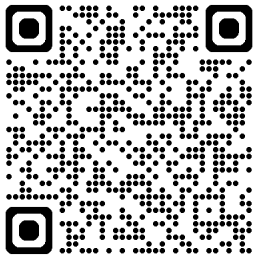
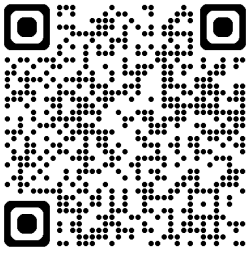
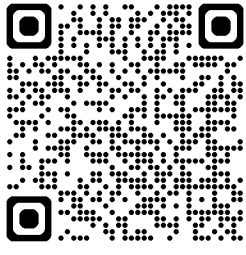


Standards for Age-Appropriate Instructional and Library Materials



This proposal establishes clear standards for age appropriate instructional & library materials, protecting minors from sexually explicit content, graphic violence, self-harm, substance abuse, and other harmful themes proven to impact development and behavior. It includes a content rating system, enforcement procedures, and parental rights protections aligned with state and federal guidelines.

Look at what is already inside New Mexico’s Biggest School Districts!

<u>Las Cruces Public Schools</u> <u>Sexually Explicit Books</u> 	<u>Albuquerque Public Schools</u> <u>Sexually Explicit Books</u> 	<u>Rio Rancho Public Schools</u> <u>Sexually Eplicit Books</u> 
If the QR Codes aren't working for you: https://www.nmfa.us/schoolbooks		

[District Name] Policy Proposal

Title: Standards for Age-Appropriate Instructional and Library Materials

To Be Added To:

Section [Insert Section] – Instruction

- [Insert applicable directive: e.g., Selection of Library-Media-Print/Non-Print Material]
- [Insert applicable directive: e.g., Parental Concerns About Instructional Print and Non-Print Material]

I. Policy Purpose

To ensure that all instructional, library, and supplemental materials provided to students in [District Name] are developmentally appropriate and aligned with academic objectives suitable to the age and grade level. This policy defines age-inappropriate content and establishes standards for content review and accountability.

Whereas, exposure to sexually explicit content during childhood and adolescence has been shown to increase the risk of trauma, anxiety, problematic sexual behavior, and distorted relational development;

Whereas, graphic portrayals of suicide or self-harm are linked to increased ideation and copycat behavior in youth, particularly those already experiencing emotional distress;

Whereas, repeated exposure to graphic violence, torture, and gore has been associated with desensitization, aggressive tendencies, and emotional detachment;

Whereas, exposure to substance-related media content is associated with increased likelihood of adolescent substance use.

Whereas, students deserve an educational environment that protects their mental development, especially within school-sponsored resources;

Now, therefore, [District Name] establishes the following standards for age-appropriate content.

Content Standards Rating System: To ensure appropriate access by grade level, all materials will be evaluated according to the following age-alignment tiers. (For more details see: Section III - Definitions of Age-Innapropriate Material)

Rating	Grades	Risk Level	Use Guidelines	Content Guidelines
G	Elementary School	Low Risk	Freely available in all classrooms and libraries.	Fully age-appropriate content. No profanity, no sexual content or innuendo, no violence, gore, drug or substance use, self-harm, or suicide references.
PG	Middle School	Moderate Risk	May be used in Middle and High School. May require parental notice.	May include mild violence, mild language, and discussion of serious topics. No graphic depictions of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • violence, • gore, • sexually explicit content, • suicide/self-harm, or • depictions of drug use by minors.
PG-13	High School	Higher Risk	May be used for High School grades only. Cannot be placed in general middle school library or classroom circulation. May require warnings and parent permission.	May include complex or mature themes with strong cautionary and/or historical framing (e.g., mental health, violence, historical trauma) with appropriate context. No explicit sexual content or acts, no glorified violence, no detailed suicide or self-harm, no glorification of drug use, and no pervasively obscene language.
R	None	Extreme Risk	Not permitted in General school libraries or classrooms. Potential Exceptions for ages 16 -18: Any material containing this content, even if intended for educational use, must be submitted for district-level review and approval. Parental notification and written consent shall be required prior to student access.	Prohibited content includes: Sexually explicit acts or descriptions Sexual fetishes or eroticized material Graphic sexual or erotic language Glorified violence, excessive gore, or torture Graphic depictions of self-harm or suicide without clear warning or prevention framing Promotion of drug use, substance abuse, or other illegal behavior

