

SJNCS Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, December 14, 2023

St. John Neumann Library

4:00 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

I. Call to Order by Chair– 4:00 p.m.

Attendance: Kelly Mechelke, Principal; Fr. Joe Reed, Pastor; Sabrina Talley, Academic Dean; Mary Marlowe, Director of Admissions; Patrick Wade, Director of Development; Jenny Hay, Board Member; Will Silverberg, Board Member; Alex LaFasto, Vice-Chair Board Member; Taylor Locke, Board Member; Hiram Morales, Chair Board Member; Jessica Louthan, Board Member; Steve Eckstein, Faculty Representative; Jennifer Dzermejko, PTMO President; Mallory Nygard, Director of Library and Information Services; Stephanie Greiner, Director of Communications (Recording Secretary)

Absent: Christine Roeck, Director of Account Services, Sabrina Talley, Academic Dean

Fr. Joe Reed arrived late.

II. Opening Prayer by Dr. Mechelke

III. Discuss / Approve previous Meeting Minutes

- Motion to approve minutes
- **Vote:** Motion approved by unanimous aye

IV. Old Business

- None

V. New Business

- Decision made to wait until the next meeting to discuss meeting agendas moving forward; this meeting will revolve around reviewing challenged books and reviewing the Library Manual.
- Mrs. Mallory Nygard has printed a new library manual to review. Jenny Hay suggested waiting until next time to review the manual and focus on books this time. Book review instructions were discussed with the evaluating committee.
- Book 1: Milo Imagines the World by Matt De La Peña
 - Discussion
 - revolved heavily around the images in the book, mainly an illustration of two women in white dresses. The concern involved whether this image is an obvious allusion to same-sex marriage.
 - How do we determine the author's intent? A member thought the intent of the image is to convey something contrary to the Catholic faith—gay marriage is legitimate. Is the intent is to normalize the idea of homosexual marriage and to draw a parallel between racism and non-acceptance of gay marriage. A member has concerns that it is normalizing behavior that is contrary to the Catholic faith. A member states it is hard to determine the author's intent without it being

explicitly stated. As the book is geared toward younger ages, we should ask ourselves would a kindergartener understand the details of the book and draw the conclusion that the illustration depicts a same sex marriage. A member said their child read the book and had no questions. Another member says the picture does not necessarily show a wedding and is less detailed than an earlier picture with a man and woman, which clearly shows a wedding. Another person shared they believe the book does probably intend to “slide in” acceptance of gay marriage. Young children could be guided by adults in a different direction or into a conversation about same-sex marriage and the Catholic faith.

- Another member stated children should be able to see all people of the world represented in literature.
 - A member feels that this book does convey something contrary to the Catholic faith.
 - Another member says the book's intent is not to judge people based on their appearance.
 - A member stated he does not want to have to explain certain topics to his children. If the book was for an older age group, it would be more acceptable, but not for young children.
- At this point, it was suggested that the Ad Hoc committee should put together a list of everyone's viewpoints.
 - Alex LaFasto stated the parent is just as much a library customer as the student.
 - Ms. Nygard stated she would like parents to talk more about what they would like their children to read. She sees the relationship between parent and librarian as collaborative.
 - At this point, the question was raised if we could mark books a certain way that identifies them as having topics that could be controversial.
 - Per Ms. Nygard, students don't do any self-checkout until middle school. Therefore, she sees every book that they check out.
 - Alex LaFasto stated we are approaching the issue incorrectly: we did not identify the problem before, we are using too many opinions, we are trying to find a solution too early, and we need to be more fact-based.
 - Ms. Nygard responded that as a work of literature. The rubric that will be used to evaluate a challenged book helps to make the subjective as objective as possible.
 - Unfortunately, there was no report from the parents as to why they didn't agree with the book, so we don't even know that the illustration was the issue.
 - Alex LaFasto stated that our current process is not effective.
 - Opinion comes in when determining the author's intent, which is the job of literary criticism. Ultimately, the decision goes to Dr. Mechelke and Fr. Joe.
 - **Call for Vote** to Retain the book “Milo Imagines the World.”
 - Vote to retain: 4
 - Vote to remove: 4
- **Book 2: Ghost Boys by Jewell Parker Rhodes**
 - This book is written from the perspective of a boy who was shot by a police officer for carrying a toy gun.
 - Member stated the book has a lot of good qualities, although it does oversimplify the problems of the inner city. The author fairly presents facts although it does skew to one viewpoint.
 - Another member believed young children would not be ready for it, but it is a very powerful book.

