

**EAST STROUDSBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION
EDUCATION PROGRAMS & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING
January 12, 2022
VIA Zoom
7:00 P.M.
Minutes**

I. The Chairperson, Dr. Damary Bonilla, called the Education Programs & Resources Committee meeting to order at 7:08 p.m. and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance. Secretary Jessica Barlotta called the roll.

II. Board Committee Members Present: Dr. Damary Bonilla, Rebecca Bear, Jason Gullstrand, Debbie Kulick

III. School Personnel Present: Tabitha Bradley, Trenee Lurry, Jennifer Marmo, Jessica Barlotta, Heather Piperato, Debra Padavano, Manvel Page, William Riker, William Vitulli, Aliya Grindle, Marjory Gullstrand, Janice Rodriguez, Catherine Schroth

IV. Community Members Present: Christopher Brown, George Andrews, Richard Schlameuss, Steven Lurry, Keleisha Phillip-Stringer, Ni Allen, Jenny Cirillo, Jesse Cruz, Justyne Cruz, Tiffany Davis, Agnieszka Desrochers, Alyssa Eaton, David Krupski, Ann M., Jessica Malachowsky, Shanice Person-Correa, Ruben Torres, Seneca Tucker, Jessica Granzen, Rostinian Zael

V. APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE:

Motion was made by Rebecca Bear to approve the agenda for January 12, 2022, after moving topic D to be discussed after topic A, before topics B and C, and with members of the Committee reserving the right to add to the agenda and take further action in the best interest of the District. Motion was seconded by Debbie Kulick and carried unanimously, 4-0.

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE:

Motion was made by Jason Gullstrand to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2021 meeting. Motion was seconded by Rebecca Bear and carried unanimously, 4-0.

VI. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION:

a. Lehman Climate Survey Report – Debra Padavano

Dr. Damary Bonilla handed the meeting off to Dr. Vitulli to get started. Dr. Vitulli started by welcoming everyone and introduced Deb Padavano who is the principal of Lehman; to discuss the climate results for Lehman, as Mr. Reichl had done at the last EPR meeting with the results of JTL. Ms. Padavano had a presentation that accompanied her speaking. She explained that the survey was given to the students back in September, when they first came back to school. Many students, the eighth graders for instance, 2021 is the first time that for many of them they have been in school. The last time they've been in school was in sixth grade, so when they look at the survey results, they have to take into account the Covid years. The data from the climate survey was disaggregated and analyzed for trends patterns and gaps, the data reflected in the following tables indicates responses, who strongly agree and agreed combined. In grade

six, there was 149 students that took the survey, grade seven was 148, and grade eight was 152 students. Ms. Padavano went on to discuss all the different questions and the responses the students provided. She also discussed how her building was using the answers and what they were doing differently based on the results of the survey. She looked at the data and then put the areas of focus together but wanted student input before proceeding. She reviewed the data with her staff and then put together a lesson for wellness Wednesdays, and had asked the teachers review the survey results with the kids. She then identified areas of strengths and weaknesses and let the students communicate their thoughts and concerns and then collaborate and brainstorm possible action steps. She went through the results of what the students wanted changed and what their action steps were, along with the reasoning behind why the survey was answered the way it was.

Dr. Bonilla thanked Ms. Padavano for the presentation. She went on to say that it is wonderful, not just to take time to ask the questions but also go the extra mile and she appreciate that Ms. Padavano has tried to figure out how to incorporate the youth voice, as that is something that they talk about a lot in this committee. Dr. Riker has talked a lot about the youth voice as well and we know that some of the results are based on students being out of the buildings for a given period of time and there was some adjustment for particularly the eighth graders. She went on to say she was thinking it's been so crazy for them, since they started middle school till being in eighth grade, so definitely considering all the challenges that they have faced in addition to any issues that they come with based on their personal life and then educational challenges. She really appreciates the comprehensive information that Ms. Padavano shared and of course there's a bit of personal interest, as Dr. Bonilla has a son in her school, and so she can attest to the way that Ms. Padavano engages with students and the attentiveness that she and her staff have towards them and she really appreciates that, as a parent as well.

She opened it up to members of the committee with questions or comments and handed it over to Rebecca Bear. She thanked Ms. Padavano for the presentation, saying it was very comprehensive. Rebecca's daughter was in Ms. Padavano's building last year. But was not in the building for two years. Her son went through Lehman and she appreciates everything that North has done for her kids, whether it be the elementary, Lehman and now the high school. She really thinks the results that Ms. Padavano has had with "the teachers care about me and listen"; Rebecca truly believes that they do at Lehman. She went on to say that she has experienced most of the teachers within blue and silver and I can honestly say what the results have said, the teachers truly care, so she went on to thank Ms. Padavano.

