

McMinn County Board of Education
Called Meeting
January 10, 2022, 5:30 p.m.

The McMinn County Board of Education met in a Called Meeting on Monday, January 10, 2022, at 5:30 p.m. at the McMinn County Center for Educational Excellence.

Attendance was as follows:

Rob Shamblin- Present
Tony Allman- Present
Jonathan Pierce- Present
Donna Casteel- Present
Mike Lowry- Present
Mike Cochran- Present
Sharon Brown- Present
Quinten Howard- Present
Bill Irvin- Present
Denise Cunningham- Present

Chairman Brown called the meeting to order and presented the agenda. Tony Allman made the motion to accept the agenda, Quinten Howard seconded. A unanimous voice vote was recorded, and the motion carried. There were no requests to address the Board.

AGENDA

1. Discussion on Eighth Grade ELA Curriculum

ADJOURN

Chairman Brown asked Director Parkison to address the Board.

Director Parkison- The values of the county are understood. There is some rough, objectionable language in this book and knowing that and hearing from many of you and discussing it, two or three of you came by my office to discuss that. I consulted with our attorney, Mr. Scott Bennett. After consulting with him, we decided the best way to fix or handle the language in this book was to redact it. Considering copyright, we decided to redact it to get rid of the eight curse words and the picture of the woman that was objected to.

I am certainly not an expert in ELA, we have people that do this every day, and I would like to call on them to explain to you, what they have explained to me, and that is our two instructional supervisors, Mrs. Julie Goodin and Mr. Steven Brady. Last year we only had one supervisor that was in charge of PreK all the way through eighth grade, Mrs. Melasawn Knight and she is familiar with this curriculum also. I would like to call on all of them to give a lot more detail than I can.

Melasawn Knight- A question from us, do you have something in mind for your outcome that you are wanting so we can frame things around that, or do you want us to go through the book and what it does with the curriculum?

Sharon Brown- From the Board's standpoint, I will speak, obviously we have not discussed this among ourselves, I am sure each individual Board Member here has in their own minds their thoughts as to what they think should happen. At this point we have not had this discussion.

Tony Allman- I have one question, is there a substitute for this book that we have?

Steven Brady- No, and that is a short answer to a longer discussion. If you would like, I have some stuff I can run through with you that explains what our curriculum is and how it works and walk you through how this book fits into the bigger picture of what our kids are studying.

Tony Allman- This is a book for the eighth grade on a third grade reading level.

Steven Brady- No, that is incorrect.

Tony Allman- So the 3.0 on the front of the book doesn't stand for third grade reading?

Steven Brady- No, what you are referring to is the AR number that it is assigned to the book. This is an eighth grade, middle school level book. Not just because of the words but because of the content and the deeper meaning to what is going on in the book.

Tony Allman- Some of this vulgar and inappropriate behavior can be whited out, but because of copyright it is like b-i-t-c-h, they can only white out the i-t-c-h just like the gd word, they have to leave gd. Is that correct?

Scott Bennett- yes sir

Steven Brady- When we see something on television that is a direct quote from an actor or a president, something where it has that inappropriate language, they will blur it out or white out parts of it or they will bleep it.

Tony Allman- I understand all that, but being in the schools, educators and stuff we don't need to enable or somewhat promote this stuff. It shows people hanging, it shows them killing kids, why does the educational system promote this kind of stuff, it is not wise or healthy.

Julie Goodin- I can talk of the history, I was a history teacher and there is nothing pretty about the Holocaust and for me this was a great way to depict a horrific time in history. Mr. Spiegelman did his very best to depict his mother passing away and we are almost 80 years away. It's hard for this generation, these kids don't even know 9/11, they were not even born. For me this was his way to convey the message. Are the words objectionable? Yes, there is no one that thinks they aren't but by taking away the first part, it's not changing the meaning of what he is trying to portray and copyright.

Tony Allman- I understand that on tv and maybe at home these kids hear worse, but we are talking about things that if a student went down the hallway and said this, our disciplinary policy says they can be disciplined, and rightfully so. And we are teaching this and going against policy?

Melasawn Knight- I think any time you are teaching something from history, people did hang from trees, people did commit suicide and people were killed, over six million were murdered. I think the author is portraying that because it is a true story about his father that lived through that. He is trying to portray that the best he can with the language that he chooses that would relate to that time, maybe to help people who haven't been in that aspect in time to actually relate to the horrors of it. Is the language objectionable? Sure. I think that is how he uses that language to portray that.

Tony Allman- I am not denying it was horrible, brutal, and cruel. It's like when you're watching tv and a cuss word or nude scene comes on it would be the same movie without it. Well, this would be the same book without it. I may be wrong, but this guy that created the artwork used to do the graphics for Playboy. You can look at his history, and we're letting him do graphics in books for students in elementary school. If I had a child in the eighth grade, this ain't happening. If I had to move him out and homeschool him or put him somewhere else, this is not happening.

Julie Goodin- Even for me Mr. Allman, you know I have an eighth grader and even if you did pull this book I would want him to read it because we have to teach our kids. Are these words ok? No, not at all that is not acceptable, but the problem is that we are 80 years removed from the Holocaust itself. I just think this is a grave starting point for our teachers. I am very passionate about history, and I would hate to rob our kids of this opportunity. Are we going to be teaching these words outside of this book as vocabulary words? No, you know me better than that Tony Allman.

