



## **Grand Jury Report “Banning Books in Solano County”**

### **Benicia Unified School District response with input from Benicia Public Library, June 18, 2024**

The Benicia Public Library, a division of the City of Benicia’s Community Services Department by contract serves as “Librarian of Record” for the Benicia Unified School District. The primary scope of work for this contract is in providing professional oversight for collection development activities, including assisting in responses to censorship challenges.

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#### **Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding 1:** Not all public school libraries publicize policies and procedures to address how a request to ban a book is implemented.

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE:** The Benicia Unified School District (BUSD) and the Benicia Public Library (BPL) which serves as Librarian of Record for BUSD have adequate policies publicizing how an item may be formally reconsidered. This finding is problematic in terms of the language used. It is incorrect to say that there is a procedure to request the banning of a book. As is common practice in public and school libraries throughout the United States, there within both organizations an option for members of the public to request “reconsideration” of an item in the library’s collections. This is not the same as a request to ban. What such a request does is allow members of the public to express concern over inclusion of an item in the library’s collection which triggers a reevaluation of the item. This evaluation is no different than the process by which an item is originally considered for inclusion and as such almost never results in an item being removed from the collection unless a mistake is uncovered showing that the item should not have been selected in the first place and even when this secondary assessment shows an item has been inaccurately included in the collection, the most frequent resolution is relocation of the item to a different area of the collection (e.g. moving a book from a middle school collection to a high school collection) rather than removal.

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#### **Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding 2:** Public school libraries run the risk of monetary fines if they do not comply with the new regulations by July 2025, incurring potential fiscal risk.

**AGREE**

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#### **Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding 3:** Not all school library staff members have been properly trained to address the general public's interest in request for banning, which may lead to further issues in implementing the new regulations.

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE:** BUSD has worked with BPL to provide professional development and training on this topic to all school library staff members. However, it was noted during this training that there are gaps in the knowledge of some mid-level administrators on this topic and professional development for this group should be implemented.

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#### **Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding 4:** Not all public school libraries have standing panels or committees with librarians who are qualified for each genre of books to respond to requests for banning, which could lead to inconsistent application of the new regulation.

**PARTIALLY DISAGREE:** While the current process and contract between BUSD and BPL guarantees that there are qualified librarians for each genre of books ready to respond to censorship requests, there is not currently a standing panel/committee established that meets the requirements of AB 1078.

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#### **Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1:** All public school libraries within the County update (or create) and publicize uniform policies and procedures on how to reject inappropriate book banning proposals.

**Has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future:** With input from BPL, BUSD will review and update any policies and procedures impacted by the new law no later than December 1, 2024. To ensure completion, this action will be incorporated into the scope of work provided by BPL when BUSD renews its annual contract.

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#### **Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Recommendation 2:** All public school libraries adopt uniform policies and procedures incorporating requirements of the new law by July 2025, thereby avoiding the possibility of future fines.

**Has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future:** With input from BPL, BUSD will review and update any policies and procedures impacted by the new law no later than December 1, 2024. To ensure completion, this action will be incorporated into the scope of work provided by BPL when BUSD renews its annual contract.

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#### **Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Recommendation 3:** Implement appropriate training for all staff members who will need to address the issue when approached by the public.

**Has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future:** BPL will provide training to both school library staff, teachers, and mid-level administrators (i.e.. Principals and Assistant Principals) on this topic no later than December 1, 2024. To ensure completion, this action will be incorporated into the scope of work provided by BPL when BUSD renews its annual contract.

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**Page 4: Findings and Recommendations**

**Recommendation 4:** All public school libraries within the County establish standing panels or committees who respond to requests for banning, consisting of members family with library literature and knowledge of requirements of the new regulation.

**Requires further analysis:** BUSD will work with BPL to establish a standing panel. However, while it is agreed that a standing panel/committee should be created as required by AB 1078, the jurisdiction of this panel/committee should be limited to responding to formal requests for removal of an item and should not include responses to casual requests for information or expressions of concern. Further analysis is required to clarify the difference between formal requests for reconsideration/banning and expressions of concern so that procedures can be updated to appropriately respond and engage the standing panel when required. This will be completed and implemented no later than December 1, 2024. To ensure completion, this analysis as well as representation on the standing panel will be incorporated into the scope of work provided by BPL when BUSD renews its annual contract.

Leslie Beatson, Ed.D.

**Printed Name**



**Signature**

Assistant Superintendent, Education Services - Benicia Unified School District

**Title**

6/18/2024

**Date**