## **Durant High School** August 24, 2023

## New law to restrict sex depictions in books

By Ryan Brown

A new Iowa law that requires all school library books to be age-appropriate without any depictions of sex acts will also apply to school curriculum, according to a rural schools advocate.

Senate File 496 was signed into law by Gov. Kim Reynolds on May 26 and stipulates punishments for school staff, including administrators, teachers and librarians who violate the law.

After a first violation, a written warning will be issued to the local school board or licensed staff member. On a subsequent violation, the superintendent or an employee of the district could face a disciplinary hearing if the law was "knowingly violated."

According to the new law, "'Age-appropriate' does not include any material with descriptions or visual depictions of a sex act as defined in section 702.17."

The law went into effect July 1, but the enforcement consequences for any library book content that is not age-appropriate will begin Jan. 1, said Ms. Margaret Buckton, Professional Advocate for the Rural School Advocates of Iowa

The law says a school's "educational programs" must meet this age-appropriate standard, and according to Ms. Buckton, the law applies to school curriculum as well.

"That's the way we're reading it; that it applies to library books and there are other uses of the word age-appropriate throughout the standards," said Ms. Buckton. "So now that they have this new definition of age-appropriate, we believe it would cross apply to the curriculum."

Ms. Buckton believes that the Iowa Department of Education will allow school districts to determine whether a book is suitable for their district.

"I think that they're going to defer to local process as much as possible," she said, and only handle challenges if they reach the state level.

Ms. Buckton added that a parent must have a student enrolled in the district in order to challenge a book and can not be just a resident of the district.

"So it's possible that a parent who

lives in another district could open enroll their student into the district and then still have the authority to make a complaint," she clarified. "It's the nexus of the complaint that the student must be enrolled in the district."

The new law requires a school board to have a policy allowing parents and residents to request access to instructional materials. The district must notify parents of procedures that allow them to review those materials. Those procedures must also state how parents can request that their students opt out of receiving those materials.

The law additionally requires that the identity of a parent or guardian who requests the removal of a book or other educational material be kept confidential.

Senate File 496 also requires that school districts must post on their websites a "comprehensive list" of all library books available to students, although this can be waived until July 1, 2025, if the district does not have an electronic catalog yet in place.

Another piece of legislation, Senate File 391, stipulates that librarians no longer have to be licensed by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners but can be previously employed by a public library.

Ms. Buckton feels that Senate File 391 could be a welcome change to districts across the state of Iowa.

"I know especially for a lot of our rural schools, there just aren't enough teacher librarians that they can find anybody.'

At the same time, however, Ms. Buckton said questions have arisen with the lessened requirement. For example, since a librarian may have no teaching experience, how will they be able to help students and teachers use the library materials?

The Chronicles sent a series of questions to Heather Doe, Communications Director for the Iowa Department of Education. These questions included whether parents could appeal a school board decision to the Department of Education and whether the department will ultimately decide if a book is age-appropriate or not.

"The Department is working to provide additional information on legislation from the 2023 session, which will include SF 496," she replied in an email.

## Familiar faces to fill irant teaching vacancies

By Kylee Hahn

Familiar faces will take over two teaching vacancies at Durant this upcoming school year.

Filling one of the high school English positions is Mr. Curtis Lilienthal, a 2018 Durant graduate who attended Loras College in Dubuque.

At Loras, Mr. Lilienthal played baseball, but during his time as a Wildcat, he participated in baseball, basketball, and football.

He substituted at Durant last year and said it was a great experience for him to get more time in the classroom without taking a full-time teaching job. He helped coach the baseball team this summer but is interested in coaching more in the future.

"I plan on focusing on my job as a teacher at first before trying to add more responsibilities," said Mr. Lilienthal.

Mr. Lilienthal said he's most excited about getting to experience Durant from the other side of the desk..

"I really enjoyed my time as a student here, and I believe I will really enjoy my time as a teacher as well," he said. "I am also excited to get started as a full-time teacher and do my best to have a positive impact on the school and community."

Last spring, Mrs. Mary Feuerbach retired after 18 years as the Family and Consumer Science teacher, but another familiar face will fill her position. Mrs. Hailey Houk taught high school science two years ago and then took on the role of fifth grade teacher

"Mrs. Feuerbach was my teacher, and I know I have big shoes to fill," Mrs. Houk said. "I have so many memories in her classroom, from her teaching me how to sew to trying new recipes. I finally feel 'home' when I am in her classroom. I hope that I can have the positive effect that all my teachers at Durant had on me."

