

ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF CENSORSHIP AND
POLICY-MAKING PRACTICES IN ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Little scholarship exists on administrators' perceptions of censorship in specific districts and schools. I studied secondary administrators' perceptions of censorship in one, Midwestern suburban school district and how their perceptions and experiences affect their policy-making practices. Grounded in an anti-censorship stance, I conducted a critical qualitative case study with an action research orientation. My data sets include district documents, school board meeting observations, curriculum meeting observations, and interviews with nine secondary site and district-level administrators. I initially sought to make a change in administrators' censorship practices in this district but shifted to analyzing their complexity based on the study data. I used concepts from historian and philosopher Michel Foucault to analyze how and why censorship occurs in this school district based on the data I collected.

This study provided insights into how censorship decisions work on the ground in one school district, revealing how power relations (Foucault, 1977) in one community influence how administrators manage their roles and decisions. In this school district, community members expect to be involved in school decisions leading administrators to inform and manage parents' concerns as part of their role. In censorship, administrators' awareness of parental surveillance of their actions leads to navigating mainly a subset of parents who are vocal in their concerns about curriculum and policies. Some negotiations involve curricular decisions that censor the information students can access. Administrators also manage teachers as part of their role to lesser degrees and in different ways than community members. Although I discuss three significant stakeholders which administrators described as part of the community discourse, parents, teachers, and students, I noted that students are not invited to participate in curricular decisions to the extent that parents are.

Secondly, on a holistic scale, the study renders discussions about censorship in schools more complex by illuminating how, through a Foucauldian lens, administrators are only one force involved in censorship decisions. Community expectations and perceived threats can dictate administrative decisions. Also, surveillance mechanisms in schools, such as the censorship of online and print materials, deny students access to information that can enhance critical thinking. Rather than focusing on one role, administrators, a holistic perspective of power relations reveals that all members of the community, both the vocal minority and the silent majority, are part of the censorship decisions in the district.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Public Schools offer both spaces of censorship and resistance. Many people in the history of the United States of America have been concerned about censorship practices in culture and in schools. People can censor just about anything on a wide or small scale, including materials and acts that have been the targets of censorship in school: speech, print, visual, and digital media; access to these media; and access to events. The topic of which materials should be available in school varies over time and community-to-community. A community's history, culture, politics, religious affiliations, and socio-economic status influences censorship issues in all their complexity. Part of the complexity of censorship practices in public schools revolves around the commitments and preferences of people represented in their school communities. Censorship groups such as Moms for Liberty actively seek to censor books in public school libraries. Other groups, such as the American Library Association and The National Coalition Against Censorship, advocate for open access to information. This chapter provides the context for the study I have undertaken on the complexity of censorship with administrators in one school district situated in larger patterns of advocacy for and resistance against censorship.

Censorship in Context

Censorship is a practice that involves those in power restricting access to information, resources, and voice. According to the American Library Association (ALA), which advocates for free access and circulation of information,

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary citizen, by exercising critical judgment, will accept the good and reject the bad. The censors, public and private, assume that they should determine what is good and what is bad for their fellow citizens. (American Library Association, 2004, para. 2)

The suppression to which the ALA refers consists of denying people's access to information either by removing or blocking content from within a resource or denying access to resources, i.e., censorship. I align myself with the ALA's definition of censorship throughout my study. I align myself with others who work against censorship practices, and I view censorship as a problem researchers, practitioners, and citizens need to continue to analyze to understand better. The context in which censorship occurs shapes the forms it takes and schools thus navigate censorship issues in varied ways. Throughout my study, I worked to understand how and why administrators in one school district experience and navigate censorship in their roles.

Overview of Censorship

Censorship is not a new concept or practice. Selectively restricting the communication of ideas, books, and other forms of literature has occurred for thousands of years in varied contexts. One recent contextual force that has intensified censorship initiatives in the U.S. is the COVID-19 pandemic. With the increase in virtual teaching due to pandemic between Spring 2020 and 2022, as schools across the country went on line, parents have gained more access to the school curriculum and a "unique window into modern educational pedagogy" (Copland, 2021, p. 40),

causing some parents to question the content schools have been teaching their children.

However, such questioning has occurred for decades, and the patterns ebb and flow, in response to various social issues that can become controversial.

I will first discuss how censorship manifests in modern society, especially in public schools. Public schools are important spaces to provide students in a democracy exposure to many social issues, sources of information, and ways of thinking about the world. They are also places to teach children how to be critical thinkers, expand their knowledge base, and become productive members of society. Since most children in the U.S. attend school outside of the home and every child comes with a unique family with their own beliefs and experiences, public schools have a daunting task of both teaching children and ensuring all children and their parents are included in the school discourse and activities. Schools value participation from parents and want to ensure all community members feel accepted and heard. I will explore the patterns of restricted materials and the reasoning for restricting these materials. Then, I will detail some significant points of historical censorship integral to the longevity of the practice and resistance of censorship and the reasons people have sought to restrict information.

Although not a new topic of concern in the U.S., book censorship has seen a resurgence in 2021- 2022 (Aftergut, 2021; Goldberg, 2021; Heuvel, 2022; Scardilli, 2022) as debates have escalated in public discourse about which books schools should allow. Current public discourse highlights the types of information deemed inappropriate or harmful and the deep investments of groups and individuals fighting for and against book banning. Many lawmakers in Florida, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia, and Utah are attempting to pass bills that specifically target removing books that might make students feel uncomfortable about their sex

or race (Aftergut, 2021; Heuvel, 2022). Parents also contribute to the uptick in book censorship by being the main community members that question school book titles (Heuvel, 2022).

Although lawmakers and some parents are advocating for removing books from library shelves and classrooms, many groups and individuals are taking a stand against book censorship (Aftergut, 2021; Goldberg, 2021, Heuvel, 2022; Scardilli, 2022). This kind of advocacy against censorship has a long history as well. Groups of school librarians such as the American Library Association and the #Freedom Texas librarian group are actively petitioning to keep books on the shelf that censorship groups oppose (Aftergut, 2021). Groups such as the National Coalition Against Censorship and Pen America also are campaigning to keep books on school shelves. Even students and authors have joined in voicing their opinions opposing the current climate of book banning (Aftergut, 2021; Heuvel, 2022; Scardilli, 2022). Students in Pennsylvania recently petitioned about books the school board removed from the library and won (Aftergut, 2021). Award-winning authors whose books have been banned or targeted are speaking up about why their books and other books that cover sensitive topics are needed and helpful to students learning (Heuvel, 2022).