Tony Allman- I know and I am not being argumentative, I am just trying to wrap my mind around because if a student sitting in the cafeteria decides to read this out loud and complete the sentences, what are you going to do? It's in the book you're teaching them so what are you going to do?

Melasawn Knight- We can say that the students know what that means, but they know what that means if they have been exposed to it prior to. The B word doesn't have to mean that unless you have been exposed to it before. It's not like we are teaching that or exposing them to that. We are trying our best to redact the best we can and follow the law and that is what we felt like we have done to address the concerns of that language, the best we could. We think it is a valuable book and most of the supervisors here have read it.

Tony Allman- We used to order from Tennessee Book Company, and these come from Learn Zillion, is that correct? Why did we change?

Melasawn Knight- You can still order through Tennessee Book Company the books if we wanted to, but our contract was through Learn Zillion. It's just another platform, a way of ordering.

Tony Allman- The common core curriculum, I may be wrong but isn't it state law that it has to be posted on the website so people can view it? I haven't been able to find that website.

Melasawn Knight- It is aligned to Tennessee Standards, so we do have that, and it is posted on the curriculum page.

Steven Brady- What exactly are you saying you can't find?

Tony Allman- The curriculum of the book that is taught, maybe I am not looking at the right website, I have been trying to find that and I can't.

Sharon Brown- I would like to interject here, we can do this all night and I want everybody to have the freedom to ask the questions and to hear your presentation. Is there something more that you all had planned to present to us?

Steven Brady- The part of understanding the book's place in the curriculum is understanding how the curriculum is built anyway. When we were in school, we would hop from one book to the next. We would study one book a few days, do a test then move on to the next book. I want to tell you why curriculum is important and how the pieces of it are designed and how we have an opportunity to teach more than standards.

Steven Brady presented a presentation that included a passage from Hoard's Dairyman: Carbohydrates often make up 60% or more of the ration dry matter and provide 70% to 80% of the cow's energy needs. Achieving the right balance between fiber and fermentable carbohydrates, such as starch, optimizes salivary buffering and rumen acid production. This combination promotes good rumen health. Optimal rumen pH is central to ruminant health and productivity - and, of course, cows are ruminants. Low rumen pH is often associated with reduced de novo synthesis of fatty acids in the mammary gland. These short-chain fatty acids, produced from scratch in the udder, use building blocks of acetate and butyrate from fiber fermentation in the rumen. So, getting the ration content of fiber and starch right to optimize rumen pH and fiber fermentation is critical. The interaction between dietary fiber and starch has been evaluated in many studies over the years. In particular, research has focused on how feeding too much starch reduces rumen fiber fermentation and energy available to the cow.

Steven Brady- so the question here, what feed should I use as their dietary supplement? What does this have to do with anything? My dad can answer this, he could go to the Co-op and they would know exactly what all those words meant. I don't have a clue what I just read, and I would say many of you don't either. So, here's the problem, what we're finding is that students can't have rigorous learning on topics they know little to nothing about. When we jump from one topic to the next, all our time is spent just figuring out words and what they meant. If I go back to that article, we are going to focus on what's a rumen, what's dietary starch. So, the way curriculums are designed now, is that we build background knowledge, center it around some kind of engaging topic that's worthy of our time, so that students can then move on beyond just figuring out what vocabulary is. Now we can answer questions like, what's the main idea, what are the details? How does this compare to that? And have those more rigorous conversations. What does that have to do with curriculum, why is curriculum important? There is a balance here between building that background knowledge and using grade level text. I can pull out a picture book of cows, but is that really at the level I need to make me have those deeper conversations about cows?

So, there are two things you have to balance here, building that knowledge and using rigorous grade level text. Going back to our ELA Modules, here is how they are built. I have some central text here like Hoard's Dairyman and I am going to spend about two months reading that. I am going to pull in books about cows, articles, might look at some videos, I may interview some farmers. Everything that helps me understand what all those words mean.

The curriculum that we use is called EL, what does that stand for? I see some teachers here, what does that stand for? Expeditionary Learning. So, the whole idea is that students go on these expeditions, and they will spend two months or so on these different expeditions, and that's their modules. In eighth grade that is four things. We do Latin America, we learn about food, The Holocaust and Japanese Internment.

So, in a module there's four big things that go into that. Here is number one from our state, what standards are we going to teach? We think about that and what topic gives us an avenue to teach those standards that are worthy of our time that we are going to spend building that background knowledge. Now that we have our topic, what kind of task could we have our students do that shows students mastered the content? That is more than just answering a question, that is them actually doing some stuff. More than a yes or no question, that is them actually doing stuff, it's a project and shows that in depth learning. All of that leads us to what text is best to accomplish these goals. We are looking at text structure, kids should know what different kinds of books look like, whether it's true or false. One of the standards here talks about conveying mood and powerful language and how we can express ourselves through writing and verbal. Those are our standards. So, the topic for this module, Holocaust, I looked online, this one is the United States Holocaust Museum which recommends sixth grade and above to begin teaching that. It's certainly a topic that is worthy of our time, it's engaging and interesting for students, that's something that they are curious about. As we get into it, it's age appropriate according to all these different sites, and it's meaningful to future learning. In eighth grade social studies, students only study up to about the Civil War, that time period. Next year in high school, they are going to jump in the deep end on World War II and study all that went on during that time period. The thinking here is, here is the best place to give them a little introduction to the Holocaust and things that went on during World War II. This module helps students begin building their background knowledge as they prepare for high school.