Dr. Bonilla handed the meeting over to Debbie Kulick. She asked when they were planning to do a follow up survey? About what time? She pointed out that she would be curious to see the side by side data. She is curious to see if they value the things Ms. Padavano has added based on their requests.

Ms. Padavano said she was thinking about doing at the end of the year, in May because she does not want to do it in June, but will probably around PSSA time.

Debbie Kulick and Rebecca Bear went on to discuss how it would be useful to question the effectiveness of the programs on the next survey to get input from the students on how they felt about the changes that were implemented at their requests after the first survey.

Dr. Bonilla went on to say they are here to partner with Dr. Padavano if she wants any ideas or wants any support from the committee and they invite her back after the results so that they are able to talk through the findings. She asked Jason Gullstrand if he wanted to share anything.

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Jason Gullstrand discussed some of the statistics shows, including how the students felt the caring and feeling good was in the mid to upper 90s and then he pointed out that the ethical participation and was a lot lower than what it would be preferred to be. He went on to say he was really curious to see how the plans in place help because including the input from the students is huge and letting them have a voice in it and moving forward with these plans make it obvious that the number is going to be well out of the 60's by the end of the school year. He is looking forward to seeing that data but it's great to see that positive

data, right up front, right in the beginning of the year. It's great way to start off the year, so he thanked Ms. Padavano for it.

Ms. Padavano thanked him is happy to respond to the student's requests where she can. She is glad they are speaking up to the three leaders of the school.

Dr. Bonilla went on to thank her for empowering our students and then asked to move on to the PTO update.

b. PTO Update: Middle Smithfield Elementary School

Dr. Vitulli shared the presentation from the PTO. Dr. Bonilla introduced the topic by thanking Dr. Vitulli for putting up the presentation. She went on to say one of the initiatives that the committee has taken on, at the recommendation of School Board Director Rebecca Bear is to have the PTO give an update on what they're working on. For some time, the committee has brainstormed about how do they support the PTO and how do they help the PTO connect with those in other schools, because they are an important part of the school community and help promote a positive school climate and really provide resources for the students and the staff. So they are going to start off with an update each month from the elementary school PTO's, then it will move to the middle schools, and then to the high schools. She thanked the Middle Smithfield Elementary School PTO for kicking off as the first PTO presenters. They are Alicia, Keleisha, Agnes, and Jenny who make up the Middle Smithfield PTO. She then gave them the opportunity to present.

The President of the PTO, Alyssa, introduced the other members. It was then handed to Keleisha, who is the Vice President. She went on to talk about last year's activity which was a toy drive fundraiser, which provided a gift to every MSE student. They plan to do it yearly. They also provide a goodie bag or Student of the Month. They are invested in the students and want the students to feel that the PTO is proud of them. She handed the presentation over to the Treasurer, Agnes. Agnes went on to discuss the Scholastic Book Fair upcoming. As well as a Bingo night, Valentine's Day Grams, a Krispy Kreme Fundraiser, and much more.

Dr. Bonilla went on to thank them for the presentation, the work they do, on behalf of Middle Smithfield Elementary School students and congratulated them for taking on the large task and successfully completing it in a short period of time. She is excited about all that they are doing. She went on to say that anyone who's able to support MSE, please do if you are a parent at MSE and you want to be part of the PTO or support in any way reach out to them using their email addresses that were in the presentation. Jason Gullstrand went on to say they are the unsung heroes, behind the scenes and people don't realize the effort that they put into things and they just want to do what's best for the kids and the committee really appreciates it.

Rebecca Bear thank you them so much for what they do. She agreed with Jason as they are unsung heroes, but Rebecca said it was probably the most rewarding experience that she has had. She added that if there's any events they would like the committee to attend or help out with please feel free to reach out to them. Rebecca did volunteer at JM Hill because they reached out to her. She personally would gladly volunteer for anything that they need to help with. Dr. Bonilla attested that they do show up, as Rebecca and Steve were at the Lehman Intermediate school play the week prior.