As Adams (2021) expressed:

From Texas to Virginia to Pennsylvania, there is a growing movement to challenge books in schools that some suggest are inappropriate to students. Concern goes beyond explicit content; it now includes opposition to LBGTQIA material, the history of racism, and material that may cause discomfort to readers. (Adams, 2021, p.1)

In 2022, recent developments in censorship policy and practice have included the phenomenon of “discomfort to readers” as a legitimate reason for banning any materials. Yet feeling

uncomfortable for any number of reasons is likely a very common experience in schools and one which could inevitably range across individuals, families, groups, and regions.

Tennessee school board banned Art Spiegelman's award-winning Holocaust Graphic Novel *Maus* (Heuvel, 2022; Jeong, 2022) due to the book's depictions of "profanity and nudity" (Jeong, 2022, para.1). The profanity was related to the harsh reality of the hatred that fueled the Holocaust and the nudity reflected prisoners being dehumanized by having to strip and remain naked in the concentration camps. The content reflected the dehumanization and vulnerability of forced nudity of entire groups of human beings. Students should be uncomfortable as they learn about the reality of mass violence in human history. In the wake of such censorship, Spiegelman advocated for schools to keep his book and other books that cover uncomfortable history available. He argues about his book: "This is disturbing imagery. But you know what? It's disturbing history" (Heuvel, 2022, par.4). It is a profoundly uncomfortable subject to learn about, and that is the point. Banning this book restricts as a problem, rather than a necessary lesson, the inevitable discomfort education of historical realities of inhumanity and mass violence might cause.

Censorship issues have expanded in other ways as well. Censors are moving from restricting students from accessing books, or removing books entirely, to charging schools with criminal intent if they make particular texts available ("Texas' Battle Over School Books," 2021). As one example of this type of censorship effort, lawmakers in 2021 continuously attempted to remove books from school libraries and began investigating schools for conceivable criminal activity linked to possibly giving students access to books that have "sexually explicit content" ("Texas' Battle Over School Books," 2021, p.2). Similarly, in 2021, an Oklahoma legislator proposed a law that would not only financially profit parents requesting book removals

but also result in firing school librarians that do not adhere to parental requests to remove books within 30 days of receiving the request (Aftergut, 2021). The sexual content mentioned in this criminal proceeding in Texas and the potential firing of Oklahoma librarians primarily focused on books that include LBGTQ+ relationships and sexuality.

Materials and school clubs that focus on LGBTQIA issues and people are an ongoing site of censorship. Some parents are focusing censorship efforts on the LBGTQ+ communities, such as protecting school clubs focused on LGBTQIA issues (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Lassiter and Sifford, 2015; “Ontario Catholic School Board,” 2011; Shah, 2011). School clubs such as Gay Student Alliances and Allies clubs exist in many secondary schools. They are “student-run organizations that unite LBGTQ+ and allied youth to build community and organize around issues impacting them in their schools and communities” (GSA Network, 2021, para.1). Although many schools have tried to ban or have banned GSAs (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.; Lassiter and Sifford, 2015; “Ontario Catholic School Board,” 2011; Shah, 2011), in 2011, “The U.S. Department of Education [warned] school districts across the country against taking steps to ban students from forming gay-straight alliances and similar support groups in their schools” (Shah, 2011. p.16). This type of ban includes religious group meetings because the debate over GSA clubs in schools is often deeply based on religious ideology. Banning GSAs goes against the Equal Access Act (Shah, 2011). Schools can ban GSAs, but they would also have to ban any school club not directly tied to the school curriculum (American Civil Liberties Union, n.d.). Parents and other community members focus on curriculum and GSA clubs to censor materials and restrict access to various information for students.

Amid recent U.S. events over the last decade from 2013-to 2022, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, an increasingly divisive political climate, and many economic and health

stressors tied to the COVID-19 pandemic, censors have been targeting books about race in educational institutions as a central theme. There is no better example of censorship practices in 2021-2022 that have stemmed from racial tensions than recent efforts to silence any discussion and teachings related to Critical Race Theory (CRT). This body of theory has become weaponized as a political instrument (Camera, 2021; Conwright, 2021; Copland, 2021; Leblanc & Wolf, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021; “Texas’ Battle Over School Books,” 2021), and a topic of recent intense debate and protest (Camera, 2021; Conwright, 2021; Copland, 2021; Leblanc & Wolf, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021; “Texas’ Battle Over School Books,” 2021). Like other sites of censorship, the theory of CRT and its accompanying practices and examples are weaponized because they have “offended the opinions or the sensibilities of one or another religious, political, ethnic, or self-styled ‘moral’ group” (American Society of Journalism and Authors, I.N.Y.N., 1987, p.3). The most prevalent topic concerning censorship is focused on ensuring educators are not teaching CRT to secondary students.

Critical Race Theory is “a framework developed some 40 years ago to analyze the ways racism is endemic to our laws and policies” (Conwright, 2021, p.7). Educators often discuss this theory in college rather than in public schools (Conwright, 2021). Yet, people opposing CRT in schools describe it as “the theory that racism is not merely the product of prejudice, but that racism is embedded in American society and its legal systems to uphold the supremacy of white persons” (Camera, 2021, C19). They object to books and curricula focusing on race as a driving factor in history. Those objecting to CRT see it as a dominant force in the classroom and library curriculum. They argue that CRT is shaming white students (Camera, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021; “Texas’ Battle Over School Books,” 2021) and indoctrinating students (Sawchuk, 2021; “Texas’ Battle Over School Books,” 2021). However, many opposed to CRT cannot articulate its actual

tenets and meanings. This topic, too, has raised concerns about “making students uncomfortable.” The driving concern that some community members and policy makers have interpreted from CRT is that focusing on race is somehow a problematic topic and they oppose the idea that someone might feel uncomfortable in discussing racial issues (Forman, 2022; Goldberg, 2021). Opponents of banning books argue that students require an unfiltered depiction of various interpretations of history that may counter dominant depictions.

