

House Oversight Committee Hearing, December 10, 2025  
Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools  
Superintendent Rodney Trice  
Director of Digital Learning and Library Services Al McArthur

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:00:00](#) I call the meeting to order. To our sergeants-at-arms, I want to thank you for being here today. Michael Galloway, David Leighton, David Little, Stafford Young. Good morning, gentlemen. Dr. Trice, I would like to give you a moment if you've got an opening statement for the committee, feel free to do that now.

Mr. Trice: [00:00:11](#) Thank you, sir. I'm always glad to be here before the committee. I am Rodney Trice, the proud superintendent of Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. One of the highest performing school districts in our great state, largely due to the parent engagement that we have and the excellence of our teachers that we have in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. We are proud of the resources that we're able to provide our students. Our third grade reading scores are amazing. Of course, we have more work to do, but I'm invited here to testify on the amazing work that our staff is doing, the resources that we're providing to our students, largely supported by our community and happy to answer any questions that the committee may have. Thank you.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:00:58](#) Thank you, Dr. Trice. I've got an opening statement. I've had to put a little bit of it on paper, so many things I want to get to today. So, I'm going to read an opening statement. I want to start by saying something very plainly. Nobody wanted this committee back here today with you. We sat right here four months ago and asked you to do one simple thing, and that was to follow the law—follow Senate Bill 49, follow the Parents' Bill of Rights, comply fully, honestly, without games. It's all we asked. You had four months. And instead, the evidence keeps piling up—week after week, production after production, parent after parent.

[00:01:41](#) So, I'm going to be blunt about why we're here today. You made us do this. We did not want a second hearing. You forced it. You forced it by your continued refusal to follow the law at the expense of innocent children. On December 10, you sat at this table, you were placed under oath, and you swore to this committee that your district was in full compliance. You told us you've been in compliance, and I'm quoting you, since '23. We took you at your word, but we went back: We read the record. We read your documents. We read your district's own emails. And I can tell you today, the evidence does not support what you told us—not even close.

[00:02:33](#) Today, piece by piece, you're going to answer for what you said then and for what the record actually shows. We're going to start with the books because this is where your district made its bed. At our last hearing in this very room, this committee held up materials your own equity office had put in front of parents and students of Chapel Hill-Carrboro for the four-, five-, six-year olds. We asked you plainly whether those materials belonged in front of little kids. And you, under oath, sitting in that chair, told this committee those were just third-party links, that your district really didn't approve them, that you couldn't speak to everything that happens on the website.

[00:03:22](#) You tried to make this committee feel unreasonable for asking those questions. You tried to make the parents watching feel foolish. The implication you wanted the public to walk away with was crystal clear—these books really aren't ours, they're not in our schools, they're just links. Dr. Trice, that was gaslighting. And either you knew it when you said it or you were so far removed from your own district that you cannot tell the committee what's sitting on the shelves of your own schools. Because after December 10 our committee staff did what your staff apparently wouldn't do: we went and we looked. We pulled your district's library inventories, the records your district maintains, and counted. And what we found is that 155 copies of 63 unique titles on sexuality, gender identity, and sexual activity are sitting on your shelves right now, today, as we speak—not on a third-party website, not on somebody else's server, inside your buildings, in the libraries where your kindergartners, first-graders, second-graders go for story time—available to any child in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro school system, readily available for them to check out. So, when you came to this room in December [and said] what we were showing you was a third-party link, it was not a misunderstanding: that was a smoke screen, a diversion, designed to throw this committee off the scent, to pat worried parents on the head, to let everyone walk away feeling like the whole concern had just been a big misunderstanding and should be forgotten. You wanted the problem to disappear. For a minute, you probably thought it had. We're going to go through these books today—not because I want to, not because anybody in this committee enjoys it—but because the children of Chapel Hill-Carrboro deserve somebody to actually read what is put in your district.

[00:05:38](#) I'm going to tell you this, Dr. Trice. Every excuse your district has offered since December, every last one of them, is going to be

tested today against your own documents and your own words. If you have a defense, you're going to make it here. Once again, you're on the record, and you will be placed under oath. It's not going to end with the books either. When this committee first opened its investigation, what did your district do? You did exactly what guilty institutions do. You scrubbed pages off your website. You quietly revised seven board policies in the weeks between our letter and the hearing, including the three most directly tied to the Parents' Bill of Rights. You routed your press inquiries through outside counsel. You gave the people of North Carolina a viral video from your board chair saying, and I'm quoting, "My recommendation is we do not comply with the law." And in four months, you've never explained it.

[00:06:41](#)

People who are following the law don't need to hide their website or change it. You got caught and you spent the next four months trying to clean up the crime scene. And while you were doing all that, you told the public a completely different story. You swore to parents you were in compliance. You told reporters you were going beyond the minimum. You told this committee you have been following the law since 2023. I want every parent in Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools to understand what going beyond the minimum is to you, what it actually means in your district. It meant substituting the binding board policy with a statute that requires for unenforceable staff guidance. It meant writing loopholes into your own procedures, so the General Assembly's provisions could be quietly walked around. It meant protecting ideology instead of protecting children you were hired to educate.

[00:07:41](#)

Now the consequences are piling up in your own front yard. Your enrollment is dropping. You're in a budget shortfall. You're closing schools. You're cutting classroom teachers. Parents in Chapel Hill-Carrboro are voting with their feet, and they are telling you, and they are telling this committee exactly why: they do not trust this district to tell them the truth about what's happening to their kids. And until that changes, the trend will continue. So, here we are four months later in this room, you're given a chance to come clean. You didn't take it then. You chose to run out the clock, lawyer up, and hope this committee would move on to something else. We didn't and the parents didn't. To be crystal clear—nobody on this committee wanted to be here. There are over a hundred other school districts in this state educating hundreds and thousands of children, and

they're implementing the Parents' Bill of Rights without being summoned to the building twice in five months.

[00:08:40](#)

The parents of Chapel Hill-Carrboro deserve the same thing. They deserve a school district that followed the law the first time so their kids could go to school where they could live their lives without hearing the words "Senate Bill 49." Instead, they're sitting in auditoriums and reading news stories, watching their enrollment collapse because one school district decided the law didn't apply to them. You made us do this, and I want that on the record. To every other school district watching this hearing today, be very clear of this: if you are running the same playbook as Chapel Hill-Carrboro, you'll be here. Stop it today because what you are watching right now is what happens next—same table, same chair, same microphone, same oath, same cameras, same parents in the gallery, wanting answers you do not give them the chance to get.

[00:09:34](#)

Senate Bill 49 is the law of the state. The Parents' Bill of Rights is the law of the state. And the General Assembly that passed them is still here, still watching, still protecting children, and out of patience with districts that think the law is optional.

[00:09:51](#)

Gentlemen, I ask you both to stand up and raise your right hand. You swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God? You may be seated. Dr. Trice, at the December 10 hearing, you testified, and I'm reading directly from the [transcript](#) here, "Beginning in September of '23, we've outlined guidance concerning SB 49 that followed the laws written." And later in the hearing, you said, "Since '23, we've always complied with SB 49 as written in the policy documents." It's your sworn testimony, is that still your position today?

Mr. Trice:

[00:10:31](#)

It is.

Rep. Jones, Chair:

[00:10:35](#)

I have an email from February 4, 2026, 25 months after the infamous January '24 school board meeting and well over two years after you claimed compliance was in place. It was sent by an assistant principal at Chapel Hill High School to your student services team, and I'm going to read it to you. She writes, and I quote, "We were asked to remind teachers about the Parents' Bill of Rights. In that reminder, it brought attention to our lack of procedures around parent notification." Dr. Trice, an assistant principal at your own high school, just a few short

weeks ago, said there was a lack of procedures. How do you possibly reconcile that with “we’ve always complied?”

Mr. Trice: [00:11:22](#) Well, I'm not familiar with that email, but I think the documents that we submitted to the committee dating back to '23 clearly outline what our procedures are. It may be that that assistant principal was mistaken and not had access to those procedures. That's something that I can follow up on, but we certainly had procedures in place for quite some time.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:11:46](#) Later that same day in the same email thread, your assistant principal wrote, "I would like to propose a process in which teachers notify counselors when they have a student who goes by a name other than what's in PowerSchool." She's proposing a process in February of '26. Dr. Trice, if that process existed in '23, what would she be proposing then?

Mr. Trice: [00:12:10](#) I'm not sure. But as you know, the documents that we submitted to this committee outline our process, and it's very clear.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:12:17](#) A week later on February 11, '26, a school counselor emailed in the same chain, "If a parent sends an email referencing their student by the nickname, preferred pronouns, does that count as parent approval, or do we need to have an email or phone call explicitly confirming that approval?" Dr. Trice, SB 49 requires parental notification before a school may change a student's name or pronouns in its official records. This law has been in effect since '23—almost three years later now. Your staff is still inserting writing in February of '26 about what constitutes valid parental consent. If the legal standard was unclear to your own counselors, what was the context of your guidance you say has been in place since '23?

Mr. Trice: [00:13:10](#) I don't understand the question, sir. Could you repeat?

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:13:13](#) If they're having to figure out what to do this far down the road, and you said you did it in '23, undoubtedly they didn't have any guidance. You got teachers looking for guidance three years later. So, do you feel like what you did was appropriate or adequate?

Mr. Trice: [00:13:27](#) If I understand the email correctly that was read, this was a case where a parent was emailing saying that it was okay for a student to have a name change or a pronoun change. I haven't

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seen the email. In that case, that would be an appropriate question because our guidance is clearly centered on students asking for a name change or pronoun change to staff. So, if a parent is writing an email saying that it's okay to change a student's name or pronoun, to me, that would be parent consent, which is outside of SB 49 or Parents' Bill of Rights.

- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:14:10](#) Well, I think what we're asking is you sent guidance three years before. These teachers are saying they have no guidance.
- Mr. Trice: [00:14:15](#) Well, you've seen our guidance.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:14:17](#) I've seen the scrubbed stuff, you're right. Dr. Trice, you told this committee under oath that your district has been in compliance since '23. Your own assistant principal wrote in '26 that your district has a lack of procedures around parental notification. Was that a true statement from your teacher?
- Mr. Trice: [00:14:36](#) I think I've answered this question. I don't know about-
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:14:39](#) I've asked it again.
- Mr. Trice: [00:14:39](#) I don't know what else to say to you.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:14:41](#) I want an answer.
- Mr. Trice: [00:14:41](#) We've had guidance since 2023. The guidance has been submitted to this committee. I don't know. Maybe the assistant principal was mistaken, and that's something that I can follow up on.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:14:51](#) Remember, you took an oath today. I prefer you to be straight with this committee today. I don't want to keep everybody here all day. Some yes and no's and some honesty would be great. I'm going to recognize Representative Dr. Grant Campbell at this time.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:15:14](#) Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have a couple of technical questions. Your communications director, Andy Jenks, is it Jenks?-
- Mr. Trice: [00:15:25](#) Yes, sir.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:15:26](#) -told the News and Observer earlier this week—just before you came back to this committee—and I quote, "Our training and

written guidance to staff with regard to student name and pronoun changes always has and continues to be in compliance with the Parents' Bill of Rights." Is that your district's position as you sit here today?

- Mr. Trice: [00:15:47](#) Yes, that's what I stated in the opening of this procedure.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:15:54](#) Your communications director also told the News and Observer, "Names or pronouns can't be changed without a parent's permission. Parents who agree must submit an application to the district." That statement describes a district where parental consent is the universal rule with no exceptions, correct?
- Mr. Trice: [00:16:12](#) Correct.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:16:14](#) Sorry.
- Mr. Trice: [00:16:14](#) Correct.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:16:15](#) Correct? Okay. Thank you. I have the guidance written by your predecessor, Dr. Hamlett—the version that was in effect during our first meeting when Mr. Jenks said your practice had always been compliant. It reads, "If the student expresses concern about parental notification and they introduce a phrase of ranging from familial strain, the teacher or employee is not required to move forward with notifying the parent." That sentence is not a universal consent rule like Mr. Jenks described. It sounds like a bypass using an invented term, "familial strain," that is not clearly defined. Was Mr. Jenks telling parents the truth this week, or did the Hamlett guidance say what it said?
- Mr. Trice: [00:17:13](#) Well, I think the guidance is just a reflection of SB 49. So, if a student approaches a staff member or an administrator with a request to change a name or pronoun, we explain to that student that there's a law in North Carolina that requires us to notify parents of the request. If a student wants to back off of that request due to familial strain or some type of abuse that may come about, certainly staff are not required by law to proceed with notifying parents of the information or the request that was given to them by the student. That's the way I understand what was said, but the guidance from Dr. Hamlet, my predecessor, is the guidance that's in SB 49 that I would assume all school districts follow in North Carolina.

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- Rep. Campbell: [00:18:10](#) Well, I'm glad you brought up the concern for neglect or harm because in that same guidance that was separate from familial strain. So, we all understand the concern for neglect or harm or abuse, but this was a separate category. So, could you explain, maybe help me understand, what familial strain is since neglect, harm, or abuse is delineated separately from that?
- Mr. Trice: [00:18:40](#) One example that comes to mind that's not uncommon is sometimes within a family, mom or dad might feel a different way. And when a request comes to a staff member, staff members speak with the students. As I mentioned, we inform the students that, required by law, we have to inform your parents, and sometimes students will talk about how there's a difference in opinion between their parents, which might cause familial strain.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:19:14](#) Okay. So, just so I'm clear here—you're stating that under familial strain, that if the parent feels differently about the subject than the student, by this guidance, the teacher or employee is not required to move forward with notifying the parent?
- Mr. Trice: [00:19:31](#) If the student does not want to move forward with us notifying the parent, we will not notify the parent.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:19:38](#) I'm sorry, could you say that again? I didn't hear you correctly.
- Mr. Trice: [00:19:40](#) If the student does... If the student does not want to-
- Rep. Campbell: [00:19:46](#) Can I interrupt one second? If other people are going to contribute to your answers, Mr. Chairman, they need to be sworn in as well.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:19:55](#) Representative Campbell, that's so noted, but I'm going to give Dr. Trice a little leniency because I think he really needs it.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:20:01](#) Okay. I'm sorry for interrupting, please.
- Mr. Trice: [00:20:03](#) So, no problem. So, with the law, SB 49, if a student does not want to move forward with the name change or pronoun change, and they have informed our staff of that, the law does not require that we notify parents of the request. And I think tied to that within our official record, we haven't changed the name or pronoun as it pertains to the student who asked for the request because they no longer want to move forward.

