

I am a mom, and I am a school board member at Warwick School District. For the intents and purposes of this conversation today, I am speaking to you solely from my personal perspective in these roles. The thoughts here represent myself and only myself. They are not assumed to be representative of the school board members I serve alongside, nor the school district in which I reside. These thoughts are my own and are shared strictly from my personal experience and accounts.

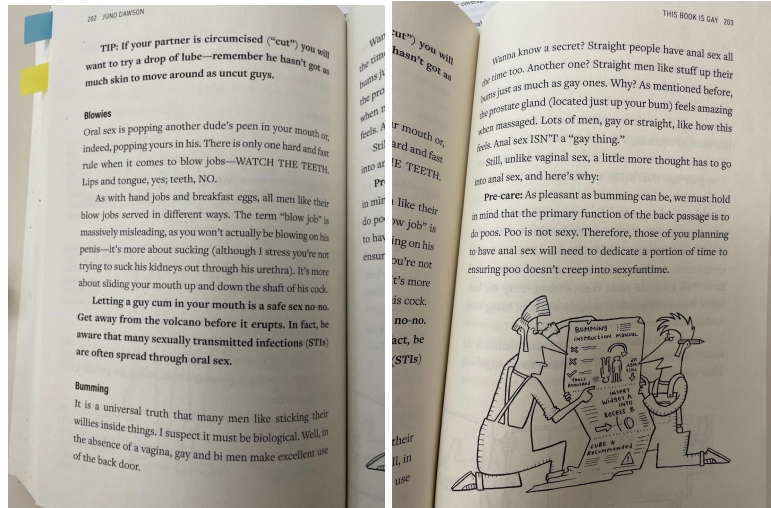
Our community has been having on-going and significant dialogue regarding the subject matter of school library books for a couple of years now—particularly as it relates to the sexual content that is available for student access. This has infiltrated our social media feeds, our neighborly conversations and especially our school board meetings. There is a large breadth of perspective in our small town. A tireless amount of work, time and public tax dollars have been given to attempt to come up with a solution to address these books in a way that ensures that all community members and students feel heard, validated and cared for. This has been a nearly impossible task and one that continues to create hardship in our school district.

Similar to many other community members and parents across the Commonwealth, in 2021, the book *Gender Queer*, of which sample pages are shared in these slides, was brought to my attention by fellow citizens of my school district. At this time I was not serving on the school board, but like many others, had begun to regularly attend meetings. Truthfully, after I got over the shock of what was uninhibitedly accessible to my high school student without my knowledge or consent, I was moved to action—hence now my role as a school board director for my local district.

This book, and a myriad like it, freely remain on many Pennsylvania public school library shelves today.



You will note on the first slide presented here (slide 1), there is an individual receiving an oral sex transaction from another individual through the use of a strap-on penis. The second slide (slide 2) is a depiction of an individual locating web content in which the use of a sex toy, specifically a “\$10 Bullet Vibrator,” is suggested for use in order to experience an orgasm. Lastly, (slide 3) shows a young man and his sister laying on a sofa together which leads to the young man tasting his sister’s “vagina slime.”



And, while this particular book, *This Book Is Gay*, has not been found in school libraries in my home district, it has been located on school shelves across the State, including a middle school. Slides 6 and 7: “Blowies. Oral sex is popping another dude’s peen in your mouth or, indeed, popping yours in his. There is only one hard and fast rule when it comes to blow jobs–WATCH THE TEETH. Lips and tongue, yes; teeth, NO.” It goes on further to say, “Wanna know a secret? Straight people have anal sex all the time too. Another one? Straight men like stuff up their bums just as much as gay ones...”