The current dynamics in the nation also reflect an ongoing pattern of legal attempts at banning books and bills being passed. In 2021, bills banning the teaching of CRT to students were passed in several states (Camera, 2021; Conwright, 2021; Copland, 2021; Leblanc & Wolf, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021). Yet, even as debates rage, political parties have not clearly defined what CRT entails, creating a discombobulated theory open to diverse interpretations (Sawchuk, 2021). Political parties contest if CRT should be part of the school curriculum and initiate legal challenges and propose bills to block the topic:

Dozens of Republican-backed bills banning the teaching of divisive topics on race and inequity are piling up in Congress and in statehouses across the country, even as a new survey of high school students shows that many never learn about such issues in classrooms anyway. (Camera, 2021, p.C18)

Debates about textbook content and CRT in public schools have added to the political tensions in the classroom and at school board meetings. New punitive policies target educators directly. If someone accuses an educator of discussing CRT in schools, that educator could lose their job (Leblanc & Wolf, 2021; “Texas’ Battle Over School Books,” 2021). A Dallas principal resigned because people accused him of allowing CRT teaching in his school (“Texas’ Battle Over School Books,” 2021). In addition to these punitive measures, the debates have been associated with

violence. School board members and superintendents have received violent threats from community members and have resigned in protest and fear for their safety (Leblanc & Wolf, 2021). These situations illustrate the heightened emotions surrounding CRT and curriculum censorship and how these emotions evolve from verbal threats to physical.

The particular censorship issues, concerns, and controversies I discuss above may be new, but the practice of censorship has occurred for centuries. Censorship topics have pertained to protecting the youth's minds from topics perceived as distasteful, dangerous, morally wrong, or inflammatory or to protecting ruling party's political agendas. Evidence of censorship under the guise of protecting young minds and dates back to Ancient Greece. In 387 B.C. Plato tried to restrict the reading of *The Odyssey* to only adult readers. Plato felt the epic poem was too mature for young readers and may corrupt their forming minds (American Society of Journalism and Authors, I.N.Y.N., 1987). Similarly, in 250 B.C. Emperor Shih Hwang-Ti attempted to destroy all of Confucius's writings because the author represented the feudal history of China (American Society of Journalism and Authors, I.N.Y.N., 1987) that conflicted with the new China he wanted to portray. The emperor wanted to shield youth from the violent and uncomfortable history. Besides focusing on materials deemed inappropriate for the youth, throughout history, people have questioned and destroyed religious texts that contradict the community's major religion at that given time based on concerns that it could corrupt all community members. Religious texts from the *Talmud* to Martin Luther's translation of *The Bible* were banned due to claims they were immoral (American Society of Journalism and Authors, I.N.Y.N., 1987).

Censorship is an important political, cultural, and ethical issue for scholars because censorship practices connect directly to issues of power in governments and organizations. Who controls the information matters in the type of messaging and information available to the people

within that country or institution. An extreme and important example occurred within the Nazi regime before and during World War II. In the twentieth century, the Nazi regime did not want people of any age to access religious materials related to Judaism. However, the Nazi political group took it further than previous censorship attempts and used censorship to increase their political censorship and agenda for Germany and beyond. Censoring information was tied to control of citizens' thoughts and actions. The Nazi regime destroyed and burned approximately 25,000 books written by Jewish authors (American Society of Journalism, I.N.Y.N., 1987, p.2). It also sought to censor Jewish voices in the public arena by banning and burning books to control access, to restrict public discourse, and to shape which voices could represent the culture they were attempting to create. Book censorship allowed the Nazis to deny Jewish authors and people a voice, making it easier to target, control, and erase the Jewish community. The Nazis were closer to extinguishing Jewish culture and people if the books did not exist.

Censorship efforts historically have targeted higher education, government employees, and media outlets. One significant example of political censorship occurred during the late 1940s and 1950s via Republican senator Joseph McCarthy's investigations into possible Communist participation in the US (Farrah, 1989). In a period known as the "red scare," McCarthy and others escalated concerns and spread propaganda about widespread communism in the U.S. McCarthy and others during this period attempted to control and censor intellectuals from the political left, prominent government members, and Hollywood. Farrah (1989) argued that "because of its wealth and influence, [Hollywood] was one of the prime targets for subversion" (p.43). This era of political censorship sparked a powerful wave of resistance. As one example, the era of McCarthyism compelled the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) "to take a more active stance against censorship" by publishing "*Censorship Controversy* condemning

McCarthy's tactics and championing freedom of thought" (NCTE Intellectual Freedom Center, 2022, para.2). The NCTE's stance was a historical event showcasing how groups can resist censorship attempts that threaten the freedom of information connected to the freedom of thought in a society. Other groups have aimed to censor materials that are offensive to their morals and values. Censorship trends have varied across cultures, periods, and materials. Still, they tend to reflect groups that aim to censor pursuing materials that have "offended the opinions or the sensibilities of one or another religious, political, ethnic, or self-styled 'moral' group" (American Society of Journalism and Authors, I.N.Y.N., 1987, p.3).

In the US, the recurring topic of censorship is important in part because it is embedded in the constitution through the existence of the First Amendment. The First Amendment in the U.S. Constitution provides protections related to free speech. The First Amendment "guarantees freedoms concerning religion, expression, assembly, and the right to petition" (Cornell Law School, n.d.). The freedoms inherent within the First Amendment should extend to all citizens. Under the First Amendment is the assumption that citizens have the right to access information, however controversial. However, in the context of public schools, federal guidelines require schools to restrict access to materials considered obscene or inappropriate since students are minors. Yet, in banning books and implementing internet filters, many school districts may be infringing on students' right to access information. For example, implementing internet filters on school devices can violate students' First Amendment Rights (Cahn, 2015; Caldwell-Stone, 2013).