The task that students do at the end of this module, after they spend a couple months talking about the Holocaust, studying this project that they do that shows they understand what went on, they will write their own narrative and pretend that they have interviewed a holocaust upstander. They are going to create graphic novel panels to visually represent a section of their narrative and they will present that to their peers. You have all these standards that we saw earlier are addressed through this project.

Last part, how do we get there? Well, here's our text. So, our anchor text is Maus, and we have all these supplemental things that we look at throughout this module that build to that anchor text. We look at interviews from Holocaust survivors, news articles from BBC, Los Angeles Times, Guardian, survivor stories, and excerpts from other books. There is even a section where we go to the Jewish Virtual Library and look at some selections from that. All of these go to build that background knowledge, it's grade level appropriate for our students. For example, we wouldn't bring in the Diary of Anne Frank book at this point because that is written at a roughly fourth, fifth grade level. Beyond what we do in the module, beyond just addressing the standards and teaching that, there is one more piece to this curriculum that we forget about, that we kind of brush over but it's really important. There is an opportunity in this curriculum for us to teach habits of character.

I am going to go back to the Hoard's Dairyman for a minute. I mentioned that I flipped through these often as a kid, well I saw this word "dam" as I was reading through that magazine and I thought oh my goodness, dad what do we have going on here? Thankfully I had a dad that would take me and teach me and say son that is not the word you are thinking about.

Jonathan Pierce- Spelled different and referred to different.

Steven Brady- Exactly. But as a kid, in my mind I am thinking oh my goodness that is a bad word. So, dad takes me and he explains when you add an "n" to the end that's different, that's a word we don't say and it means something else. Here we are talking about something to do with cattle.

In the curriculum, every lesson has the habits of character part to it. Where we teach our students the difference between right and wrong. We teach them to be empathetic, we teach them to be ethical people, have compassion, we teach them respect and that's part of our curriculum. In saying all that, teachers have already anticipated concerns before parents had even seen the module, we've not done this yet, it's not been put out to the public. We would have started this right after Christmas break here. We understand some of this language is objectionable. When we think about the author's intent, I could argue that his intent was to make our jaws drop. Oh my goodness, think about what happened and what it would have been like to have lived during that time period and that shock. So, the author chose to use those words, we understand they are objectionable, we understand our community and our families and that's not something that we see is needed to be spelled out in our book, so we felt it was appropriate to write that out.

What we have done in anticipation of any of those concerns, we prepared a parent letter to go home to inform them of this topic we are about to study. We went ahead and took the step to censor that explicit content and we went ahead and made sure that all of our books are stamped "property of MCS" so that if one does come up for some reason, hey look at these words we are teaching in school, no, that's not one of our books.

Every lesson we teach gives us a chance to make a change for the better for our students. When we teach habits of character, we are teaching our students how to be better people. There was a time where that happened every day at home, but when we think about what's going on now and in the lives our students live in, many of them live in broken homes when they are at one house one day and another house the next. The list goes on and on of the things they have to deal with. Whether we realize it or not, school is the most stable thing in many of our students lives. What students see and hear where they live, may not be appropriate in some settings and we have a chance with every lesson to change what our students see is ok. We get a chance to kind of influence their ethics, their morals, their upbringing.

I appreciate the stand that you all are taking to assure the public that we care about our kids, and we believe it's important to teach our students the difference between right and wrong and help them be ethical people with compassion and morals with respect for others. We are not promoting the use of these words, if anything we are promoting that these words are inappropriate and it's best that we not use them. It's inappropriate for school, for our conversation here and you may hear that at home, you may see that on tv, but we do not promote that.

There are many lessons that can be learned through this book about how we treat others, how we speak, things that we say, how we act and how to persevere. I just wanted you to get an idea of why these lessons are structured like they are and how this text is just surrounded by excerpts and articles

and the things we do to build that background knowledge and the opportunity we have to make a difference in our students lives.

Jonathan Pierce- I believe I heard Ms. Knight say a moment ago that there's not a book that can replace this one.

Steven Brady- Not without redoing this whole module.

Jonathan Pierce- I ask that you go back to your Hoard's Dairy example. Not one time do I see a vulgar word in that paragraph there. My objection, and I apologize to everyone sitting here, is that my standard no matter, and I am probably the biggest sinner and crudest person in this room, can I lay that in front of a child and say read it, or this is part of your reading assignment. I've got enough faith from the Director of Schools down to the newest hire in this building, that you can take that module and rewrite it and make it do the same thing. Our children need to know about the Holocaust, they need to understand that there are several pieces of history, Mr. Bennett, that shows depression or suppression of certain ethnicities. It's not acceptable today. We've got to accept people for who and what they are. I'm just an old country school board member and I think in our policy it says the decision stops with this board. Unfortunately, Mr. Parkison we did not go through the complaint process that's also in our Board Policies. But Rob, the wording in this book is in direct conflict of some of our policies. If I said on the school bus that I was going to kill you, we would be bringing disciplinary action against that child. Again, I am the biggest hypocrite, but I wouldn't want to go to court that day. And somebody lay this book down and say look it was taught in the classrooms. Therefore, Madame Chairman I'm going to bring this to a head. I started it so I am going to bring it to a head. I move that we remove this book from the reading series and challenge our instructional staff to come with an alternative method of teaching The Holocaust. Mike Lowry- second.