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- Rep. Campbell: [00:20:38](#) Okay. We seem to be talking about two different things because that's no part of what I just quoted you. There was no part of that where I was saying that the student has decided not to go forward. It says in the guidance, "If the student expresses concern about parental notification, the teacher/employee is not required to move forward." This does not say that the student has withdrawn their desire. It's just saying that they don't want their parents notified. There's nothing in that guidance that you're adding to it here. So, I'm just trying to clarify.
- Mr. Trice: [00:21:16](#) Well, the law is if we're going to move forward in a name or pronoun change, or if that's the direction we want to head—the student wants to head—we have to notify parents. I'm not sure what's unclear.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:21:30](#) Well, I'm not sure what's unclear either because again, there's nothing about the student withdrawing in this. This is just saying in the guidance, which I guess you're also saying that guidance from a superintendent is not considered policy. There is nothing in here about the student withdrawing. It's just simply saying if the student expresses concern about their parents being notified, the teacher or employee is not required to move forward. There is nothing in here that I've said about the student withdrawing their request for a name change.
- Mr. Trice: [00:22:08](#) Well, I would ask that you refer to our full guidance. I'm not sure of the exact place you're looking at, but we follow the law. The law is outlined in our guidance, and before any name or pronoun change is made in our official record, parents have to be notified.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:22:30](#) Well, then I'll ask you-
- Mr. Trice: [00:22:31](#) That's just at the base of our guidance. I don't know what else to say.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:22:33](#) If a student wants to go forward with a name change and they say, "I don't want my parents notified, I'm concerned," and the teacher is told they don't have to move forward, is that in compliance with the law?
- Mr. Trice: [00:22:46](#) If we move forward with a name or pronoun change, parents have to be notified.

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- Rep. Campbell: [00:22:51](#) Even if the student expresses concern?
- Mr. Trice: [00:22:53](#) Even if the student expresses concern, if we're going to move forward with a name or pronoun change, we have to notify parents of the request.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:23:02](#) So, the quote that I gave you is not in compliance with the law, correct? And I know it's not your words. I want to make that clear.
- Mr. Trice: [00:23:11](#) Yeah. I'm not sure how you're interpreting that. I've read through our guidance document. You seem to be landing on familial strain. That's certainly something that may come up when we're speaking with a student that we take into consideration, where we're advising a student that we have to notify parents if that's something that the student wants to move forward with per their request.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:23:38](#) I'll move forward here. The January 2026 revision adds the following sentence, and I quote, "Preferred name change in Infinite Campus will not be made without parental consent." That sentence does not exist anywhere in the version from Dr. Hamlet. Infinite Campus is your official student record center. If the practice has "always been compliant," why was that added one month after this committee put you under oath and you swore to us that you were complying? Why did the change have to be made?
- Mr. Trice: [00:24:20](#) I think the guidance document perhaps, if memory serves me correctly, was referencing PowerSchool. We updated the document to reflect the new student information management system, which is Infinite Campus.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:24:38](#) And is "guidance" and "policy" interchangeable? I just want to make sure. I don't want to be unfair here.
- Mr. Trice: [00:24:45](#) In our district, the board adopts policy, and sometimes as an administration will attach guidance to policy, but the board in our school district does not adopt or develop guidance. That's the administration's task.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:25:04](#) Okay. Moving forward to kindergarten through fourth grade, your communication director also told the News and Observer, and I quote, "Gender identity, sexual activity, and sexuality already weren't part of the district's K through four curriculum

before the state law was passed." Is that your district's position as you sit here today?

- Mr. Trice: [00:25:27](#) Yes.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:25:29](#) Okay. I'm going to take you back to the Hamlet guidance, page eight. "Educators are encouraged to represent and include individuals and families of diverse gender identities or sexual orientation in any curricular resources or classroom materials." Do you feel that conflicts with that statement at all?
- Mr. Trice: [00:25:56](#) I don't think so. I mean, to recognize individuals and families is not teaching gender identity, sexuality, or sexual activity. That's just recognition of individuals and families.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:26:10](#) Okay. So, representation different than curriculum?
- Mr. Trice: [00:26:15](#) No. Representation means that you might talk about different individuals, different family structures, but that's not the teaching of gender identity. It's just the recognition of individuals.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:26:32](#) Do you feel like representation falls under instruction at all?
- Mr. Trice: [00:26:37](#) Not necessarily, no.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:26:38](#) Okay. That's fair. That's kind of all my technical questions. I'm going to end with this. I'm sure you guys don't want to be here. I'm sure there are other things that you think you could be doing. I think that we all feel the same way. I think that there are many things about your school district you have to be proud of. I'm not knocking that, but we have this recurrent issue that we get testimony and commentary here, and then we see repeated examples where you go home and people representing your district say the opposite with pride.
- [00:27:25](#) I do think you have, by statistics, a very high performing school district. You also have one of the largest gaps of achievement between white and black students. Your district has an antisemitism problem. I'm just going to reference a couple things, Mr. Chairman, then I'll close out. A teacher in 2021 stated in your district, and I quote, "Antisemitism doesn't actually exist because Jews control the banks in Hollywood." In 2022 and 2023, you had antisemitic graffiti, including "watch your back" on a bathroom wall and also swastikas at Culbreth

Middle School. You had students harassing Jewish students using Nazi salutes.

[00:28:25](#) At Carrboro High School, there was a post on social media celebrating their display, which was in the school's library that included the do-it-yourself occupation guide, which included things about organized looting and seizing of buildings with accompanying pictures and also advised, "a group may decide it is better to destroy or vandalize a space than to return it to its usual role in good condition." Your same communications director says, "Our district vehemently rejects any hint of antisemitic behavior—as we do all forms of hate speech. Schools must always be places of joy and kindness where we value diverse backgrounds that make us a community."

[00:29:14](#) I agree with that statement, but just like that statement from your communications director, it seems to go in the face of things that we get evidence for when we look at this. So, I'm just going to ask you this, because I have a million things I could be doing, as you do too. Could we just agree today in this committee, you're under oath, that materials that talk about sexuality, describing sexual acts, illustrating sexual acts, shouldn't be in elementary school libraries. And can we just agree on that and just say, "We're not going to do that going forward"?

Mr. Trice: [00:29:58](#) I'm not necessarily agreeing with that. What I'm saying is that we trust the professionalism of our school librarians to...

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:30:15](#) One more... I will clear the gallery. We will not have that.

Mr. Trice: [00:30:18](#) As I was saying, we trust the professionalism of our school librarians who are highly trained individuals to make the appropriate choices—age-appropriate choices—for our children. We've had these books in our libraries in some cases for years, and in my capacity, both as a resident of Chapel Hill and someone who's also worked in the school district for some time, I can count on one hand the number of challenges that we've had concerning books—and not always about LGBTQIA+ students and families. And so, I think our community is very satisfied with the range of resources that we provide our students and our families, and we look forward to continuing to do so.

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- Rep. Campbell: [00:31:10](#) Well, that's very cute. At no point did I introduce LGBT issues. I said sexual acts. All right, let's pare it back. You said we don't agree on this, and I'll close with this, Mr. Chairman. Materials that illustrate and describe sexual acts just don't belong in elementary school libraries. Can we agree on that?
- Mr. Trice: [00:31:38](#) I'm not aware that we have any resources.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:31:40](#) I didn't ask you that. We'll get to that later. Can we agree that that's not the place for those?
- Mr. Trice: [00:31:45](#) What I can agree to is that we don't have any resources in our libraries that depict that.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:31:52](#) All right. Well, then let's go to the hypothetical until later. If there were, if there were materials found that described or illustrated sexual acts in elementary school libraries, that would be inappropriate.
- Mr. Trice: [00:32:06](#) I think the premise is a bit off. As a school district that is highly concerned with the type of material that's in our libraries, we do a great job. Our professionals do a great job to make sure that the books that are available to our students are appropriate. I'm not sure where you're angling with the questioning.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:32:30](#) There's no angling. I'm asking you a direct question. You're not answering it directly, so, I'll ask it one more time: If there were books in an elementary school library that described or illustrated sexual acts, would that be inappropriate? And there's no... I get to do the premise of my own questions, but that's a direct question. Is that appropriate or not? That's all I'm asking.
- Mr. Trice: [00:32:54](#) And all I'm saying is we don't have any books in our libraries that depict your line of questioning. So, I'm not sure what you want me to do as superintendent. Our libraries in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools do not reflect that. So, I can't participate in any hypotheticals about our district or any other district in North Carolina. I can just speak to our libraries, and they don't have any resources that depict what you're describing.
- Rep. Campbell: [00:33:26](#) Okay. So, your testimony here today is that there are no materials in your elementary schools, in your school district, in their libraries that describe sexual acts or illustrate them?

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Mr. Trice: [00:33:37](#) Not to my knowledge, no.

Rep. Campbell: [00:33:39](#) Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:33:42](#) Thank you, Representative Campbell. And Dr. Trice, we won't have to deal with hypotheticals here in a short time. Piggybacking off what Dr. Campbell said, Superintendent Hamlett, in effect at the time of our December hearing, had provisions describing what staff should do if a student expresses any concern about notifying their parents of a name or pronoun change. I'm going to read it to you in full, and I want you to listen very carefully. I believe we may have it up on the screen for you. We have it up. Good. All right. "If the student expresses concern about parental notification ranging from significant familial strain to potential neglect or harm, the teacher/employee is not required to move forward with notifying the parent."

[00:34:31](#) "However, a member of the school counseling team, administrator, and possibly a teacher or other trusted adult should collaborate with the student in a developmentally appropriate manner to determine the best path forward for the school to affirm the student's identity and create a safe school environment for the student without violating law." That's verbatim from your guidance. Under that provision, when your staff decided not to notify a parent, they were simultaneously directed to affirm the student's gender identity. The parents are kept out. The school moves forward with affirmation. That was your official procedure, correct?

Mr. Trice: [00:35:11](#) Yes.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:35:14](#) Kind of contradicting ourselves there a little bit. SB 49, we've got that up? Good. "Prior to any changes in the pronoun name used for a student in school records or by school personnel, notice to the parent of the change." No exceptions, not for familial strain, not for student obligation. The law your district claims to have followed since '23 contains zero exceptions to that notice requirement. Where in that statute on the screen does it authorize a school to withhold notification and simultaneously affirm a student's gender identity? Take a moment to read and point it out to us, please.

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Mr. Trice: [00:35:54](#) I think the part that's highlighted that says, "Prior to any change in name or pronoun used, the school is required to inform parents."

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:36:06](#) That's your interpretation?

Mr. Trice: [00:36:09](#) I think that's-

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:36:10](#) Okay.

Mr. Trice: [00:36:11](#) That's kind of what's on the screen.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:36:13](#) It's not there. Your staff wrote guidance, signed it, trained on it, applied it. It has no basis in the law. Here it is. Version January 2026—you took out the phrase "affirm the student's identity." Dr. Trice, if that statement was consistent with law, why did y'all remove it?

Mr. Trice: [00:36:36](#) I'm sorry. I don't understand your question.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:36:38](#) Okay. I'll do it slower. What you're saying is not there. Your staff wrote guidance. They signed it, they trained on it, and they applied it. It has no basis in law. Here's what the January 2026 version says in the same section. You took the phrase out "affirm the student's identity." Where is that consistent with law?

Mr. Trice: [00:37:08](#) I'm not sure that the law outlines anything about affirming a student's identity. Not to my knowledge.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:37:17](#) If you felt like you were in compliance, why did they remove it?

Mr. Trice: [00:37:22](#) I don't know. I mean, we certainly- in my opinion, it's more about recognizing that a student may be viewing their gender identity differently. I mean, as staff, we recognize that. And we also let students know that if we're going to move forward with a pronoun change or name change, that we have to let parents know. I don't know any other way to describe that.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:37:49](#) So, you don't know when your staff makes changes?

Mr. Trice: [00:37:55](#) I'm aware of when my staff makes changes, but-

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:37:57](#) But you just-

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- Mr. Trice: [00:37:59](#) I'm not sure how affirming or not affirming a student's identity has anything to do with the law.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:38:08](#) Why was it removed?
- Mr. Trice: [00:38:10](#) Maybe there was clearer guidance for students.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:38:14](#) So, your staff wouldn't have run something that important by you and said, "Superintendent, we're removing this. You've been held in a committee. We're going to change what we're going to do now. We better-"
- Mr. Trice: [00:38:23](#) I don't see how that changes anything. If a student says they have a different gender identity, recognizing that and working with parents is what we would do to change a name or pronoun.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:38:35](#) All right. I want to be precise with what your district was doing. A parent has a legal right to be notified. Your staff decided not to notify them citing familial strain. A standard you invented and never actually defined. While the parent sat unaware, your guidance directed a team of your school's staff to collaborate with a child to affirm the child's gender identity. The district took a position to exclude the parent. You called that compliance with SB 49. Then you deleted the instruction after the committee held its hearing. The familial strain bypass was still there in January of '26 version. You kept that. You only deleted the part describing what your staff was doing while the bypass was in effect. Why did you delete affirming the student's identity?
- Mr. Trice: [00:39:31](#) I mean, you've asked that question. The only response that I have is before a name or pronoun change, we notify parents of that request. I'm not sure about what affirming or not affirming a student's identity has to do with SB 49.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:39:49](#) We're not going to get anywhere with this just like last time. I'm going to recognize Representative Schietzelt for a question.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [00:39:58](#) Thank you, Mr. Chair. And it seems kind of weird at this point to say welcome back, but we'll just roll with it. Last time you all were here before this committee, I had a few comments in closing up my own line of questioning about institutions, about the distrust that has been brewing for years between parents in some of our public schools and about how CHCCS's failure to

follow the law, or at least declared aspiration not to follow the law or even to be truthful with this committee at times, interfered with the efforts of some in this body, including myself, to advocate for our public schools, and how it makes that job very, very difficult. Building trust in our institutions requires keeping them in their proper lanes. And in the closing paragraphs of *Obergefell v. Hodges*, Justice Kennedy, writing for the court, emphasized the importance of these institutions, emphasized the importance of parents and the importance of our religious institutions in providing our children with the moral framework, that that is what our First Amendment requires in the United States.