II. Policy Statement

[District Name] shall not knowingly select, distribute, or retain in circulation any material deemed age-inappropriate under the standards set forth in this directive. All materials accessible to students shall be subject to review.

III. Definitions of Age-Inappropriate Material

Instructional, library, and supplemental materials must match the developmental maturity and comprehension level of the students to whom they are made available. Content selection must reflect what is appropriate for a child's age and stage of development in terms of language, themes, and subject matter. Material that exceeds this threshold shall be deemed age-inappropriate and removed from student access.

Age-Appropriate Material is defined as content that:

- Matches the general cognitive and developmental maturity of the intended grade level
- Supports academic learning without relying on adult themes, shock value, or graphic detail
- Includes clarity and restraint when addressing real life topics, suited to the students' stage of development
- Reinforces values of safety, responsibility, respect for family authority, and age-appropriate curiosity
- Can be reasonably understood and processed without adult-level interpretation, experience, or emotional resilience.

Age-Inappropriate Material is defined as content that:

- Includes graphic depictions of sexual acts, erotic content, sexual fetishes, or sexually suggestive language
- Contains graphic or detailed portrayals of violence, abuse, mutilation, or torture
- Encourages or graphically depicts suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, or other high-risk behaviors
- Promotes or normalizes illegal activity, including drug use, underage drinking, or criminal behavior
- Introduces sexual identity concepts, gender theory, or body-related ideology in ways not appropriate to the grade level served
- Contains language, themes, or images intended for adult audiences or that require adult-level discernment to interpret
- Undermines parental authority, encourages secrecy from parents, or promotes autonomy from adult guidance in a school setting.

Any material that meets one or more of the above age-inappropriate criteria shall not be assigned, circulated, or made available to students, regardless of artistic or literary framing. Staff are responsible for ensuring all materials align with these standards before distribution or display.

A. Sexually Explicit Content

Sexually explicit content includes any material—written, visual, or audio—that depicts, describes, references, or implies sexual acts, sexual anatomy, or sexual behavior in a manner that is provocative, graphic, arousing, or offensive. Sexually explicit content causes measurable harm to minors by disrupting brain development, impairing emotional and behavioral control, damaging relational boundaries, increasing susceptibility to exploitation, and triggering early sexual behavior with long-term psychological consequences. Such content is not permitted in any classroom, library, or supplemental resource accessible to students.

This restriction applies regardless of the material's literary, artistic, or historical framing and regardless of claimed instructional intent. No content is exempt from this standard if it contains explicit or suggestive sexual material, other than approved, opt-in-enabled health curriculum at the secondary level.

The following are classified as sexually explicit content and are prohibited:

- Descriptions or depictions of sexual intercourse, oral sex, anal sex, masturbation, or genital stimulation
- Images or descriptions of nudity, partial nudity, or intimate body parts in a sexualized or provocative context
- References to or portrayals of sexual fetishes, BDSM, kink, or similar sexual behaviors
- Erotic, graphic, or prurient sexual language intended to arouse or shock
- Any portrayal or normalization of sexual conduct involving minors, or between minors and adults, in fictional or nonfictional contexts
- Any content that encourages sexual exploration, identity experimentation, or behaviors not age-appropriate for the student population served
- Any sexual content presented without clear instructional purpose in a district-approved health curriculum, and without active parental notification and opt-in availability

Materials meeting any of the above criteria shall not be circulated, assigned, or made accessible to students at any grade level. Staff are responsible for identifying and removing such content during acquisition, review, or upon parental challenge.

