



Family Concerns

"Bridging the Information Gap"

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Blue Valley Parents Speak Out

By Linda Holloway

On February 14, 2006, the Kansas State Board of Education (KSBE) heard about a very unlovely subject. Twelve individuals trekked to Topeka to express their concerns about the ongoing problem of high school teachers assigning books with stunningly troubling content. The spotlighted district was Blue Valley, located in Johnson County, where the local board continues to stonewall parents. After a two-year battle over books containing graphic material, including sodomy, rape, incest, bestiality, murder and other violence, the district retains them in the curriculum. This group of parents and/or district patrons went to the KSBE to present evidence of the inappropriateness of the books and to present a draft of an opt-in policy for this kind of controversial material. No employee from the district testified, but one parent defended the books. (This parent is on the Curriculum Selection Committee and was a member of the district's panel, which voted to retain the books on compulsory reading lists.)

Family Concerns has reported on the situation in Blue Valley situation in the past. Concerned parents and other patrons worked their way through the proper channels to challenge books – from the local teacher and administrator to the local school board and superintendent. They never asked district employees to ban the books, but rather, to remove them from the required reading lists. District administrators and teachers opposed them every step of the way. Some of the parents set up a Web site to inform others about the unbelievable story themes and language in the books. The "F" word appears hundreds of times in some of the books along with other coarse and vulgar language. If you would like to know more about the issue and the books, go to www.classkc.org. You can read passages from the books on the Web site; but beware, they are disturbing and disgusting.

Heidi Harper read two passages to the members of the state board during her allotted time of less than three minutes. Nancy Hanahan, another speaker said, "These books contain words that the FCC won't allow over the airwaves. They can't print them in newspapers; yet they want children to read this stuff."

The district argued that these books are "essential" for higher education preparation. Several in the group researched this claim to discover its validity. They asked the following question of English department personnel at various universities: "Do you have a recommended reading list that a well-prepared young person should have completed in high school before attending your institution?" Some of the universities contacted were Yale, the University of California (UCLA), University of Kansas, University of Missouri, Ft. Hayes, and Creighton, and none of those schools had such a list. However, Kansas' Baker University did have a list – a list

that included authors such as Homer, Plato, Voltaire, and Dickens – not any of the authors on the Blue Valley required list.

At the conclusion of Lisa Friedrichsen's testimony, Sue Gamble, KSBE member from Shawnee, stood and walked to Lisa. She stopped her and handed her several books, and said that she must return the books. "I cannot accept gifts from constituents."

Lisa recovered quickly from the shock of the rude behavior and said, "These were not gifts but part of a packet sent to you and the other members for background information."

Does this mean that Mrs. Gamble cannot receive any printed information from any constituents on any topic?

Janet Harmon presented the draft of the opt-in policy. It's intent is not to ban books, but to inform parents about the content of assigned reading material. The policy suggests a checklist; for example, "Does the book contain bestiality? Yes or No." The list would be objective and without value judgments. Parents could then check out the book themselves and make the value judgment for their children. Currently, in the Blue Valley District as well as other Kansas districts, parents must find out about books on their own and discover the district's policy and procedure for opting children out of objectionable assignments. Merely a list of books that could be assigned does not provide enough information. This is burdensome for parents who may not have time to read multiple books.

Heidi Harper said she quotes Ephesians 5:12 when speaking to Christians on the subject. It says, "For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret." This Biblical view is the opposite of those who defend such books because they are about the real world, as if students must read about such vile behavior simply because it exists.

Blue Valley is not the only district in Kansas where this is happening. Do you know what your child or grandchild is reading?

Pray:

- For this brave group of parents and patrons, that the Lord will fill them with encouragement and endurance
- That more Kansans will join the battle
- For KSBE to seriously consider this issue
- That more parents become informed about what their children are reading
- That pastors will communicate a strong Christian worldview to their flocks.

Action: Contact your KSBE member at www.ksde.org with your views on such books.