

DIRIGO HIGH SCHOOL



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Dirigo High School Material Review Committee Report

Challenge of book, Gender Queer

In response to submissions of Instructional and Library Media Materials Challenge forms from community members Bonnie McKenna, Sara Cole and Elizabeth Kelly requesting the book be removed from the DHS Library.

RSU 56 Policy Reference: Policy IJJ, Instructional and Library-Media Materials Selection

Date of Report: June 14, 2022

Committee Members: Nick Karavas, Assistant Principal/Athletic Director; Cindy Petherbridge, RSU 56 Library Media Specialist; Ami Greco; DHS Social Worker, Kurt Rowley, DHS Social Studies Teacher; Melanie Prescott, Community Member

Summary Recommendation from the Review Committee: All five committee members found value in the book. No member of the committee felt the book should be banned. The committee recommends keeping the book in the DHS library.

Alignment of book to RSU 56 Selection Criteria: Gender Queer meets all the criteria set forth in the RSU 56 policy on the selection of instructional materials. It is a well-researched and accurate resource that has value to a subset of the population at DHS. The RSU 56 policy on the selection of materials indicates that, “before recommending materials for purchase, professional staff should evaluate the existing collection, consulting reputable, unbiased, professionally prepared selection aids.” In this instance, that policy was followed. Gender Queer was awarded the Alex Award from ALA. The Alex Award recognizes books that are published for adults that have a special appeal to young adults. Additionally, Gender Queer earned a Stonewall Honor Award in non-fiction from the ALA, recognizing excellent works relating to the LGBTQ+ community. Gender Queer reviewed well, earning a starred review from the School Library Journal, which recommended the book for grades 9 and up.

The RSU 56 policy on the selection of instructional materials also states that it is the responsibility of

the school “to provide a wide range of materials on all levels of difficulty, with diversity of appeal and the presentation of different points of view.” Gender Queer meets that criteria. Learning differing points of view is one of the key components of being able to understand and respect diversity, which is outlined under being a responsible and informed citizen in the Guiding Principles of the Maine Learning Results, which RSU 56 has adopted.

Appropriateness of Book to Age Span at DHS: In the professional opinion of the selection aide, *School Library Journal*, Gender Queer is appropriate for students in ninth grade and up, making its inclusion in a high school setting unremarkable. The *School Library Journal*’s review of the book states, “VERDICT A book to be savored rather than devoured, this memoir will resonate with teens, especially fans of Alison Bechdel’s *Fun Home* and Mason Deaver’s *I Wish You All the Best*. It’s also a great resource for those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand.”

In regards to concerns about the age appropriateness of Gender Queer, statistics from Out Maine indicated that 3.2% of high school students in Maine identified as transgender or unsure of their gender identity. The Mayo Clinic notes, “Gender dysphoria is the feeling of discomfort or distress that might occur in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth or sex-related physical characteristics.” Gender dysphoria is a diagnosis identified by the American Psychiatric Association under the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). It is defined as a feeling of distress or discomfort in individuals who have gender identity confusion. Gender Queer is one resource that questioning high-school students may find useful.

DHS Library Expertise and Practices: The educators who selected Gender Queer for the Dirigo High School library collection adhered to professional ethics, best practices and evidence based information in regards to the decision to purchase and shelve the title. Knowing that our students, a microcosm of the state of Maine and society in general, include students who identify as LGBTQ+ or who are wondering about their gender identity, the Library Media Specialist and/or Library ed-tech III intentionally purchase materials to support them and all students.

Other RSU 56 Policy and Student Rights Considerations: The RSU 56 policy IJJ also clearly states, “The Board recognizes that the final authority as to what materials an individual student will be exposed rests with the student’s parents or guardians. However, at no time will the wishes of one child’s parents to restrict his/her reading or viewing of a particular item infringe on other parents’ rights to permit their children to read or view the same material.” (p. 4)

RSU 56 Policy ACAA notes, “Harassment of students because of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ancestry or national origin, or disability is prohibited. Such conduct is a violation of Board policy and may constitute illegal discrimination under state and federal laws.” Most of the protected classes are easily understood; however, sexual orientation and gender identity are often less clear. In order for employees and students to understand what sexual orientation and gender identity entail, information around such must be obtainable; therefore, DHS strives to provide such information. Per the *School Library Journal*, Gender Queer was described as “... a great resource for those who identify as nonbinary or asexual as well as for those who know someone who identifies that way and wish to better understand.”