[00:41:16](#)

And when we keep these institutions confined to their proper roles, it fosters trust generally. It fosters what a wonderful brief by the Gays and Lesbians for Individual Liberty at the United States Supreme Court back in, I think, 2009, 2010 called "a confident pluralism that conduces to civil peace and advances democratic consensus building." And I believe that was the intention behind the Parents' Bill of Rights, to keep public schools to their proper roles and create space for parents, to create space for our religious institutions to shape these morals when our children are young and impressionable. So, with that, I would like to move back to a line of questioning that you were receiving from Representative Campbell. Mr. Jenks, your communications director, wrote to WRAL in a statement issued on October 30, 2025, and again on December 10, 2025—and this is a quote. Yes, we have it up here on the screen. "At the time, we took steps to go beyond the minimum requirements of the statute, and instead of just adopting the blanket policy language, we developed detailed nuanced guidance for school staff." Have I read that accurately, Dr. Trice?

Mr. Trice: [00:42:40](#)

I believe so, yes.

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:42:42](#)

Is this CHCCS's official description of its response to Senate Bill 49—the passage of Senate Bill 49?

Mr. Trice: [00:42:52](#)

That we went beyond the minimum? Is that what you're asking?

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:42:55](#)

I mean, can we rely on this as the district's position of how it approached the implementation of the Parents' Bill of Rights?

Mr. Trice: [00:43:03](#)

I believe so, yes.

- Rep. Schietzelt: [00:43:05](#) This statement references "guidance" and repeatedly today—I'm a lawyer, we pay attention to the words. You're using the word "guidance" over and over, and we had a little colloquy about the difference between policy and guidance. You gave Representative Campbell a little bit about the procedural differences between policy and guidance that were adopted by the board. I would like you to speak briefly to the substantive differences between policy and guidance. What is the different function in terms of the obligation that it places on the people who work for CHCCS? What is the difference between guidance and policy?
- Mr. Trice: [00:43:44](#) As I mentioned before in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, when we mentioned policy, which is adopted by our board of education, there are a range of issues that school districts deal with that may fall outside of policy or may need a bit more explanation so that staff can do their jobs well. And in those cases, administrations typically develop guidance for staff to kind of direct action.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [00:44:15](#) Does guidance have the same sort of binding effect that policy has?
- Mr. Trice: [00:44:19](#) Yes. We expect that all of our staff will follow guidance. Absolutely.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [00:44:25](#) You expect them to follow guidance.
- Mr. Trice: [00:44:27](#) Just like we would expect staff to follow policy, we would expect them to follow guidance.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [00:44:31](#) Just want to make sure we're speaking clearly here. Senate Bill 49 requires boards of education to adopt policy. That's the language of the statute. Is that correct?
- Mr. Trice: [00:44:42](#) My understanding is that in some instances, yes, but in other instances, the law references guidance or procedures.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [00:44:53](#) Are we pulling up the... Okay. We'll just move on here. So, when Mr. Jenks, in that statement, which we've now established is an official position or an official statement by the school system, said you went beyond the minimum by issuing guidance instead of adopting policy. Would you agree that's not going beyond the minimum?

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Mr. Trice: [00:45:18](#) I think we went beyond the minimum.

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:45:20](#) In what way?

Mr. Trice: [00:45:21](#) Well, the General Assembly did not define gender identity. They didn't define sexuality. They didn't define sexual activity. And so, we did as a district so that we could give direction to our staff. We went beyond the minimum.

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:45:36](#) Yes, sir. But we did require adopting a policy.

Mr. Trice: [00:45:42](#) In some instances, yes.

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:45:44](#) And has the board adopted a policy consistent with Senate Bill 49 adopting the language that is required by the statute?

Mr. Trice: [00:45:53](#) I think in the areas where policy needed to be adopted, we're in full compliance, but in areas where the law refers to procedures or guidance, we've developed procedures and guidance.

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:46:07](#) So, in terms of where the law requires policy, you could point to a policy adopted by the board that is consistent with the language of Senate Bill 49.

Mr. Trice: [00:46:18](#) I believe that's what we've shared.

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:46:20](#) Can you point me to the board agenda or the date on which any of these policies were done?

Mr. Trice: [00:46:24](#) I would have to get back with... I can't do that right now, but I could certainly get back with you on that.

Rep. Schietzelt: [00:46:28](#) I would appreciate that, Dr. Trice. I'm wrapping up, Mr. Chair.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:46:33](#) Representative Chesser, you are recognized for a series of questions.

Rep. Chesser: [00:46:37](#) Thank you, Mr. Chair. A little bit all over the place here right now in my mind. So, trying to figure out where to land because I'm looking through Senate Bill 49 right now for where it allows guidance instead of policy. And if I find it, I'll get back to you on that. Real quick, I don't believe I was here the last time you were here, Doctor, so I apologize for missing, but I had a chance to review the transcripts and the video from last time. And before I get into my line of questioning, I would like to follow up

on Senator—Sorry, Grant, I just demoted you—Representative Campbell's statement where he asked a theoretical question to Dr. Trice, and I would like to direct that same question to you, Mr. McArthur. If in fact, theoretical, there were explicit materials depicting sexual acts in the libraries, would that be appropriate for elementary school students?

Mr. McArthur: [00:47:38](#) I truly can't speak to hypotheticals, but there are no titles in our school libraries that represent what you just stated.

Rep. Chesser: [00:47:44](#) So, you can't issue an opinion right now whether or not you would think that would be an appropriate subject matter to be in an elementary school library?

Mr. McArthur: [00:47:54](#) No. I'm saying that it's important that a lot of thought is put on the people in our buildings who select these titles, and that when they are selecting them, they are looking at age appropriateness for these titles.

Rep. Chesser: [00:48:10](#) I agree. I think much more thought should be given to what we're exposing our children to than the opinion of adults that want to push an agenda. Now, to my line of questioning here that I really want to get to in my time. Dr. Trice, on December 10—and I'm going to go to the transcript here because like I said, I wasn't here, so, I want to make sure I don't misquote anything—but I believe Representative Jones showed you content accessible through your elementary resource page. That's a link that was on your site as a resource for students and parents, correct?

Mr. Trice: [00:48:43](#) I believe I remember that. Yes, sir.

Rep. Chesser: [00:48:45](#) Okay. And according to the transcript, you said, "We don't approve all content that is linked off of our website." Is that your answer?

Mr. Trice: [00:48:55](#) I believe that I remember that exchange. Yes, sir.

Rep. Chesser: [00:48:57](#) You stand by that answer?

Mr. Trice: [00:48:58](#) I believe so. Yes, sir.

Rep. Chesser: [00:49:00](#) And then later in the same hearing, Representative Warren asked you how posting occurs to the website and whether there are guidelines and whether individuals can just arbitrarily post

on that site. And you said, "An individual would not be able to post a resource on that website. We have a multidisciplinary team that reviews materials and resources, particularly if those resources are going to be shared with parents." You stand by that answer as well?

- Mr. Trice: [00:49:24](#) Yes, sir.
- Rep. Chesser: [00:49:25](#) So, accurate on both accounts?
- Mr. Trice: [00:49:28](#) I believe so.
- Rep. Chesser: [00:49:28](#) Okay. How do you reconcile that both are true at the same time? Either you don't approve the content or you have a multidisciplinary team that reviews content. I'm confused. Can you provide some guidance on that?
- Mr. Trice: [00:49:47](#) So, what happens in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, if a department wants to update their website, there's a team that comes together that looks at content and decides whether it should be posted or not. We consider that, a team of individuals.
- Rep. Chesser: [00:50:06](#) So, it is reviewed.
- Mr. Trice: [00:50:08](#) I'm sorry.
- Rep. Chesser: [00:50:09](#) So, then it is reviewed.
- Mr. Trice: [00:50:10](#) Content is reviewed.
- Rep. Chesser: [00:50:12](#) That's what you just said.
- Mr. Trice: [00:50:13](#) Yes.
- Rep. Chesser: [00:50:14](#) So, all content is reviewed by this team?
- Mr. Trice: [00:50:18](#) Well, there are multiple teams. There isn't just one team. So, if I'm in the science department, then the science department staff may look at the website. If I'm in the elementary education department, the elementary team will look at content that's available for a website. So, there are multiple teams that deal with content that we push out to families, that look at and approve content for our websites.

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Rep. Chesser: [00:50:47](#) So, why would you testify the last time you were here, quote: "We don't approve all content that is linked off our website."

Mr. Trice: [00:50:54](#) I think what that was in reference to was third-party links off of our websites. And so, we don't necessarily approve of every single piece of content that is on a third-party website that's linked off of our website. So, I think that's a bit different than how we view our department postings.

Rep. Chesser: [00:51:20](#) I was making the same reference in both frames of questions, and you just reframed it outside of my intent and what I clarified was my intent with the line of questioning.

Mr. Trice: [00:51:30](#) Okay.

Rep. Chesser: [00:51:31](#) So, one quote you say you don't-

Mr. Trice: [00:51:35](#) Right. You were asking about how things are posted to the website. And I gave you an example of how content is posted to the website if it's school related, but we also link to resources that are outside of our school district. And I think what you're referencing from December 10 is links to outside organizations. And what I was sharing with the committee is that-

Rep. Chesser: [00:52:02](#) So, you don't review what-

Mr. Trice: [00:52:02](#) We don't approve all content from-

Rep. Chesser: [00:52:04](#) If it's available to your students, and it's on your website, you don't approve where it goes and what's available on third-party sites? You don't review that at all?

Mr. Trice: [00:52:13](#) We review it, but we don't approve all content on third-party websites.

Rep. Chesser: [00:52:17](#) So, what is the process if you're reviewing it and you don't approve of something that's on it, you find that it would be inappropriate for children?

Mr. Trice: [00:52:27](#) Yeah, then we wouldn't link it.

Rep. Chesser: [00:52:28](#) So, then you have reviewed it and then think that it's appropriate for all children then?

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Mr. Trice: [00:52:34](#) Yes, but third-party websites might be updated. And I think what I was sharing with the committee is that we don't control third-party websites, and we don't necessarily approve everything that's on a third-party website.

Rep. Chesser: [00:52:51](#) Okay. So, you understand that Senate Bill 49 puts a requirement on you to evaluate content that is being provided to children, and it does not exclude third-party content that you link to. If you are providing access to it, you are required to review it for content, or can you point to the third-party exclusion within the law?

Mr. Trice: [00:53:17](#) I think that my understanding is Senate Bill 49, it speaks to classroom instruction. What's on a website is not classroom instruction.

Rep. Chesser: [00:53:29](#) So, let's back up. This multidisciplinary team that you have, who appoints them?

Mr. Trice: [00:53:37](#) They're not appointed.

Rep. Chesser: [00:53:39](#) How do they get their position on the team?

Mr. Trice: [00:53:42](#) Well, like I said, members of a department, whether we're talking about elementary or secondary education, English language arts, science, social studies-

Rep. Chesser: [00:53:49](#) So, just by default-

Mr. Trice: [00:53:50](#) It's not by default.

Rep. Chesser: [00:53:51](#) Then how do they get their position on the team?

Mr. Trice: [00:53:54](#) By the fact that they're employees within a department, they are-

Rep. Chesser: [00:53:57](#) That would make it by default.

Mr. Trice: [00:53:59](#) They are members of a team that may analyze-

Rep. Chesser: [00:54:02](#) So, every teacher in a department gets to vote on whether or not content is presented?

Mr. Trice: [00:54:08](#) I'm not talking about teachers. Teachers don't typically-

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Rep. Chesser: [00:54:11](#) Okay. So, every member of faculty within a department.

Mr. Trice: [00:54:14](#) I think you're thinking about it wrong. So, when you-

Rep. Chesser: [00:54:16](#) That's why I'm asking clarifying questions.

Mr. Trice: [00:54:18](#) I'm trying to answer.

Rep. Chesser: [00:54:19](#) I'm hoping to get some clarity, but you're not providing any.

Mr. Trice: [00:54:20](#) But I think you're interrupting, and you're not understanding. So, what I'm saying, at the district level, depending on whether you are on an elementary team, secondary team, a content-based team, those are the individuals who update our website for content.

Rep. Chesser: [00:54:36](#) So, in the administrative office?

Mr. Trice: [00:54:37](#) Absolutely.

Rep. Chesser: [00:54:38](#) Okay. So, by default, being assigned to a particular area within the administrative office makes you a member of this review team?

Mr. Trice: [00:54:48](#) It makes you a member of the department, and departments review content for websites. So, yes.

Rep. Chesser: [00:54:53](#) So, your department does review content for websites?

Mr. Trice: [00:54:56](#) All departments do.

Rep. Chesser: [00:54:57](#) And if you disagreed with something that was linked on a third-party site, you wouldn't link to it. That's your testimony from just a few seconds ago.

Mr. Trice: [00:55:03](#) Yeah. If we disagreed with something that was on a third-party website, we wouldn't necessarily link that or use that as a resource.

Rep. Chesser: [00:55:13](#) So, by default, if it is linked, it's something that you agree with.

Mr. Trice: [00:55:15](#) And that's not what I'm saying. If we are linking to resources, we agree with those. And what I shared with the committee earlier and with you earlier, we don't necessarily agree with all content that's linked on a third-party website.

