

**Written Statement Before the U.S. House Committee on Education and
the Workforce
Hearing: Combatting Graphic, Explicit Books in School Libraries**

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I appreciate the opportunity to submit a written statement to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce regarding graphic and explicit content in school libraries.

My name is Nicole Solas and I am the mother of two school-aged children and a Senior Fellow with the Education Freedom Center at Independent Women's Forum. IWF is a non-profit organization that advances policies that enhance people's freedom, opportunities, and well-being. The IWF Education Freedom Center informs the public about education policies that harm students and disempower parents and encourages the creation of educational options that focus on academic achievement and create safe environments for students to learn and thrive.

First, it's important to identify the nature and scope of graphic and sexually explicit books in school libraries. This is not an occasional problem. On the contrary, **the amount of sexually explicit books in school libraries is extensive and vast. You can see excerpts from many books¹ and verify the school districts with the books.² This is not an exhaustive list.³** These books do not simply provide clinical sex education describing anatomy and reproduction. They contain numerous pornographic passages and pictures meant to instruct children on sexual pleasure,⁴ sexually excite children, or push a radical, ideological viewpoint of sex and sexuality.⁵ In many cases, these books are unequivocally erotica with both homosexual and

¹ BookLooks.org, Accessed 10/17/2023.

² Nicole Solas, "IWF Pornographic or Ideological Books in Public School." https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Pg_UmE5x6xawTADkDQHsEFcK0ty--SUQIZze7AjJzmq/e/dit#gid=0, Accessed 10/17/2023.

³ "Sexually Explicit Books in School." Michigan Liberty Leaders. <https://michiganlibertyleaders.com/sexually-explicit-books-in-schools/>.

⁴ BookLooks.org, Book Report: "Sex Plus: Learning, Loving and Enjoying Your Body" <http://www.booklooks.org/data/files/Book%20Looks%20Reports/S/Sex%20Plus.pdf>.

⁵ BookLooks.org, Book Report: "Sex: The All You Need to Know Guide to Get You Through Your Teens and Twenties, 2nd Edition," <http://www.booklooks.org/data/files/Book%20Looks%20Reports/S/sex%20second%20edition.pdf>.

heterosexual storylines framed against the youthful backdrops of high school, family, and friends. In one reported incident, hardcore pornography for adults was removed from a high school library⁶ and you can read an excerpt.⁷ Please take some time to review the listed excerpts and graphics list provided above. You will be astonished.

Pornography harms children and leads to negative mental health and social effects.

The American College of Pediatricians warns that “[c]hildren suffer many negative effects due to modern society’s exposure to and acceptance of pornography. These negative effects include mental disturbance and unrest for the young school age child, including acting out and violent behavior. Because of its harmfulness to children, pornography must never be used as a tool to teach children human sexuality.”⁸

Nevertheless, woke leftists argue that sexually explicit content in school library books is permissible because the sexual content is intended to “educate” them about human sexuality, including sexual pleasure, as part of comprehensive sex education.⁹ This rhetoric is a grooming tactic¹⁰ that desensitizes children to sexual content and makes them vulnerable to sexual harassment and sexual assault at school.

During the 2017-18 academic year, there were 13,799 reported incidents of sexual violence in public schools—a 43% increase from the year prior.¹¹ This influx of pornographic school library books further sexualizes an already fraught school environment for children.¹² There is also the risk that older children will take graphic or sexually explicit content home to younger

⁶ Tommy Wiita, “Adult Romance Novel Removed From Sartell High School Book Collection,” Bring Me The News, January 26, 2023, <https://bringmethenews.com/minnesota-news/adult-romance-book-removed-from-sartell-high-school>.

⁷ BookLooks.org, Book Report, *Him* by Sarina Bowen and Elle Kennedy, <http://booklooks.org/data/files/Book%20Looks%20Reports/H/Him%20slick%20sheet.pdf>, Accessed 10/17/23.

⁸ American College of Pediatricians, Position Statement, “The Impact of Pornography on Children,” June 2016, <https://acpeds.org/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children>.

⁹ American College of Pediatricians, Position Statement, “School-Based Sex Education in the United States,” September 2018, <https://acpeds.org/position-statements/school-based-sex-education-in-the-united-states>.

¹⁰ RAINN, *Grooming: Know the Warning Signs*, July 10, 2020, <https://www.rainn.org/news/grooming-know-warning-signs>.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education, “Sexual Violence in K-12 School Issue Brief,” December, 2022, https://ocrdata.ed.gov/assets/downloads/sexual-violence_updated-December-2022.pdf

¹² Larry Sand, “Red Flags in the Classroom,” *City Journal*, June 21, 2023, <https://www.city-journal.org/article/sexual-abuse-in-public-schools>.

children who are even less emotionally prepared to view graphic and explicit content.