B. Graphic Violence & Gore

Graphic violence and gore includes any material that depicts or describes physical harm, brutality, or bodily mutilation in a way that is excessive, sensationalized, or inappropriate for student audiences. Exposure to graphic violence and gore has been shown to desensitize minors to real-world harm, increase aggression and anxiety, distort moral reasoning, and impair empathy, especially during critical stages of brain and social development. Content is considered violent or gory when it focuses on pain, suffering, or death in a graphic or detailed manner, especially when presented without a clear moral, historical, or instructional purpose appropriate to the student's age and developmental maturity level.

The following types of content are strictly prohibited in all student-accessible materials:

- Detailed descriptions or visual depictions of murder, torture, mutilation, dismemberment, or assault
- Scenes that focus on bloodshed, suffering, or extreme bodily harm
- Violence portrayed as entertaining, humorous, or without consequences
- Normalization or glorification of revenge, brutality, or sadistic behavior
- Narratives that include extreme or ritualistic violence without clear age-appropriate context
- Repetitive exposure to violent themes that may desensitize students to real-world harm

Content involving historical conflict, self-defense, or survival may be permitted when presented factually and without graphic detail. All violent content must be evaluated for age suitability and purpose. Material that glamorizes, sensationalizes, or exploits violent acts is not appropriate for any grade level.

C. Suicide & Self-Harm

Materials that include references to suicide, self-harm, or related mental health breakdowns are strictly prohibited in all classrooms, libraries, and student-accessible resources. These topics are known to trigger imitation, emotional

deterioration, and increased risk among minors, especially those facing instability or trauma. No exceptions shall be made based on literary, historical, or thematic framing.

The following content is not permitted under any circumstance:

- Any written, visual, or audio depiction of a person attempting, completing, or describing a suicide
- Any mention, explanation, or illustration of suicide methods, tools, or techniques
- Any scene or storyline that includes a character harming themselves through cutting, burning, starving, purging, or any other self-inflicted injury
- Any narrative or message that presents suicide or self-harm as understandable, justified, heroic, noble, empowering, or a way to solve a problem
- Any portrayal that links suicide to revenge, attention, legacy, romance, or emotional closure
- Any content that expresses or promotes thoughts of self-harm, worthlessness, hopelessness, or emotional collapse as normal, unavoidable, irreversible, or permanent
- Any storyline in which a character who dies by suicide is admired, honored, celebrated, or shown to have achieved peace or resolution through the act

This policy applies to all student-accessible materials, including books, digital media, handouts, teacher-selected readings, and classroom discussions. If any portion of a material violates one or more of the above standards, the entire work shall be subject to removal or restriction.

D. Substance Abuse & Criminal Conduct

Instructional and library materials must not expose students to content that promotes, glamorizes, or normalizes drug use, substance abuse, or illegal behavior. Exposure to such content during childhood and adolescence increases the risk of imitation, desensitization, and early initiation into harmful behaviors. Materials that present unlawful conduct as desirable, lucrative, identity-affirming, or without consequence are not developmentally appropriate and are prohibited from student access.

The following content shall be classified as inappropriate and subject to removal:

Drug Use & Substance Abuse

- Glorifying depictions of illegal drug use, including but not limited to cocaine, heroin, psychedelics, or synthetic substances
- Normalizing portrayals of underage drinking, vaping, marijuana, or tobacco use
- Scenes involving the misuse of prescription drugs for recreational or emotional purposes
- Characters or narratives that portray intoxication or addiction as empowering, therapeutic, or culturally accepted
- Content that presents substance use without consequences or as a normal part of adolescence or identity formation

Criminal Behavior

- Glorifying descriptions of theft, assault, vandalism, or destruction of property
- Scenes involving sexual assault, coercion, or consent violations
- Storylines that romanticize or justify gang involvement, revenge-driven violence, or vigilante justice
- Dialogue or messaging that promotes criminal activity as entertaining, rebellious, lucrative, or morally ambiguous
- Content that omits or downplays the consequences, harm to victims, or legal realities of unlawful behavior

Materials containing any of the above elements shall not be included in classroom instruction, library collections, digital platforms, or other student-accessible resources. Instructional settings must reinforce lawful behavior, personal accountability, and age-appropriate decision-making at all times.