- A person from the group thought the recommended age seems young, and she strongly believes a child should be coached to finish the book. If the book isn't finished, it skews to a certain viewpoint, rectified in the end. This person also struggled with some of the issues but thinks the cultural differences are worthy of discussion among families. Parts are uncomfortable to read but important.
 - We do not have a reason for this challenge, so we don't know; it could be due to the recommended age. Ms. Nygard would not want the book checked out to anyone younger than Middle School.
 - The relationships are very endearing between the Ghost Boy and the police officer's daughter.
 - **Call to Vote:** Retain the book and make it available to 7th and 8th only.
 - **Vote:** Unanimous Aye
 - Moving forward, the Ad Hoc committee will just make the recommendation to the board
- Book 3: The Summer I Turned Pretty by Jenny Han
 - A member recommended this book be available only to 7th and 8th grades due to language and the fact that it references things 7th and 8th graders experience.
 - A member recommends we remove the book because it is a formulaic romance novel for kids. There are quite a few inappropriate cultural references.
 - Per a member there is Implied statutory rape (characters are 16 – 18 and sneak out of the house together.)
 - A member asked if kids understand the formula of romance novels, or would they only see the parts they relate to? She thinks the book should be age-restricted but has value because it discusses relatable experiences to older kids.
 - At this point, Fr. Joe asks if parents can see the books that the kids have checked out. Ms. Nygard said yes, they can.
 - Fr Joe would like parents to be able to see that and facilitate conversations, even if parents don't take advantage of it. He would like Ms. Nygard to be involved with letting parents know what books their children are checking out. The catalog is searchable, and if you click on the book, you can see information about the book, like recommended age and reviews.
 - A person thinks the book has value for normalizing sibling relationships and puberty.
 - A member thinks the book has value because it discusses how divorce and illness (cancer) affect children.
 - Fr Joe asked if we remove this book that handles important topics, do we have alternatives in place that handle those topics as well. As a Catholic school, we must be aware of how we steer children during those turbulent times and have books that orient them properly.
 - Ms. Nygard stated that she knows of other books for that audience that handle similar topics.
 - A member asked if we should consider adding study guides with questions to help guide engagement. The issue is how the engagement is facilitated when the hard questions arise.
 - A member remarked that parents are afraid that they won't know about what books are being read to facilitate questions.
 - Ms. Nygard suggested we could add study guides online.
 - **Call for Vote** to retain the book "The Summer I Turned Pretty" by Jenny Han.
 - Vote to retain: 2
 - Vote to remove: 6

- Book 4: Ready Player One by Ernest Cline
 - A member remarked that this book was engaging and detailed. The virtues of perseverance and hard work are highlighted, as well as overcoming adversity; however, there are far more negatives than positives.
 - The book has mature content, themes, and language. The main character's upbringing is violent; his mother was a sex worker who dealt with substance abuse. The characters are surrounded by gun violence.
 - Per a member, the author's anti-religion bias comes through (anti-God, no heaven, etc.).
 - Another member also enjoyed the book but believes it has no place in a Catholic school library.
 - Another member agreed that there are a lot of adult themes. The positives are that this could be a good book for a kid who loves video games but is inappropriate for the ages of children served by the SJNCS library.
 - **Call for Vote** to Remove from library.
 - Vote: Unanimous Aye

- Book 5: Fallout by Steve Sheinkin
 - This book is a journalistic-style history of the Cold War through the Cuban Missile Crisis. Sentences could be taken out of context to praise communism and the description of the nuclear holocaust. It is excellent but should be for older grades.
 - Per Ms. Nygard, only 7th 8th graders have checked it out.
 - **Call for Vote** to retain
 - Vote: Unanimous Aye

- Policy changes will be discussed at the next meeting.
 - Ms. Nygard stated that a parent had followed the reconsideration policy correctly and discussed a book with her, which had been removed from the library. She is trying to communicate more with parents. She wants parents to know that they can approach her. We will work on getting emails sent to parents to let them know what books their child is checking out.
 - At the next meeting, Dr. Mechelke and Fr. Joe will have decided on books.

VI. Closing Prayer by Fr. Joe - Meeting adjourned at 5:29 pm