

February 16, 2024

A statement from Alachua County Public Schools and Superintendent Shane Andrew about pornographic materials in schools

To be clear up front--this Superintendent, the district, and the staff believe **no** student should have access to pornographic materials in their schools. That belief is shared by the ACPS employee who has been the subject of recent social media postings about a book challenge.

This is to set the record straight.

On January 23, a formal hearing was held before a hearing officer regarding a challenge brought by an ACPS parent to the book 'Melissa,' previously published as 'George,' by Alex Gino. The hearing was videotaped.

Earlier today, a very small segment of that video was posted on social media, including X (Twitter) and Facebook. That video was taken out of context and was misleading.

The parent asked the ACPS witness several questions, including whether he felt it was appropriate for an 8-year-old to read "*about* pornography and dirty magazines" (emphasis added). However, the witness did not intend to convey that this book was, in fact, *about* pornography and dirty magazines. He certainly does not agree that it is appropriate for an elementary school student or any student to read pornographic materials. It is rather his belief that this particular book is not pornographic, does not violate state statutes and can therefore be read by elementary school students in grades 3-5.

The parent never actually asked the ACPS witness if he believed this book is pornographic. The witness did clarify later in the hearing that he did not believe this book is pornographic.

There are two sections of the book in which the words 'dirty magazines' or the word 'porn' are mentioned. They are as follows:

The phrase 'dirty magazine' was used by a teenage boy taunting his little brother. The little brother was, in fact, not looking at a dirty magazine.

The word 'porn' appeared later in the book, when the same older brother stated he knew his little brother was not reading porn.

This is the full extent of the use of those two terms in the book. The book contains no pornographic scenes, pictures or descriptions.

The hearing officer recommended that the book remain in the elementary school library. In her order, the hearing officer pointed out that the parent had not objected to the book based on it being pornographic.

The School Board of Alachua County voted on February 6 to confirm the hearing officer's decision.

The district will continue to follow state and district laws and procedures in responding to parent concerns regarding books in our schools.