- Rep. Chesser: [00:55:31](#) My time is limited, Mr. Chair, so, if I can just close with a final statement here. I think what we are witnessing is an administration that is hell-bent on circumventing the law in any way they can. And I think we got to see a piece of that in a Freudian slip. I almost got you on that. A Freudian slip here where you stated that if a child for familial strain did not want their parents notified, then you would not notify the parent. And I saw your legal counsel, I'm assuming it's your legal counsel, jump up from behind you and come and tap you on the shoulder. That is inappropriate and unacceptable. And it is the position of this committee and this body not to micromanage and control but to place firm guidelines in place to protect our children and not allow anyone to violate the sanctity of the trust that has been placed in us to help protect our children. And with that, I yield, Mr. Chair.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [00:56:46](#) Representative Echevarria, you're recognized for a series of questions.
- Rep. Echevarria: [00:56:51](#) Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One, the constant custody fight parents have to engage with school districts like yours is exhausting, and it doesn't feel like you're protecting students. It actually feels like you're fighting parents. And I have to say that the effort you make to circumvent parents and circumvent the law is astonishing. My questions will start with this: so, on October 30, 2025, this committee sent your district a formal oversight letter notifying the district of its SB 49 inquiry. The following day, October 31, an equity office employee spent 45 minutes hiding nine pages from the district's public website, including the LGBT resource page, the elementary resource page, the hate speech protocol page. And your written response to this committee claims that the employee acted alone without instruction and offers no explanation for why those specific pages were concealed within 24 hours of the letter's arrival to your district.
- [00:58:02](#) So, Dr. Trice, thank you for being here. I have a simple question. Please answer it as directly as you can. You've said publicly that your district is in full compliance with SB 49 and the Parents' Bill of Rights. If that's true, if every resource on your equity website was lawful, appropriate, and compliant, as you claim, why did an employee in your equity office spend 45 minutes on October 31—the day after this committee's first oversight letter—hiding nine pages from the public?

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- Mr. Trice: [00:58:38](#) What I would say is SB 49, or the Parents' Bill of Rights, does not apply to websites. It's about classroom instruction and other things. So, that was not a violation of law. I'm not sure that scrubbing a website was the most appropriate thing to do. I recognize that. I believe that the employee was trying to lessen damage that may have come our way, but at the end of the day, all the material that was on the website is material that we would affirm. There was nothing wrong with it. But as I mentioned, what's on a website has little or nothing to do with how we implement or follow SB 49.
- Rep. Echevarria: [00:59:29](#) So, there's nothing wrong with it. So, if we were to make those websites, or you were to make those sites public today—all nine pages that your employees hid—and showed them to every parent in the state, would they be lawful, and would parents be pleased?
- Mr. Trice: [00:59:48](#) Well, what I would say, they were publicly available prior to October, so, they were things that we commit to and affirm in our school district. And just because of the Oversight Committee's letter, it doesn't make them unlawful. It doesn't change the values that we have as a school district. And so, I wouldn't see a problem with those becoming public. They were public before.
- Rep. Echevarria: [01:00:18](#) Okay. So, then you were just hiding them from the committee, not the parents?
- Mr. Trice: [01:00:24](#) No, I wouldn't say-
- Rep. Echevarria: [01:00:24](#) They were public before you got the letter, but when you got the letter, then they became not public. So, what was the motive behind that?
- Mr. Trice: [01:00:34](#) I don't understand the motive. What I know is that it was not the right thing to do. We've dealt with that in our school district.
- Rep. Echevarria: [01:00:42](#) So, what message did your equity staff send by covering up the content before the first hearing?
- Mr. Trice: [01:00:48](#) I'm not sure if there was a message that was sent. As I mentioned, it was not the right thing to do, but it happened, and we've dealt with that as a school district.

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- Rep. Echevarria: [01:00:57](#) Excellent. I'll ask you this. I mean, it really is troubling that the website was scrubbed without instruction. So, did anyone tell this employee to do that, or did they just take it upon themselves?
- Mr. Trice: [01:01:13](#) My understanding is that they were updating the website in general—the equity website in general—and did it themselves, yes.
- Rep. Echevarria: [01:01:24](#) Okay. So, we have the logs from the updates on the website. And previously, about 15 months, there was only eight updates. And then after the committee letter, within a day, there were 17 changes to the site. You're telling me that that was just coincidental or was that-
- Mr. Trice: [01:01:50](#) No, I think I've shared with you that it wasn't the right thing to do, and we've dealt with that as a school district.
- Rep. Echevarria: [01:01:55](#) Excellent. So, after this came to light, you did issue a directive requiring senior administrative approval for equity website changes. That means you saw this, as you stated, as a serious enough incident to tighten control. Now, the question I have is if the content on those pages was lawful, appropriate, and compliant as you keep saying, and you had nothing to hide, why did you respond by changing the process instead of restoring the content?
- Mr. Trice: [01:02:32](#) Well, I think the conversation in the committee, much like today, was about controls. It was my understanding that all of our website content is updated by a multidisciplinary team of individuals. That didn't happen in this case, so, we had to implement tighter controls. We're the type of school district where if we see that something needs to be improved or if there's a way that we can do it better, then we'll do that. In this case, an issue or problem came to light, and we worked as an administration to correct that wrong.
- Rep. Echevarria: [01:03:16](#) In closing, Dr. Trice, for years, before you were the superintendent, you were the deputy superintendent for systemic equity engagement. So, when you came before this committee and claimed that you didn't know about the graphic, gender-themed books and LGBT resources linked from your own equity pages, I'm not sure many people in this room believed you because you ran the program. Your staff quietly unlisted content 24 hours after an oversight letter. And rather

than come before this committee and say, "We found violations, and we cleaned them up," your administration has tried to pretend that there was never a problem with the content and that one lone employee changed the website for no disclosed reason at least.

[01:04:09](#)

I think here's a question that really matters for parents and for parents in the state. Did you, as a longtime equity chief and now superintendent, know this unlawful content was being distributed to children made available to them and hidden from parents? Or are you asking us to believe that a man of your stature, your professionalism had so little grip on your own administration that staff can erase evidence of violations that you stated you were not aware of and that they can do that behind your back and you never have a clue?

Mr. Trice:

[01:04:48](#)

I would have to reject the premise of the question. What was on our website was not unlawful. In fact, it was an affirmation of our values as a school system. As I mentioned just a moment ago, everything that was on our website was publicly available for parents and students prior to the committee's letter. I do understand that an employee scrubbed the website. I've said it was inappropriately done, and we've put in controls that we think will mitigate certain actions such as that in the future. But I don't have any issue with what was on the website. As the equity chief, it was consistent, like I said, with our values as a school system.

Rep. Echevarria:

[01:05:45](#)

And last question. So, please explain to me, outside of a situation of abuse, where you, your administration, or any school employee knows what's better for a child than their parents, and under what circumstance would it be necessary to not be partners with those parents instead of circumventing the law to make sure parents are unaware of what's happening with their children?

Mr. Trice:

[01:06:13](#)

Sir, as I've mentioned, SB 49 requires us as a school district before making any formal changes to names or pronouns that we notify parents. That's certainly our process, that's what we do. So, to answer your question-

Rep. Echevarria:

[01:06:30](#)

Excuse me, I don't mean just pronouns. I said any situation because there's a common theme. I mean, we're all here, we're listening, and you're obviously highly competent. Under what situation does your school district or your employees know

what's better for a student? Because remember, they're your students, but they're someone else's children. And you often refer to them as your children, except they're not your children. They're the children of their parents. So, under what circumstance do you find it appropriate to conceal what's happening with a student in a situation where there's no abuse? I don't mean just pronouns, I mean any circumstance.

- Mr. Trice: [01:07:18](#) I'm not aware of any circumstances where we would exclude parents in that information. Sorry, I misunderstood your line of questioning.
- Rep. Echevarria: [01:07:27](#) Thank you very much.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:07:30](#) Representative Rhyne, you are recognized for a series of questions.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:07:33](#) Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I want to thank both of you for being here today, and I also want to acknowledge the very difficult but important work of a superintendent in our school system. Dr. Trice, you obviously have some very formal training in your field. Can you tell us why you feel having these types of books that were mentioned last time you were here and some mentioned today are important books to have in your school system?
- Mr. Trice: [01:08:07](#) Sure. Chapel Hill-Carrboro is a very diverse community. We have individuals with differing religious, cultural identity backgrounds. As a school district, our board has made it important for us to have resources that reflect the diversity of our community, and so, through our libraries or our library portfolio, we attempt to reflect the diversity of our community.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:08:45](#) And as an educator, where would you or any educator for that matter learn essentially this pedagogy that you speak of that's important for children to learn to read, to have these books? Where would you learn that?
- Mr. Trice: [01:09:04](#) I mean, certainly that's part of formal schooling that any educator would go through. When students' interests are piqued, it's easier for them to learn, and so, we try to create environments that are engaging, that align to student interests. It's not unusual for us to survey and ask questions of our students, what are they interested in, whether they love to

explore, and we design resources and environments that align with those interests.

- Rep. Rhyne: [01:09:43](#) Just to clarify, what I hear you saying is that this is essentially taught in our ed prep programs. Is that correct?
- Mr. Trice: [01:09:52](#) Yes, but I think it's also life experience. If you're interested in a topic, you're more motivated-
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:10:01](#) I'm referring to how you learned that this was important.
- Mr. Trice: [01:10:06](#) Yeah, I'm trying to answer that. So, I was saying, as I mentioned before, it is a formal part of getting one's credentials, but it's also informed much like teaching and learning about life experiences and what we know about students and what we know about people in general is that if they're interested in something, they're more motivated to learn about that topic.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:10:33](#) So, what about professional development in your district? Is this also a place where this is taught?
- Mr. Trice: [01:10:40](#) And when you say this, what do you mean?
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:10:42](#) The importance of having these type of books in your libraries.
- Mr. Trice: [01:10:46](#) And are you referring- when you say these type books, could you help me?
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:10:51](#) The books that were brought into question last time and the books that have been talked about.
- Mr. Trice: [01:10:56](#) Books that highlight LGBTQIA+ characters certainly reflect the diversity of our community, and through training, through our mission statements, through policy, our board policy, the resources that we provide our students and families have to reflect that diversity,
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:11:19](#) Yes. When you say training, can you expand on that further? You said, "through training."
- Mr. Trice: [01:11:26](#) Through training in terms of staff coming together to determine the type of resources that are needed for our libraries or classrooms. Yeah, so just general training.

- Rep. Rhyne: [01:11:42](#) On page two of the testimony that you sent us, you state, "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." And then you cite a book called *The Power of Reading: Insights from the Research*. I assume you've read this book, which you cited.
- Mr. Trice: [01:12:08](#) It's been some time, but yeah.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:12:10](#) I noticed that the research in this book points to the importance of free voluntary reading versus direct instruction. That's really the point of the book, and it really focuses on access, stating that basically when books are more readily available, more reading is done. It then goes on to state how great comic books can be for language development. The book then goes on to discuss studies done on comic books and list many, many titles, including *The Amazing Spider-Man*, Archie, Batman, Bugs Bunny, Casper the Friendly Ghost, Chip 'n Dale, Dennis the Menace, Mighty Mouse, Star Wars, Tom and Jerry, and Wonder Woman. It then goes on to give example after example of how comic books improved reading in these children.
- [01:13:08](#) But your testimony seems to take this study and conflate it to mean that they need these library books that we've heard about today and last time when you say they need access to books they find personally engaging in order to develop critical reading and writing skills. When, in actuality, the study suggests they could be reading these comic books that I named and get the same benefit. I mean, I don't think to date we have anybody identifying as a bunny, a ghost, or a chipmunk, and yet it sounds like these books in the study you cited can still be very effective. So, why would you choose the books in question last time and here today over the ones in the study for free voluntary reading? What makes those better than the ones named in the study that you cited?
- Mr. Trice: [01:14:02](#) Well, my response to that is it's probably not either/or, we would want all of those books.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:14:10](#) But you cited this study-
- Mr. Trice: [01:14:12](#) We would want the comic books, and we would want the books that reflect the diversity of our community.

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- Rep. Rhyne: [01:14:21](#) It's interesting how research works—I can find almost anything to cite and support what I believe to be true and what you believe to be true, and I think that maybe that's what you've done in your testimony. I want to move on and talk about the email chain that I saw where you recently had conversations about how to administer the CATS assessment. Can you tell us what CATS stands for?
- Mr. Trice: [01:14:47](#) That was an email that I sent?
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:14:48](#) No, it's an email chain that you all sent in to us.
- Mr. Trice: [01:14:52](#) I'm not familiar with that email, sorry.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:14:54](#) Are you familiar with what CATS assessment is?
- Mr. Trice: [01:14:57](#) No, ma'am.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:15:02](#) It's my understanding that CATS is the Child and Adolescent Trauma Screening, and I think we maybe have a copy of it we can put on the screen. There seems to be some back and forth in this email that basically questions maybe you were giving the CATS assessment prior to the Parents' Bill of Rights, and then there is some back and forth between your—looks like your senior leaders—on how to maybe continue to give this in light of the Parents' Bill of Rights. Does this look like maybe the assessment that they were referring to there?
- Mr. Trice: [01:15:51](#) I'm not familiar with that document, I'm sorry.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:15:54](#) So, this document has been going out in the school system and you're not aware?
- Mr. Trice: [01:16:00](#) If it would happen prior to me becoming superintendent, I may not have been aware of that. I'm not sure when that was released.
- Rep. Rhyne: [01:16:07](#) Okay. And this email is from January where your senior leaders are, looks like, struggling with continuing to give this, and this is a few years later, after the Parents' Bill of Rights, but you don't know if this has been going out or been happening in your district or being given to-

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Mr. Trice: [01:16:24](#) It may be that our senior leaders were discussing how an assessment complied with Parents' Bill of Rights, but I was not involved with that communication.

Rep. Rhyne: [01:16:33](#) Do you know what age this assessment is given to?

Mr. Trice: [01:16:36](#) I can't see on that screen.

Rep. Rhyne: [01:16:39](#) It doesn't say.

Mr. Trice: [01:16:39](#) Oh, it doesn't say.

Rep. Rhyne: [01:16:40](#) I'm asking. Or does it say? Seven to 17? Do you see those questions that are there?

Mr. Trice: [01:16:48](#) No, ma'am.

Rep. Rhyne: [01:16:52](#) I won't go through them, I'll let everybody else look at those and read those questions that are on there and decide if you feel like that's appropriate for a seven-year-old to be given. And I don't think you're testifying as to whether you don't know whether it's continuing to be sent out in your district or not. Is that your testimony that you don't know?

Mr. Trice: [01:17:15](#) Yeah, I don't know, but I can certainly find out and get back with you.

Rep. Rhyne: [01:17:18](#) That would be great. And so, if it is being sent out, also, do you know if it's an opt-in or an opt-out process? No further questions, Mr. Chairman.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:17:35](#) Representative Quick, you're recognized.

