

ANCHORAGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

ASD MEMORANDUM #204 (98-99) February 25, 1999

TO: SCHOOL BOARD

FROM: OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

SUBJECT: CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES REVIEW: ATHLETIC SHORTS

RECOMMENDATION:

It is the Administration's recommendation that the School Board authorize the continued circulation of the book Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher through the District's school libraries.

PERTINENT FACTS:

Sue Frances, a parent of an eighth grade student at Goldenview Middle School, filed a "Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials" with the District relative to the book Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher. Her suggestion was to remove the books from the library shelves in the schools and be made available to students through the principal's office in a school. Attachment A presents Ms. Frances' written complaint.

The Controversial Issues Review Committee met to consider this issue on January 20, 1999. Notes from that meeting are presented in Attachment B. The Controversial Issues Review Committee from Ms. Frances; her spouse, Steve Frances; Chad Sant, a social studies teacher at Goldenview; and Linda Masterson, the Librarian at Goldenview. The issue was also discussed and debated within the committee itself.

Fourteen (14) of the 17 voting members of the committee were at the meeting. The committee unanimously passed the motion, "**That the book Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher remain on the mid level library shelves.**" This followed a lengthy discussion and vote in which the requirement of prior notification to

parents before the book be used as a read aloud in class was rejected on a 12 to 2 vote.

The Administration's recommendation in this case is consistent with that of the Controversial Issues Review Committee. The book, Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher, is found to be appropriate for inclusion in the library collections at the middle and high school level. It is unlikely to appeal to students at the elementary level. The lessons and morals in the stories are positive, and outweigh the concerns some may have with the language and other issues raised by the complainant. The book should be available for consideration for inclusion in school library collections in the District.

The Administration feels the Controversial Issues Review Committee made the right choice regarding the issue of prior notification of parents before any of the stories could be used as a read aloud in class. Such a requirement does eliminate any flexibility on the part of teachers and may set a precedent that does not need to be set at this time. The District relies upon its teachers' professionalism and judgment every day as the teachers work with and instruct close to 50,000 students in numerous areas, covering numerous situations, and using numerous materials and strategies. Continued reliance on teacher professionalism, with interventions directed toward individuals as needed, is a reasoned, reasonable approach to the type of situation reflected in this issue.

The Administration does want to thank Mrs. Frances, and Mr. Frances, for expressing their concerns and bringing forward this issue. Their interest in their own children and in the best interest of students across the District was evident and is to be commended. While the Administration and Mr. and Mrs. Frances reached different conclusions regarding the specific book Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher, they share a common concern for quality education and a concern for the best interest of all students.

The members of the Controversial Issues Review Committee are also to be commended for donating their time to the committee. They took their charge seriously, heard from both Mr. and Mrs. Frances and the school representatives, and for debating the issue before them in a reasoned manner without becoming confrontational either with the persons testifying before the committee or with each other.

In summary, the review process is in place. The Administration supports the decisions reached by the Controversial Issues Review Committee in this matter.

Attachments to this memorandum include:

Attachment A Complaint Filed by Sue Frances

Attachment B Notes of Controversial Issues Review Committee Meeting
— 1/20/99

Attachment C Hand-out from Fred Stofflet at 1/20/99 Meeting — Roster
of Committee Members

Attachment D Hand-out from Fred Stofflet at 1/20/99 Meeting —
"Purpose and Composition" of the Committee

Attachment E Hand-out from Fred Stofflet at 1/20/99 Meeting —
"Standards of Operation"

Attachment F Hand-out from Marcia Indahl at 1/20/99 Meeting — e-mail
from Chris Crutcher regarding the book.

BC/FS

Prepared by: Fred Stofflet, Executive Director, Curriculum & Evaluation

Approved by: Carol Comeau, Assistant Superintendent, Instruction

Attachment A

Attachment B

Anchorage School District
Controversial Issues Review Committee

Notes of Meeting

January 20, 1999

Members Present: Members Absent:

Herb Berkewitz Johathan Cornille - Excused
Bill Boyle Ginger Jenkinson - Excused
Esther Cox Brian Szender - Excused
Jimmie Daniels
Lorie Greene
Jessica Horn
Jim Hughes
Marcia Indahl
Linda Masterson

Visitors Present:

Sandra O'Brien
Valerie Oliver Sue Frances
Louise Sagmoen Steve Frances
Dana Shearer Chad Sant
Margaret Spencer

Other Unidentified Persons in the

Fred Stofflet Audience

Fred Stofflet called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. The meeting was held in the School Board Meeting Room in the School Administration Building, 4600 DeBarr

Road, Anchorage, Alaska. Members present introduced themselves and identified the type of seat they were filling. Members present at the start of the meeting included Berkewitz, Boyle, Cox, Daniels, Greene, Horn, Hughes, Indahl, Masterson, O'Brien, Oliver, Shearer, and Spencer.

