

NOAH WEBSTER EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION MODEL POLICY

TO: TBD
FROM: Noah Webster Educational Foundation
RE: Preventing Obscenity in School Libraries Model Policy
DATE: TBD

This model policy seeks to address the oversight of sexual content in school libraries. This policy sets standards for all books and resources in the school library, including newly acquired materials and those that need to be removed to make space.

Preventing Obscenity in School Libraries

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BACKGROUND: Concerns have recently developed about the content of books and other resources made available to students through their school library. The district school board is responsible for addressing these concerns by implementing standards for school library materials to ensure no obscene content is available to students. This model policy outlines those standards as recommended by educators and professionals with library experience. These recommendations can be found in the NWEF training series ‘[Oversight of Sexual Content in Curriculum and School Libraries](#).’

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Subject: Preventing Obscenity in School Libraries

I. Description of Policy

This School Board/School Division is responsible for protecting the well-being of its students and encouraging safe engagement with educational resources. To work towards creating a safer educational environment, this policy outlines the appropriate standards for all library books ordered for availability across the district's school libraries, as well as standards for removing books to make space for new resources. Specifically, this policy aims to prevent books and other school resources from containing obscenity inappropriate for student reading, viewing, or other forms of engagement. This policy also affirms the responsibility of school librarians to review all materials before they are made available for students.

II. Definition of Obscenity

The term “obscenity” as defined throughout this policy refers to that which, considered as a whole, has as its dominant theme or purpose an appeal to the prurient interest in sex, that is, a shameful or morbid interest in nudity, sexual conduct, sexual excitement, excretory functions or products thereof or sadomasochistic abuse, and which goes substantially beyond customary limits of candor in description or representation of such matters and which, taken as a whole, does not have serious literary, artistic, political or scientific value.¹

III. Standards for Selecting Library Books within District Libraries

School board members should establish clear standards for school librarians to evaluate books and other learning materials available in the school library. School librarians employed by [this district] are responsible for maintaining the school’s library, including ordering new books and resources for availability. As school librarians order materials for the school library, they should reference the following requirements:

- A. Educational significance - supports the district’s current curriculum and educational standards
- B. Appropriateness - free from obscene content
- C. Authoritative - substantiated or supported by documentary evidence and accepted by most authorities in a field.
- D. Treatment - literary or artistic handling, especially with reference to style.
- E. Aesthetic quality - (philosophy) concerned with notions such as the beautiful and the ugly. (science) concerned with the study of the mind and emotions in relation to the sense of beauty.

¹ Virginia Code § 18.2-372, “Obscene” Defined,
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title18.2/chapter8/section18.2-372/>

All of these standards apply to books, movies, online platform subscriptions made accessible through the library, and any other resources and materials that students might interact with and engage with, provided by the school library.

IV. Standards for Removing Books from District Libraries or “Weeding”

Additionally, school librarians within [this district] are responsible for removing books and resources to make space for new materials. They should also maintain a standard for removing or “weeding” books and resources from the school library. The following considerations, as well as those listed above, should be considered when removing books and resources from the school library:

- A. Contains outdated Information
- B. There are multiple or older Copies
- C. Visible damage
- D. Lack of circulation
- E. Oversaturation of the topic
- F. Ideologically biased
- G. Inappropriate reading level
- H. Does not support the current curriculum

All of these standards apply to books, movies, online platform subscriptions made accessible through the library, and any other resources and materials that students might interact with and engage with, provided by the school library.