Rep. Quick: [01:17:38](#) Thank you, Mr. Chair, and welcome back. I was here when you were here the last time. I have a couple of statements before my question. Statement number one is: The protection of all children in our state is paramount and a chief concern among all of us.

[01:18:01](#) Statement number two is: I don't believe that elementary school students or any students should be exposed to inappropriate materials. That's one of the reasons why I delayed giving my now-adult daughters cell phones until I thought they were able to handle it, and I still thought it was a little bit early, even when they got to high school.

[01:18:20](#) Statement number three: I think that the only thing that will satisfy some is if you come in and admit that some kind of way you have a hidden desire to harm children, which I don't think is the intent or your desire at all.

[01:18:40](#) Fourth statement I have to make is that: In my opinion, my opinion, you are being brought here to be the political victim or the political punching bag of a well-intended law that was made through a flawed process.

[01:18:58](#) The process for a Parents' Bill of Rights could have included inviting those who do this work every day to be a part of making the law. However, when you cut and paste law from national organizations and try to fit it into a North Carolina mold, you get results like this right here. I served for 12 years on the school board in Guilford County, 11 of the years as vice chair in the third-largest school system in the state of North Carolina. When this bill was brought forth, I never was consulted, and I didn't have to be. Let me be clear, I didn't have to be consulted. Neither did you have to be consulted, but the end result is when you don't allow for the expertise of the implementation of a law to be included in the process of making a law, you sometimes make a mess.

[01:19:51](#) Well intended, the title of the law, Parents' Bill of Rights. Oh, absolutely. I'm for that. Having raised children and for those who raise children, we absolutely must be notified and informed of certain things. We have to have certain rights. So, there's no argument that I have with the intention, but the devil is always in the details. And now that the details are playing out, you have been brought here time and again to be used to say in some kind of way that you don't care about children. And I don't think that is the case. I don't think that in the heart of hearts any of us believe that that's the case.

[01:20:33](#) You just happen to be a convenient target for this committee. I will say this about Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools—you have to do something, as Dr. Campbell alluded to, you have to do something about the achievement gap. And I would love to spend time in this committee or in any other way that we can help you do something about closing the achievement gap, rather than bring you here multiple times to try to be used for a law that we came up with, a law that we came up with, and now we are targeting you for not implementing a law that probably should have had your involvement. If we expect you to do it, we

probably should have had your involvement as we crafted these laws.

[01:21:19](#)

Bill Parcels, the football coach, famously said, "If I'm going to cook the meal, then I have to be able to buy the groceries." And so, we're asking you to cook a meal, and we're handing you the groceries. We're telling you to make steak, but we don't provide you with any beef to make it with.

[01:21:37](#)

Now, for my question: How are books selected for involvement in Chapel Hill-Carrboro elementary schools?

Mr. Trice:

[01:21:48](#)

Certainly. I can speak to that generally, but I think I'll pass it on to my colleague, Al McArthur. Much like the line of questioning, we have multidisciplinary teams that really take in book recommendations, either from parents, teachers, staff, community members, and they are passed on to this multidisciplinary team. But most generally, school librarians at the school level and the principal have ultimate decision-making authority on what is implemented into our library portfolio. But I know that Mr. McArthur, who deals with this day in and day out, could probably give you a more thorough explanation.

Rep. Quick:

[01:22:36](#)

Would you?

Mr. McArthur:

[01:22:38](#)

For sure. We as a district have a collection development policy that lists out certain criteria that must be followed, and I would like to point out that age appropriateness is a part of that. So, each school librarian uses book reviews. They also attend and are a part of various national and local organizations, specifically for librarians. They consult amongst themselves. And like Dr. Trice mentioned, they speak with families, students, and teachers to ensure that what is included in our school libraries represents the school community.

Rep. Quick:

[01:23:11](#)

Let me ask you something a little more personal to you. What is it about your background that we can trust that you know what you're doing as far as selecting books in your service area?

Mr. McArthur:

[01:23:26](#)

All of our librarians who are entrusted with that particular task are licensed, especially at the elementary school level. We have all but one who's licensed, who went through a master's program specifically for library sciences. And the one who does not currently has her master's degree, she's working towards it.

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- Rep. Quick: [01:23:50](#) And finally, are you aware of any other school districts that view library books as part of the curriculum?
- Mr. McArthur: [01:24:02](#) No. In talking with other library directors across the state, every book in a school library is not inherently a part of a school's curriculum or being used instructionally.
- Rep. Quick: [01:24:13](#) Thank you. Thank you all for being here again, and thank you for answering the questions to the best of your ability.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:24:21](#) Rep. Cervania, you are recognized for a series of questions.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:24:26](#) Thank you, Chair. Welcome, Superintendent Trice, Mr. McArthur. Thank you for your leadership on behalf of students and families and your high achieving level of success in your school district. I want to ask a number of many questions, so, this might go fast. Your success—can it not be attributed to having active parent involvement? Don't you need to have active parent involvement to succeed as you do in your school district?
- Mr. Trice: [01:25:04](#) Absolutely. I would say that's an essential part of our formula. Our parents demand high level of engagement and outcomes for their students. And so, they're very much a part of curriculum adoption, resource adoption, and they'll let you know when we're not meeting their standards.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:25:24](#) Very good. Now, this is part of a series of questions that I want to start by grounding us in the conversation of what this is and what it's not. So, going back to the law that was based on SB 49, we are in agreement. I mean, I read it constantly and in preparation too—12 pages. Hopefully my colleagues came in prepared on this, too. It states that it governs what is taught, correct?
- Mr. Trice: [01:25:56](#) Yes.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:25:57](#) And not everything a student could potentially access, correct?
- Mr. Trice: [01:26:02](#) Correct.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:26:03](#) Yes. Libraries are not the same as curriculum.
- Mr. Trice: [01:26:08](#) Correct.

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- Rep. Cervania: [01:26:10](#) And these spaces are for voluntary learning, exploration, and growth, not directed instruction.
- Mr. Trice: [01:26:18](#) Correct.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:26:18](#) Yes. Because the ratified law only has one reference really to books, is that correct?
- Mr. Trice: [01:26:26](#) That's our understanding, yes.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:26:27](#) Yes, okay. I'm going to lead this down with the contents of books. My colleagues have mentioned and asked, I want to provide more information from your expertise. *Obergefell* was mentioned by Representative Schietzelt. Are you familiar with this law?
- Mr. Trice: [01:26:54](#) I'm not familiar with it.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:26:56](#) Okay. Well, we'll walk through this together. *Obergefell versus Hodges* was decided by our Supreme Court. It had said that states cannot deny equal dignity and legal recognition of all relationships. This also includes same sex relationships under the 14th Amendment. Are you aware of that?
- Mr. Trice: [01:27:26](#) Yes.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:27:27](#) Okay. And so, this reinforces the fact of the content of books, if we follow that ruling of our country in that we cannot treat same-sex families or content in those books as less valid or less worthy, correct? Or you cannot answer or answer that. But the policy that singles out these families can be raised as equal protection concerns under the federal law. Do you keep that in mind as you go through the process of evaluating and getting the reference of the ratified law of SB 49? Does the US Constitution, the First Amendment, and 14th Amendment come under the standards of evaluation, Mr. McArthur?
- Mr. McArthur: [01:28:26](#) Yes, they do.
- Mr. Trice: [01:28:28](#) For sure.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:28:29](#) And so I'm going to lead down those questions of the First Amendment and the 14th Amendment. There was a ruling about library book removal. Mr. McArthur, are you familiar with

Board of Education versus Pico [*Island Trees School District v. Pico*]?

- Mr. McArthur: [01:28:48](#) Not familiar, no.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:28:50](#) So, this ruling was held by the Supreme Court saying schools cannot remove books simply because they dislike the idea of them. I trust in you, you've testified here, you have an interdisciplinary team that evaluates books. We have- I don't know if everybody's familiar—librarians mostly all have master's degrees. It's stated here, and it's library science. No person just can come into your school to be a librarian, correct?
- Mr. McArthur: [01:29:29](#) That is correct.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:29:31](#) They are well aware that books are not just merely books that if we don't like them, they shouldn't be not held in a library. Very good. I want to just really stress that this is primarily an equal protection and due process ruling and not a First Amendment or education case, that case. But we have to keep that in mind when we not only rule on the laws that we create here but the sworn oath that we all make here, as my colleagues do, on the US Constitution. So, I'm going to keep going on this. Have you received any formal complaints when it comes to any of these books that have been referred to on any of these lists or third-party pages?
- Mr. McArthur: [01:30:31](#) To my knowledge, recently there was one.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:30:35](#) Okay, yes, and that's my knowledge too. One out of the many, many families who are in your school district, many, many books. How did you handle that issue?
- Mr. McArthur: [01:30:48](#) It was a complaint to have their child not borrow the book. It was communicated to the school administration and the school librarian to inform them that on record in our digital catalog, that it's put on notice that those particular students could not access that title or could not borrow the book.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:31:09](#) And all parents in your school district have that right?
- Mr. McArthur: [01:31:13](#) Yes.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:31:14](#) And can express that.

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Mr. McArthur: [01:31:15](#) Mm-hmm.

Rep. Cervania: [01:31:16](#) Let me go on to also say—you said parents want to have the availability of content age appropriate, right? That's actually your umbrella of all content, right? Kids are not always allowed to check out certain books, and it's limited by age, is it?

Mr. McArthur: [01:31:39](#) Yes.

Rep. Cervania: [01:31:39](#) Sorry, grade level.

Mr. McArthur: [01:31:41](#) Mm-hmm.

Rep. Cervania: [01:31:43](#) And also integrating the ratified law of SB 49, parent controlling laws, right?

Mr. McArthur: [01:31:52](#) Yes.

Rep. Cervania: [01:31:53](#) Yeah.

Mr. McArthur: [01:31:53](#) They have complete access to our library catalogs.

Rep. Cervania: [01:31:56](#) Very good. Okay. And then I'm going to go off a little bit, and then I'll end my questions. We have a lot of doctors and a dentist, and I was pre-med. I think I'm six years away from a medical degree. And as always, it's been said, three years from a law degree. I want to be very careful about us talking about what sexual activity books are available in our libraries because I think our students are very savvy nowadays to know that babies are not from storks anymore, correct? We have books from when I was growing up, when I was pre-med, when I was a science person, that explained reproduction, right? Those books still are considered quality content books.

[01:33:03](#) I want to make sure that we're very careful that we don't say that reproductive books that explain sperm and eggs and how babies are born and how cisgender parents or same-sex marriage parents have families and build their families. There are books in our school districts that outline that, right? That are not profane and that are not sexually offensive, correct?

Mr. McArthur: [01:33:41](#) Yes.

Rep. Cervania: [01:33:42](#) These are ways for children to learn about science, about families.

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- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:33:51](#) Represent Cervania, the chair has been very lenient. You're at the 10-minute mark, so, how about wrapping up?
- Rep. Cervania: [01:33:56](#) Oh, goodness gracious. I appreciate it.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:33:57](#) I got fussed at for not giving time, so, I've let you air your grievance, so, wrap it up.
- Rep. Cervania: [01:34:02](#) That was it, sir. Thank you so much.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:34:04](#) Thank you. Representative Ager was over here just about to bounce out of his chair to get to the microphone. Representative Ager, you're next.
- Rep. Ager: [01:34:10](#) Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'll try not to be 15, 20 minutes. But no, I think we're in good shape here. Thank you all for being here. I know it's maybe not the most pleasant experience any of you have had. When I was doing the preparation for this committee—and I think I just got it yesterday—but we got a long list of books that have some sort of complaint about, I suppose, that are in the libraries of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro system. And so, I figured I'd pick one up and just see what I could learn about it. And I didn't have time to read them all because I know there's a lot on the list.
- [01:34:53](#) But I did pick this one up, *Joyful Song: A Naming Story*. And I read through it this morning just to see what it said. And really, all it has in there, in very limited parts of it, are that two moms exist for this wonderful family that's going through this story. That's the piece, right? And it seems odd to me, and I think we've determined here pretty clearly that same-sex marriage is settled law here in North Carolina and across the country. We've got same-sex couples here and in every county, probably in North Carolina. So, a book that references two mothers or two fathers is really no more concerned with sexuality than a book that references a mother and a father. It's all the same.
- [01:35:49](#) And it's clear that instruction, in SB 49, it says that instruction on gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality shall not be included in the curriculum. I think we've determined pretty clearly that library books are not in the curriculum, but I'd also like to argue that there's nothing in this book that has anything to do with gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality. And so, it doesn't make any sense that it would be somehow not in compliance with SB 49.

[01:36:22](#)

And so, I mean, I don't know what we're doing here. I'm confused because if the majority thinks there's something vulgar or not okay in this book, then why don't they just be clear about their desire to go back in history and change the law? We talk about being lawful here and same-sex marriages are lawful, and so, we ought to talk about them as a community, and that doesn't mean we shouldn't talk about them at any age, right? If it's lawful, it's lawful, and that's what we're talking about here. So, my real question for you all, and just want to get some ... We're throwing a lot of things at the wall here, so, I would love to hear from you all, kind of, the real challenges as a school district that you're facing, the real hurdles that you see, both in the library system as well as in the district.

Mr. Trice:

[01:37:15](#)

Sure. So, yeah, we're always happy to talk about the great things in Chapel Hill-Carrboro, but there are real challenges and I wouldn't say that they're isolated to the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools. We're incredibly excited with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and their renewed attempt to adopt curriculum content standards for our state in the past couple years—science, we have ELA [English language arts] coming up, and math in the near future.

[01:37:46](#)

One of the big challenges many school districts face across North Carolina is funding to support those new curriculum standards. As a superintendent, I think often and deeply about providing our students with access to high quality—the best quality learning experiences. The achievement gap has come up a number of times in this committee hearing, and making sure that children have access to the highest level of curriculum resources available would go a long way with giving our school district, but any school district across our state, the ability to deal with the achievement gaps. So, that's just one area that I think a lot about, but I know that Mr. McArthur can speak to some issues in the library.

Mr. McArthur:

[01:38:36](#)

One area that I look to across the state is school districts ensuring that all schools have a licensed and trained school librarian, along with assistance to help them ensure that the titles that are selected are properly circulated through the schools, making sure that kids have access to books.

