

STATE OF MICHIGAN LAW DAY 2007 ESSAY CONTEST
“LIBERTY UNDER LAW: EMPOWERING YOUTH, ASSURING DEMOCRACY”
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What should students be exposed to in schools?
Should a school board have the right to remove books containing
profanity and vulgarity from a school library?

Should a school board have the right to remove books containing profanity and vulgarity from a school library? Yes. Who would want students to be reading books containing profanity and vulgarity? If we allow students free access to media containing questionable material, it is my opinion that this material will have a negative affect on their behavior. For example, there could be distractions in class such as passing notes and gossiping about the books' content, or students walking down the hall repeating the profanity used in the books. Let us not forget less structured environments like the school bus where there is an easy outlet for the vulgarity to occur.

The Core Democratic Value that supports my opinion is Common Good. "The public or common good requires that individual citizens have the commitment and motivation that they accept their obligation to promote the welfare of the community and to work together with other members for the greater benefit of all." My opinion supports the common good by banning inappropriate books from the school library; it impacts the general welfare of the students. Furthermore, I believe that by removing the negative influence, students will have fewer distractions from the educational process, therefore limiting the potential for misbehavior.

Citing a historical instance, William Pynchon, a merchant and trader, was author of the first book banned in Boston. In 1650, his book entitled, The Meritorious Price of our Redemption was condemned by the General Court of Massachusetts. This is a historical instance that supports the Common Good by protecting the general welfare of the public. According to the American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom, between 1990 and 2000, the ALA recorded 6,364 challenges, or formal, written complaints requesting a book's removal from a library due to content or appropriateness.

Based on Justice Rehnquist's dissenting opinion joined by Chief Justice Burger and Justice Powell in Board of Education v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853, 909-910(1982), "[i]n each of these instances, however, the book or the exposure to the subject matter may be acquired elsewhere."

"Unlike university or public libraries, elementary and secondary school libraries are not designed for free-wheeling inquiry; they are tailored, as the public school curriculum is tailored, to the teaching of basic skills and ideas. Thus, Justice Brennan cannot rely upon the nature of school libraries to escape the fact that the First Amendment right to receive information simply has no application to the one public institution which, by its very nature, is a place for the selective conveyance of ideas." Id. at 915.

The role of our public schools is to provide free access to a structured, safe and educationally appropriate learning environment. Allowing inappropriate media in our school libraries violates this role. For this reason, I believe it is our responsibility to limit access to books containing profanity and vulgarity.