Debbie Kulick attested to the value of the PTO as it grew from PTA and she grew up in a household where everything revolved around the elementary school and the importance of the work that gets done and makes a difference way down the road. She would also encourage the PTO, as she would any of the school's PTO, to send her any information and she will try to publish information about their events that are coming up or things that they are holding for which they are looking to get public support.

c. DEI Committee Update – Trene Lurry

Dr. Vitulli handed the meeting over to Trenee Lurry. She went on to say that they continue to meet as scheduled, and as a district, they are talking about how we can best support the LGBTQIA+ population of students. They have verbalized over time that they are lacking support and need more support from the DEI group, and that is what they are willing to do as a district, and they are working together, as a community, to be able to have that discussion, to see how they can best support them. that's all I have for you this evening have a good night. Dr. Vitulli thanked Trene for the information.

d. Library Books

Dr. Vitulli introduced Dr. Bonilla to give the background on this topic. Dr. Bonilla began by saying that a couple of weeks ago, they received several female complaints regarding two books in the high school and allow the board to have a working session. They had a public working session last Wednesday evening, if people were not able to join, they can catch the recording and hear the points that were made. This committee has been tasked with making recommendations to the full board in relation to the two books in question and the recent discussions that they have had. I will share the titles of the books and what they've been tasked with is three things:

One: will the district implement an opt in or an opt out option for parents around access to books?

Two: will the district have a reserve section of books, particularly at this conversation we're talking about the high school libraries?

Three: will we put the two books in question back on the high school library shelves?

The decision is not made by this committee. This committee will make recommendations to the full Board and, at the next board meeting on January 24 at 7pm, which is a public meeting, the full Board will vote on such recommendations, the titles of the books are: All Boys Aren't Blue: A Memoir-Manifesto and Gender Queer: A Memoir. Dr. Bonilla went ahead to open the meeting up for the committee to have a discussion, she asked any members of the board, who are not on the committee, to hold off comments until they began public comment. At that time, they will open it up with some direction for the public to participate with comments.

Debbie Kulick began by saying she can appreciate the concern from some parents, and she can appreciate the request for the access to the same information. Her opinion is that parents may sign an opt in/opt out form, and she feels that the two books are merely going to be the beginning of what we would consider a reserve shelf. She believes there will be many books in the future that will join the books on that shelf and students can have access to them, however, there are some parents who feel that their students should not, though, and they should have that option.

Dr. Bonilla said she appreciated Debbie kicking off the discussion and that is exactly what they are doing is sharing. In context, she went on to explain that where they are coming from in terms of the consideration, she did want to share a couple of things that are part of the discussion. One is that they have received emails from parents who are against said titles and they have also received emails from parents who are for said titles. They also want to reference, the last public meeting, where they had members of the public, including students, talk about their views on said titles and particularly: The student voice that they talked about today is important, so they are glad that the students felt safe enough and empowered enough to come and share their views. She did also want to state that the books are for an older audience, they are in the high school libraries, not in the elementary schools or the middle schools, at this time. The Librarians talked through a process, at the public working session, so the public and Committee has the opportunity to follow up on that as well, as the Librarians joined in the evening meeting, and if they wish to make a comment, they will be able to do so. One concern that Dr. Bonilla expressed at the public session, because she was in the consideration space of a reserve section, after hearing the Librarians and the conversation about the social emotional well-being of the students and the possibility of causing trauma to students who are questioning or trying to figure out where they are in

terms of identity in any space, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation. It can be in different spaces. She would not want to cause trauma on our students and, for her, if we are a district that talks about the importance of social emotional learning, trauma informed care, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and we invest time and money to train our staff, then that consideration at this time is not on the table for her. She went on to say she would love to hear from Rebecca and Jason, and not every single thing had to be addressed at once.

Jason went on to say he definitely agrees that parents have a choice to decide what their child can and can't read, especially in the library space. It's a choice that they have and so giving that parents to opt their child out of reading those particular titles, or any titles in the library that they don't feel comfortable with their child having access to, for whatever reason, it may be, he thinks it's really important. Providing the resources and the format and documentation for a parent to be able to easily access that material is really important. He wants to ensure we don't hide that form 12 layers deep on a website where they they're going to have difficulty finding it. A parent has every right to say, these are the titles or might be a subject area or something that they don't feel comfortable with their child checking out. He knows the Librarians would then process that and put it in their system and make sure that doesn't occur. Making it opt in makes it really difficult, because then those students who want it, it makes it significantly more difficult, especially if we did that and put it on a reserve shelf. That is adding multiple layers for those students who want to explore and read it and move on with that topic; then we have added, not one boundary, but two. He added that, moving forward, the goal is to remove those boundaries. His issue with this, moving forward, is that they are not just looking at the two books, these topics or subjects today, it is something that they have to put together to make sure that in the future, whatever plan, the whole board decides to come up with, is implemented fairly throughout all areas of subject matter; that it isn't particularly one subject area or another subject area, so we want to be very cautious moving forward. Providing access to those books to those students without a reserve, and for them to have unfettered access to it, is the direction that Jason believes is the way to go. It doesn't mean he agrees or disagrees with the content or the subject or the information inside. He truly believes a parent has the opportunity to opt a child out of that, and they have an opportunity to opt a child out of other books that are there. Moving forward, that would be his opinion on it, but it's the whole Boards' opinion moving forward and, at the end of it all, it really comes down to the solicitor and his recommendation because there are laws already set in place and it's the Board's job to follow those laws and to make sure that they abide accordingly. It's not going to please everybody how it turns out; there are multiple steps that need to be done in order to make the correct decision, as opposed to just an off the cuff decision, so he looks forward to the conversation they will have with that.