Rep. Ager:

[01:38:58](#)

Thank you both very much. And I would submit to you that instead of playing this gotcha game here we're engaged in, which I suppose is maybe interesting for the media, we really

could be digging in to solve these problems by passing budgets that are going to pay teachers, highway patrol officers, forest service rangers, correction officers-

Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:39:18](#) [to the gallery] You've been warned. Do it again, you will be out of the committee room.

Rep. Ager: [01:39:21](#) ... and we know the price of healthcare is through the roof. We've got lots of folks in our rural communities who are struggling. Our jail systems are chronically underfunded and can't even pay their bills. And so, those are the real problems facing North Carolina, and I would submit that we ought to be focused on those. So, thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:39:40](#) Representative Dahle, you're recognized.

Rep. Dahle: [01:39:43](#) Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for being here. So, I want to go back to something we were talking about earlier, I'm not a lawyer, but I did work for 20 years with a lawyer who did federal cases, so, I can read English and words and decipher all that. So, I want to go to section five that was put up on the board, and it says, "Prior to any changes in name." And I want to go back to what you were saying—change focuses on a transformation or you accepting and then saying you have changed your pronoun. And what you were stating to me, as I understand it, and I want clarification—is affirming focuses on just acknowledging, "Okay, you feel that way. However, we do need to discuss this with your parents if we are going to change," correct? So, within this law, you have not broken any part of this law because you are not changing pronouns without parents' permission. Is that correct?

Mr. Trice: [01:41:02](#) That is correct. And that has been our consistent practice throughout our guidance. Yes.

Rep. Dahle: [01:41:07](#) Now I'm going to break a legal rule, which is I'm going to ask a question I'm not sure I know the answer to. But Chairman Jones alluded to the fact that you've lost students, and I need to know, is that true? And do you know how many students you've lost? And are they all because of the books that Representative Ager pointed out? Or are they just people who moved? Do we know anything about the statistical nature of why people have left school?

- Mr. Trice: [01:41:50](#) Yeah, certainly. So, yes, we've lost students more precipitously since the pandemic. We've lost about 1, 500 students, and we know a little bit about why we've lost that number of students. Much like many areas within North Carolina, there are not as many five- to 17-year-olds. So, we're looking at birth rates across our state, across our country, and in fact, it's a global phenomenon. With respect to Chapel Hill-Carrboro, we experience about an 82 or 83% market share of students in our community. So, our parents, they vote with their feet by sending their kids to our schools, and so, I know that they're satisfied.
- [01:42:50](#) But with respect to declining enrollment, housing prices have really skyrocketed, and it's just not affordable for many new families to live in our community. And I know that our elected officials have been kind of working to address that situation. We don't experience a lot of pressure from private schools, charter schools, homeschooling. As I mentioned, our market share is pretty high. We have some evidence that about 75, 77% of our students either move to a new district in North Carolina or they move out of state or out of the country when they leave or exit our school system. So, that gives us a sense that there is change, but it has very little to do with the programming that we offer as a district.
- Rep. Dahle: [01:43:50](#) Thank you. That was a lucky shot. Glad that worked out for me. Now, as far as library books are concerned, I want to direct this to Mr. McArthur. Or are you a doctor? I'm sorry.
- Mr. McArthur: [01:44:09](#) Just mister.
- Rep. Dahle: [01:44:10](#) As far as that's concerned, librarians have control of what students check out. So, let's say, I don't know, a six-year ... I don't have any children, I'm sorry, so, I can't always figure out the grade. Let's say a six-year-old brings a book that is totally inappropriate. It has nothing to do with this subject matter, but it's totally inappropriate. Would that librarian not be responsive and go back and find an age-appropriate book that may be on that subject?
- Mr. McArthur: [01:44:46](#) That's true. And it could also apply to a reading level as well.
- Rep. Dahle: [01:44:49](#) Okay, and reading level. So, the books in the library are there for reference and/or exposure to those people who want them. Okay, and you did say that there was a family that didn't want a

child to read a book, and so, therefore, the librarian, it was put on the letter, and I've spoken to many librarians and been told that this is how it happens, but I just want to clarify that.

- Mr. McArthur: [01:45:22](#) Yes. And that's a process that we've had in place long before Senate Bill 49 as well, where parents can have conversations with their school librarians about books that are in the library and whether their child should have access or not.
- Rep. Dahle: [01:45:36](#) Now, I also want to just clarify one point—might be a question in here, we'll see. As probably the only gay person on this lovely committee, and I ... The reason I mention it is because when children are bullied or made fun of for any reason, I could say because I'm the only fat person on this board and bullying and those-
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:46:14](#) That's an inaccurate statement.
- Rep. Dahle: [01:46:17](#) Okay. But what I'm saying is, do those children in the educational system need some affirmation, not changes, that their family is just a family? And does it take up lots of instructional time?
- Mr. Trice: [01:46:39](#) I mean, I think all children need affirmation, certainly, and family is a big part of that. And as I mentioned at the top of our conversation, it's an expectation in our school district that the resources we provide students reflect the diversity in our community, which includes gay students. And so, a family is just a family.
- Rep. Dahle: [01:47:02](#) Okay. Thank you.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:47:03](#) Representative Cunningham.
- Rep. Cunningham: [01:47:12](#) Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you all for being here. I'm going to go back a little bit to the pronoun and the name change. Is there currently a form—if you need a form for the parent to fill out—is there a form?
- Mr. Trice: [01:47:28](#) Yes, ma'am. That's outlined in our guidance document.
- Rep. Cunningham: [01:47:33](#) Okay, so, if there is a form and the child comes in, makes the request for the name change or the pronoun change, how do the parent get the form?

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Mr. Trice: [01:47:45](#) Well, our guidance document has the form linked.

Rep. Cunningham: [01:47:52](#) On the website?

Mr. Trice: [01:47:54](#) Yes, our guidance is on the website.

Rep. Cunningham: [01:47:56](#) Okay. Thank you. So, I want to go to when the child comes in and they make a determination that they're going to withdraw. So, you don't have to notify the parent at that time if they withdraw. Is that correct?

Mr. Trice: [01:48:12](#) You mean withdraw from school or?

Rep. Cunningham: [01:48:14](#) Withdraw from the request for the name change or the pronoun change?

Mr. Trice: [01:48:17](#) Oh, yes, ma'am. I'm sorry. I misunderstood the line of... So, that's correct. So, the law is if we're going to proceed with a name change or a pronoun change in the official record that we have to notify parents prior to any change taking place.

Rep. Cunningham: [01:48:39](#) Okay. Thank you for that. I'm thinking because if the child comes and asks for a pronoun change or a name change, the parent still should be notified. And the reason I'm saying that is because apparently there are some additional things going on that they would come and make a request like that, whether it be familial tension or other issues going on within the home environment. If the administration ... You said the school board does the policy, the administration issues the guidance. Is there a policy from the board of education, from your board of education that's already present for you all to provide the guidance?

Mr. Trice: [01:49:37](#) So, our guidance document stands independent of board policy, if I understand your question.

Rep. Cunningham: [01:49:45](#) I think you got it right.

Mr. Trice: [01:49:46](#) Okay. Well, thank you.

Rep. Cunningham: [01:49:48](#) And I'm having a little issue with that because if they're giving you the policy, the guidance should follow the policy.

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- Mr. Trice: [01:49:58](#) Yeah, I think our guidance follows the law. That's the reason for the guidance because of Senate Bill 49. It outlines the law and how it should be enacted in our school system.
- Rep. Cunningham: [01:50:15](#) Okay, that's what you're saying. But I'm saying if there is a policy that is established by the school board, the policy and the guidance must be applicable to Senate Bill 49. Both of them must be aligned. They can't be separate if they're following the statute of the law.
- [01:50:38](#) I'm going to make some comments, and then I'm going to be done. I'm a nurse by profession. I wish we weren't having to talk about sexual identity, pronouns, and name changes, but it's here. But I would beg to say the difference, if we looked at children and allowed the parents to parent, they are responsible for parenting their children. And we have taken so much of that away from them that we're having issues with children: social media, sexual identity. We are having so many issues with our children and the parents being able to parent that the children are not learning. They're not even being disciplined. They're not achieving.
- [01:51:32](#) And I'll lastly, say this—federal does dictate law, but the state also supersedes some of the federal statute. It comes to the state to make that determination. Ten million people in the state of North Carolina, or more, determine the elected officials that come to this body and establish the law. So, we won't change in what laws are established. It's up to the people. It's up to the parents to go to the polls and make those decisions about their elected officials. Once we're here and we determine the statute, that's what it is. You must follow the law. There's no way around it. If the statute passes and it's written into the books, you must follow the law. There's no way around it.
- [01:52:31](#) It's not about your emotions. It's not about what people think is right or wrong. They made those decisions when they elected the people in the body to make those difficult decisions for the all of the citizens of the state of North Carolina. So, if you want to change that, you've got to do your groundwork, but right now, the statute is there, and you must follow the law. Thank you, Mr. Chair.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [01:53:02](#) Thank you. Representative Johnson, you are recognized.

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- Rep. Johnson: [01:53:05](#) Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you both for being here today. I've been suspiciously quiet during this one because I've been reading and listening, and I want to read a sentence to you, and can you confirm this is from your guidance? And this is verbatim: "If upon hearing that parents must be notified, the student changes their mind and withdraws the request, staff are not required to notify the student's parents." That is part of the official guidance?
- Mr. Trice: [01:53:33](#) Yes. Correct.
- Rep. Johnson: [01:53:34](#) It seems to leave a huge loophole to me that every single day they could be using the name, the pronoun. At the end of the day, the student says, "I've changed my mind," and then they are still not, at the end of the day, required to tell the parent. In theory, could that happen under this guidance?
- Mr. Trice: [01:53:55](#) I don't think so. Any official change to a student's name or pronoun has to go through parents. You have to notify parents. So, I don't see how we can make an official change every single day. I'm not understanding the logic.
- Rep. Johnson: [01:54:14](#) Are you considering it an official change if they refer to them as that during the entire day, the entire school day they're with them?
- Mr. Trice: [01:54:23](#) When you say them, who are you referring to? I'm sorry.
- Rep. Johnson: [01:54:25](#) The student.
- Mr. Trice: [01:54:25](#) Well, if the student-
- Rep. Johnson: [01:54:26](#) If the teacher is calling the student this pronoun all day, and at the end of the day, is it possible for that student to go, "I changed my mind," and then start over the next day.
- Mr. Trice: [01:54:35](#) As I mentioned, a teacher cannot refer to a student as a different name or a different pronoun—that would be an official change in my mind, and so, you have to go through parents to notify them of an official change.
- Rep. Johnson: [01:54:53](#) Okay. Well, I'm going to move on. And there was one thing that Representative Schietzelt touched on—and you'll learn the way we word things he is an attorney, I am not. You'll hear the difference. He alluded to this section five of [NC General

Statute] 115C-76.45. It's section five that says, "Prior to any changes in the name or pronoun used with the student in the school records or by school personnel, the parents have to be noticed of that change." And there was some question of whether or not when that happened or if policy could outweigh the guidance,

[01:55:33](#)

I mean, I think it's clear in section A that it says, "The governing body"—which is you as a superintendent—"the governing body of the"—and I'm reading directly—"the governing body of the public school unit shall adopt procedures to notify a parent." And to me, that doesn't leave a lot of wiggle room in the guidance. It's a "shall," "shall notify them." And I just think there's a huge loophole for this to reset every single day potentially to get around that.

[01:56:07](#)

And given everything that we've heard today and just frankly knowing some of the things that are out there that I think Chairman Jones is going to cover—and this is just my opinion, one legislator—I think there has been a willful intent to break the law in Senate Bill 49. I think there has been a willful intent. That is my opinion. What I think is crystal clear and should be crystal clear to everybody is there's a lot of loopholes left in this guidance and not just the one I read, ones we've been hearing about all day, that there is a willful intent to subvert the intent of the law, and I'm drawing a distinction between those.

[01:56:52](#)

I think that it has been willfully broken, but I think what is clear is there has been a willful effort to subvert the intent of Senate Bill 49. And I hope going forward, because hopefully sooner rather than later, we are going to be asked to vote on a budget. And it is really hard for me to vote to fund something that I feel is willfully breaking the law. So, I hope changes are made going forward, and I yield my time back to the chairman.

Rep. Jones, Chair:

[01:57:24](#)

Thank you, Representative Johnson. Representative Warren, you are recognized.

Rep. Warren:

[01:57:28](#)

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I actually came in here with just three questions, but listening to everything, I have a couple more and some things I'd just like to clear up. First of all, I want to establish the fact, Dr. Trice, you aren't a scapegoat here. You aren't being targeted. You're here because the buck stops with you. And it's your school system that has been brought to our attention that there's potential violations of Senate Bill 49. So, I

want to clear that up. Nobody's out to get you. We want to establish what's going on. You had mentioned that ... Well, actually, Chairman Jones brought up that you had an assistant principal who brought up an issue about not having a policy in 2026, and you testified that "we've been in compliance since 2023."

[01:58:21](#)

So my question to you is, coming from my background, my HR background, we always had employee handbooks that we had a record that we gave all the policies and the guidance out to the individual employee that they signed for, and we had that record on hand that they had been advised. We had that for company policy. We had it for sexual harassment training, and we did that twice a year. Do you have anything in place like that that covers you so that you don't have to sit here before a committee and say, "I don't know what ... They didn't know the policy or they hadn't heard it?"

Mr. Trice:

[01:58:57](#)

Well, I don't think those were my words. I'm not familiar with the exchange. Certainly our guidance has been in place for quite some time. I think materials that we've submitted to this committee demonstrates in a number of occasions where the central leadership has shared the importance of following the guidance. I can't really speak-

Rep. Warren:

[01:59:22](#)

I'm going to interrupt you for just a second. All I'm asking you is, do you have a procedure in place that verifies each employee has been advised of what your policy is and your guidances are—in this particular case in relation to State Bill 49's provisions—but do you have anything like that in place even for sexual harassment or anything of that nature?

Mr. Trice:

[01:59:45](#)

Absolutely. Yes, sir.

