

STATE OF NEW YORK

7766

2023-2024 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

November 22, 2023

Introduced by Sens. MURRAY, BORRELLO, PALUMBO, RHOADS -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Rules

AN ACT to amend the education law and the public officers law, in relation to establishing the "public school instructional materials review and transparency act"

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. This act shall be known and may be cited as the "public
2 school instructional materials review and transparency act".

3 § 2. The education law is amended by adding a new article 15-D to read
4 as follows:

ARTICLE 15-D

PUBLIC SCHOOL INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS REVIEW AND TRANSPARENCY ACT

Section 731. Definitions.

8 732. Informal complaint.

9 733. Formal complaint.

10 734. Accessible public database.

11 § 731. Definitions. As used in this article, the following terms shall
12 have the following meanings:

13 1. "Instructional material" means textbooks, workbooks, library
14 volumes, audio-visual recordings, and any other instructional, curric-
15 ulum, literary, resource, or support material.

16 2. "Challenged material" means any instructional material for which an
17 informal or formal complaint by a parent or guardian of a student who
18 attends a school district has been made.

19 3. "Informal complaint" means a process whereby a parent or guardian
20 of a student who attends a school district requests of a teacher, school
21 principal, or other school official, whether in writing or verbally,
22 that an instructional material in use within the school district be
23 reviewed by the teacher, school principal, or other school official for

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

LBD13342-07-3

1 appropriateness in the school setting and subsequently be discontinued
2 or restricted in use by age or grade level, or be made subject to use by
3 parental permission.

4 4. "Formal complaint" means a written complaint by a parent or guardi-
5 an of a student who attends a school district, to a school superinten-
6 dent requesting that the school district review a challenged material in
7 use within such school district for appropriateness in the school
8 setting and subsequently discontinued or restricted in use by age or
9 grade level, or be made subject to use by parental permission.

10 5. "Review committee" means a temporary or standing review committee
11 for each school district, whose members shall be appointed by the super-
12 intendent or school board of each such school district for the purpose
13 of reviewing formal complaints. Members of such committee shall include
14 but not be limited to stakeholders of such school district, as deemed
15 appropriate by the school board or superintendent. A list of such
16 members shall be posted on the website of such school district and be
17 made available to the public upon request.

18 § 732. Informal complaint. Initial complaints regarding challenged
19 material may be brought as an informal complaint by parents or guardians
20 of students attending a school district to a teacher, department chair,
21 principal of a school, assistant superintendent of a school district, or
22 other school administrative personnel. Such informal complaint about a
23 challenged material may be resolved by mutual agreement of the complain-
24 ant and the school personnel to whom such complainant brought the
25 matter. If such resolution is not reached to the complainant's satisfac-
26 tion, the complainant may file a formal complaint.

27 § 733. Formal complaint. 1. When a parent or guardian of a student
28 attending a school district submits a formal complaint to a superinten-
29 dent of such school district, the superintendent shall refer such formal
30 complaint to a review committee within five business days. Such review
31 committee shall make a formal recommendation to keep, remove, or
32 restrict access to the instructional material that is the subject of
33 such formal complaint to the school board of that school district within
34 thirty business days. Such school board will vote to approve or deny
35 such recommendation at the next regularly scheduled meeting of such
36 board and will allow for public comment regarding such recommendation at
37 such meeting.

38 2. Formal complaints shall:
39 (a) be in writing or electronic mail form;
40 (b) specify the complaint as being a formal complaint about instruc-
41 tional material;
42 (c) provide a source citation for the challenged material;
43 (d) request that the challenged material be reviewed for appropriate-
44 ness; and
45 (e) specify why the complainant believes the content of such chal-
46 lenged material to be inappropriate or violative of school policy.

47 3. Each school district shall establish a policy that lays out a proc-
48 ess by which formal complaints shall be made, including the form in
49 which such complaints shall be submitted.