The idea of extinguishing or blocking access to materials is not novel, given practices of censorship that stretch back centuries. The array of materials targeted historically is worth noting; the issue of censorship is always about control of information. Plato wanted Homer's *The*

Odyssey “Expurgated for immature readers” (American Society of Journalism and Authors, I.N.Y.N., 1987, p.3). Plato deemed the epic novel too mature for youth, thus corrupting them. Nazis targeted Jewish literature as part of a wide-scale eradication of Jewish culture and, subsequently, Jewish people. Those calling for the control of teaching CRT and sexuality-related topics reflects particular beliefs about appropriate material for youth. Censor-worthy materials change with the time and context because people bring in their current community discourses and experiences to determine whether or not materials are worthy of being read. Censorship issues have manifested in many ways in the US as well.

Also, in the US, censoring based on religious and personal beliefs has emerged as the dominant reason for people to censor information in recent decades. Parents, community members, and educators have disagreed on which topics are appropriate to teach as part of the history curriculum (Lord, 2002; Sandham et al., 2001; “The Enlightenment, Texas Style,” 2010; Weissberg, 1989). The US has an extensive and troubled history of slavery, colonialism affecting Native American tribes, segregation, and exclusions of immigrant groups, among many other unsavory issues. Inevitably, some content in U.S. history books and archives portrays the country in a negative reality. To some members of the public, negative portrayals are un-American. For example, In Texas, “the selection process [for textbook adoption] too often forces publishers to sanitize content and avoid words or concepts that might offend” (Lord, 2002). Sanitizing content means avoiding any content that is too controversial or portrays the country negatively. Also, many people question whether schools should teach evolution in the science classroom (“Evolution Alone Ain’t in Kansas Anymore,” 2006; Goldston & Kyzer, 2009; Phillips, 2004). By questioning the appropriateness of a curriculum focused on evolution, communities allow

schools to teach religion and religious concepts like Creationism in the school curriculum (“Evolution Alone Ain’t in Kansas Anymore,” 2006).

Because students are primarily legal minors, whether they are full citizens and have the right to information and free speech remains a legal and social debate. The debate involves several court rulings that further question to what extent students’ have First Amendment rights in the confines of school and what schools should be able to censor. Although, as stated earlier, censorship can infringe on students’ rights to information as held under the First Amendment, some school districts interpret The Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) as a justification to censor “websites that affirm the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ+) communities” and “refusing to unblock web pages that deal with youth tobacco use, art galleries, blogs, and firearms” (Caldwell-Stone, 2013, p.58). Administrators, teachers, parents, students, and other community members may interpret differently what information is appropriate and protected under the First Amendment and CIPA, thus adding another layer of complexity to what, if anything, administrators should censor within their schools, districts, and communities.

Foucauldian Discourse

Discourse has been used and defined in a myriad of ways. Linguists, for instance, have described discourse as a body of knowledge to help researchers understand “conversational rules and procedures” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p.29). I will use the term discourse from Foucault (1978) in my study to mean ways in which people not only gather bodies of knowledge but how the community uses the accepted knowledge as a mechanism for power: “For Foucault, ‘knowledge’ is much more a matter of the social, historical and political conditions under which, for example, statements come to count as true or false” (McHoul & Grace, 1993, p.29). Thus,

discourse involves the “accepted” and “appropriate” truths a community has come to accept. I analyzed interviews, documents, and observations to understand administrators’ censorship practices and approaches within the discourse of their school communities. The discourse is forever in flux and influences what is considered normal or appropriate within a community at any given moment. Discourse involves a community’s perceptions, use of language, beliefs, and understanding of what is typical and expected in that community. Discourse is discontinuous, for it is never linear and does not eventually lead to an all-knowing and forever accepted truth. Although not essential to all approaches and studies involving community discourse, establishing my definition and use of discourse was essential to help me understand censorship’s historical and current relevance in public schools and how powerful a community’s accepted discourse influences administrators’ censorship perceptions and actions.

The issues involved in censorship in the schools involve law and policy. Several crucial court rulings have contributed to the depth and often the uncertainty of what, if anything, schools should be able to censor for students in the US. The court ruling of the landmark case of *Tinker V. Des Moines Independent School District* (1969) declared that students have First Amendment Rights; however, school boards can remove materials from schools for “good cause” (Lukenbill & Lukenbill, 2007, p.10). In this ruling, for the first time, courts stated that students have First Amendment Rights. This ruling also set the stage for vague and undefined terms, such as “good cause,” as a gateway for school boards to remove school materials.

Another critical ruling occurred in 1977. In *President’s Council, District 25 v. Community School Board No. 25*, the court ruled that the school board did not infringe upon students’ First Amendment Rights when Piri Thomas removed *Down These Mean Streets* due to sexual and drug-related content (Justia U.S. Supreme Court, 2021). Once again, this case raised

the topic of which books were improper. What is a reasonable cause to remove books? What is inappropriate for students? How do parents, communities, and schools make these decisions? The confusion continued in 1982 in the case of *Board of Education Island Trees, New York v. Pico* when the court ruled the school board had no right to remove several books from the school. They asserted: “A board of education cannot simply remove books because of ideas, values, and opinions expressed in them,” but the board can remove books based on “sound educational reasons” or books that are “vulgar” (Lukenbill & Lukenbill, 2007, p.10). Once again, this ruling with inevitably subjective terms such as “vulgar” left much room for interpretation on what constitutes an educational reason to remove material.

The rulings with vague terms that left the door open for additional censoring of student materials continued in 2007 in the *Morse and the Juneau School Board et al. v. Frederick Rulin's* case. The court ruled that the “school board can place restrictions on certain areas of speech within a school environment” (Lukenbill & Lukenbill, 2007, p.10). This case occurred when a student held a sign supporting marijuana across the road from school grounds. The court declared that the students’ First Amendment Rights did not apply in this situation. However, the jurists were divided on this court decision: some “questioned just how far a school board could go in determining what was proper speech within the context of school and school’s social mission” (Greenhouse, 2007 as quoted in Lukenbill & Lukenbill, 2007, p.10). This is an ongoing issue salient to the current study. What makes material—whether a book, website, flier, or anything else—“appropriate” and “safe” for students? These terms are by nature vague, subjective, and shifting in meaning. How do administrators decide which materials are appropriate and safe? How and when should administrators censor curriculum? Censorship

involves diverse layers and complexities related to power dynamics and living in a democratic society, which Dority (1994) emphasized effectively:

Paradoxically, censorship— and fear of censorship — in public schools is particularly harmful because it results in the opposite of true education and learning. It is through the process of acquiring knowledge that students can learn to be discriminating— to make decisions rationally and logically in light of evidence. By suppressing all materials containing ideas or themes with which they do not agree, censors produce a sterile conformity and lack of intellectual and emotional growth in students. Without the capacity of critical thinking, young people are completely unprepared to function as members of a democratic society. (Dority, 1994, p.36)

The court rulings discussed in this section highlight the complexity of censorship and students' First Amendment Rights issues. Schools in the U.S. are ideally grounded in protocols of democracy; therefore, practices and processes involved in censoring the access of materials for students in schools are a democratic issue. It is at the heart of the conflict of applying school censorship embedded in democratic protocols. School administrators' sole perspectives on their experiences with censorship and processes of self-censorship is an understudied area (Borowiak, 1983; Chandler, 1985). I focused on this topic in this study, aiding in illuminating the complex context-based power relations involved in such censorship decisions in schools in a democracy.