Sharon Brown- Is there any further discussion? Other board members wish to comment?

Rob Shamblin- Yes, we kind of jumped into the 7th, 8th, now the 9th inning on this and I appreciate the presentation, Mr. Brady, on the background of how the curriculum is set. But, we are here because some people objected to the words and the graphics used in the book. My bigger concern is that this is probably the tip of the iceberg of what is out there. The question I came tonight with, wanting to know is, what is our process? How do we vet the curriculum? I think it's impossible to ask you to read every line of every book, of every anchor text, but somebody has. Somebody has read that and made that decision and there's got to be a review process, and then a discretion made on what age appropriate level this should be presented and taught. I've read the background on this author and the series, talked to some educators, and it is a highly critically acclaimed and a well reviewed series and book context. It's banned many places in Europe because of how critical it is against the heinous acts that were done. So, it can be vetted either direction about the picture that it paints. But before we go and make any decisions, I think we need to understand the process and what discretion is used to determine what is going to be approved and age appropriate because we might be throwing out a whole lot more things if we are going to take this stance on just a couple of words. I'm not minimizing that, don't misunderstand my words, but on a few words, eight words I think you said and one picture.

Before we move action, I would like to hear more about the process and the discretion that's used, how we got where we are.

Lee Parkison- I can help you a little bit with that. We have a textbook and instruction materials quality commission. This is who approves these curriculums for us. We have to adopt a curriculum that is approved by the state department. This curriculum was high on the list in the state department. They are responsible, Mr. Shamblin, for not necessarily vetting but they do determine age appropriateness. It just so happened, to give you all a little bit of background on this, this commission and the state department is made up of two directors of schools, a principal, one teacher or supervisor from grades K-3, one teacher or supervisor from grades 4-8, one teacher or supervisor from grades 9-12, one member not employed in the education system of the state and each of the three divisions, that's grand divisions in the state. That's west, middle and east and that totals nine members. The Education Commissioner or the Deputy, or an Assistant Commissioner of Education, serving with the Commissioner's designee, shall be an Ex Officio Secretary of Commission with the right to vote and shall serve without additional compensation.

This is a state approved curriculum. We ought to be asking questions a little bit further up the line.

Rob Shamblin- I think further down the line is my perspective. What are we doing at the local level when we adopt that, when we choose to go and adopt that curriculum from the state's recommendations? What do we do to vet it and make sure it meets the standard that we want to present to our community and our children?

Mike Cochran- What I've been told from teachers, I thought we had a committee together to look at ELA programs.

Lee Parkison- YES

Mike Cochran- From the teachers that were on that committee, and some other teachers just in the school system, talked to me about it and said basically they reviewed and if I understand it correctly, you can tell me if I'm wrong because I wasn't there, they came up with a list of three possibilities. Submitted it to the office, but none of those three were chosen and this ELA program was chosen instead without them vetting it. Why did we choose this one rather than to go with the one they vetted and the one they agreed and approved on?

Melasawn Knight- To set the background, this ELA adoption was unlike any other adoption we've had as far as textbook goes. In the past, we were given a list of textbooks and any vendor could give you a textbook and you would be able to adopt anything no matter what the state said. Starting with ELA, it was put off for a couple of years, they went through it, and it was a very rigorous selection process where they found curriculum that they vetted and felt like it was appropriate for us to adopt. They put out an approved list, which was honestly very disconnected as far as they gave us rather than just a curriculum that would go all the way up, some vendors were approved for k-2, some for k-5, some for 6-8, some for high school, it was just very disconnected and very few went continuously up that. In doing that and seeing that, we put together a very large teacher team to come in. It was quickly seen it was all over the place. Some liked this, some liked this, there was no cohesion at all. At that point

Covid hit so that process was skewed just a little bit, but we did send out some surveys on what they liked to the teachers, they did vote, shared them with Mr. Parkison at that point. The state had many more meetings just with supervisors of districts and directors of schools on what honestly their top three choices of what they thought were background building curriculum, that's where they were going with that. At that point this one was going to be a cohesive curriculum from K-8 and it was adopted with the best intent. I was not the sole person that made that choice, but it was one of my top two to choose from. Everything that was done was done with the best intent and the rules of following the adoption committee and I think a lot of teachers support the curriculum and we do have teachers that don't support the curriculum and don't approve of it. We are going to have that with any curriculum we have. I think we are doing the best to be proactive in trying to address the things that we see are going to be in just about any curriculum that builds background knowledge where we find words, is this the only book with words like that, that we have seen, no. It's not, not to that extent but there are some other words. I am going to be very upfront with you and say that we've come across some with some language in there as well. They are throughout some of the books but as a teacher when I taught, I taught Bridge to Terabithia, I taught The Whipping Boy, To Kill a Mockingbird, those are filled with language, and we read those as a kid too. I am not justifying anything at all as far as foul language goes but I think we try to do our best because I know there's been issues with just about every curriculum that's been adopted with things of this nature.