50 4. (a) Upon receipt of a formal complaint pursuant to this section,
51 the superintendent of a school district shall:

52 (i) refer the formal complaint to a review committee for the purpose
53 of reviewing the formal complaint and making recommendation to the board
54 of education for that school district;

55 (ii) provide, during the initial fifteen business days of the review
56 committee's receipt of the formal complaint, the review committee with

1 records of any correspondence regarding the challenged material that the
2 school district has received from any residents of such school district
3 during such fifteen business day period or within the prior calendar
4 year;

5 (iii) notify the public by posting information on its website that the
6 review committee will commence review of a challenged material and that
7 the public may submit public comments within fifteen business days for
8 such review committee to accept and examine. Such notification shall:
9 include the source citation for the challenged material; inform the
10 district residents that the review committee will accept written
11 comments for review for the initial fifteen business days of the review
12 process pursuant to subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph; and specify
13 that the review committee will make a recommendation to the school board
14 to keep, remove, or restrict access to the instructional material that
15 is the subject of such formal complaint no later than thirty business
16 days after the commencement of the review process, provided, however,
17 that if such review process is completed less than seventy-two hours
18 before the next regularly scheduled meeting of the board of education
19 for that school district, such recommendation shall be taken up at the
20 next succeeding regularly scheduled meeting of such board;

21 (iv) notify the complainant that the review committee will be making a
22 recommendation to keep, remove, or restrict access to the challenged
23 material that is the subject of a formal complaint to the board of
24 education of that school district at an open meeting of such board, and
25 that such complainant shall have the opportunity to give public comment
26 at such meeting, at least seventy-two hours in advance of such meeting;

27 (v) notify the public that the review committee will be making a
28 recommendation to keep, remove, or restrict access to the challenged
29 material that is the subject of a formal complaint to the board of
30 education of that school district at an open meeting of such board, and
31 that the public shall have the opportunity to give public comment at
32 such meeting, at least seventy-two hours in advance of such meeting.
33 Such notice shall include the source citation information of such chal-
34 lenged material; and

35 (vi) make available the source citation of such instructional material
36 and the formal complaint, with identifying information of the complain-
37 ant redacted, by posting on a regularly and routinely updated website
38 maintained by such board to the extent practicable at least seventy-two
39 hours prior to the meeting of the board of education for that school
40 district during which such complaint shall be the subject of discussion.

41 (b) (i) Upon receipt of a formal complaint, a review committee shall:

42 (A) perform a thorough review of the formal complaint and challenged
43 material in a timely manner, provided, however, that such review shall
44 be completed no later than thirty business days after the receipt of
45 such formal complaint, unless an extension is requested pursuant to
46 subparagraph (ii) of this paragraph; and

47 (B) accept and review, during the first fifteen business days of the
48 review process, any correspondence regarding the challenged material
49 that the school district has received from any residents of such school
50 district during such fifteen business day period or within the prior
51 calendar year.

52 (ii) An extension of ten additional business days to the thirty busi-
53 ness day review period may be requested by the review committee in the
54 event that there is an abundance of comments regarding the challenged
55 material received within the first fifteen business days of the review
56 process.

1 (c) Upon completion of a review process, a review committee shall:

2 (i) notify the school superintendent and board of education of that
3 school district that the review committee has made a decision and will
4 be making a recommendation to keep, remove, or restrict access to the
5 challenged material that is the subject of a formal complaint to such
6 board at the next regularly scheduled meeting of such board, provided,
7 however, that if such review process is completed less than seventy-two
8 hours before the next regularly scheduled meeting of the board of educa-
9 tion for that school district, such recommendation shall be taken up at
10 the next succeeding regularly scheduled meeting of such board;

11 (ii) make a recommendation to such board to keep, remove, or restrict
12 access, by age or grade level, or by requiring parental permission, to
13 the challenged material that is the subject of a formal complaint at the
14 next regularly scheduled meeting of such board.

15 (d) Upon receipt of a recommendation from a review committee to keep,
16 remove, or restrict access to the challenged material that is the
17 subject of a formal complaint, a board of education for a school
18 district shall vote to keep, remove, or restrict access to such chal-
19 lenged material at a regularly scheduled meeting of such board, and
20 allow time for public comment by school district residents or parents or
21 guardians of students attending that school district regarding such
22 challenged material at such meeting immediately prior to such vote. Each
23 member of the public authorized to make public comments shall be allowed
24 up to three minutes to speak at the meeting of the board prior to such
25 vote.