Coming to Research Censorship

Arriving at my decision to research censorship in secondary public schools has been a journey. Fresh out of my master's program in Instructional Media, ready to be a librarian who would change the world, I faced censorship issues from my first day on the job. One of my administrators controlled purchases for the library and questioned some of my choices. I was

appalled that my administrator would question my co-librarians and my professionalism. For example, the principal made sure we did not take longer than the time allotted for lunch. Threatening to decline book orders because some titles were too “citized” or “gay sounding,” the principal regularly watched the library to ensure my co-librarian and I ordered books that principal deemed “appropriate.” We, the librarians, conducted ourselves professionally.

I am a trained secondary English teacher and a certified library media specialist. I have a bachelor’s degree in English Education and a master’s degree in Instructional Media, so I am versed in accessing and acquiring grade-level appropriate materials. Due to my experience, and my belief that censorship is damaging to students in a democracy, I bring a critical positionality to my study, which informs my approach to my study. My principal did not have an English or library media specialist background, so I was deeply offended by his questioning my professionalism and expertise. The principal also seemed to make decisions based only on their belief systems. Yet, through my educational degrees and my parents, I developed the belief that children have the right to access materials to gain knowledge and grow as individuals. A library collection must represent all students’ backgrounds, cultures, interests, and religions. As a librarian, I see it as part of my responsibility to ensure all my students can see themselves in the library materials, print and online. The five years my co-librarian and I experienced the head principal’s censoring our selections and questioning our expertise led me to want to research censorship within the secondary school setting. My librarian experience brought me to the topic of my dissertation.

As I conducted pilot studies with school librarians and worked on literature reviews focusing on librarians’ challenges with censorship, I realized to enact change in censorship practices within public schools requires focusing on public-school district and site

administrators' relations to censorship because administrators, not school librarians, are best positioned to enact change. Since every community and school has a unique set of power relations, norms, and components, the context was essential when studying and enacting changes. Administrators generally have more control to dictate curriculum and establish and enforce policies than teachers. Although often assigned such administrative titles as "Media Directors" or "Library Media Administrators," school librarians manage and administrate libraries, interact with faculty to enhance content-area teaching, and, ideally, advise and educate school principals concerning such topics as censorship, media, and technology. School librarians may converse with principals, consult with teachers, and engage with Parent-Teacher Association members concerning censoring resources. Still, their job is limited to their defined role in the school. Librarians are part of the school system and have their role in advocating for intellectual freedom. Still, they typically cannot enact widespread change except by influencing their principals and perhaps their district administrators. They can, however, enact change by reaching out directly to advocate for intellectual freedom. To spur change in how district and school administrators perceive censorship, censor, and make censorship policies required first understanding how the school system places administrators in a censorship role because they must navigate multiple discourses in the community to make censorship decisions.

As I dove into scholarship on this crucial topic, I found most of the literature focused on administrators as a sole mechanism of censorship. Most literature I reviewed (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2015; Antell et al., 2013; Dawkins, 2018; Doyle, 2018; Flanagan, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Kravitz, 2002; Martinson, 2008; Scales, 2010, 2015) portrayed administrators as the primary mechanisms for censorship-related decisions. From my educational experience, I also felt the same way. Still, I recognized that individual administrators are always situated in broader

forces, debates, and systems. I recognized that many factors shape a given community's power dynamics and discourse that can in turn influence a principal's role in shaping policy, mission, and vision. These forces include dominant belief systems and values in the school community and among parents, the school board, teachers, and students, which include conflicting personal beliefs regarding childhood and the role of educators in children's lives.

I, therefore, proposed to begin filling gaps among qualitative research studies on censorship in secondary and public schools by examining how district and site administrators' perceptions of and experiences with external and internal pressures relating to censorship—the community's multi-layered cultural, political, and socio-economic complexities—influence their choices to censor or not. Through this increased understanding, I wanted this study to immediately call attention to the need for change in the public school district and school censorship policies and practices to enact and realize positive change—increasing students' access to resources and activities—within secondary public schools. Understanding administrators' perceptions and practices is an important aspect of censorship dynamics.

Problem Statement

District and secondary public-school administrators routinely censor print, visual, and digital media and students' access to these media, thereby intervening in library-media specialists' and teachers' work and questioning their expertise. Those opposed to this censoring of secondary schools' print, visual, and digital resources contend that administrative censoring and students' access to these media infringes upon young adults' rights to access information within secondary, public-school environments. In principle, information can lead to learning, knowledge formation, and becoming informed, educated, problem-solving citizens. Because

district and site administrators have the positions and means to enact change in censorship perceptions and practices, it is their perceptions and practices concerning censorship one must examine how to free secondary, public-school students from unwarranted, oppressive censorship.

Although substantial empirical research exists focusing on a combination of teachers', librarians', or administrators' perspectives on how and why public school censorship occurs and focusing on these professionals' prodding for increasing the kinds of resources available and students' access to these resources (Lofthus, 1996; Seglem, 2009, Shupala, 2006), little research exists in which researchers look deeply into only public school, district-level and school-site administrator censorship (Borowiak, 1983; Chandler, 1985). Borowiak (1983) and Chandler (1985) focused on solely administrators' perceptions and experiences with censorship but through the use of surveys and questionnaires not interviews and observations. Borowiak's (1983) study focused on just high school secondary principals and focused primarily on textbook and library print materials. My work contributed to understanding the censorship decisions administrators face and enact, the complexities in administrators' roles, and how their positions are a part of the institution of school power relations that contributes to censorship.