Dr. Bonilla thanked Jason and went on to address that she also agrees with parent choice. She thinks parents are the best advocates for their children and do agree with parent choice. She also heard Jason say, he was recommending an Opt Out, and she would agree with that. She then gave Rebecca Bear the opportunity to react to some of what has been stated already by others.

Rebecca added that she took the opportunity to read both books. She said that initially, it was hard for her to process as a parent, because the topic is new to her as well, so she could see how parents could act towards reading it, because being almost 50, her generation never spoke about it and the younger generation is a lot more open and a lot more out there, if you will, than they were when she grew up and she could see when she read the book, All Boys Aren't Blue, how society made this young man feel. She never thought that somebody felt that way or realized that society did that, so it was it was eye opening to her to read it. She does feel that maybe the topic isn't what some parents want their children to read and that's fine. There were other books in the library that her child took out when he was younger, which she was alarmed that it was there as well. She reached out to the librarian, but then read the book with her child and discussed it afterwards, because to her, it was a heavy topic. Not every parent wants their kid to read certain things, she completely understands that and it's their choice, as are other choices such as letting kids listen to rap music or not, the same thing being the choice to turn off the radio. What she learned at the group meeting they had, when they had the open discussion, was that the library books are actually listed right on the website under library and after the meeting she went home and looked at it. So

if parents can go through the entire library online and look at the books and see what they don't want their kids to read. They could then check it off an opt out, so she thinks that's really important. The other concern she had is because they put so much attention on these two books for now, and she is sure there will be more books in the future, that if they put them on a reserve list, kids are going to take them out just because they're on the reserve list. Her fear is they're going to take away from what the true message is especially the gender queer one, because it's an easier read, if you will, because it's more of a comic strip type read and she doesn't want kids to take it out and then make a mockery of what the topic is, because she thinks it's a very important topic and it's needed, but she does not want anyone to take away the value of what the book is trying to give. She thinks it should be out there on the shelf. The gender queer has been on the shelves for two years now and it's finally coming to light and she doesn't know if parents just didn't know it was there, or how it even came to the forefront of attention. It's been on the shelf for two years, because when she went into the library list to see you how long it's been on the shelves, it has been on them for two years, and it was never a problem before. She doesn't know if kids have taken it out before or not, she can't tell that. She doesn't take away anything from parents that don't want their kids to read it, but she doesn't want to take away from kids that could benefit from it as well. She spoke to one of her very good friends from high school, whose daughter is now questioning as well, and she read the book with her daughter, and said that she actually got a lot out of it. For Rebecca, it was just more of a learning experience, because her children are not questioning that but by Rebecca reading it, it helped her to become a better ally to those that are going through what is referenced in the book.

Dr. Bonilla thanked Rebecca. She then wanted to make a point that one of the concerns in this conversation is that both of the books in question are related to the same topic, and there's a concern that has been expressed by several board members in terms of creating a reserve section, with two books about the same topic; Debbie is leaning yes to a reserve section, Dr. Bonilla is leaning no, Rebecca is leaning no, and Jason is leaning no.

Debbie went ahead with a question. If she was a parent and opted out, she has no problem with the form. She thinks the form idea is excellent. She agrees with Rebecca that being able to find out everything in the library from the website is a big help, and she agrees with Jason that the form shouldn't be buried 60 feet down in the website. Her question was, her reason for thinking of a reserve shelf is; if the books are in common shelving and she is a parent who has said she does not want her child to see this book or to read this book, what stops her child from taking it off the shelf, not taking it out, and being exposed to it? That's the part she is thinking of, which is why she leans towards the reserve shelf and she agrees with Jason who apparently agreed with her, that this will not be the only time they have a book that they are going to have questions about or have concerns from other people.

Dr. Bonilla responded that she appreciates the question and offered to have members of the committee who want to respond, can. She would return the question and say: what's not to allow a child to see such a book online, on technology, or in any other space that they have access to, such as other content that a parents may not want their kids to see but find out later that they saw online?