Mike Cochran- I'm not out for blood, it bothers me if we have teachers come together and they spend time looking at the curriculum and they give you two to three options, and we go completely another way that they haven't had a chance to vet. About every two to three months, I get a call from a teacher or a parent with some other issue in this curriculum, whether it be from first, second grade, third grade up to seventh and eighth grade, and so I think we've gotten into this mess, at least if we had teacher buyoff you don't have two to three people left holding the bag if it goes wrong.

Melasawn Knight- They did have a chance to vet, the 6-8 curriculum is the one part of this curriculum that was still in the process of being, this version was still in the process of being completed during that adoption process, so we didn't know the whole set of books, which we didn't with any grade level. K-5 did have the option to vet.

Mike Cochran- But they didn't choose it, right?

Melasawn Knight- Some did. I can still go back on my computer and find the survey results if I need to.

Sharon Brown- Does any other board member have any other comments or questions during this discussion because we do have a motion and a second on the floor.

Mike Cochran- Let's table that motion, I will make a motion to table it until we can get a little bit more discussion. Then we can come back and make a motion. So, I make a motion we table that motion until we get a little more discussion done.

Sharon Brown- Mike has made a motion to table the motion, do we have a second?

Rob Shamblin- And the further discussion should be that we need to follow the process and procedures that we have in place for objectionable curriculum.

Sharon Brown- Do we have a second for that?

Rob Shamblin- Yes, I made the second.

Sharon Brown- Let's do a roll call vote. This it to table Mr. Pierce's motion of removing the book.

Quinten Howard- Table it until when?

Mike Cochran- Until we discuss it a little bit further, if we need to have that motion then we can un-table it.

Quinten Howard- But what are we going to do in the meantime?

Mike Cochran- There's a lot of discussion we haven't even gotten to. So, we need to do a little bit more asking questions, and a little bit more investigating before we just jump into a motion in my opinion.

Scott Bennett- As a point of order Madame Chair, a motion to table is indefinite. So, Mr. Cochran's motion to table would put it off indefinitely and I would suggest that would also give the administration time to follow this Board's policy of 4.403 to develop a rapport for the Board to consider. Right now, you are trying to make a decision without the benefit of the Review Committee having gone through to look at this and the administration has done a very good job trying to give you some information, but there is a process to be followed.

Sharon Brown- So we need to come to a vote for this motion.

Jonathan Pierce- I want to remind all Board Members to lay on the table as neither debatable or amendable when it comes to an immediate vote.

Vote was as follows:

Rob Shamblin- YES

Tony Allman- YES

Jonathan Pierce- NO

Donna Casteel- YES

Mike Lowry- NO

Mike Cochran- YES

Sharon Brown- YES

Quinten Howard- NO

Bill Irvin- NO

Denise Cunningham- YES

Vote Results- 6 YES, 4 NO

Sharon Brown- Our motion does carry to table the vote to do away with the book.

Mike Cochran- I will start. I went to school here thirteen years. I learned math, English, Reading and History. I never had a book with a naked picture in it, never had one with foul language. In third grade I had one of my classmates come up to me and say hey what's this word? I sounded it out and it was "damn," and I was real proud of myself because I sounded it out. She ran straight to the teacher and told her I was cussing. Besides that one book which I think she brought from home, now I've seen a cuss word in a textbook at school. So, this idea that we have to have this kind of material in the class in order to teach history, I don't buy it. This is English Language Arts and I have been told by teachers that as far as the TCAP is concerned, there's no skills in here that this book teaches that they can pull off on TCAP. That's what they are judged by and that's what we are judged by. Not saying that there is not important material, I've read it and read through all of it and the parts it talks about his father, the father is the guy that went through the Holocaust, I really enjoyed, I liked it. There were other parts that were completely unnecessary. We are talking about teaching ethics to our kids, and it starts out with the dad and the son talking about when the dad lost his virginity. It wasn't explicit but it was in there. You see the naked pictures, you see the razor, the blade where the mom is cutting herself. You see her laying in a pool of her own blood. You have all this stuff in here, again, reading this to myself it was a decent book until the end. I thought the end was stupid to be honest with you. A lot of the cussing had to do with the son cussing out the father, so I don't really know how that teaches our kids any kind of ethical stuff. It's just the opposite, instead of treating his father with some kind of respect, he treated his father like he was the victim.

We don't need this stuff to teach kids history. We can teach them history and we can teach them graphic history. We can tell them exactly what happened, but we don't need all the nakedness and all the other stuff. It's not like this is the only book that comes up. Again, every two to three months I get something. I had a poem again, seventh and eighth grade sent to me.

Sharon Brown- Mike, we are dealing with eighth grade.

Mike Cochran- That is what this is, eighth grade.

Sharon Brown- You said seventh and eighth grade

Mike Cochran- Seventh and eighth grade

Sharon Brown- No, we are dealing with eighth grade.

Mike Cochran- Alright, eighth grade.

Sharon Brown- This poem, teachers help me out, is this poem in the eighth grade book?

No ma'am, it is in the seventh grade, and it is a poem that we do not even do.

Mike Cochran- It doesn't matter, it's in the curriculum, all this stuff keeps popping up. So, I want to read it, you guys can fire me later, I guess.

