



OKLAHOMA STATE
DEPARTMENT of EDUCATION

January 19, 2024

Via Email

Dr. Angela Grunewald
Superintendent
Edmond Public Schools
angela.grunewald@edmondschools.net

Re: Awareness Complaint Nos. 23-281, 23-696, 23-704, 23-724, 23-834

Dear Superintendent Grunewald,

As you likely are aware, the above-captioned complaints concern the presence of the books *Kite Runner* and *The Glass Castle* in Edmond Public Schools. The allegation is that the books at issue violate the prohibitions in OAC 210:35-3-126.

Because the complaints vary in whether they address library or curriculum standards, the State Department of Education (SDE) worked to determine the facts from your staff. As SDE understands it, these books are (1) available in Edmond Public Schools libraries without restriction and (2) assigned for a tenth-grade reading assignment, with provision for parental opt-outs. Because OAC 210:35-3-126 does not address curriculum assignments, SDE solely reviews for the availability of the books in “a school library, media program, a classroom library, or any other collection of books or other materials, print or digital, that are maintained by a School district or its employees for use by students.” OAC 210:35-3-121.1.

Because SDE understands that the books are available without restriction in Edmond Public Schools libraries, SDE referred the books to its Library Media Advisory Committee with the understanding that the books are available to all ages. The Advisory Committee recommended that both books qualify as sexualized content within the meaning of the rule and that the books are not appropriate before age 18. The particular findings on both books are reported below for reference.

Library Media Advisory Committee Report on *Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini:

Book contains explicit, graphic sexual language in describing the violent same sex rape of a 12-year-old boy by a group of boys. The sexual theme carries throughout the book as part of the background leading to the conclusion. This book meets the criteria for pornography and contains excessive sexual content. The complexities of Afghanistan’s culture and history can be taught to our students without exposing them to explicit, graphic, violent sexual assault. This book describes a rape situation that is traumatic and can deliver secondhand trauma to the reader (are teachers trained to handle secondhand trauma?) Oklahoma’s taxpayers should not be expected to fund sexual materials for minors. The book references the following: a child being raped, a child having blood drip down his leg after the rape, and the rape is described

throughout the story with more detail with each telling. There is a question about this book having any educational value.

Library Media Advisory Committee Report on *The Glass Castle* by Jeannette Walls:

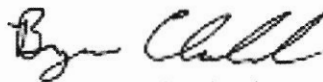
This book has minimal, if any, educational value. The sexual content is explicit and prevalent throughout. There is no reason why any minor school-aged child should read this. The graphic nature of the sexual content is delivering secondhand trauma to the reader. This is a memoir, the author is healing by writing this, but it is not appropriate to deliver the story of her trauma, so graphically, to young minds who cannot comprehend it for its purpose as an adult may be able to. The book has no overriding merits and could easily be replaced by a motivational memoir found at any local bookstore. The book references: a child going into a whorehouse, an uncle masturbating while touching a child's leg, a grandmother molesting a young boy, a child showing another child his father's penis, and rape.

Based on these recommendations, SDE believes that Edmond Public Schools is in violation of OAC 210:35-3-126 by maintaining these books in its collections for use by students. On review of the documentation, SDE also understands that Edmond Public Schools is seeking compliance with the rules, and accordingly SDE would further recommend that the violation was merely negligent and that the needed corrective action is the removal of those two books from any Library as defined in OAC 210:35-3-121.1.

Under OAC 210:35-3-126, you have fourteen days in which to request a hearing in front of the State Board to contest these recommendations. You can send that request to legalservices@sde.ok.gov, with a copy to the Executive Secretary for the State Board at terrie.cheadle@sde.ok.gov. If you do not request a hearing within the timeframe, the Board will consider the recommendation uncontested. If you decide to voluntarily take corrective action, the Board will be informed of the Awareness reports but will be advised that no Board action is needed in light of voluntary compliance.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Bryan Cleveland
General Counsel

CC: Complainants