

[Books](#)

Couple asks ban on book

Wed Jan 09, 2008, 02:51 PM EST

READING -

Two parents are expressing concern about a book on the optional summer reading list for incoming freshmen at Reading Memorial High School, but the School Committee is standing by the work.

Linda and Gary Phillips complained to the committee last week that the book "Where the Heart Is," by Billie Letts, a 356-page novel about a pregnant teenager in Oklahoma whose boyfriend leaves her, forcing her to carry and raise her baby with the help of new friends, is not suitable for the list.

"This books needs to be removed from our students' recommended or any reading assignments," said Linda Phillips in a statement Wednesday night. "It is the content of the book that is the substance of our complaint, not what someone else says is in the book or what someone says about the book."

The couple has two teenage daughters in Reading public schools.

At the Dec. 19 School Committee meeting, Superintendent Patrick Schettini read a statement from Michael McSweeney, chairman of the English Department, after which the committee unanimously voted to stand behind Schettini's recommendation to keep the book in the high school.

In the statement, McSweeney wrote, "Taken as a whole, the novel does not advocate child abuse or endangerment. The contrary is true. Taken as a whole, the book is life-affirming."

David Michaud, vice chairman of the School Committee, said that he stands behind Schettini's recommendation and the committee's vote.

"Let there be no mistake – this is a book about good – the good that prevails in a young woman's life despite many challenges," he wrote in a statement that Lisa Gibbs, chairman of the School Committee, read on behalf of Michaud, who was absent from the meeting. "The author creates dramatic context by juxtaposing a couple of heinous incidents with a book full of good. The overwhelming impression is of good."

Linda Phillips said that she does not agree with McSweeney's or Schettini's recommendations.

"We do not believe Mr. McSweeney's review and the superintendent's recommendation should stand as an acceptable vigilant safeguard against pornographic and destructive literature recommended or required for our children," she said about some of the story's images, which includes numerous sexual references. "We recommend this be changed immediately."

Phillips added that she believes the School Committee did not properly notify her about the committee's scheduled review of the book on Dec. 19.

The School Committee did not take any further action on Wednesday night.

Phillips said that if the book became a movie, it would not be suitable for teenagers.

"If all the violence and explicit sex, physical abuse and foul language were included in a movie, it would be

given worse than an ‘R’ rating,” she said.

But in April 2000, “Where the Heart Is” went Hollywood and became a two-hour movie that the Motion Picture Association of America gave a PG-13 rating for intense thematic material, language and sexual content.

In December 1998, Oprah Winfrey selected the book as a part of her book club. The book has also received the Walker Percy Award given at the New Orleans Writers Conference, and has topped the New York Times best seller list.

Staff Writer Stephen Vittorioso can be reached at 978-371-5737 or at svittori@cnc.com.

Comments (0)

Leave a Comment:

Participation in online discussion is subject to our [Terms of Use](#). By commenting, you agree to be bound by these terms.