Supporters of these materials in school libraries argue that sexually explicit content should be viewed in the context of the whole book.¹³ This minimizes the impact of pornography on children and falsely assumes children can contextualize graphic content. One page depicting children engaged in sex acts is not justified by a thousand other pages without sexual content. Other media rating systems such as the MPAA and FCC also do not consider context when tracking explicit content for children.

School Library Books Need Parental Advisory Labels

Parents across America catalog and expose explicit school library content on their own websites¹⁴ and Facebook groups¹⁵ because there is no universal, codified system to inform parents of graphic or explicit content in school library books. Other media such as movies, radio, music, and the internet have long-standing rating systems or restrictions that recognize the importance of protecting children from inappropriate content. MPAA ratings on movies have informed parents of inappropriate content since 1968,¹⁶ the **FCC** has regulated radio, TV, wire, satellite, and cable media since 1934,¹⁷ parental advisory labels have been placed on audio recordings since 1985,¹⁸ and school internet restricts access to pornographic websites under the The Children’s Internet Protection Act.¹⁹ Accordingly, school library books must also be systematically rated to provide parents with the information needed to determine if a school library book is appropriate for their children.

¹³ Zachary Rogers, The National Desk, “Parents Livid Over Explicit Books in Ga. Schools, One Mom Banned From Board Meetings,” March 30, 2022, <https://fox23maine.com/news/nation-world/parents-livid-over-explicit-books-in-ga-schools-one-mom-banned-from-board-meetings-georgia-forsyth-lindsay-henderson/>.

¹⁴ Linda Stein, “New Website for Parents to See Ratings, Excerpts from Explicit School Library Books, Delaware Valley Journal, June 10, 2022, <https://delawarevalleyjournal.com/new-website-for-parents-to-see-ratings-excerpts-from-explicit-school-library-books/>.

¹⁵ LaVerna in the Library - Utah’s Mary in the Library Facebook Group, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/353057099906284/>, Accessed 10/17/2023.

¹⁶ Motion Picture Association, Film Ratings, <https://www.motionpictures.org/film-ratings/>, Accessed 10/17/2023.

¹⁷ Federal Communications Commission, Consumer Guide: Obscene, Indecent, and Profane Broadcasts, December 30, 2019, https://www.fcc.gov/sites/default/files/obscene_indecent_and_profane_broadcasts.pdf, Accessed 10/17/23

¹⁸ Ashawnta Jackson, “Parental Advisory: The Story of a Warning Label,” *JSTOR Daily*, September 19, 2020, <https://daily.jstor.org/parental-advisory-the-story-of-a-warning-label/>.

¹⁹ Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, [https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/47/54.520#:~:text=\(i\)%20The%20Internet%20safety%20policy.by%20minors%2C%20harmful%20to%20minors](https://www.law.cornell.edu/cfr/text/47/54.520#:~:text=(i)%20The%20Internet%20safety%20policy.by%20minors%2C%20harmful%20to%20minors), Accessed 10/17/23.

Both the MPAA movie rating system and Parental Advisory music labels were pioneered by concerned parents. A similar advisory committee of parents can organize to implement a rating system for their school library collection. A school district in Iowa used **artificial intelligence** to speedily identify sexual content in school books so there are tools to assist parents and school districts.

School Libraries Should Provide Parent “View Only” Patron Accounts with Parental Restriction Capabilities

Even with a book rating system in place, parents have little control over their children’s unfettered access to inappropriate school library materials. Usually, parents discover graphic or explicit content only after their concerned child brings the inappropriate material to them. Parents are unsupported by school boards that ban²⁰ them from campus, cut off²¹ their public comment at school board meetings, and label them “book banners”²² for their legitimate concerns about graphic and explicit material in school libraries. Most parents still have not seen firsthand the graphic and explicit content in school libraries, and the retaliation against parents who have seen the graphic content obfuscates the solution—transparency and parental control.

One website²³ allows parents to search school library catalogs from home, but without every page of every book published online, it is difficult to know whether a book contains explicit or graphic content. Further, even if parents could read every page of every book, there is no easy or immediate way to restrict their child’s access to graphic or explicit books at school. School libraries should provide parent “view only” patron school library accounts that allow parents to instantly restrict²⁴ their children’s access to inappropriate books. Used in conjunction with parental advisory labels, parent patron school library accounts with restriction capabilities protect the rights of parents to direct the education and upbringing of their own children.

²⁰ Elizabeth Troutman, “Parent Who Exposed Pornographic Library Book Sues After School Bans Him From Property,” *The Washington Free Beacon*, July 15, 2022, <https://freebeacon.com/campus/parent-who-exposed-pornographic-library-books-sues-after-school-bans-him-from-property/>.