Stofflet welcomed the members to the meeting. He indicated that the meeting would be recorded on tape and that the tape would be made available to the Superintendent and School Board members. He indicated the primary purpose of the meeting that evening was to discuss the book Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher. He also indicated that the complainant had been asked to come around 7:30. Prior to that time, he wanted to review some issues related to the committee and its operations.

Stofflet distributed a roster of all members of the committee. He also presented a handout describing the "Purpose and Composition" of the committee and describing the "Standards of Operation" for the committee. Stofflet stressed two major points:

- 1) The committee's primary purpose was to debate the issue before it and to make a recommendation as to resolution of the issue to the Superintendent. It was clearly identified that the School Board would have the ultimate say on the issue, and the role of the committee was to discuss, debate, consider, and refer.
- 2) The committee members' interactions with the complainant(s) and representative(s) from the school should be information gathering in nature, not debate. Committee members were asked to treat the people testifying before the committee with respect, to ask follow-up questions only, and to avoid trying to change the minds of the people who are testifying.

The order of operation to be followed at meetings would be:

- 1) Call to order.
- 2) Introductions.
- 3) Presentation by complainant(s).
- 4) Clarifying questions from committee members.
- 5) Presentation by school/district representatives.
- 6) Clarifying questions from committee members.
- 7) Final comments from complainant(s).
- 8) Final clarifying questions from committee members.
- 9) Debate and resolution among and between committee members. During that portion of the meeting, discussion and debate will be limited to committee members. Parliamentary procedures will be followed during that debate. A

majority of the members present at a meeting can carry a motion; a quorum of the committee, defined as a majority of the committee, must be present to conduct business.

Other points made in discussion were:

- 1) The committee would typically deal with an issue in one meeting.
- 2) That Tuesday was the preferred meeting date for future meetings.
- 3) That there were no other issues then identified to be taken up by the committee.

The committee took a brief break about 7:25 to await the arrival of the complainant.

The meeting was called back to order at 7:34. Committee member Louise Sagmoen joined the committee during the break.

Sue Frances was provided the opportunity to address the committee relative to her concerns with the book Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher. Following Ms. Frances' presentation and some discussion with the committee, Chad Sant, a Social Sciences teacher at Goldenview, discussed his use of the book in class. Linda Masterson, Librarian at Goldenview, explained how the book came to be in the library at the school. Following the discussion with the school staff, both Ms. and Mr. Frances made wrap-up comments. Following the discussion with the Frances, the committee moved into its own debate and discussion.

Ms. Frances indicated the book first came to her attention through her son, and eighth grade student at Goldenview Middle School. The book consists of a series of short stories. The first story in the book had been read aloud in a social studies class at school. Ms. Frances' son had spoken about that story at home and thus brought the book to her attention.

Based upon a) Ms. Frances' presentation, b) her and Mr. Frances' response to questions from committee members, and c) her and Mr. Frances' wrap-up comments, the primary issues the Frances had with the book were:

1) Homosexuality --

- a) Both parents of the hero in the first story were homosexual, had divorced, and were each living with same sex partners.

b) It was suggested that such "partnerships" might be normal. The parents' partners were referred to as step-father and step-mother, which does not reflect legality.

c) The main character in the last story befriended a person infected with AIDS caused by unprotected "anal intercourse" with an infected homosexual partner.

2) Language --

a) Profanity was used throughout the book.

b) Anchorage School District students could be suspended for using the language presented in the book.

3) Disrespect toward parents and authority --

a) The main character in the first story describes a scene in which his mother is drinking beer garbed in her bra sans blouse.

b) The main character in the first story presents an unflattering depiction of his parents' size and an unflattering description of what they looked like during his conception.

Ms. Frances expressed concern that the story, "A Day in the Life of Angus Bethune," had been read aloud in class by the teacher without prior notification to parents of any kind. Her child talked to her about the book. She had spoken to at least one other parent who did not know of the story being read. Ms. Frances speculated that many parents were in that category.

Mr. Frances also suggested that students today may not be as mature as some believe. He agreed that students today were certainly exposed to more issues than were students a few years back, but that did not equate to maturity.

Aside from its use in the classroom, Ms. Frances objected to the book being circulated through the library. She suggested that the book Athletic Shorts be placed in the principal's office and distributed to students and parents together through that office.

