

Content in School Libraries Should Contribute to Healthy Learning

By Rep. Dan Moul (R-Adams)

Over the past couple of years, our schools have been mired in controversy stemming from COVID-19-related online learning, masking and vaccine mandates. Schools are also coming under fire out of fears concerning teaching on race relations and accommodations based on sexual orientation or gender preferences. However, an important issue that came up recently and prompted me to write this column concerns some of the books available in school libraries.

A recent school board meeting in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, brought this issue to my attention. A mother of an elementary school student in the North Penn School District went before the local school board to complain about a book she discovered in her child's school library. She proceeded to read from the book, and I was shocked at what she found. The book about a tormented young boy who is black and gay is autobiographical in nature. While the author emphasizes his experiences as a black child growing up in America, he also describes his sexual confusion, fears and yearnings from a young age and as he matures. The book does not focus on gay sexual content but does contain graphic descriptions of more than one encounter that many would find troubling in any elementary school.

It is easy to understand why this parent was incensed that this book was readily available to her child and other children in her local elementary school library and who could blame her for wanting it out? Her experience led me to check schools in our legislative district and it did not take long to find the same book. My next question was "how did it get there?"

I learned that school libraries obtain books in one of two ways – by purchasing them or via gift. When purchased, they must be approved by the school board and voted on. Likewise, school boards must also approve and vote to remove items from their school library collections. When gifted, however, there is far less scrutiny. The board must vote to accept the gift, but far less attention is paid to its contents. It is unclear whether the book in question was purchased or gifted, but what is clear is that it was not properly vetted to ensure its appropriateness for elementary age children.

We trust our school librarians, teachers and administrators to expand our children's minds and imaginations. This includes ensuring our libraries serve as an abundant source of healthy and useful knowledge to help our children learn and grow. While I embrace our First Amendment right to free speech and do not support book banning, I agree that the subject matter contained in this book is grossly inappropriate for young children and has no place in our school libraries.

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