Rep. Warren:

[01:59:46](#)

Okay. Could you possibly send the committee some validation of that—an example of a handbook or an affidavit of having attended a sexual harassment class—something that verifies your policies are covered and how frequently you do that?

Mr. Trice:

[02:00:04](#)

Yes. I mean, I think we've shared with the committee emails and trainings that we've done with our principals and assistant principals. So, that's certainly a part of our process as well.

Rep. Warren:

[02:00:15](#)

So, you could repeat that and do it again for me?

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Mr. Trice: [02:00:17](#) Yes, sir.

Rep. Warren: [02:00:18](#) Okay. Thank you. You had mentioned that website teams determine what they're going to put on their respective subject matter sites, but they don't—if I understood you correctly—they don't really get into third-party links that they put in and what that content is. Is that correct?

Mr. Trice: [02:00:43](#) No, that's not what I said or what I intended to say.

Rep. Warren: [02:00:48](#) I'm asking you to clarify.

Mr. Trice: [02:00:49](#) Oh, I thought you asked if it was correct. Oh, I'm sorry. So, yes, so, there might be links to a third party that we agree with or want to use as a resource, but that does not mean that every resource that a third party provides we agree with or endorse or have reviewed because we're not part of that third party.

Rep. Warren: [02:01:12](#) So, if there's something on a third-party link that isn't in compliance with SB49, you don't know that, but you put the link on it?

Mr. Trice: [02:01:23](#) No, that's not what I'm saying.

Rep. Warren: [02:01:24](#) Well, it is what you're saying.

Mr. Trice: [02:01:25](#) No, it's not what I'm saying.

Rep. Warren: [02:01:26](#) I believe it is what you're saying.

Mr. Trice: [02:01:27](#) But that's not what I'm saying. I'm telling you, that's not what I'm saying.

Rep. Warren: [02:01:29](#) When you go back and look at the link-

Mr. Trice: [02:01:30](#) What I'm saying, if there are resources that we link to and we agree with them and they support what we're trying to communicate, we'll post them. But what I can't endorse or review is every resource that is a part of that third-party website. I may not have seen those resources.

Rep. Warren: [02:01:51](#) So, am I correct that when you were here in December, the books and material that Chairman Jones pointed out during that committee meeting were from that third-party link. Is that not correct?

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- Mr. Trice: [02:02:03](#) That's my understanding, yes.
- Rep. Warren: [02:02:05](#) So, could you see how conceivably anybody could look at that and say, "This is an end around compliance with Senate Bill 49," because you can put on a link to a third-party resource and then disavow any knowledge of what's going on because you can't approve everything on that resources' website.
- Mr. Trice: [02:02:24](#) I don't think that's accurate.
- Rep. Warren: [02:02:24](#) Well, it sounds accurate.
- Mr. Trice: [02:02:26](#) Material on a website is not addressed in Senate Bill 49. Senate Bill 49 addresses what's taught in a classroom. And so, anybody who's professing that links on a website violates Senate Bill 49 just doesn't understand the bill.
- Rep. Warren: [02:02:40](#) Well, there's a thing we have up here called legislative intent, which doesn't always specify to every nuance of the legislation, but the legislative intent is clear. And I think this is and can conceivably look as an end around for providing material or instruction via a third-party link and still maintain that you're in compliance with the law.
- [02:03:05](#) I want to ask a question and either one of you can answer this. I'm just going—it's not for me so much as trying to clarify what Representative Campbell and Representative Chesser were getting at. So, let me ask you not a hypothetical question but just a plain question. Is there any context in which books depicting explicit sexual activity would be appropriate to be put in your library?
- Mr. McArthur: [02:03:28](#) There are no explicit texts in our library or sexually explicit text in our libraries.
- Rep. Warren: [02:03:33](#) And that is not what I asked you.
- Mr. McArthur: [02:03:37](#) I can't speak to hypotheticals.
- Rep. Warren: [02:03:39](#) You've told us how learned librarians have to be, apparently semantics is an issue. I'm going to ask you again—is there any context in which books depicting explicit sexual activity would be appropriate to be put in your library?
- Mr. McArthur: [02:03:55](#) There are no sexually explicit texts in our libraries.

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Rep. Warren: [02:04:01](#) Did I ask you if there was?

Mr. McArthur: [02:04:04](#) I'm answering-

Rep. Warren: [02:04:05](#) You're answering a question of... You're not answering the question. I'm asking if there's any context in which you would put a book like that in the library.

Mr. McArthur: [02:04:13](#) No.

Rep. Warren: [02:04:14](#) Thank you. That wasn't difficult, was it? Would you say that the books in the library are there to support lessons in the classroom?

Mr. McArthur: [02:04:24](#) Not all, no.

Rep. Warren: [02:04:26](#) Not all of them, I'm saying you said books are in there to do that then?

Mr. McArthur: [02:04:28](#) Some are, yes.

Rep. Warren: [02:04:29](#) Okay, thank you. Who checks books out, among the books that were pointed out here, who checks those out for four-year-olds and five-year-olds in kindergarten?

Mr. McArthur: [02:04:42](#) In our elementary libraries, that would be our elementary librarians.

Rep. Warren: [02:04:46](#) The librarians would take that out for a four- or five-year-old?

Mr. McArthur: [02:04:51](#) The students would come up to the circulation desk, and they would check the books out, yes. But of course, they would, like I was asked earlier, make sure that the books that they were checking out were age appropriate and that they were on the readability level of a student.

Rep. Warren: [02:05:04](#) So, would you say that these books that some members on here have a question with would be informative for a student of any age to read?

Mr. McArthur: [02:05:15](#) They are all based on... As I mentioned earlier, our books are in the library for two purposes. They can support the curriculum, but they also support the independent interests of our students. And if it is a book that a student wanted to check out independently, then the librarian would assist them with that. I

would also like to add that families have the ability to see what's in our school libraries, and at that point, they can have conversations with school staff to ensure that whatever title is in the library that they disagree with is withheld from their child.

Rep. Warren: [02:05:49](#) So, would you say that all parents of students and guardians of students in your school are aware of the books that are available for their children at that age group?

Mr. McArthur: [02:05:57](#) I can't speak to awareness, but it is on our school's website, and it is also common conversations that parents would have with classroom teachers as well, in terms of the curriculum, anything regarding curriculum dealing with their students.

Rep. Warren: [02:06:15](#) I've had six children, and they span ages 26 through 56. I've been in classrooms in Ohio, Florida, and here, and I've been involved in parent teacher associations, band groups, and my experience has been that not all parents are really that diligent in attending their schools and associating with their teachers. And I know I, personally, have talked to teachers who lamented the fact that the kids who need the most help have the parents who are least involved, and I find it hard to believe that parents who might object to these type of books being available for their child, or for the teacher in the kindergarten to check a book out for a four- or five-year-old, that they would agree with that, that they would be agreeable to it. I'm suggesting that they're ignorant of the fact that that's even available.

[02:07:07](#) And I think when you look at the books and the subject matter, while they may not be part of the curriculum, I believe they are instructional and they're educational, and that, by virtue of definition and the law, could possibly fall into that category. And I'll read to you from the actual law, section 115C-76.55, "Age-appropriate instruction for grades kindergarten through fourth grade. Instruction on gender identity, sexual activity, and sexuality shall not be included in a curriculum provided in grades kindergarten through fourth grade, regardless of whether the information is provided by school personnel or third parties, such as your links. 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." And I believe your library books would fall into that category.

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- Mr. McArthur: [02:08:02](#) I disagree.
- Rep. Warren: [02:08:03](#) Well, we're here to disagree, I guess. I mean, all of us, I'm sure there's a lot of people in the audience that disagree with us, and a lot do. But I think they fall into that category, but it does not include responses to students who ask specific questions. So, could you tell me what benefit a four-year-old gets from having a book presented to them and read to them? And I'm not saying it's wrong, I'm just asking... I guess what I'm asking is, where do we get the responsibility of introducing sexuality to four- and five-year-olds, kindergarten kids? When does that become a state responsibility?
- Mr. McArthur: [02:08:43](#) The books in our library are, like I said earlier, selected to serve students K through five. Overall, the librarians have a certain set of skills that allows them to ensure that the titles that they have in the library are reflective of the student body. And as I said earlier as well, school libraries serve as a way for students to explore topics on their own. If there's a topic or the reading level of a title is not relevant to the age of a student, the librarian wouldn't provide access to that particular title. Student choice is what's important here, and also ensuring that regardless of their age level—meaning that fifth graders access the same library as kindergartners do—that regardless of what is in the library, it's important for all students to see themselves represented in the library or things that they might see at home, in terms of older siblings.
- [02:09:45](#) Also, their parents as well, are represented there to affirm them and what they see, and potentially, for students who, in particular, for students who particularly identify as LGBTQIA.
- Rep. Warren: [02:10:02](#) Mr. Chair, I just want to make a comment, and then I'll close with that.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:10:05](#) You're recognized.
- Rep. Warren: [02:10:08](#) The sexual mores or the social mores regarding sexuality, gender roles, what's acceptable, what's taboo, they vary widely from one culture to another, and the societal standards are generally based on religious beliefs or traditions, and even what some people might consider natural order. Our social mores regarding sex and sexual behavior and relationships have changed dramatically over the last 75 years. I don't think anybody will disagree with that. And while we recognize that,

it's not the role of the state to establish or teach what's morally right or morally wrong or socially acceptable or socially unacceptable. In American society, it has historically been the responsibility of parents to educate their children on the subject, based on their family values and their religious beliefs. It has not been, nor is it the role of the state by way of its employed teachers, to teach as part of a curriculum or a passive exposure with instructive literature.

[02:11:07](#)

Some people may look at this, and say, "We can defend this because it's teaching tolerance and acceptance. It's identifying with a student." Others may view it a little differently and say that, at best, it's social engineering, and at worst, it's grooming. But in any case, it's still an encroachment on parents' rights and parents' responsibility, and it's in a direct conflict with the legislative intent of Senate Bill 49. As one of the members pointed out earlier—and I have heard it throughout my tenure here, talking to... We deal a lot with education every year, as you know, but I've consistently heard people in the education community refer to the students as "our kids"—and I believe it was Representative Chesser who pointed out—they're not our kids. They're our students, and we have a constitutional responsibility to concentrate on providing them a free education, and we should concentrate on academics.

[02:12:05](#)

I do agree that I think there's some gray areas in the administration, in terms of trying to comply, or willingness to comply with the legislative intent of Senate Bill 49. But I do want to say I have the greatest respect for teachers. What you face today is not what we faced when I was a student. You have such a diverse set of challenges before you, with blended families, divorced families, English as a second language, if a language at all. God bless you for what you do. We appreciate that, and we hope to have something for you very soon. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Rep. Jones, Chair:

[02:12:43](#)

Representative Schietzelt, you're recognized for a second time.

Rep. Schietzelt:

[02:12:47](#)

Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I first would love to just begin by echoing the sentiments that Representative Warren just expressed about the job that our educators face today. It is difficult, and we do have to acknowledge that. I want to acknowledge the statements that Representative Ager made earlier that we have a lot of work to do in this space. And this is my first term, and I've been honored to work on what we can

do to make our educators' lives a little bit easier. And in fact, Representative Ager said a number of things that I agree with deeply, but I would like to point out one area where he and I disagree, which is about the importance of this hearing and this subject matter. Because the way I see this, what we're talking about is not trivial. We're talking about our public institution's ability and willingness to follow the laws as they are written by the body that is charged with writing them.

[02:13:45](#)

That's why I raised *Obergefell* earlier, not to get into a debate about the holding of it, which was restricted to recognizing marriage equality and marriage access. The reason I brought it up earlier was to point to the importance of these institutions and the lines that we have to draw between them when conflict arises. Someone has to draw that line. In just about every state in the union, it's the state legislature that is charged with drawing that line, and here, in North Carolina, it is the North Carolina General Assembly that is charged with drawing that line. So, I'd like to get into a couple more points of legal interpretation. There's been a lot of back and forth about whether books in the library are there to supplement curriculum or they are there to supplement the student interests, serve the student interests, and I fully appreciate that distinction.

[02:14:44](#)

My first question is, does the school system delineate between these two types of materials in the library? Do we have a list of resources and books that are there to serve the curriculum, and a separate set of books that serve only student interests?

Mr. McArthur:

[02:14:59](#)

No.

Rep. Schietzelt:

[02:15:00](#)

If you don't distinguish between those, then how can the law distinguish between them?

Mr. McArthur:

[02:15:06](#)

It is, as Dr. Trice stated earlier, our policy, in regards to Senate Bill 49, has been explained to our classroom teachers where these titles could not be used to directly teach gender identity, sexuality, or sexual acts.

Rep. Schietzelt:

[02:15:20](#)

I don't think that it quite gets... Again, we're beating a dead horse here, but we're asking questions that frankly, we're not receiving responses to. If you don't distinguish between these materials, how can you expect the law to distinguish between them? Because as we've talked about, we pass laws, and we

can't foresee every single possible application of that, but we expect to be able to liquidate the law. As James Madison famously wrote in, I think it was Federalist 37, we've got to liquidate these laws. So in practice, you don't delineate between them, but you expect us to delineate between them as we assess the materials and we assess the things that are brought to our attention by people within the school district. If you can't do it, and you're not doing it, then why would you expect us to be able to do that? And why would a court be expected to delineate between these things that you, yourself, are not separating?

- Mr. Trice: [02:16:17](#) I would think that would go back to something Representative Quick mentioned, when laws are being considered, asking for the advice and input of educators could be helpful. It's not an issue within schools, in terms of what library books represent versus curriculum that's adopted for science or social studies. There are textbooks and other resources that are available for classroom instruction. There are other books, such as library books, that are for independent reading. But if I'm studying, I don't know, rocks in a classroom, and there are books in the library on rocks, it certainly can be used as a resource. But we also have books on aliens and magical kingdoms. That doesn't mean we're teaching about ET, or something like that, in our classroom, so, they're library books.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:17:12](#) I fully appreciate that. Right now, my son is doing his fifth-grade research project, and he's decided he wants to do it on the 1991 Duke basketball team. I understand that's not something they're teaching in his class.
- Mr. Trice: [02:17:23](#) Right.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:17:23](#) But let me back up then and ask another question. So, I have my thoughts on the answer to this, but I would love to hear your thoughts, why do we have books that serve student interests rather than the curriculum in the library?
- Mr. Trice: [02:17:36](#) Because as a school district, we promote literacy and the love of reading, and we know that when students have a literacy-rich environment, they become better readers.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:17:50](#) So, literacy is part of the curriculum?
- Mr. Trice: [02:17:53](#) Certainly, literacy is part of the curriculum.