Mr. Sant explained that he teamed with a language arts teacher on many projects. This particular book was used by both him and his teaching partner. He used only the first story, "A Day in the Life of Angus Bethune," as a read aloud in his eighth grade social studies class during the lessons associated with the psychology unit. He felt it developed the idea of empathy, that it related to the

students at the middle school level, and that it might appeal particularly to boys. He also felt the story develop a moral that a student, with many problems, can triumph in the end through his own efforts and those of others.

Sant indicated that middle school aged students frequently treated their peers in demeaning ways. He specifically indicated that he felt the word "faggot" was one of the most frequently used put-downs among middle school students, similar to the use of the racial term "nigger" in a prior time. He also indicated that there were many other offensive terms and much offensive language used in the hallways at middle school. Sant indicated that he appreciated the district's embraced the ideas of tolerance and diversity. He indicated the story is not about homosexuality, though it is presented in the story and it does grab people's attention. Sant indicated the students were very responsive to the story. They recommended it to others.

Sant also explained how he and the language arts teacher coordinated lessons and worked together. He indicated he had not thought it necessary to obtain parental permission before using the story, but subsequent to his discussions with Ms. Frances, had re-thought that issue and might use a parent notification process before using the story again. He explained the types of accommodations that might be made for a student whose parents objected to the student's taking part in particular activities.

Linda Masterson, the librarian at Goldenview, indicated that the book Athletic Shorts by Christ Crutcher and Crutcher's works in general were strongly recommended by professional publications for inclusion in middle school/junior high school libraries. Goldenview's library had been built from scratch about three years ago, and she had used such publications for selection of many of the works in the library.

She indicated that Crutcher's works were "realistic fiction" and appealed to students of that age level. Further, Masterson indicated that libraries contained many titles that might be offensive to someone. The goal, in her view, would not be to remove those works found offensive by someone, but to provide a balanced collection so that there were works that appealed to everyone. She worked to maintain a balance at Goldenview and cited examples.

Prior to going into committee deliberations, Stofflet explained to the Frances what happened to the recommendation from the committee, culminating with School Board action. He speculated that the item would be on the Board's agenda for the last meeting in February.

Following the information gathering discussion, the committee moved to its own debate and deliberation.

Esther Cox moved and Bill Boyle seconded,

"That the book Athletic Shorts by Chris Crutcher remain on the mid level library shelves; if stories from the book are used in class, that parent notification be given first."

Cox indicated she felt the book was appropriate to middle school aged students. She recognized that students at that age could be hurtful to others who were different and that many used language among peers they would not use with adults. However, public schools and public school teachers face a variety of value systems every day. Educators should take that into account and give parents an opportunity to know when issues that might be considered controversial are going to be taken up.

During the discussions on the motion which followed, Cox made it clear that she had intentionally used the term "notification be given first" as opposed to "parental permission be obtained first." She was not requiring explicit parental permission through her motion.

Also during discussion, some voiced concern related to the need for parent notification. They felt notification would equate to permission. It was also determined that the book was in one elementary school, and had not been circulated there. Also, Marcia Indahl distributed an e-mail message she had received from Chris Crutcher in response to an inquiry from her.

Herb Berkewitz moved and Marcia Indahl seconded,

"I move to amend the motion by striking all the words after the semi-colon."

The effect of this amendment, if passed, was to strike the requirement for parent notification prior to reading the stories in a class setting.

Berkewitz spoke to his amendment. He felt the concerns expressed by the Frances' were legitimate but that the original motion was too far reaching and micro-management. He argued that this type of decision, whether or not to notify, should be left to the teacher and building level.

In the discussion which followed, members those who supported the amendment argued:

- a. for flexibility and reliance on the teachers to make appropriate choices;
- b. that felt the notification would equate to permission;
- c. that parents should have an open dialogue with their children about their family values and use topics that might disturb those values as opportunities to talk;
- d. that this particular story might make students look deeper at themselves and help address a major issue at the middle level; and
- e. middle school students are on the way to becoming adults and they should be given some discretion also.

Those in favor of the notification requirement suggested that:

- a. notification of parents is not the same as requiring prior parental permission;
- b. students come from a variety of backgrounds and value systems;
- c. notification puts the burden of deciding something is inappropriate on the parents, not the teacher; and
- d. Mr. Sant indicated he would probably give notification the next time he used the story.

The Berkewitz amendment passed 12 to 2.

Ayes - Berkewitz, Boyle, Daniels, Greene, Horn, Hughes, Indahl Masterson, O'Brien, Oliver, Shearer, and Spencer.

Nays - Cox and Sagmoen.

The amended motion then before the committee read,

"That the book *Athletic Shorts* by Chris Crutcher remain on the mid level library shelves."