IV. Parental Rights and Transparency

1. Parents and legal guardians possess a fundamental right to direct the upbringing and education of their children. This right is recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, 268 U.S. 510 (1925), which affirmed that "the child is not the mere creature of the state," and that those who nurture and direct a child's destiny have the right and duty to recognize and prepare them for additional obligations. In alignment with this principle and the provisions of the New Mexico School Personnel Act (NMSA 1978, § 22-10A-1 et seq.), [District Name] is committed to upholding parental rights and ensuring transparency in educational materials.

To this end, the district shall implement the following measures:

1. **Access to Educational Materials**

Parents shall have the right to inspect and review all instructional and library materials available to their child, including digital and supplemental content, in accordance with applicable laws and district policies.

2. **Catalog Transparency**

Each school shall maintain a current, publicly accessible catalog of all library materials available to students. Materials under review or subject to restrictions shall be clearly identified.

3. **Parental Notification and Opt-In Requirement**

Parents shall be notified in advance and must provide **written consent** before their child may access or be assigned any material identified as sensitive, mature, or outside the student's designated content rating tier. General permission is not sufficient; consent must be specific to the material or content category.

4. **Enforcement and Documentation**

No student shall access flagged content without documented parental approval. Schools must track and enforce opt-in permissions and restrict access accordingly.

5. **Right to Challenge Content**

Parents and/ or community members have the right to challenge the inclusion or use of any material they believe violates district policies on age-appropriateness or harmful content. A formal review process shall be available, as outlined in Section V of this policy.

These provisions are established to uphold parental rights, promote educational transparency, and protect students from exposure to materials that may not align with their age, developmental readiness, or family values.

V. Review & Enforcement Process

2. **Pre-Acquisition Review**

All newly purchased or donated materials shall be reviewed by library / school staff using the age-appropriateness rubric approved by [District Name] to ensure compliance.

3. **Audit of Existing Collections**

All existing library and classroom collections shall be reviewed by library / school staff using the age-appropriateness rubric approved by [District Name] to ensure compliance. Materials found to violate content guidelines will be subject to revaluation and potential removal, restriction, or reclassification.

4. **Parent / Guardian / Community Member Challenge**

Parents or community members may initiate a challenge using [Insert Form Name] or its equivalent. School must formally respond according to [Insert District Policy Number]: initial meeting and decision within 15 school

days; if the school decides to retain the material, parents / community members may submit a written request for district-level review within 10 business days of school's decision; district-level review within 20 additional business days.

5. District Review Committee

A 7-person committee (3 educators, 4 parents/community members) will evaluate material in light of the definitions above and submit a final written determination. The members of the review committee will be chosen randomly from all educators and parents at the same level where the material would be used (elementary, middle, high school).

6. Remediation Options

Materials found to be age-inappropriate may result in:

- Removal from circulation
- Restricted access by grade level
- Labeling or parental opt-in requirement
- Transfer to faculty-only access for instructional review purposes

7. Appeals Process

Any person may appeal a committee decision in writing to the Superintendent within 10 business days. The Superintendent will then make a final determination in writing within 5 business days.

