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October 9, 2023

TO: Ms. Karla Silvestre, President, Board of Education
RE: Why sexually explicit books should be removed from MCPS
libraries.

Dear Ms. Silvestre,

Last month in a hearing, Sen. John Kennedy read aloud a passage from *Gender Queer*: "I got a new strap-on harness today. I can't wait to put it on you. It will fit my favorite dildo perfectly. You're going to look so hot. I can't wait to have your cock in my mouth. I'm going to give you the blow job of your life. Then I want you inside of me."

Literature like this is not for the purpose of "reading about LGBTQ+ people," as the County would have it. It's pornography. It reduces people to merely their sexual acts, which devalues the diverse kinds of people they're trying to educate the children about. Books like this portray people of various sexual orientations, who are created to love and be loved, into objects of others' fantasies and lusts: "I got....," "I can't wait....," "I'm going to....," "Then I want...."

It's all about "me" without regard or respect for the other person involved.

In a September 14, 2023, interview in response to the Senate reading, the author of *Gender Queer* told the *Washington Post*, "It keeps being called a children's book ... but I think that's coming from a misreading of the comic-book form. 'Gender Queer' is a comic, and in full color, but that doesn't mean it's for children. I originally wrote it for my parents, and then for older teens who were already asking these questions about themselves. I don't recommend this book for kids!"

The *Post* article didn't include *why* the author thought the book is not for kids, but that's what she said. Meanwhile, MCPS continues to include the book and others like it in school libraries.

Not only do those choosing books for MC school libraries promote pornography (what other word applies to the lascivious language above?), that is, sex that objectifies the other, they promote it while clutching their pearls that a child should pick up a Marlboro:

In “Comprehensive Health Education in Grade 5,” MCPS curriculum discourages 5th-grade children from using tobacco in, for example, Unit 2.5.B.1.d., which tells children how to “Identify family, cultural, peer, and legal influences on tobacco **to avoid use.**” Because this module is in the “health” category, we assume children are being advised to avoid tobacco because it may kill them. So far so good.

But another grade-5 lesson spends an entire module (Module C of “Disease Prevention and Control” advising children to take measures to avoid HIV, which may kill them, while engaging in sex.

In other words, children are being advised to abstain from the pleasures of tobacco altogether because it’s dangerous, while being told that random sex is just fine even though it’s dangerous (because decreasing the risk of HIV/AIDS, should they actually carry that out, does not remove the risk of death from it).

Why the double standard?

And why the blindness to studies such as [DeLago et al. \(2020\)](#) showing that viewing of explicit sexual content was among the factors predicting sexual abuse of other children, usually a few years younger than they? The same study cites Ybarra et al. (2014) as showing that youth exposed to ... media depicting kissing, fondling, or having sex, were seven times more likely to be involved in coerced sexual victimization, compared to youth who reported almost no media exposure to sexual situations.

The findings of these reports and many like them are not surprising. It is logical that exposure to sexual situations in which the parties of whatever sexual orientation focus on their own excitement and pleasure to the eclipse of another’s dignity as a *whole person* – will lead to sexually coercive behavior.

A related question: we wonder why MCPS includes units on recognizing and defending oneself against sexual harassment (so far so good) but none on how to treat persons we are attracted to with the respect due them as whole people: body, mind, and soul – instead of a lopsided emphasis on people as sex objects.

Vetting of MCPS library books

Montgomery County Board of Education Policy says that library books undergo “a rigorous evaluation process.” In fact, a panel of five “staffers” reviews each book. We wonder how objective the panel members could be, since they are paid by a County whose policy states that “when planning for instruction teachers/schools are encouraged to utilize a variety of resources to continue to promote an inclusive environment.”

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In other words, as MCBE understands the word “inclusive,” the decision to include what amounts to a culture of using and being used by others seems to have been made long before staffers review any book.

We respectfully call on you and your Board, Ms. Silvestre, to include books in school libraries that truly educate children about various kinds of people without some books sinking into one-dimensional pornographic stereotypes. Instead of books with characters and plot lines that model for young readers a “me first” attitude, we believe it would be healthier to emphasize literature showing generous, even sacrificial love to others – a model that has been held for millennia to be the height of human dignity, and that leads to the greatest human flourishing.

Sincerely,

/s/

Mary Joan Modderman
President, Maryland Coalition Against Pornography

Study cited:

De Lago et al. 2020: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0145213419304375>

cc: Dr. Monifa B. McKnight, Superintendent of Schools