There was no further discussion on the amended motion.

The amended motion passed unanimously by a 14 to 0 vote.

The meeting was adjourned following the vote on the amended motion.

Respectfully submitted,

Frederick P. Stofflet, Facilitator

Anchorage School District

Anchorage, Alaska

Controversial Issues Review Committee

1998-99 Membership per School Board Action on 12/15/98

Person Type-of-Seat Term Expiration

Jessica Horn Student June 30, 1999
Brian Szender Student June 30, 1999
Ginger Jenkinson PTA Representative June 30, 2000
Dana Shearer PTA Representative June 30, 1999
Bill Boyle Minority Community June 30, 1999
Louise Sagmoen Minority Community June 30, 2000
Herbert Berkowitz At-Large June 30, 2000
Jonathan Cornille At-Large June 30, 1999
Esther Cox At-Large June 30, 2000
Lorie Greene At-Large June 30, 2000
Sandra O'Brien At-Large June 30, 1999
Jimmie Daniels Elementary Principal June 30, 2000
Jim Hughes Secondary Principal June 30, 1999
Valerie Oliver Elementary Librarian June 30, 2000
Linda Masterson Secondary Librarian June 30, 1999
Margaret Spencer Elementary Teacher June 30, 1999
Marcia Indahl Secondary Teacher June 30, 2000
Fred Stofflet Non-Voting Facilitator –

Anchorage School District Attachment D

Controversial Issues Review Committee

Purpose and Composition

The Controversial Issues Review Committee is designed to represent a broad spectrum of the Anchorage community. Its purpose is to discuss and debate issues or materials deemed controversial by one or more parents or community members. The Controversial Issues Review Committee is charged with

- a. hearing the complainant's concerns,
 - b) hearing from those who selected the materials or who are involved with the questioned issue,
 - a. debating and deliberating within the Committee to ensure that the issue is well understood, and
 - b. making a recommendation to the Superintendent as to the proposed disposition of the material or issue.

The Committee is not constrained as to the recommendation(s) it wishes to make. It may recommend anything from "total removal of materials from the district" to "continued use of the materials in an unrestricted fashion."

The Controversial Issues Review Committee is an advisory committee to the Superintendent. The Superintendent is free to accept or reject the recommendations of the Committee. Ultimately, the Superintendent will make a recommendation on the issue/material in question to the School Board. If the Superintendent agrees with the Committee, he will so state. If he disagrees with the Committee, he will make his recommendation to the School Board, forward the Committee's recommendation, and explain why he disagrees with the Committee. The School Board will have the final say on such issues.

The Controversial Issues Review Committee consists of 17 voting members and one non-voting facilitator. The voting members are appointed by the School Board, but may represent particular constituencies. The facilitator is appointed by the Superintendent. The voting membership includes:

- 2 Students;
- 2 Representatives of the PTA;
- 2 Minority Community members;

- 2 Principals or Assistant Principals (1 elementary, 1 middle or high school);
- 2 Teachers (1 elementary, 1 middle or high school);
- 2 School Librarians (1 elementary, 1 middle or high school); and
- 5 Citizens-at-Large representing the community as a whole.

Anchorage School District Attachment E

Controversial Issues Review Committee

Standards of Operation

1. The Controversial Issues Review Committee shall meet at most once a month. It shall only meet in those months when there is one or more issues before the Committee for discussion and deliberation.
2. A quorum of the Controversial Issues Review Committee shall consist of nine (9) or more voting members. The Committee can convene and deliberate only with a quorum present.
3. A majority vote of members present during a meeting shall carry an action.
4. During meetings, members are asked to refrain from speaking until recognized by the facilitator. During debate and discussion, members are encouraged to freely express their views, to examine issues in detail and from all perspectives, but to maintain civility during the discussion.
5. Members interactions with the complainant(s) or with members of the school community using a specified material or involved with an issue under discussion should be relegated to asking questions for clarity and understanding. Committee members should neither engage those who are testifying before the Committee in debate nor try to convince them that they are wrong in their perceptions. The debate should be held among the members of the Committee at the appropriate time.
6. The order of meeting will be:
 - a. Call to Order
 - b. Introductions
 - c. Presentation by Complainant
 - d. Committee Questions for Clarification
 - e. School Level Educators' Response to Complaint (Librarian, Teacher(s), Principal) or District Level Educators' Response to Complaint.
 - f. Committee Questions for Clarification
 - g. Complainant's response or rebuttal
 - h. Committee Questions for Clarification
 - i. Committee Deliberation, Debate and Recommendation(s)

Attachment F