We want to recognize that students have free access to all types of books. We also discussed that no parent, guardian or group of guardians have the right to determine the reading matter of students other than their own children."*

The concerns noted in the filed complaint were the book's sexually-explicit content and pornographic material. Dr. Reynolds alluded to these complaints and provided the following explanations in support of retaining *Gender Queer*.

1. *"This book is an awarded book and is recommended as a read from the [School Library Journal](#)."*
2. *"This is an optional book in our libraries and should remain for students that need to see themselves or their stories reflected in the book."*
3. *"We should consider what we deem appropriate for our high school students and whether images are appropriate."*
4. *"This book supports queer students and their allies and the importance of representation on our library shelves."*
5. *"We should have books that reflect the experiences of our LGBTQ+ students."*
6. *"There is a high rate of suicide for transgender students and having opportunities to have connection in relation was important in our library collections."*
7. *"It was also noted (that) nude images in art books are also considered appropriate."*
8. *"There are images that could be viewed as explicit but in context of the memoir they are not pornographic."*

Counterarguments to Dr. Reynolds' Rationalizations (Author's Opinions)

The reasons given by Dr. Reynolds for keeping *Gender Queer* in our high school libraries are hollow rationalizations. None of her arguments provides justification for that which is indefensible.

- 1. The bottom line and overriding factor is that there are indisputably pornographic images in this comic book memoir that cannot be ignored.** Why the author felt s/he had to include them is anyone's guess. Absent these images, this would have been a book that indeed could have supported our queer students and provided them with the opportunity to see themselves within its pages, in which case it should certainly have remained in our libraries. However, **that is not the case.** As some speakers noted, **there must be other options of more appropriate reading material available to meet the needs of our LGBTQ students other than a book that contains such sexually explicit and offensive images.**
- 2. To imply that this comic book with its pornographic images even remotely resembles an "art book" is preposterous.**
- 3. Additionally, admitting that there are explicit images which should not be considered to be pornographic because they are taken in context of the memoir is absurd.** This is a desperate and failed attempt to defend the inexplicable. Why should sexually explicit images be acceptable just because they are contained in a memoir? It is not unreasonable to assume that **most** WCASD residents, if shown these images, would vehemently object to their taxes funding this book for our high school libraries, memoir or no memoir!
4. During the March 28, 2022 meeting, both Dr. Reynolds and Dr. Sokolowski implied that even though there are concerning and explicit images, the book, **taken as a whole**, is appropriate reading material for our libraries. "**Taken as a whole" is a specious argument which can be refuted by a food analogy.** Eating a dozen oysters could result in severe food poisoning or even death if **just one** oyster is contaminated. Similarly, if even a small portion of the book is undeniably toxic, that book should not be in our school libraries that are accessible to minors.

Final Decision: 8:1 to Retain Gender Queer in HS Libraries

An overwhelming majority (> 80%) of the Committee members voted anonymously to keep *Gender Queer* on the library shelves of WCASD's high school libraries.

Author's Opinion: This was not a surprise since it has been established that the Review Committee was **stacked** with individuals who would likely vote in the manner desired by the district.

The Review Committee presented its recommendation to the WCASD School Board on March 28, 2022. Each of the board members and Dr. Sokolowski noted their opinions regarding the retention of *Gender Queer* in WCASD's high school libraries. Eight of the nine board members concurred with the Committee's decision to keep the book on the high school library shelves; only member Stacey Wholmsey dissented, noting that she will be voting "NO" due to "*process and procedure and not necessarily a moral judgement.*" She said she thought that the decision should have been postponed in order to provide an opportunity for all voices to be heard. Although Superintendent Sokolowski originally had expressed concern about *Gender Queer's* being in the WCASD libraries, his opinion flipped. He articulated the reasons why he supports the Committee's recommendation to keep the book in WCASD's high school libraries.

Internet Links to Pertinent Portions of March 28 Meeting Video

- Full Video of >4 Hour March 28, 2022 Meeting to Vote on *Gender Queer*: [LINK](#):
- Public Comments section prior to vote: [LINK](#):
 - Committee member Diane Masar's statement noting that not retaining *Gender Queer* would be an "Act of Violence." [LINK](#)
 - Jenifer MacFarland's statement noting dissatisfaction with procedures: [LINK](#)
- Dr. Kalia Reynolds' explanation of committee procedures and recommendations: [LINK](#)
- Dr. Sokolowski explaining his change of opinion and final choice to retain *Gender Queer*. In the WCASD's high school libraries: [LINK](#)
- School Board members giving their personal opinions on retention and final vote: [LINK](#)
- Public Comments at the end of the meeting: [LINK](#)