VI. Rationale

This policy protects students from premature exposure to harmful or developmentally inappropriate content, while still supporting academic freedom and diversity of perspectives. It establishes transparency, accountability, and clarity for educators, families, and school staff. It further ensures that [District Name] adheres to:

- The U.S. Supreme Court's definition of content harmful to minors
- Federal and state child protection guidelines
- Community expectations regarding student safety and wellbeing

Prepared By: [Your Name or Committee Name]

Date Submitted: [Insert Date]

Contact info: [Phone & email contacts here]

Citations for Reference

Sexually Explicit Content

- American College of Pediatricians – The Impact of Pornography on Children
<https://acpeds.org/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children>
- PubMed – Exposure to Sexual Content and Problematic Sexual Behaviors in Children and Adolescents
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37343427/>
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center – Impact of Exposure to Sexually Explicit and Exploitative Materials
https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_impact-of-exposure-to-sexually-explicit-and-exploitative-materials.pdf

Violent Content

- Journal of Adolescent Health – Violent Media in Childhood and Seriously Violent Behavior in Adolescence and Young Adulthood
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10177625/>
- National Institutes of Health – Screen Violence: A Real Threat to Mental Health in Children and Adolescents
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10025407/>
- American Psychological Association – Violence in the Media: Psychologists Study Potential Harmful Effects
<https://www.apa.org/topics/video-games/violence-harmful-effects>

Drug and Alcohol Content

- National Institutes of Health – The Impact of Substance Use Disorders on Families and Children
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3725219/>
- BMC Public Health – Risk and Protective Factors of Drug Abuse Among Adolescents
<https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-021-11906-2>
- JAMA Pediatrics – Substance Abuse in Children: Prediction, Protection, and Prevention
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/189961>

Gore and Graphic Violence

- ERIC – Early Childhood Exposure to Media Violence
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1186998.pdf>
- National Institute of Justice – Children Exposed to Violence
<https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/children-exposed-violence>

Suicide-Related Content

- National Institutes of Health – Association Between Exposure to Suicide and Suicidality Outcomes in Youth
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3707992/>

- JAMA Network – Social Media and Suicide Risk in Youth
<https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2825340>
- Journal of Pediatric Psychology – Self-Harm and Suicidal Behaviors in Children
<https://academic.oup.com/jpepsy/article/49/8/571/7693167>

Legal Citations & Summaries

FEDERAL

- 18 U.S.C. § 1470 – Prohibits the transfer of obscene material to minors; 10-year felony. Transfer of Obscene Material to Minors <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/1470>
- 18 U.S.C. § 2252 – Prohibits distribution of sexually explicit material involving minors. Child Exploitation Material <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/18/2252>
- Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) – Requires public schools to block or filter internet access to obscene and harmful content for minors. <https://www.fcc.gov/consumers/guides/childrens-internet-protection-act>
- Pierce v. Society of Sisters, 268 U.S. 510 (1925) – Parents have a constitutional right to direct the upbringing and education of their children. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/268/510/>
- Ginsberg v. New York, 390 U.S. 629 (1968) – States can restrict access to material deemed harmful to minors. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/390/629/>
- Miller v. California, 413 U.S. 15 (1973) – Defines obscenity based on community standards, offensiveness, and lack of serious value. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/413/15/>
- Pico v. Board of Education, 457 U.S. 853 (1982) - Books that are “pervasively vulgar” or inappropriate for a specific “age group” may be removed from schools. <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/457/853/>

NEW MEXICO

- NMSA § 30-37-2 – Harmful Material to Minors
<https://law.justia.com/codes/new-mexico/2021/chapter-30/article-37/section-30-37-2/> – Criminalizes dissemination of harmful material to minors; includes sexually explicit or prurient content lacking serious value.
- NMSA § 30-6-1 – Child Abuse (Mental or Physical Endangerment)
<https://law.justia.com/codes/new-mexico/2021/chapter-30/article-6/section-30-6-1/> – Prohibits knowingly placing a child in a situation that may endanger life or health, including psychological harm.
- NMSA § 22-10A-1 – New Mexico Parents’ Bill of Rights
<https://law.justia.com/codes/new-mexico/2021/chapter-22/article-10a/section-22-10a-1/> New Mexico’s Parents’ Bill of Rights; affirms parental access to instructional content and decision-making authority in education.