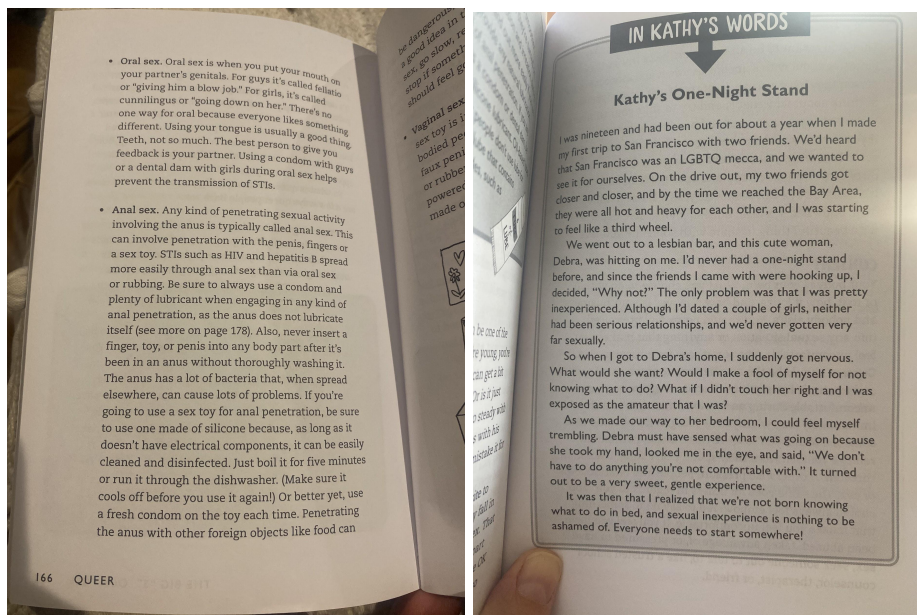
As a former public school educator, I am keenly acquainted with the Pennsylvania State Standards that guide our education system. I remain vigilant and acknowledge that these standards are just that–standards. They provide a roadmap of not only what educators are expected to make available to their learners in terms of content, but also can serve as criteria for parents to use to gain understanding of what knowledge is accessible within the walls of our schools. When reviewing our standards and the subsequent general purpose of the school library–to enhance and support the curriculum, I struggle to find meaningful applications of books like the ones highlighted today.

On a more personal note, as a mother of a teenage young man especially and a pre-teen young lady who both attend public school, I am anguished to think of the potential ramifications of the consumption of such media. These profane sexual images and text seen and read are engraved in a young and impressionable mind with the potential for significant consequences–intended and unintended; once known, they are never unknown. Social norms provide for filters, clarity of boundaries and an expectation of what is available to minors and what is not. I am increasingly confused as to why I can march my kids into the local book store and have higher standards for what they will consume than their local public school library.

In my local school district, the community has not been quiet, nor relenting, regarding library books, and our school board has not taken exception to needing to move forward with a solution. Our board and administration have worked in tandem with our local solicitor to provide a newly affirmed policy. This policy has been many, many (many) months in the making, has required extensive research, numerous meetings and edits, hours of time, a great deal of tax dollars to get us where we are today. I am actually very proud of this policy.

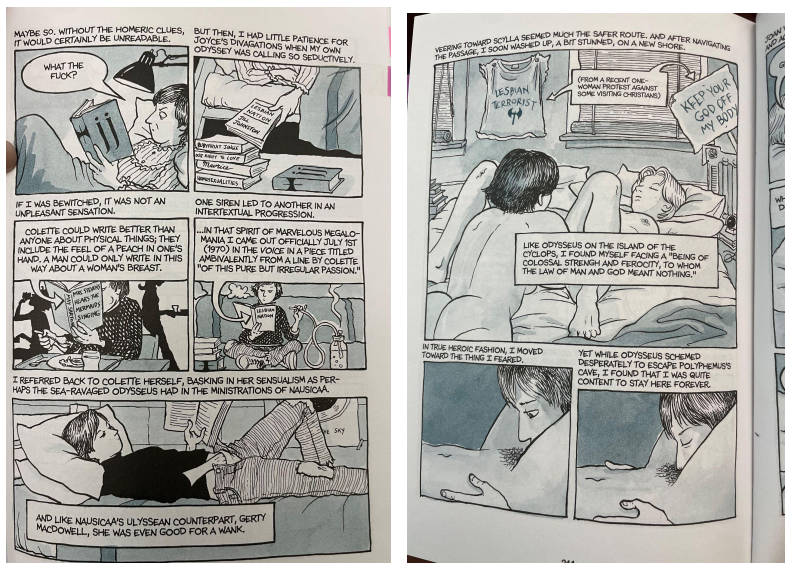
The policy engages community, staff and student feedback through the mechanism of a committee, it allows for parents to be readily informed of books and topics available to students. Parents and guardians have the opportunity to opt their child out of specific book titles. This policy encourages communication at home and between school and home. There are mechanisms for book challenges brought forth by parents and guardians of the school district. All in all, it seems like a strong, fair effort.