²¹ Emma Colton, “Georgia Parent Reading Sexual Content from Library at School Board meeting is Cut Off: ‘Inappropriate,’” *Fox News*, March 24, 2022, <https://www.foxnews.com/us/parent-reading-sexual-content-school-cut-off-board-member-irony>.

²² Max Eden and Jay Greene, “Parents Who Object to Pornographic Material in School Libraries Aren’t Book Banners,” *The Daily Signal*, October 6, 2023, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2023/10/06/parents-who-object-to-pornographic-material-in-school-libraries-arent-book-banners/>.

²³ Destiny Discover, <https://www.gofollett.com/aasp/ui/pick/pick>, Accessed 10/17/23.

²⁴ Piper Hutchinson, “St. Tammany Libraries to Red Flag Certain Graphic Novels,” *Fox8Live*, March 1, 2023, <https://www.fox8live.com/2023/03/01/st-tammany-libraries-red-flag-certain-graphic-novels/>.

“Classroom Libraries” Must Be Inventoried and Treated As School Library Materials

Children also gain access to graphic or explicit books from a teacher’s personal collection of books kept in the classroom (“classroom libraries”) which is separate from the school’s official library collection. In some cases, a teacher gifts²⁵ or personally selects inappropriate books to give to specific students without the knowledge or approval of the school because it is not approved instructional material or cataloged library material. In the spirit of transparency, teachers should inventory their classroom library²⁶ and include this inventory in the school’s broader academic transparency policy.²⁷

The First Amendment allows schools to remove materials that are “pervasively vulgar” or not “educationally unsuitable” under *Board of Education v. Pico*.²⁸

Finally, parents should feel empowered knowing that the First Amendment is on their side. Curating an age-appropriate school library collection is part of the American Library Association’s Selection Criteria for School Libraries.²⁹ These criteria recommend that books “[b]e appropriate for the subject area and for the age, emotional development, ability level, learning styles, and social, emotional, and intellectual development of the students for whom the materials are selected.”³⁰ The American Library Association (ALA) even **trained** its member libraries to understand that “school boards have greater discretion over school library materials. If the board can demonstrate that the

²⁵ Christina Watrobski, “Michigan Parents Outraged After Teacher Gifts Middle School Students ‘Pornographic’ Book,” *Crisis in The Classroom*, *ABC15News*, January 13, 2023, <https://wpde.com/news/nation-world/michigan-parents-outraged-after-teacher-gifts-middle-school-students-pornographic-book>.

²⁶ Alia Wong and Nirvi Shah, “Judge Sides with Florida in Challenge to Rules About Books In Schools,” *USA Today*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2023/07/07/florida-judge-tosses-teachers-challenge-on-school-book-rules/70391726007/>.

²⁷ The Goldwater Institute, *Academic Transparency Act Model Legislation*, Revised 6/8/22, <https://www.goldwaterinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Academic-Transparency-Act-2022-Model-Legislation.pdf>, Accessed 10/17/23.

²⁸ *Board of Education v. Pico*, 457 U.S. 853 (1982) <https://caselaw.findlaw.com/court/us-supreme-court/457/853.html>.

²⁹ American Library Association, *Selection Criteria*, Updated 2018 by ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit/criteria>, Accessed 10/17/23.

³⁰ American Library Association, *Selection Criteria*, Updated 2018 by ALA Office for Intellectual Freedom, <https://www.ala.org/tools/challengesupport/selectionpolicytoolkit/criteria>, Accessed 10/17/23.

materials are 'educationally unsuitable' or 'pervasively vulgar,' the removal may be upheld by the courts."³¹

Recently, however, the American Library Association reframed sexually explicit content as "diverse materials" to label parents as "book banners" removing "diverse materials" instead of honestly characterizing the books as containing sexually explicit content which can be removed.³² No amount of diversity sanitizes sexually explicit content for children's eyes and the American Library Association should be held accountable for deceiving the public at the expense of children. Parents should encourage schools to disassociate from ALA and join organizations that respect parents' rights.

I hope this written statement provides at least a starting point for parents to take real action steps either as individuals or organized groups to combat the graphic and explicit books in school libraries.

Thank you.

³¹ Dan Kleinman, Right to Read Act Ethics Complaint, Safe Libraries, October 27, 2002, <https://safelibraries.blogspot.com/2022/10/right-to-read-act-ethics-complaint.html>.

³² Dan Kleinman, Right to Read Act Ethics Complaint, Safe Libraries, October 27, 2002, <https://safelibraries.blogspot.com/2022/10/right-to-read-act-ethics-complaint.html>.