Mrs. Houk said she was inspired to move to the elementary wing because of another retired Durant teacher

"Mrs. (Suzy) Bohnsack was always a teacher I looked up to and wanted to be like, so when the fifth grade position opened up in the elementary wing, I moved down to fifth grade," Mrs. Houk said.

Mrs. Houk taught in the Davenport

school system before moving to Durant, and she said her strength is teaching at the high school level.

After teaching fifth grade last year, Mrs. Houk said she knew she wanted to come back to the high school.

"This is it; this is my last move," she told her husband.

Since Mrs. Houk is coming back to the high school, she is reuniting with some of her old students again.

"I will miss some of the ones who just graduated, but I am so happy I will have some of the same kids I did before," said Mrs. Houk. She also looks forward to having her fifth graders again in seventh grade. Her favorite part about teaching is her relationships with students.

"There are several students that I have had in the past that reach out to me and let me know what is going on with their lives," said Mrs. Houk. "It makes me happy knowing that they think of me to want to share what new thing is happening with them."

Mrs. Houk's husband, David Houk, also teaches art in the high school wing, but



Mrs. Hailey Houk talks with Mrs. Mary Feuerbach at the end of May about taking over Mrs. Feuerbach's Family and Consumer Science curriculum.

that doesn't mean they see each other of-

"The reality is, we're too busy throughout the day to even touch base, said Mrs. Houk. "When we were right across from each other before, we rarely saw each other."

## State provides guidelines for class discussions about racism, sexism

The state of Iowa has recently provided teachers with online training guidelines on how to discuss racism and sexism in the classroom.

Iowa House File 802, passed two years ago by the Iowa Legislature, covers ten divisive concepts to avoid in the curriculum. These topics are all focused on racism and sexism.

As teachers prepared to return to the classroom, the state introduced mandatory training this summer on how to teach under HF 802 through the Area Education Agency (AEA). A slideshow familiarized Iowa teachers with the law and presented case scenarios they might face in the classroom and appropriate responses.

One concept prohibits teachers from saying that the "United States of America and the state of Iowa are fundamentally

By Garrett Pearlman and Gavin Brous- or systematically racist or sexist," according to the slideshow.

> It continues by saying that "A teacher can teach specific moments in history that demonstrate racism and sexism but cannot teach that the nation is fundamentally racist or sexist."

> However, senior Michael Ostofi disagrees, saying that racism exists in the state of Iowa.

> "Racism is such a key topic that America hits on daily, and to use Iowa as an example, the state has a bunch of small town areas which get hit either the least or the most, depending on the community/environment and how the society is," said Ostofi.

> Junior Addison Zindel also thinks that sexism is still a problem in the United States.

> "I think that there are many instances of Iowa and of the whole country being sexist," said Zindel. "The unequal pay for

example. I feel that many older people have not strayed too far away from the role women played in the past. When these people hold power in business, it can have negative effects on the women that work for them."

However, junior Joshua Peel said he doesn't believe systemic racism or sexism exists in Iowa or the United States.

"There are definitely individuals that are racist and/or sexist," he said. "But the U.S itself isn't systematically racist or sexist. There have been times in the U.S that certain races and sex have been discriminated against. I don't think it's fair to generalize a whole group of people or country to be racist or sexist."

According to the slideshow, another concept explains that educators must not teach that an individual bears responsibility for actions committed by their race or sex in the past, such as slavery. All three students had similar views on this concept.

Ostofi said he does not feel guilty for actions that happened in the past.

"I don't feel guilty [about slavery] because that's how the past was and how the 1600s -1800s were and how the environment played out, but I also think that it was very wrong," said Ostofi.

Zindel also doesn't feel responsible for discrimination that occurred in the past.

"I don't particularly feel guilty because the people that are living now had absolutely nothing to do with," said Zindel. "I don't deny that it happened, but I don't think that we should still hold the blame for it."

However, Zindel feels it's still important to study the country's history of racism.

"I think it's important for students to understand what things were like back then," said Zindel. "If new generations don't understand what happened and how bad See RACE, page 2