I'm just wild about Harry, and Harry's wild about me

The heavenly blisses of his kisses, fill me with ecstasy

He's sweet just like chocolate candy

Just like honey from the bee

Oh I am just wild about Harry, and he's just wild about me

One of the discussion questions is define what this word "ecstasy" means. My problem is, all the way through this literature we expose these kids to nakedness, we expose them to vulgarity. You go all the way back to first grade, second grade and they are reading books that have a picture of a naked man riding a bull. It's not vulgar, it's something you would see in an art gallery, but it's unnecessary. So, teachers have gone back and put tape over the guys butts so the kids aren't exposed to it. So, my problem is, it looks like the entire curriculum is developed to normalize sexuality, normalize nudity and normalize vulgar language. If I was trying to indoctrinate somebody's kids, this is how I would do it. You put this stuff just enough on the edges, so the parents don't catch it but the kids, they soak it in. I think we need to relook at the entire curriculum.

Sharon Brown- Do we have any other comments from anyone else about the eighth grade curriculum? Because that is what our agenda item is and that is what we have to be discussing.

Rob Shamblin- Back to the question about the local discretion that we use in our process, and thank you Mel for sharing. It's good to know that we have eyes locally looking and making that decision. In that arena, what would have stopped this from going forward had this not happened the way it happened? Would it have gone forward unredacted or redacted? Does that make sense?

Steven Brady- We implemented that, we chose to do redactions.

Rob Shamblin- So can we take it, as far as it needs to go, because I don't know that it is going to end with one book. I think the process needs to include a bigger plan to holistically redact things that we don't want in there. We hope we have good employees, like minded culture, centric folks that fit with McMinn County, that they're going to make the right discretionary decisions to redact that literature in an appropriate way for the age related presentation.

Steven Brady- After discussing with Mr. Parkison, we felt that was best for our community like you were saying.

Rob Shamblin- My question goes further, can we redact at a larger level than what I saw there. Why do we have to leave some of that, why can't we gray all of it?

Scott Bennett- That is a legal question, there is a fine line between what is called Fair Use under copyright laws and what is protected. So, if I'm an artist, whether it's an author or a musician or whatever else. When I put my creative energy into a product, I've got one cohesive product, and generally if someone else comes along and pulls a bit out of this, then that's a copyright issue, or if you

put something into it, that's a copyright issue. You change this word to that word, that's a copyright issue. Where educators are free to make limited changes, is where they are redacting some words that doesn't change the meaning of the text and doesn't change the feel of the text. If it's intended to be gritty, and intention getting and a little uncomfortable, it still has to be when we're done doing your white line.

Rob Shamblin- That's interpretation, right?

Scott Bennett- That's why they build courthouses and why we have lots of lawyers.

Rob Shamblin- If we use that interpretation to suit our culture and what we want to present responsibly, we could potentially go further in what we saw exhibited here.

Scott Bennett- In my opinion, I think that they whited out as much as they can from this work without changing the character of the work. You have a lot of room within Fair Use, you can make edits that are consistent with the values of the school system. At some point you go so far that you really should have just picked this one book. If we spent some time this week talking about this, I think your educators did a good job making the changes to get rid of the actual offensive words.

In responding to the question earlier, if a kid had actually said the whole word, yes you could have disciplined them because you took the word out and you're not supposed to say it. Had they gone further and maybe, you know we don't like the scene of the mice hanging from the tree. Ok, so now you are starting to move into the author's creative license, at that point you are just changing their work.

Rob Shamblin- But surely removing the full four letters of a four letter word doesn't change the intent of the author's whole book, it just cleans it up.

Scott Bennett- Copyright law always looks at it as a case by case basis. Is someone were to look at it and were to say, I know what that word was. Then you haven't done violence to the integrity of homework. If you delete more of it so that you're left guessing, at that point you sort of have. At some point the scale tips so it's no longer within that bucket of Fair Use. It's very case by case and I wish, Mr. Shamblin, I could give you a yardstick to measure to say ok you can go this high and no higher. In this area it's more about holistic approach. If it's gritty, it's meant to be and if you change it to where it's no longer gritty, the author would say you changed my work and created new work. That's a copyright violation.

Rob Shamblin- So if we ban the whole book based on the words, what other books right now that are currently in use are we going to have to ban?

Sharon Brown- That falls under another topic for another day.

Scott Bennett- Madame Chair if I may build on that, this Board has a policy that allows people to opt out of material that parents believe to be inappropriate. I don't know if the parents are aware of that, I would suggest most parents really aren't. So, if this is something community people have a real concern

about, I think that's where this board interacts with its constituents and says we do value your input and there is a mechanism to opt out.

Sharon Brown- I guess I have a question to that point. If that was the route taken and we have thirty kids in a class, and all thirty sets of parents or whomever decides they didn't want their child to be reading that book, which I would agree with them, what would they teach? If we have something here that we can teach, do it now.

Rob Shamblin- If we remove the anchor text specifically to this context, what's the solution? What is the next step?

Melasawn Knight- I think the whole module would have to be rewritten in some way because it all stems around a graphic novel, and it all stems around different types or writing styles. I think we would have to look somehow at finding another graphic novel of this rigor and trying to find anchor text to pull in with that.

Steven Brady- Another reason this book was chosen for this module, it's the only Pulitzer Prize winning graphic novel that's out there. It's very highly acclaimed and that's part of the reason why it was chosen for this project.

Mike Cochran- We didn't teach this last year, right?

Steven Brady- No, we did not.

Mike Cochran- So what did we teach last year instead of this?