Debbie went on to say that is not the district's responsibility, their responsibility is the narrow scope of the library. They can't control what a child looks at elsewhere with devices that are not provided by the district, or when they talk to their friends or whatever. She understands that there are many other places, but she is only looking at the narrow little scope for which the district is responsible.

Dr. Bonilla commented that they can definitely explore that. She does think there is a component of conversations that will need to take place, and particularly for families (because for some, they do not have parents but have grandparents, as she did, so she'd mindful that she has been saying parents), but where there will have to be a discussion with the child or children, if they don't want them accessing certain content, because it's not just the school responsibility. They are in this together and there, there has to be conversation. Dr. Bonilla talked to her kids about things that she wants to build awareness on and if there's something that she is not comfortable with, she talked to them about that as well, but it's a valid point. She would love to hear Jason and Rebecca's comments if they have any.

Rebecca added that the books were on the shelf for two years and she knows they have been in a pandemic, but kids have still gone to the library and they didn't find it then.

Jason commented that, similar to Rebecca's point, you don't happen upon the books. They are books that are sought out, they are books that are searched out because it's a particular topic that piques someone's interest. It is not something you would just flip through the library and find it. He said it does pose the question that Debbie says is how do we allow that dialogue to open up for our students and what role does the school district play with the parents in regard to that? Our libraries aren't set up like a book store, where there are different sections and communities. Our libraries still use a formal Dewey decimal system and fiction and nonfiction, etc... Thus the happenstance of stumbling upon such topics wouldn't be as easy as if you were in a bookstore. Since they've been in the library for a couple of years and it just came to our attention, then maybe it's not as common as we think.

Dr. Bonilla agreed that it's something for consideration. The question about having a reserve section of the books in the high school libraries: Debbie is yes, Dr. Bonilla is a no, Jason is a no, Rebecca is a no but has a question or comment.

Rebecca's concern about the reserve shelf is if there is a student who is already kind of almost embarrassed or unsure of their feelings, to have to go to someone and ask for the book is going to take a lot of courage as well, and they might not be ready to have that courage to do so. Rebecca does not want to add more social emotional pressure to them to have to ask for help, nor does she want to take away from a friend of somebody who is questioning that and wants to be a better friend to that person, but kind of embarrassed as well that they want to be supportive of their friend. That is why Rebecca does not like the reserve shelf idea. Not because she wants it easily accessible to everyone, but because she wants to give kids the peace of mind and empowerment to make their own decision without asking for it.

Jason pointed out that his concern is for the future. His decision was not based on the topic or content but instead the concept that if the books are put on a reserve shelf, can they ever come off, is there a way off? It would be another policy that would have to be created in the future. Once the door is opened to limit content, what content could potentially be filtered in the future? He is looking at it from a future position of what precedent could be set by this decision.

De. Bonilla commented that she appreciated Jason's input and she appreciated his efforts to be proactive rather than being reactive. She then proceeded to clarify that she knows where everyone stands on the reserve shelf and where individuals are leaning in terms of the parent and guardian choice. Everyone seemed to want parental choice, however, Dr. Bonilla and Jason agreed on an Opt Out, but she needed clarification on what Rebecca and Debbie felt about Opt In or Out. Both Rebecca and Debbie agreed on the Opt Out. The next thing she went on to clarify was in regards to putting the book back on the shelf. Dr. Bonilla was a yes to put it on the shelf. Rebecca and Jason were in agreement. Debbie was a no because she wanted a reserve shelf, and without that, she did not want them put back out. There were no other questions from the Committee.

VII. Questions & Comments from Board Committee Members on agenda items

n/a

VIII. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION – LIMITED TO ITEMS OF DISCUSSION

Limited to comments on this agenda by residents and taxpayers of the school district (3 min. ea.)

Dr. Bonilla proceeded to open the meeting for public comment. She did remind everyone that the public participation is limited to the items of discussion, they will not entertain comments on anything other than the four items that are on the agenda. They will begin with board members who are not on the committee. Those who speak that are not a member of the board are asked to you state their name, the township from which they reside, and their comments are limited to three minutes, which Dr. Vitulli will help with. She passed the meeting off to George Andrews first.

George commented that he agreed with Debbie Kulick on putting the books on a separate shelf, not just for the two books in question but based around content, not subject to determine what goes on the reserve shelf. So it could be a romantic book, such as Fifty Shades of Grey, again not based around subject, but

around content. Dr. Bonilla thanked George and told him he could bring that point up at the full board meeting and she also made the point that if they put a reserve section in place now, they are only discussing the two books specifically referred to. She also clarified that at the public working session, they all agreed that the Librarians would not be going through every book that is stock because it is too much.