26 § 734. Accessible public database. Each school district shall maintain
27 an accessible public database pursuant to subdivision nine of section
28 seven hundred one of this title. Such public database shall be main-
29 tained regularly and updated upon the acquisition of any new instruc-
30 tional materials and discontinuation of use of any instructional materi-
31 al by the school district. Such public database also shall be searchable
32 by source citation data.

33 § 3. Section 1501-b of the education law is amended by adding a new
34 subdivision 5 to read as follows:

35 5. The board of education of any school district is authorized and
36 empowered to approve or deny a recommendation by a review committee, as
37 defined by subdivision five of section seven hundred thirty-one of this
38 chapter, to keep, remove or restrict access to a challenged material, as
39 defined by subdivision two of section seven hundred thirty-one of this
40 chapter. When such recommendation is scheduled to be the subject of
41 discussion and subsequent action by a board of education during an open
42 meeting, such board shall make available the source citation of such
43 challenged materials by posting such information on a regularly and
44 routinely updated website maintained by such board to the extent practi-
45 cable at least seventy-two hours prior to such meeting.

46 § 4. Section 701 of the education law is amended by adding a new
47 subdivision 9 to read as follows:

48 9. In the several cities and school districts of the state, board of
49 education, trustees or such body or officer as perform the functions of
50 such boards, shall maintain an online database listing the source cita-
51 tions of all instructional materials, designated pursuant to subdivision
52 one of this section, that are in use in such school district for teach-
53 ing and support of learning by students in the schools under their
54 charge. Such database shall be made accessible to parents and guardians
55 of students attending such school district. Such public database shall
56 be maintained regularly and updated upon the acquisition of any new

1 instructional materials and discontinuation of use of any instructional
2 material by the school district. Such public database also shall be
3 searchable by source citation data.

4 § 5. Subdivision (e) of section 103 of the public officers law, as
5 amended by chapter 481 of the laws of 2021, is amended to read as
6 follows:

7 (e) 1. Agency records available to the public pursuant to article six
8 of this chapter, as well as any proposed resolution, law, rule, regu-
9 lation, policy or any amendment thereto, that is scheduled to be the
10 subject of discussion by a public body during an open meeting shall be
11 made available, upon request therefor, to the extent practicable at
12 least twenty-four hours prior to the meeting during which the records
13 will be discussed. Copies of such records may be made available for a
14 reasonable fee, determined in the same manner as provided therefor in
15 article six of this chapter. If the agency in which a public body func-
16 tions maintains a regularly and routinely updated website and utilizes a
17 high speed internet connection, such records shall be posted on the
18 website to the extent practicable at least twenty-four hours prior to
19 the meeting. An agency may, but shall not be required to, expend addi-
20 tional moneys to implement the provisions of this subdivision.

21 2. If a vote to approve or deny a recommendation by a review commit-
22 tee, as defined in subdivision five of section seven hundred thirty-one
23 of the education law, to keep, remove, or restrict access to an instruc-
24 tional material, as defined by subdivision one of section seven hundred
25 thirty-one of the education law, that is the subject of a formal
26 complaint, as defined by subdivision four of section seven hundred thir-
27 ty-one of the education law, is scheduled to be the subject of
28 discussion by a board of education during an open meeting, the source
29 citation of such instructional material and the formal complaint, with
30 identifying information of the complainant redacted, shall be made
31 available by posting on a regularly and routinely updated website main-
32 tained by such board to the extent practicable at least seventy-two
33 hours prior to the meeting during which such vote shall take place.

34 § 6. Section 751 of the education law is amended by adding a new
35 subdivision 5 to read as follows:

36 5. The commissioner, in addition to the annual apportionment of public
37 monies pursuant to other articles of this chapter, shall apportion each
38 school district an amount equal to the cost of the creation and/or main-
39 tenance of an online instructional materials database required pursuant
40 to subdivision nine of section seven hundred one of this chapter.

41 § 7. This act shall take effect immediately.