Lee Parkison- We got it in late, Mike. We didn't get to teach but two modules.

Melasawn Knight- Three modules instead of four because of the pacing with Covid. You know how we had our calendar and we had one day they had at home? They rewrote the curriculum for three modules instead of four because we wouldn't have been able to teach four full modules.

Mike Cochran- So this one got left out?

Melasawn Knight- This was the one they suggested leaving out, yes. The third module usually in every grade level was left out.

Sharon Brown- Would it be possible for us to go to the next module? Obviously, there is a lot of discussion about pros and cons and everybody has an opinion.

Steven Brady- Anything is possible, I wouldn't recommend it because the next module builds on this one. Not everything but there are certain things they would miss that they would have learned here, that carries on to the next one.

Sharon Brown- I would think that would be something that you could bring them up to speed on and use another unit that wouldn't be as controversial.

Jonathan Pierce- I will use my last discussion, to say again one time, that I have faith in the educators in this building, and if I can't find a text to teach those same modules, then I probably need to go back to one of my curriculum development classes. We've talked about curriculum development, very good question Mr. Shamblin, "what's the process"? I think the process was missed from the state textbook selection committee. I really question how a book of that nature could be let out of the Department of Education. We have a textbook selection committee that meets each year according to what group it is that is to be adopted. We've discussed other adoptions in here, and I believe our Board Policy says and I will go on that, is I'm going to accept the recommendation of that committee. I sure didn't see this one coming, and Mr. Brady somebody should have and you're in that new hot seat now. Somebody in that selection committee, and probably some of you are sitting in here, should have caught that one. I cannot support laying that kind of language in front of your children and I'm not as fortunate as you. I don't have that child to lay that book in front of, so therefore you're way ahead of me. As long as I sit in this seat, I cannot support it Mr. Parkison. Don't tell me there's not another book out there, they had to have more Rob, they had a selection process. Another day, another topic but somebody missed it.

Mike Cochran- I've been talking for months, I've not met a teacher yet that is satisfied with the ELA program. I've been saying that in this board meeting month after month, so we bear part of this responsibility because we aren't brave enough to actually look into it and see what needs to be done. We always limit it to where we talk about just this one little thing because we talk about bigger things until we actually have to do something. We need to look at our ELA program, we need to get our first, second and third grade teachers in here at a minimum and figure out where we're going wrong. I've got teachers telling us that we are not getting them the standards they need, we stopped teaching them spelling in the fourth grade and teachers say they need that. They're not hitting the grammar like they need to and whatever this ELA program is, is not meeting what it needs to meet. If this board has to stand up and take some responsibility, and either we got to deal with it and we just can't keep shaking it off to somebody else, this is our responsibility as well. If your teachers tell you time and time and time again this is messing our kids up, then we got to take some action. This is just one book in the multitude.

Sharon Brown- And tonight that is our topic.

Mike Cochran- It is but that's the trick we always play. We can only talk about this tonight. So, I will make the motion one more time, unless there is any more discussion, I would like to take it at minimum make the motion that we remove this book from the curriculum. That would be a start and maybe we can go from there.

Tony Allman- I only have one question, how long does this book stay in our schools? Is this just going to be taught to the eighth graders this year or handed off to the others?

Melasawn Knight- I was just about to bring that up. The high schools have adopted a separate curriculum, but it is in the freshman curriculum, the same book, and was taught last year in freshman

classes and a digital version as well. We are not talking just eighth grade, we are talking freshman but different curriculum vendor.

Tony Allman- How long does this book stay in the school system?

Melasawn Knight- Six years, we are on year two. Four more years.

Sharon Brown- Ok, we have a motion, do we have a second? Do we have discussion?

Rob Shamblin- Chairman Brown, we have somebody back here I think wants to speak. I don't know if you want to recognize.

Teacher from McMinn High School- Hi, I am one of the freshman teachers, I am not trying to contradict Melasawn, but I teach the ninth grade curriculum at McMinn and that book is not part of our curriculum. We have others, we have the Pearson version, not that I am a fan of it but..

Rob Shamblin- Is that the older version?

Teacher from McMinn High School- No, we adopted a newer version when they adopted the older one.

Rob Shamblin- I spoke to another system that was familiar with that book, but they are using the older version that doesn't have the same verbiage and graphics. I don't know what changed.

Melasawn Knight- It was taught at the other high school last year, Central and it's the same curriculum.

Teacher from McMinn High School- Ok, yeah we didn't do it at McMinn. The books are meant to teach to the standards, which is what this curriculum is going to do. Develop the student's knowledge with the standards in an in depth way, and I completely support that. Common core for ELA makes complete and total sense. I can't speak for math, but I can for ELA. We are able to dig deep and we're able to look at things that we weren't able to look at before. When we taught the old standards, I've been in the classroom almost ten years, when I taught eighth grade at Sweetwater for five years and I taught the older standards it was, ok what's the main idea and then we moved on and ok what does this word mean, it was very disconnected like Mr. Brady said. Now our standards pull everything together, so you look at it in layered ways. I love the Holocaust I have taught the Holocaust almost every year in the classroom, but this is not a book I would teach my students.

Tony Allman- We aren't against teaching the Holocaust.