She then asked Steven Lurry to speak. He discussed that after hearing all the discussion about the books and the thought put into considering what to do with them, it brings up a lot of conversation. Some of which is about work that can be done at home as far as parents go, but there are a lot of other books out there with similar content and those are not being removed. He would not want to see the books removed because with the information that they have in it and the present day, and the things that kids are experiencing, these books may be a tool that's going to help them. Parents need to do the work at home as far as the things that they don't want their kids to see and they have to be more involved with the children, so he would not want it to go on to a reserve. In the beginning he had mixed emotions, but said that once you step back and listen to the process, he thinks the kids will be losing more than they would actually be gaining as parents.

Dr. Bonilla thanked him for sharing his thoughts. She also went on to mention a case from Fairfax, Virginia, where two books were similarly taken off the shelves by administration to conduct a review. Each was conducted by a separate committee. Our district explored that possibility in their public working session the week prior. The results of the Fairfax District were to put both of the books back on the shelves and while one of them is not in our ESASD libraries, but the other one is, and so I wanted to read the results related to Gender Queer. The committee that reviewed Gender Queer found the illustrated memoir was a “scientifically based narrative of one person's journey with gender identity that contains information and perspective that is not widely represented.” That is an area that was discussed in the open session. There are not a lot of resources available to support the population of students in this space. Dr. Bonilla then opened the meeting to the public, as no other Board Members had any comments. David Krupski, who is from Lehman township which resides in East Stroudsburg, began Public Participation. He started by thanking the board members, both in committee and those on the call, as well as all other East Stroudsburg Area School District employees who happened to be publicly participating and listening on this call for all of the work they do for the students and the Community. He did not want to speak for any of the school Librarians but as someone who went through the East Stroudsburg Area School District, he thinks it's important to acknowledge that the work the Librarians do is not only critical, but it is difficult work and they are professionals, all of them with degrees in what they do and, to Mr. Krupski's knowledge, no one in the committee has a degree in this work, so he thought it is important that it was acknowledged the fact that they probably did their due diligence, because they are professionals he is sure that they researched and the books that they choose, have not only educational value, but Community value as well, so he thinks it's important to put that out there, that they are debating two books for the greater good of the Community and the fact that, to his knowledge, at least in the Committee meeting, they were not allowed to speak, and in the working session, they were oftentimes talked over or were muted or there were side conversations that the public was hearing versus their responses is something that needs to be talked about. He also mentioned that as well as being an educator, his family growing up, was a foster family, and so they took in foster kids and over the last 30 or so years, his parents who take foster children from both Monroe and Pike County, they have taken in close to 60 kids and when they talk about being putting books on a restricted shelf, the kids might not have the courage.

Dr. Bonilla added that the Librarians were given the option that if they wanted to speak, they could. The committee did not want to put them on the spot, again, as they did present at the working session. They are grateful for the work that they do, as they said, and definitely want to support in the best interest of our students.

Shanice Person-Correa was the next to talk. She is located in Lehman township and also a graduate of an East Stroudsburg North class of 2007. She was one of the students that spent a lot of time in the library.

She didn't interact much with her peers. She is a level one autistic, so she learned a lot of what she knows of peer interactions from a lot of books that she read. For her, this is important because her family had a lot of values that she wasn't allowed to explore and restricting access to things, especially in school libraries, when the area in Lehman is far away from things and there is no transportation, so students may not have access to a local library. Restricting access would be problematic. She understands the idea of having parents have control over what their children can and cannot access. She doesn't think there should be a reserve shelf, maybe a shelf or section of the library that's restricted to age or maybe grade level, where a lot of the more mature or heavier topics, are all put so there is not singling out of anything and letting certain students that fit that criteria go there and have that manned by library staff. She is not exactly sure how it's set up right now, but she would feel more comfortable with that as a community member because it makes everything equal.

Ruben Torres was next and he lives in Middle Smithfield Township with two girls in the East Stroudsburg Area School District. He is in favor of an Opt Out Form, as he is not aware of any Opt in Forms being presently available. He is in favor of keeping the books on the shelf, as he believes they both have scientific value and they both have serious literary value, which rebuts their council's recommendation and evaluation of the books being obscene. He believes his input trump's the argument. He was also speaking up against a reserve shelf on. Many students already struggling with identity or any other social issue or whatever issue may be, he believes they will be intimidated and may be stigmatized if there's such a shelf in existence, and they have to ask someone to get to the books if they're curious about a topic. These are difficult years emotionally for teenagers they're evolving and growing as humans and adults and he feels there shouldn't be any obstacles put in their way if they're seeking information or they're questioning something.