Yet, just within the last two weeks, I again received information from a community member—who received pictures of a book viewed and memorialized by a student who was perusing the philosophy section of our high school library.



(slide 4) “Anal Sex. Any kind of penetrating sexual activity involving the anus is typically called anal sex. This can involve penetration of the penis, fingers or a sex toy. STIs such as HIV and hepatitis B spread more easily through anal sex and via oral sex or rubbing. Be sure to always use a condom and plenty of lubricant when engaging in any kind of anal penetration, as the anus does not lubricate itself (see more on page 178). Also, never insert a finger, toy, or penis into any body part after it’s been in an anus without thoroughly washing it. The anus has a lot of bacteria that, when spread elsewhere, can cause lots of problems. If you’re going to use a sex toy for anal penetration, be sure to use one made of silicon because, as long as it doesn’t have electrical components, it can be easily cleaned and disinfected. Just boil it for five minutes or run it through the dishwasher. (Make sure it cools before you use it again!)”

Slide 5 depicts and promotes teens pursuing interactions through a one-night-stand with a stranger they met in a bar.
(Queer: The Ultimate LGBTQ Guide for Teens)



Slide 6 depicts masturbation and slide 7 depicts oral sex. (Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic)

While this policy offers to give families the ability to “opt-out” of specific book titles, the point of intervention still occurs at the library circulation desk putting both students and school staff in a peculiar predicament and allowing students still have access at-large to the entire catalog of books provided by the school library. As was the case here, this high school student was not intending to locate a book of this topic or nature and even came to speak to our school board about their displeasure of finding and being exposed to this content erroneously.

In the case here, as a seated board member, I am choosing to pursue the option to personally challenge this particular book locally with my school district, per what the library policy allows. Challenge policies, in theory, are good. They push forward a train of thought that allows members of the community to provide feedback, work together, and for the school district to take a deep dive and second-look at materials to ensure any given book meets the requirements of content within the school library. Inevitably, when a book challenge is brought forth, there will be opposing opinions, boundaries, perspectives and personal belief systems brought to the table—there will be a “winner” and there will be a “loser.” And, most importantly, our kids will continue to feel the impact of this—all perspectives have the opportunity to feel unheard and unseen. This is a damning predicament.

I remain proud of the efforts and work this school board has done. I would, however, also be remiss and irresponsible not to tell you that it has not come at a significant cost to our community at large. Neighbors who no longer speak to each other, kids feeling subjected to scrutiny and having labels applied, librarians and school staff living in fear of making a mistake or missing a detail, time and tax dollars needing to be allocated that could be readily used elsewhere. There are a litany of unintended consequences of having to handle a policy of this nature on the local level—I personally fear that our quaint small town may never recover from the divide.

As a mom and a community leader it is a personal priority of mine to “listen long,” communicate well and adjust accordingly. I am deeply saddened for the chaos that books, which have long been intended to provide growth, experiences, healing and joy, have brought to not just my own community, but to many communities across the Commonwealth. The passage of SB7 takes the onus off our people—our neighbors, our children, our teachers and librarians and properly

provides a framework and a way forward in creating boundaries and expectations that protect our kids while honoring family discretion. From this seat, I can only speculate what our little town could be like today if our only obligation was to respond to legislature rather than having to muddle our way through the various intricacies involved in creating a system and policy from the ground up.

I continue to believe in transparency and strong communication from school to home and vice-versa. I continue to believe that ALL students (actually ALL students—not just sub-groups of students) deserve and need to be able to experience and see themselves in their learning. I strongly believe in family advocacy and the ability for families to have choices within the public education system as to what their student is and is not exposed to.

But we need help. And I am asking, begging you all—please help. It pains me to think of how our community would look today if we had had additional support before now.