Teacher from McMinn High School- Oh I know you're not, unless they have adequate background of the concept that's being discussed, they're going to miss it, some of my freshman this year still had a hard time connecting the dots and being ethical, moral and all that other stuff. It's because they have not been in the classroom for nearly two years because of Covid, they are missing a lot of stuff that they might have, had they been there. It's going to be a lot harder to get them to understand.

Sharon Brown- Thank you for your comments. We have a motion on the table, we are asking for a second.

Jonathan Pierce- May I correct you a little bit?

Sharon Brown- Yes, please.

Jonathan Pierce- The motion that I made was laid on the table. To bring that motion back off the table, and I think Mr. Cochran is ready to do this. He must move to take from the table, it requires a second, it is not debatable, not amendable. If it passes, the motion is then back on the floor for our discussion, if it fails it stays on the table.

Mike Cochran- I will make a motion we pull off the table then take your motion back off the table

Sharon Brown- Do we have a second for that?

Tony Allman- Second.

Sharon Brown- Call for a vote. Our vote is, the motion on the table is, to remove the book.

Scott Bennett- No, the motion on the floor is to take from the table Mr. Pierce's earlier motion. So we are clear, it's going to come back before the Board and then the Board can go back to the main motion.

Quinten Howard- So the motion is to take back off the table and if it passes, then we're open to discuss?

Scott Bennett- There you go.

Elizabeth Pierce Oswalt- He has made a motion to table, it passed. Only he can bring it back up to remove it. So, he is going to remove it, you have a second from Mr. Allman. It's not debatable, it's not discussion, now you are going to vote to remove the table of that motion of Mr. Pierce's.

Sharon Brown- Roll call vote please.

Roll call vote was as follows:

Denise Cunningham- YES

Bill Irvin- YES

Quinten Howard- YES

Sharon Brown- YES

Mike Cochran- YES

Mike Lowry- YES

Donna Casteel- YES

Jonathan Pierce- YES

Tony Allman- YES

Rob Shamblin- YES

Elizabeth Pierce-Oswalt- Madame Chair, now you have the motion that came up from Mr. Pierce.

Sharon Brown- Mr. Pierce's motion that has been seconded, so we allow discussion, or do we automatically take a vote?

Elizabeth Pierce Oswalt- You allow discussion on this.

Sharon Brown- Is there any further discussion on the motion that is on the table?

Mike Cochran- To clarify, your motion was to remove this book from the classroom and have them replace it with something different, right?

Jonathan Pierce- My motion was to remove this particular book from our curriculum and that if possible, find a book that will supplement the one there.

Rob Shamblin- We're in discussion, right?

Sharon Brown- We are in discussion, yessir.

Rob Shamblin- Mr. Bennett, you're telling me there is no way we can remove every letter of foul language, and every piece of the graphic that would incite or offend?

Scott Bennett- I hesitate to say no way, I can say that the more you remove the closer it becomes getting outside of your Fair Use umbrella. I think if you remove part of the words so that you can still see what's there, but it's not the whole word, I think you're within the bucket of Fair Use. I think as you start to edit it for contents, more and more and more you get further from that umbrella of Fair Use. Now to be practical, what's likely to happen is this author, I think he is in Switzerland, is he likely to come and do something about it? I don't know, I know that there are a lot of people with a lot of money suing school districts for copyright violations. Not a lot around here, so I can only tell you what's safe. What your administration has done with this book is safe. Going any further might be safe, but please understand no one ever calls me to say hey we forgot to invite you to our daughter's birthday party, we hope you can make it. That comes with problems. I am by nature very cautious, we edited this as much as I am comfortable saying that you can edit and still be within Fair Use.

Rob Shamblin- I don't think that there is really any retribution that we would face for removing eight words in full and a graphic or two in full, if that permits us to use that book. But if it's more offensive than that, and I have not seen the book and read the whole book, I read the reviews, then it's a bigger problem.

Scott Bennett- There's an option that we had discussed and it's a little unusual. We could contact the author and ask for permission to do further redaction. If the author gives us permission, then we can do whatever we want with it. That would be unusual, but it's not unheard of.

Quinten Howard- But that would take a period of time.

Rob Shamblin- And this is already in use, as I understand it?

Scott Bennett- Maybe, maybe not. The internet is an amazing thing, we could send an email tomorrow and might have an answer. It could very well be that in the time the administration is taking to try to find a substitute work we get word from the author that he is actually fine with some extensive edits. So maybe what happens is the administration comes back to the Board and says, what do you think about this, here's a new text and here's a very edited Maus. Now I have gone from giving you legal advice to foretelling the future and that's outside of my license.

Rob Shamblin- At that point if it's been removed, it could be added back if there is no better alternative, I assume? I don't know what it's going to take to find an alternative.

Sharon Brown- It would probably mean we would have to move on to another module, they would know better than I on that. Any further discussion? We do have a motion on the table to take the book completely out. No other discussion?

I will call for a vote. This is a YES or NO vote for removal of the book.

Vote was as follows:

Denise Cunningham- YES

Bill Irvin- YES

Quinten Howard- YES

Sharon Brown- YES

Mike Cochran- YES

Mike Lowry- YES

Donna Casteel- YES

Jonathan Pierce- YES

Tony Allman- YES

Rob Shamblin- YES

Sharon Brown- Motion carries.

Is there any other business pertaining to this topic?

Do I have a motion to adjourn?

Bill Irvin made the motion, Mike Lowry Seconded. All were in favor.