Jennifer Marmo was next and she lives in Lehman Township. She thanked the committee for the thoughtful answers, and hoped that the full Board of Education will listen to their opinions on this discussion definitely looked beyond these two books that have been in question. She thanked Dr. Bonilla and Mrs. Bear specifically, for bringing up the social and emotional well-being of the children of the Community. She feels that a reserve shelf would definitely affect the social and emotional well-being of the children. According to the Journal of Adolescent Health, LGBTQ youth are 3.5 times as likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers. Transgender teens are 5.87 times more likely to attempt suicide as their heterosexual peers. 40% of high school students who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or questioning have seriously committed suicide. If there is a reserve shelf for those children to have to go up and ask for the books, that definitely is going to be an issue for them. The books definitely need to be back on the shelf. The kids need it. Ms. Marmo and her child needed it. She needed it to understand her offspring a little bit better. She suggested an opt out form seems to be the best choice for everyone, because that allows parents who want to censor materials, the ability to do that, where as it would allow others to allow their children access. She ended with she hopes the books are put back on the shelf after the next board meeting or before.

Tyne Cruz, who is Justine Cruz who lives in Smithfield Township. She wanted to say that, as far as scientific value goes, children sucking each other off is not scientific value. The one graphic novel shows a grown man with a boy which is pedophilia, and it's pretty obvious that it's a grown man. He's significantly taller, he has a beard, body hair, and the young kid is much shorter and is pre-pubescent and they're playing with each other's genitals. She says this isn't helping social and emotional well-being of the children. It's insulting to the LGBTQ community that these are the only types of books that help them. There are books that can be looked for that talk about finding your identity and finding love within your sexual orientation, without debasing and devaluing the children, children that do not belong to the school. She believes there is a compromise that can be had and she thinks it needs to be more Opt in than Opt Out. She believes parents all need to be able to read what is in the books before their children are able to check them out. She went on to say that as far as legally obscene goes, the Solicitor said it himself, there's legal repercussions for leaving significantly sexually explicit books on the shelf for young children. Dr. Bonilla thanked Ms. Cruz and added that she wanted to address the comments, because she doesn't allow misinformation. She shared that there's an assumption about the age of the individuals pictured in

the book and that high school children don't have facial hair or look a certain way. She also went on to say that the Solicitor said that the District legally cannot take books off the library shelves once they are already put on there.

Tiffany Davis was the next to speak, from Price Township. She went on to express that, to her, it seemed as though everyone who has spoken so far has framed the narrative around LGBTQ. She wanted to make it clear that, to her, this has nothing to do with LGBTQ. She said there are plenty of LGBTQ books in the library shelves that she personally does not have a problem with. She does with this one, because it has sexually explicit material. She went on to say that it is obscene. It's not only that book, it's the other one and she found two more that are sexually obscene since the special meeting the week prior. She said the concern that the two books are going to be the only ones on the reserve shelf is false and, as far as the reserve shelf goes, she is not even sure she agrees with the reserve shelf. She doesn't know what the proper solution is, but there are other options for kids who want to look at the books. They don't have to be shamed by asking the librarian. There are public libraries, there are bookstores, there are friends they could borrow it from, so she feels like the reserve shelf is not worthwhile. She went on to say the discussion should be kept to the content, not the topic. She doesn't care if it's a boy on boy, girl on girl, or man on horse, she doesn't want to see sexually explicit books in the school libraries and that's it. She thinks it's pretty simple, the books are obscene, they are pornographic, and they need to go.

Dr. Bonilla thanked her for the comment and then, with no more public participation, she wanted to highlight some things based on comments. She went on to say that they talk in the committee about education being a partnership, and therefore any ideas that individuals in the community have for books that can be considered for the libraries, please send those in an email. The committee is always present to partner with individuals. She also went on to make a point that she personally will not cast out any students who want to read a book like the two books that are in question. She would not send them to the public library or a corner or anywhere that they feel shame for wanting to read something that is going to support their journey. That is where she stands on it. She added that the other thing is, if they are going to put the cards on the table, while she is very appreciative of any Community Member who makes a comment, some of the Community Members who have questioned the books do not have children that are attending our physical schools. Dr. Bonilla has two sons in our physical schools and, as a parent, she feels they should have access to books that are important to them and/or support their respective journey. She also added that if we're not talking about the LGBTQ plus community, comments, such as were made during public participation, about oral sex, which is actually something that human beings can be exposed to, again, not talking about age or parental involvement, everybody should choose what is best for their kids. But that should not be made out to be dirty as she heard in a public comment so those are some of her thoughts. She opened it up to hear from others on the committee.