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- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:17:54](#) So, if we're serving students' literacy by serving student interests, then aren't we supplementing the curriculum with these books? And wouldn't that fit squarely within the definition that we have, right here, in the statute that has been read over and over and over in today's hearing?
- Mr. Trice: [02:18:09](#) Well, I think that's a bit circular.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:18:12](#) No, I think your interpretation... This is my time right now.
- Mr. Trice: [02:18:15](#) Okay, but you ask me a question. There are some books... There are some books in our library-
- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:18:15](#) I'm going to ask for my time.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:18:15](#) Give the gentleman time to ask something.
- Mr. Trice: [02:18:15](#) Well, he asked me a question.
- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:18:16](#) I'm going to take my time, Dr. Trice.
- Mr. Trice: [02:18:25](#) You asked me a question, can I answer?
- Rep. Schietzelt: [02:18:25](#) No, because you haven't answered the questions all day. And so, the problem here is that we've asked you questions about the application of the law—and a very fair and straightforward application of the law—and you two gentlemen have come in and tried to split hairs about how that law is supposed to apply, by trying to distinguish between books that serve student interests and books that serve the curriculum. But as you just stated, all of these books are here to serve literacy. All of these books are to encourage academic interest, and that itself is part of the curriculum. So, when we start going down this spiral, it becomes very difficult to make this distinction. These books in the libraries all supplement learning. They all supplement the curriculum, and that is the only way that we can read the law with any sort of integrity.
- [02:19:09](#) So, there's no question here, I just want to point out that this whole distinction that we're trying to make is completely false. You can't do that. You can't make that distinction between materials that are intended to serve student interests and materials that serve the curriculum, and that's probably one of the reasons that you don't make that distinction. And I don't see

why you expect the law to make that distinction too, that is silly on its face. Mr. Chair, I yield the rest of my time.

- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:19:40](#) Thank you, Representative Schietzelt. We're getting to the fourth turn. I know y'all been sitting there patiently, and I thank you for sharing with us today. Dr. Trice, I want to make sure that we heard you right. Your testimony today is that the Parents' Bill of Rights does not preclude the 155 books we found in your library, correct?
- Mr. Trice: [02:20:01](#) I'm sorry, could you rephrase that?
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:20:04](#) Your testimony today, about the Parents' Bill of Rights does not preclude the 155 books that we identified in your library, right?
- Mr. Trice: [02:20:13](#) Doesn't preclude them?
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:20:14](#) Yes.
- Mr. Trice: [02:20:16](#) So, books in our library are not... The books that you found in our library do not necessarily mean that it's part of classroom instruction, if that's what you're asking.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:20:27](#) Do you acknowledge that they are in your library?
- Mr. Trice: [02:20:30](#) Yeah. The books that were submitted by the committee are in our libraries, yes, sir.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:20:40](#) I want to pull up the provision in question one more time. Can y'all pull that up, 76.55? It talks explicitly about age-appropriate instruction for grades kindergarten through fourth grade, and it reads, "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 the school personnel or third parties. For the purpose 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." I want to ask again, you claim to this body today, that these books are not subject to that section, correct?
- Mr. Trice: [02:21:38](#) The books in our libraries are books in our libraries that don't represent textbooks that we use for instruction necessarily.

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Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:21:47](#) Okay, so, it's your interpretation of the statute that books regarding gender identity, sexuality, or sexuality are allowed in your elementary school libraries and your school district based on your interpretation of the law, correct?

Mr. Trice: [02:22:00](#) Correct, sir. We do not teach gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality in grades K through four.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:22:07](#) In your testimony, you provided this committee that these books are no different than books on ghosts, video games, and professional athletes, correct?

Mr. Trice: [02:22:16](#) I mean, they are different. I mean, I'm not sure what you're asking.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:22:23](#) These books are allowed in your school, and they're currently there to be checked out by first graders and second graders, correct?

Mr. Trice: [02:22:29](#) Not necessarily, but in some instances, some-

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:22:32](#) Not necessarily. They're either there, in the library, to be checked out or they're not. It's just-

Mr. Trice: [02:22:37](#) Well, you asked about a particular grade level. There are certain books that were represented in your list that wouldn't be appropriate for first or second graders, so, not necessarily.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:22:47](#) So, under your interpretation, by what you've said today, would a Playboy magazine be allowed?

Mr. Trice: [02:22:56](#) I'm not going to entertain that.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:22:57](#) Why not?

Mr. Trice: [02:22:59](#) Because it's a ridiculous-

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:22:59](#) You said in your testimony that it's books not part of the curriculum-

Mr. Trice: [02:23:00](#) It's a ridiculous question, and I will not entertain it.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:23:03](#) It's ridiculous that we have to do this.

Mr. Trice: [02:23:04](#) It's ridiculous, and I will not entertain it.

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- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:23:07](#) Of course you wouldn't. You didn't know anything today again. You're clueless.
- Mr. Trice: [02:23:10](#) Move on. Let's move on.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:23:11](#) Okay. Well, then explain to me a book titled *Granddad's Pride* that openly depicts two men in BDSM outfits making out is currently available in your elementary schools. So, is sexual imagery allowed or not? Dr. Trice, you're looking at the picture, you got the guys in the kink outfits.
- Mr. Trice: [02:23:35](#) I'm not sure what I'm looking at.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:23:37](#) You're not sure what you're looking at, but you're okay if your kindergartens look at it. Is this your goal? Is this what you want kindergarteners through fourth graders... I mean, is this the goal? Is this the curriculum? Is this the studies that you want Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools known for?
- Mr. Trice: [02:23:58](#) I don't understand what the challenge is. I see a pride flag. I see community. I see two couples who appear to be in a loving relationship. They're not breaking any laws. They're not hurting anyone. And that's certainly something a child may see in their community, so, I'm not sure what the challenge is there.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:24:21](#) Dr. Trice, children are being subjected to this filth, and if this is a hill you want to die on, the Democrats want to die on, indoctrinating young children, I wish you the very best. You're on the wrong side of history. This committee is going to make certain that the public sees exactly what your district is doing. The last hearing, a member of the other party wrote a letter to the Speaker—I'm sure you're aware of—complaining about when I read *Santa's Husband; These are my Eyes, This is my Nose, This is my Vulva, These are my Toes*; and the book *It isn't Rude to be Nude*. So, in the interest of saving that member from having to waste time writing another letter, what I would like to do is give to you, Superintendent, who's beyond qualified, the opportunity to read from some of your books in your elementary libraries. Are you willing to do that?
- Mr. Trice: [02:25:08](#) Absolutely not. I'm not here to read to the members of this committee, I'm here to testify and answer questions.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:25:14](#) Great. I didn't want to, but I'll read them. The first is *It Feels Good to be Yourself*, a book teaching children that you cannot

tell whether a baby is a boy or girl, that you can only guess. It goes on to say that "some people are boys, some people are girls, some people are both, neither, or somewhat in between." This is a recommended book for K through three students in your district. *My Maddy*, a book instructing children that the words Mommy and Daddy should be replaced with Maddy. It goes on to say, "Before Maddy leaves, I get a big kiss. Maddy's kisses feel like sandpaper against my face." I'm not going to throw them. They should be in the trash.

[02:26:08](#)

The third is *Call me Max*, a book about a child changing their name without the teacher notifying the child's parents. Sounds familiar. These three books are in your elementary libraries right now. You have sworn that they are legally permissible there, and you've refused to read. We went through them. If you're unwilling to read these books here today—I want to make sure that I'm correct—you won't read from them, correct?

Mr. Trice:

[02:26:38](#)

Asked and answered.

Rep. Jones, Chair:

[02:26:40](#)

Let the record reflect that the superintendent of Chapel Hill-Carrboro Schools will not read the books that are in his library in the legislative chamber, from the books he has sworn are permissible in his own elementary school libraries. It's too inappropriate to read here, certainly too inappropriate for the children. Let's just start on these books a little bit. Let's get on into them a little bit. *It Feels Good to be Yourself*—this is in your libraries, correct?

Mr. Trice:

[02:27:12](#)

Yes, sir.

Rep. Jones, Chair:

[02:27:17](#)

And the introduction page, "Some people are boys, some people are girls, some people are both, neither, are somewhere in between. The sweet, straightforward exploration of gender identity will give children a fuller understanding of themselves and others. With child-friendly language and vibrant art, *It Feels Good to be Yourself* provides young readers and parents alike with a vocabulary to discuss this important sensitive topic."

Rep. Dahle:

[02:27:38](#)

Excuse me, Mr. Chair.

Rep. Jones, Chair:

[02:27:40](#)

You're not recognized. "She's a transgender girl, that means when she was born, everyone thought she was a boy. Until she grew a little older, she got to tell everyone she's a girl. The girl

now is Ruthie. Alex and JJ are both non-binary. Just like there are many different ways to be a boy or girl, there are many different ways to be non-binary, too many to fit into a book." Most kindergarteners I know are worried about if they get apples or French fries with their Happy Meal, not worried about binary or non-binary. We've had enough books. They know they're wrong. After reading these books aloud, sections of them, do you still stand firmly that these books do not violate the Parents' Bill of Rights and are okay for elementary schoolers?

- Mr. Trice: [02:28:38](#) Those are books that are appropriate for our library, some of which are not appropriate for classroom instruction, given SB 49.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:28:46](#) But you're fine with your children checking them out of the library, correct?
- Mr. Trice: [02:28:49](#) They are library books, and students can check out library books.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:28:53](#) You understand how these books openly indoctrinate young children and strip parents of their rights to raise their own children the way they see fit?
- Mr. Trice: [02:29:00](#) That's your statement, not mine.
- Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:29:02](#) It ain't opinion, it's right. Representative Rhyne, you're recognized for a question.
- Rep. Rhyne: [02:29:15](#) Dr. Trice, I want to go back to what I was talking about with you earlier. Actually, a couple things I want to go back to. When you stated that these books that you have in your library are not part of your curriculum, they're part of the voluntary reading, can you explain to us what is the purpose of independent voluntary reading?
- Mr. Trice: [02:29:48](#) As I mentioned, to promote literacy. We know the importance of literacy in the education trajectory of our students. We know through decades of research that children who have access to literacy-rich environments often do better in schools. And so, in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools, it is a high priority of ours to make sure that our librarians are equipped with the resources that promote that love of reading throughout our school settings.

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Rep. Rhyne: [02:30:25](#) So, voluntary reading is to promote the love of reading and increase literacy, is that what I hear you saying?

Mr. Trice: [02:30:32](#) Yes.

Rep. Rhyne: [02:30:33](#) Okay. So, if that is the purpose of voluntary reading, then it's not the purpose that voluntary reading is all about affirming, is that correct?

Mr. Trice: [02:30:43](#) Not necessarily.

Rep. Rhyne: [02:30:45](#) But you didn't include that in your statement for what voluntary reading was for. It's for literacy. And based on the study that you cited, it is about increasing literacy.

Mr. Trice: [02:30:55](#) I didn't say that. Reading often puts you in a new world and a new reality, but that's certainly a part of reading.

Rep. Rhyne: [02:31:03](#) So, how far does that affirming go then?

Mr. Trice: [02:31:07](#) When you say affirming, what are you referring to?

Rep. Rhyne: [02:31:09](#) Affirming a student, how far do we take that? How far does that go?

Mr. Trice: [02:31:11](#) Well, I mean, we certainly want to affirm our students, so, we bring multiple backgrounds and identities and upbringings, and so certainly, we want our resources to reflect and affirm.

Rep. Rhyne: [02:31:26](#) Anything the child wants to be?

Mr. Trice: [02:31:30](#) Yeah.

Rep. Rhyne: [02:31:30](#) How far does affirming go?

Mr. Trice: [02:31:31](#) I mean, if I want to be a doctor, certainly, books on being a doctor would be affirming.

Rep. Rhyne: [02:31:36](#) Okay. But you've stated that affirming is [about] a child's sexuality, gender identity, that sort of thing.

Mr. Trice: [02:31:42](#) Well, certainly, some students may question their sexuality or gender identity, and they're curious, and books can help students and families work out those issues. That's certainly accurate.

Rep. Rhyne: [02:31:54](#) The other question that I wanted to go back and address really deals with this issue of policy and guidance. Because I've been in your school board's position—where the school board sets policy, and then the administration issues guidance—and you said the two are separate, but that is incorrect. Your guidance is to implement the policy that the school board sets, and that's what should be happening. And I hate that your school board person is actually not here to question today, because I think that is their responsibility. No more questions, Mr. Chairman.

Rep. Jones, Chair: [02:32:38](#) We're going to close this. The law is not unclear. The standard is not confusing. The Parents' Bill of Rights was passed to protect children and to ensure that parents remain the primary voice in their child's life. This is the law of the state, and it applies to every school equally, fully, and without exception. This committee's responsibility is not to reinterpret the law, it's to see that it's followed because this is not abstract. This is about what children are exposed to and whether parents are being informed and respected. That's the baseline—it's not optional. And let me be equally clear about the next step—compliance with state law is not voluntary, and going forward, it will not be without consequences. Due to your testimony today and what we feel is the incompetence of what's happening, just now, I introduced legislation to ensure that districts that fail to comply with the Parents' Bill of Rights face real enforceable consequences, including financial penalties they will not be able to ignore.

[02:33:40](#) And for everyone to remember why we have it today, it will be called the CHCCS Act—the Curriculum Honesty, Compliance, and Child Safety Act. Because when a district chooses not to follow the law, it should not expect to continue receiving taxpayer dollars without accountability. Public funds come with public obligation, and if those obligations are ignored, there will be consequences—real consequences. That's how accountability works. That's how trust is restored. That's how we're going to ensure that protections are put in place for children and parents, and not just words on paper, but standards that will be followed. No parents should have to fight for their rights. No child should be placed in the middle of these fights, and no district should believe it can ignore the law without consequences. I advise you, stay tuned, we're just beginning. Committee's over.