

Dear Hornet Community Members,

Books are windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for readers.¹ When a young reader consumes a book with characters and plots that reflect their own lives, the reader's lived experiences are validated. When young readers consume literature with characters and plots that are different from their own lives, a "window into another perspective" is created, which helps the reader build empathy, critical thinking skills, and a better understanding of the world at large.

Essex High School recently learned that a gender-affirming book in our library is being discussed on various websites. There is a long history of certain books being banned in the United States, so this is not a new conversation. The Office for Intellectual Freedom has reported a large increase in the number of challenges and has issued a statement, noting that a disproportionate number of challenged books are about the LGBTQIA+ experience, despite being underrepresented in publishing². The book in question is an award-winning book titled *Gender Queer*, a memoir recounting an asexual, nonbinary person's path to self discovery and coming out.

At Essex High School and across the Essex Westford School District we know how critically important it is within our curriculum, libraries, classrooms, and school community to have a representation of a plethora of lived experiences. Our students have a right to a well-balanced library collection, including *Gender Queer*, which is one title sitting among numerous titles featuring cisgender, heterosexual relationships which, on a side note, are not being targeted.

The policies and procedures of the American Librarian Association and the Essex Westford School District ensure that our students see themselves reflected in our library collections, and those different from them, to actively work against hate, exclusion, and bias. Our procedures follow Article II of the American Library Association's Library Bill of Rights, recognized in our media selection procedure, which states, "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." The District also has systems and structures in place for reconsidering books to ensure titles are reviewed by a panel of trained professional librarians from across EWSD. We are committed to the representation of diverse and historically misrepresented groups in our schools and libraries as detailed in the EWSD Equity Policy³.

Books allow our children to explore our world and others in a safe and appropriate way. We reaffirm our commitment to having a representation of a plethora of lived experiences and following our selection and reconsideration procedures for library materials by school librarians for the betterment of our students and communities, as we continue toward our vision of "growing hearts and minds for a better today and tomorrow—every day, every way, every one."

EHS Librarians & Leadership Team

¹ Rudine Sims Bishop, The Ohio State University. "[Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors](#)" originally appeared in *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*. Vo. 6, no. 3. Summer 1990.

² ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom Staff. (2021, November 30) [The American Library Association Opposes Widespread Efforts to Censor Books in U.S. Schools and Libraries](#). Intellectual Freedom Blog.

³ [C29 Equity Policy](#), Essex Westford School District, accessed December 3rd, 2021.