Rebecca added that she read both books. The first time she read it, she only read the pages that were sent to them. She didn't read them in context of what the message was of the book. She said that if you flip through the book and you go to those pages you could see what some of the public is saying, but if you read the book, from start to finish, the context changes. By going to singular pages, you're taking the message of the book out of context. So for Rebecca, as a parent, when she first saw it, she had the reaction of 'I don't want my kid reading this' but then she read the book, from start to finish and then it all made sense to her of why those pictures were there, but if her child opens that book up to that page, and just that page, it would bother her, but if they read the book for the context and for the message of the book, it's different. It is hard for her, because she sees both sides, but you have to look at the full thing of what the book is and not pull out things from the book that you want it to be and look for these hidden messages, because those hidden messages you're going to find if you look for them, but if you read the book for what it is it's not it.

Dr. Bonilla thanked Rebecca for sharing. She added that she does anticipate that there will be more discussions considering as the comment was made in public participation, there are other books. The Librarians will not be going through every book, as that's what they agreed on at the public session, but others have the freedom to do so.

Debbie Kulick added that she does agree with the former students who suggested that perhaps there's an age restricted area, where, perhaps 16 and up, would be an accessible age to be able to access things that they may want to and she appreciated the thought in that direction.

Dr. Bonilla added that she actually did as well, and the conversation, in terms of recommendations that they are having today is about right now, but as they continue to have discussions, that might change. Additionally, they are four out of nine votes, and so, when they have the discussion at the full board meeting, everyone will vote as they think is best for the students.

Jason Gullstrand added that Rebecca made a good point, how sometimes when the individual portion is looked at as opposed to the whole, text being looked at can be misinterpreted, and with the crude comment that was made regarding a particular scene, he doesn't think it was what they thought they were reading or where they looked at because it wasn't and the book doesn't promote pedophilia. If you look at it in the context of just that particular snapshot as opposed to the whole, like Rebecca said, there's a much different interpretation of what it is that is there. He just wanted the Community to know, as a board, they are doing their due diligence, to look at the whole as opposed to the particulars. He wanted them know that's something they are definitely doing and it couldn't be more obvious to the people in the Community, since they brought it up in conversation before they had an open work session regarding it. They are discussing it in multiple different meetings so they want the people in the Community to know they are listening, they are interpreting the information and they are doing their due diligence to make the right decision moving forward.

Dr. Bonilla thanked Jason for sharing. She also thanked the members of the committee for a good discussion. She explained that she values when they have discussions, where they don't agree on every single thing because she feels like they have looked at the different aspects on behalf of the students. She then moved on to the Advisory Recommendations.

IX. ADVISORY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE: Motion to approve the attached Education Programs & Resources Committee meeting dates for 2022. Motion was made by Debbie Kulick. Motion was seconded by Jason Gullstrand and carried unanimously 4-0.

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE: Dr. Bonilla asked for a motion to adopt the Opt Out Procedures, including a Library Resource Restriction form as presented by the librarians. Motion was made by Debbie Kulick. Motion was seconded by Jason Gullstrand and carried unanimously 4-0.

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE: Dr. Bonilla asks for a motion to NOT recommend a reserve section in the East Stroudsburg Area School District at this time. Motion was made by Rebecca Bear. Motion was seconded by Jason Gullstrand and carried by 3 members with 1 abstaining.

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE: Dr. Bonilla asked for a motion to recommend the Board directs administration to put the books back on the shelves. Motion was made by Jason Gullstrand. Motion was seconded by Rebecca Bear and carried by 3 members with 1 opposed.

X. PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED TO FINANCE COMMITTEE

- a. LETRS Books - 8K (VII.a.)

Dr. Vitulli explained that they are doing LETRS training with all the staff. The LETRS company has been purchased by another company which is redesigning, reprinting, and reformatting the program. They are making a request to purchase enough books to take them well into the future of the existing program so that nothing they have invested in training in the last year or two is lost. They are getting 30 copies of each book, so that they can do the trainings themselves and continue the trainings with the materials as they are in their current state. The funding for the purchase is coming from curriculum instruction. Dr. Bonilla clarified that it was previously submitted to the Finance Committee.

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE: Dr. Bonilla asks for a motion to move the items previously submitted to the Finance Committee forward to the full Board. Motion was made by Debbie Kulick. Motion was seconded by Rebecca Bear and carried unanimously 4-0.

XI. NEXT MEETING - Wednesday, February 9, 2022

RECOMMENDATION BY THE COMMITTEE: Motion to adjourn was made by Debbie Kulick to adjourn. Motion was seconded by Jason Gullstrand and carried unanimously, 4-0

XII. ADJOURNMENT: 8:58 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Jessica Barlotta