



## TESTIMONY OF DR. RODNEY TRICE Superintendent, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

### Introduction

Good morning, my name is Rodney Trice. I am the Superintendent of Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS). I began serving in this role on July 1, 2025. Because I have previously testified before the Committee, I will not review my professional history again, but encourage you to review my prior written testimony from December 2025.

Based on the letter I received from the Committee, it is my understanding that I am here to testify about whether the presence of certain books in our school libraries violates the Parents' Bill of Rights, S.L. 2023-106. As I testified previously, our school district is, and always has been, in compliance with the Parents' Bill of Rights.

The Committee's letter quoted portions of G.S. § 115C-76.55, which states in full:

*Instruction on gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality shall not be included in the curriculum provided in grades kindergarten through fourth grade, regardless of whether the information is provided by school personnel or third parties. For the purposes of this section, curriculum includes the standard course of study and support materials, locally developed curriculum, supplemental instruction, and textbooks and other supplementary materials, but does not include responses to student-initiated questions.*

As I testified previously, CHCCS has provided training and written guidance to its administrators and teachers regarding how to implement this provision of the law. Most recently, I recirculated that written guidance in January 2026. I want to reiterate that instruction in gender identity, sexual activity, and sexuality is not part of our district's K-4 curriculum (nor has it ever been to my knowledge).

The Committee provided with its letter a list of titles from our elementary school library catalogs. The common thread among these books is that they depict or mention people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. The letter suggests that by merely being on a

shelf in a school library, these books are “in direct conflict with the Parents’ Bill of Rights.” But the books identified by this Committee are not part of our elementary school curriculum, nor are they used to provide “instruction on gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality” to students. The vast majority of books in our school libraries are not part of the district’s curriculum or used for instruction. Just as our district does not provide instruction on gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality to K-4 students, we also do not provide instruction on how to play video games, the biographies of professional athletes, or stories about ghosts – subjects of numerous popular titles in our school libraries.

A central mission of school libraries is to encourage children to read independently, outside of the classroom. Decades of research shows that time spent reading in the elementary years is a strong predictor of educational outcomes in high school and beyond.<sup>1</sup> A child’s exposure to print in the early years predicts differences in vocabulary, background knowledge, and reading comprehension ability over time.<sup>2</sup> There are also numerous studies showing that students’ access to books they find personally engaging is correlated with the development of critical reading and writing skills.<sup>3</sup>

In short, the more children read, the better their long-term academic performance. This is one reason why it is so critical for children to have access to books for independent reading that appeal to their personal interests and experiences. It is also deeply important for children to see themselves represented in books and media. Children are more engaged when they see people like themselves and their own families in texts, and can make a personal connection to the story or characters. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop, a scholar of children’s literature at The Ohio State University, wrote in an oft-quoted 1990 article that books should be “mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors”: they should provide children a mirror to reflect their own experience, a window to see the experience of others, and a sliding glass door through which the child can enter other worlds in their imaginations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Cunningham, Anne E., and Keith E. Stanovich. “Early Reading Acquisition and Its Relation to Reading Experience and Ability 10 Years Later.” *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 33, no. 6, 1997, pp. 934–945; Krashen, Stephen D. *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Heinemann/Libraries Unlimited. 2004; Mol, Suzanne E. and Jelle Jolles, “Reading enjoyment among non-leisure readers can affect achievement in secondary school.” *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 5, No. 1214, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Cunningham, Anne E., and Keith E. Stanovich. “Early Reading Acquisition and Its Relation to Reading Experience and Ability 10 Years Later.” *Developmental Psychology*, vol. 33, no. 6, 1997, pp. 934–945.

<sup>3</sup> Krashen, Stephen D. *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Heinemann/Libraries Unlimited. 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Bishop, Rudine Sims, “Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors,” *Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books for the Classroom*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1990.

Many children in our CHCCS community have parents, family members, or friends who are LGBTQ. These children have the same need as their peers to see examples of themselves and their families represented in the books they choose to read. Even for children without a personal connection, books provide a window to learning about the world around them, a world that includes LGBTQ families and stories.

In 2025 the General Assembly enacted G.S. § 115C-98.1, “Parent Access to Library Books.” This statute requires that all school library catalogs be available to parents online. “Library books” are defined as “electronic, print, and nonprint resources, excluding textbooks, for independent use by students and school personnel outside of the standard course of study for any grade or course.” Around the state, many schools scrambled to implement this directive, but no change was required in CHCCS because our school libraries had already been online and available to parents for years.

After reviewing the online catalog, parents in the district have a right to identify library books that may not be borrowed by their child. Our digital book program also provides parental controls that allow parents to limit their child’s access to certain books.

If a parent has a broader concern about a title in the school library, the district encourages parents to discuss their concern with the school librarian. If this does not resolve the concern, district procedure allows parents to file a formal challenge requesting that the title be removed from the library collection. The process for reviewing these challenges is outlined in district policy.

As with all aspects of teaching and learning in our district, CHCCS understands that parental involvement in our library program is critical to students’ success. Our goal is to ensure that students have library books that interest them and they can relate to and that parents feel comfortable with the books their child borrows so they will encourage their child to read. If parents identify a book that they do not want their child to borrow, we have a process that empowers parents to make those decisions. I am proud to be part of a district that is committed to meeting the unique needs of each student and family we serve.