Purpose

In this study, I conducted a qualitative study focused on school administrators' experiences with censorship, practices, and cases in one school district. At the local level, the purpose of my study was to illuminate district and site administrators' perceptions and perspectives of visual, print, and digital censorship, their censoring of students' access to resources and events, and their censorship policy-making; to illuminate the multi-layered forces that influence administrators' perceptions of censorship and censorship policy-making; and, as a result, to stimulate administrators' awareness of how multi-layered forces influence their

perspectives, perceptions, and censorship-related actions toward their enacting change in their censorship practices and censorship policy-making. On a broader scale, my purpose was to explore district and school censorship as a phenomenon embedded in a community's cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts. District and site administrators' decisions and interactions can create censorship events. Sometimes, administrators can continue to censor or invite community members to censor school materials despite their efforts to curtail censorship. I used case study research with an action orientation to carry out this purpose. I aimed to study the phenomenon of censorship holistically and in a bounded area of one school district (Stake, 1995). I continued to restrict my case only to the secondary schools in one school district since my educational experience lies at this schooling level.

Research Questions

I began my study with interest in the experiences of school and district administrators when making decisions about materials for the school district. I was also interested in the roles external and internal pressures played in administrators' decision-making process. As Agee (2009) noted, research questions in qualitative research studies can reflect emergent flexible design. As I interviewed administrators and my study progressed, I fine-tuned my research questions. My purpose led to my research questions. These three inter-related questions addressed my problem statement and connected to my literature review.

1. How do these administrators perceive censorship, censor (events and print, visual, and digital media and students' access to the information within these media), and make censorship policies?

2. How do such multi-layered forces as the discourse of a school community influence its public-school, district, and secondary-school site administrators' perceptions of censorship, censorship practices, and policy-making?
3. How can administrators enact change in censorship practices?

Methodology Overview

I selected qualitative methodology as best suited for investigating how district and site administrators perceive censorship, actually censor, and make censorship policies because I wanted to: 1) acquire “detailed, descriptive data and perceptions about the variations in” administrators’ perceptions of censorship, actual censorship, and censorship policy-making in light of the community’s multi-layered cultural, political, and socio-economic influences; 2) get “inside the phenomenon” of district and site administrators’ censorship practices; 3) to move “inside the phenomenon of interest to [collect] detailed, descriptive data and perceptions about the variations in what goes on and the implications of those variations for the people and processes involved” (Patton, 2015, pp. 3, 6).

I proceeded from a constructionist epistemology, critical theoretical perspective, and case study research methodology. I used qualitative methods; all secondary administrator participants completed a demographic survey highlighting their educational professional work experience and backgrounds. I also examined such documents as district resource-selection policies and school board notes on censorship topics. Because I investigated administrators’ perceptions of censorship, their perceptions of the external forces that influenced their censorship decisions, and how they ultimately decided to censor resources or access to resources, I attended district board meetings, both in-person and online, and district administrative meetings.

Since school districts have the daunting task of ensuring their policies reflect majority viewpoints within the school district, documents related to district policies and protocols, at least in principle, reflect community members' ethical and cultural values. Yet, communities are diverse and consist of differing opinions. I began this study by examining and interpreting such documents as district resource-selection policies and school board notes related to censorship topics. Such inquiry provided insight into administrators' resource evaluation and meaning-making processes when making censorship decisions.

I also interviewed secondary administrators and observed district administrator and school board meetings in the district. I conducted interviews with district and site administrators posing open-ended, structured questions concerning administrators' perceptions of censorship, their perceptions of the multi-layered cultural, political, and socio-economic influences upon their censorship decisions, and how they arrived at censorship decisions and policy. Each participant in my study participated in one fifteen- to sixty-minute interview. I conducted a follow-up interview with seven of my nine participants via phone, in-person or email avenues based on their preference. I audio recorded all interviews and transcribed them *verbatim*, wrote memos to record body language, and changed participants' names so they would be anonymous.

After getting approval from the curriculum associate superintendent, I sent a recruitment email to all secondary administrators in the district (approximately several dozen). In total, I interviewed nine secondary school administrators. The breakdown of positions was as follows: three district-level administrators, two high school administrators, and four middle school administrators. Three high school and middle school administrators were head site principals and three assistant site principals. Five administrators were female, and four were male. I changed names and genders in my study to keep participants anonymous. I analyzed data using in-vivo

and structural coding techniques, applied thematic analysis approaches and memo writing, and, based on analyzing through my lens of power-relations and surveillance, found six significant findings, which I discuss in detail later in the document.

Significance

My study offered a unique view into secondary administrators' perceptions and experiences when dealing with curriculum and censorship-related topics in one school district. It explored how administrators perceive their roles and how their perceptions influence their decisions. Very little literature exists on solely focus on administrators' perceptions and reasons behind their censorship-related curricular decisions, experiences with censorship, and policy-making processes (Borowiak, 1983; Chandler, 1985). Most existing school literature examines censorship issues and decisions related to administrators' perceptions along with other school community members such as library media specialists', teachers' perceptions (Lofthus, 1996; Seglem, 2009, Shupala, 2006). Often, outsiders to the school systems view administrators and teachers as the oppressors and censors, and indeed, their voices are essential in making censorship decisions. However, this perception of administrators does not reflect the complexity of their roles in a broader system of power. Administrators are not the sole power bearers in schools. The discourse of the community and the power relations among the community: parents, teachers, staff, school board members, and community members are all contributing mechanisms of power. My study adds to the censorship literature by focusing on censorship from secondary administrators' perspectives, thus illuminating the complexity of their roles in power relations that shape censorship decisions in context. I found that administrators' roles are multifaceted, and their decisions are never one-dimensional. Their educational roles and complexities will change with the discourse of the school community.

Studying censorship in theory and seeing how censorship plays out in school settings broadly is entirely different than studying one school district's administrators and contextual dynamics. Most previous studies and literature focus on book challenges and internet filters from classroom educators, library media specialists, or parental perspectives (Adams, 2007; Doyle, 2018, Flanagan. 2017; Moskalski & McBride, 2015; Scales, 2010). The literature that focused on administrators either placed them as the censors (Antell et al., 2013; Dawkins, 2018; Kravitz, 2002) or showed how administrators self-censored to avoid issues with parental concerns, student-produced complications, events in the library media center, and library materials (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2015; Doyle, 2018; Flanagan, 2017; Kennedy, 2017; Martinson, 2008; Scales, 2015, 2013, 2010). Administrator roles and beliefs were essential to understanding decision-making processes related to censorship.

While conducting my study, I witnessed a substantial increase in censorship debates, frustrations, and issues in the contemporary U.S. context. Censorship reflects more about broader politics and beliefs than just an objectionable word or passage in a text. My study showed how administrators' censorship decisions were complicated and intertwined with the complexities of power dynamics within a specific social milieu. As well as showing the complexity of administrators' perspectives and decisions, my study illuminated, through analysis using a Foucauldian Lens, how power relations shaped their positioning within the censorship dynamics and, in turn, how their perceptions contributed to those dynamics. My research also revealed that due to the perceived role of administrators having substantial censorship power, people focused on administrators' roles as the culprits in supporting or blocking censorship. Administrators often make those final decisions about a specific case or complaint about school materials. Due to their roles in education, people perceived administrators as fully in charge of educational

decisions. In reality, their roles are more complex than this one-dimensional portrayal.

Administrators made decisions within community and social contexts.

My study has potential liberatory effects for students, teachers, and administrators, which reflects my critical investment in advocacy for open informational access. Freire (1970) stated, “Any system which deliberately tries to discourage critical consciousness is guilty of oppressive violence. Any school that does not foster students’ capacity for critical inquiry is guilty of violent oppression” (p.74). The school district system involved many layers of decision-making and influential forces within a social environment. Administrators were one of many community members who could influence and decide what students could access in school and on school-issued Chromebooks. Ultimately, administrators’ decisions to censor or not were not entirely their own, so all community members must become aware of their roles and impact on censorship decisions. Context-based action and case study research can contribute to understanding how the national censorship trends play out in local contexts.

Organization of Chapters

Foundational censorship knowledge and my use of discourse were essential before analyzing this case study and the multiple layers at work in one school district. In this chapter, I covered the overview of censorship focusing on historical and current issues salient to understanding the reasons for and longevity of censorship issues. Chapter 1 also established the study’s purpose to illuminate administrators’ perceptions of multiple forms of censorship and how their perceptions may influence censorship-related decisions and policies. Multiple issues influence administrators and emphasize the complex nature of school censorship.

Chapter 2 covers the research on school censorship and reveals the significant avenues of censorship and the materials and information to which people most object. The literature review

established how my study contributes to the existing censorship literature and fills some existing research gaps focusing on secondary administrators' perspectives and their roles in censorship.

Chapter 3 turns to my study's methodology, which includes methods, data analysis processes, and my awareness and my reflexivity. Chapter 4 covers the themes that my analysis uncovered, which showcases the power relations at work in the school district. Power relations are constantly in flux, and secondary schools, particularly the English curriculum, are a place to enact and resist censorship. Chapter 5 explains the discoveries and implications of my study. Discoveries include my findings and how they addressed my research questions. I conclude Chapter 5 on my future censorship salient research topics and my concluding thoughts on the importance of my study, the continued study of censorship, and how all community members enact power relations in a given school district or site.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Blocksee: Blocksee is a Chromebook program that allows teachers to view students' Chromebook screens while they are in class. Blocksee allows teachers to freeze student screens as well. Blocksee is purchased and used on school-issued devices.

Community: The school community consists of community members, in particular, administrators, teachers, parents, and students.

Content Filtering Software: This is a generic term for any software on electronic devices that restricts what websites and images appear on that device.

Discipline vs. Management: For this study, discipline is when an authority figure enforces rules and potentially punishment on a person. Management refers to an authority figure supervising people and helping to redirect undesirable behavior.

Discursive Objects: Foucault's concept (1972) of discourse is enacted on a shared discursive object; that means an object created by discursive subjects to enact power and knowledge. In my case study, the community views students as discursive objects around which censorship discussions circle rather than having students play a significant active role in the censorship decisions which affect them

Gaggle: Gaggle is an extra layer of paid filtering that alerts administrators when content is found on students' G-Suite documents deemed inappropriate. The software searches Google searches, apps, and mail on district school-issued technology devices, including school-issued devices and desktop computers.

G-Suite documents: G-Suite documents are documents created by Google Docs, Google Slides, or Google Sheets. G-Suite documents are equivalent to Microsoft Word, PowerPoint Presentations, and Excel Spreadsheets.

iBoss: This is the specific name of the content filtering software that the public school district used during this study. This software operates on school devices in computer labs and classrooms and on school devices taken home: Student and teacher Chromebooks.

In loco parentis: This is a Latin term meaning "In place of the parent" and is a legal term that "refers to the legal responsibility of some person or organization to perform some of the functions or responsibilities of a parent" (Cornell Law School, n.d., para. 1). *In Loco Parentis* is often associated with education because while a child is at school, the administrators and teachers become the parents. They are legally responsible for caring for children in their school/classroom. This term is at the core of censorship issues in schools revolving around whose responsibility it is to choose a deemed appropriate curriculum.

Perceived: The term *perceived* refers to indirect evidence, meaning the conflict originated from the community's implied opinions. The term *perceived* pertains to when administrators believe they understand an implicit opinion or expectation.

Protection: At its core, protection is about ensuring a child is safe. Safe can mean physically safe from harm. Safe can also mean not causing harm to a child developmentally or emotionally. Both parents and educators feel the need to protect students from the curriculum and materials deemed unsafe for students. The factors that constitute what is unsafe for one person to the following vary.

Stakeholder: The term refers to anyone in the community who is part of the public school's constituency: parents, community members, students, and educators.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Substantial empirical research has focused on teachers' or librarians' perspectives on how and why public school censorship occurred and on these professionals' proddings for increasing the kinds of resources available and students' access to these resources. The qualitative dissertation research primarily includes administrators' perceptions and other educator roles, such as library media specialists and teachers (Lofthus, 1996; Seglem, 2009; Shupala, 2006; Vrabel, 1997). Chandler's (1985) qualitative dissertation investigated elementary administrators' experiences with censorship, while Borowiak (1983) focused on only secondary administrators in one Chicago school district. When contemporary researchers concentrated on district and site administrators' roles in censorship, they tended to center their studies on these administrators' attempts to censor print, visual, and digital media and events opened to students. Although qualitative researchers often mentioned district and site administrators and their roles when writing about censorship, qualitative research in which researchers delved into only administrators' perceptions of censorship and censorship practices and censorship policy-making remains in short supply (Borowiak, 1983). Crucial to examining district and school administrators' perceptions of censorship, censorship, and censorship policy-making are

considering the internal and external factors that influence these perceptions and decisions; these forces helped illuminate why and how decisions about open access to information occur in all formats are essential and elucidates the meaning and value of giving students access.

I will start this chapter by defining how scholars define censorship and the parameters I set to discuss censorship in my study. Then I include scholarship based on the following themes about my definitions of censorship: Foucault in Education, Discourse of Childhood, External Factors Administrators Face According to Scholarship, Parents' Rights Vs. Schools' Rights, District Administrative Censorship, Administrator Driven Self-Censorship, and CRT Censorship and State Legislation. I start by discussing how Foucault's concepts of power relations and the Panopticon are related to educational studies about censorship. Foucault's concepts became points for analysis in my study. I will then cover the scholarship related to school administrators' external pressures, such as parents and school board members, that helped explain why administrators censored library media centers and the print and digital curriculum housed there.

Furthermore, I explored research about how administrators, librarians, and students self-censored their actions correlated to school events, library materials, and student publications. Notably, little qualitative scholarship exists on censorship in specific contexts, such as one school or one district. Further, few studies focus on only administrators' roles and perceptions. Still further, few use Foucauldian approaches to analyzing censorship in qualitative studies. Lastly, I will discuss the current censorship topics in the US manifesting CRT censorship and state legislation.

Defining Censorship

Censorship involves those in power restricting access to information by modifying or restricting access to resources. People can censor just about anything, including the materials

commonly censored in schools: speech, print, visual, and digital media; access to these media; and access to events. A community's history, culture, politics, religious tendencies, and socio-economic well-being influence censorship issues in all their complexity. As noted in Chapter 1, the American Library Association (ALA) is one of the largest and best-known organizations fighting against censorship, particularly library censorship. The ALA defines censorship as "...the suppression of ideas and information that certain persons—individuals, groups, or government officials—find objectionable or dangerous" (American Library Association, 2017). For the ALA's (2004) membership, suppression not only means denying individuals access to information (which equals censorship) but withholding their democratic rights guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution:

Most attempts at suppression rest on a denial of the fundamental premise of democracy: that the ordinary citizen, exercising critical judgment, will accept the good and reject the bad. The censors, public and private, assume that they should determine what is good and what is bad for their fellow citizens. (ALA para.2)

The topic of what is good/bad or appropriate/inappropriate appearing in this statement raised many questions. What is considered good? What is considered bad? What should citizens seek out as being good? What one considers bad and worthy of rejection may be considered good by another person. The ambiguous nature of the terms is among the subjective terms that shape censored or not censored materials. Even when attempting to clarify why censorship is not democratic and people should not support it in the US, the American Library Association's definition allows people to use the definition whether they are proponents of censorship and anticensorship.

ALA (2017) members further contended that censoring ideas and information violates individuals' Constitutional rights under the First Amendment in the "First Amendment and Censorship" document:

The right to speak and the right to publish under the First Amendment has been interpreted widely to protect individuals and society from government attempts to suppress ideas and information and to forbid government censorship of books, magazines, and newspapers as well as art, film, music and materials on the internet. (American Library Association, 2017)

Self-censorship is another broad type of censorship. Self-censorship involves a person who censors materials they think may be offensive or harmful to themselves, at least at the moment of censorship. For example, Bogdan (2010) and Bogdan and Yeomans (1986) wrote about giving girls the right to self-censor required reading materials in schools when these materials objectify, sexualize, and story violence against girls and women. Students can self-censor when they feel they are not ready to be exposed to certain materials. Perhaps a character in a book is dealing with a situation, and the student reading the book decides to stop reading because the situation in the book reminds the students of their own life or trauma in a triggering way. Similarly, researchers reported administrators' censoring materials, or "self-censoring," to protect themselves from parents' actions should they perceive print, visual, or digital media to be offensive, developmentally inappropriate, or counter to the community's cultural norms.

Researchers reported a different kind of self-censorship in the literature concerning censorship, one prevalent among students and librarians. This type of censorship occurred when individuals working in schools feared harm through administrator actions rather than believing the resources in question will harm them (Hill, 2010; Winter, 2019). Library media specialists

self-censored when they select library books to purchase (Hill, 2010; Vrabel, 1997; Winter, 2019), similar to my experience when my administrator watched my actions as a library media specialist. I often had to keep myself from self-censoring library materials that I considered too conservative, such as books about conservative political figures. Supporting freedom of information, I had to remind myself that just because the political views in books were not my own did not mean I should exclude that material; I needed to represent all viewpoints because I served the entire student population, not just students who shared my political ideologies. A school curriculum that represents multiple viewpoints is what access to information requires. Library media specialists may choose to pull in their “own biases” (Winter, 2019, p. 5) when selecting library materials primarily related to LGBTQ content (Pekoll, 2020; Winter, 2019). Nevertheless, finding research concerning the degree of librarian self-censoring was challenging:

Self-censorship is the kind of thing that you cannot measure and for that reason may be an even more widespread problem... By definition we don't hear about self-censorship. Librarians know the sensitivities of their communities, who the 'troublemakers' are and how they operate, and I'm sure they act with that knowledge. It's certainly true of art museums, where directors and curators openly admit that there are some things 'we just don't show here.' I've heard enough from librarians to know that the same process is at work. (Joan E. Bertin, telephone interview with book author, May 21, 2010, in Hill, 2010, p.9–10)

Petress (2005) set the stage for the layers associated with school censorship, noting that historically courts have inconsistently judged who has the right to censor school books and curriculum materials by ruling both for and against school boards' rights to censor school materials. Regardless of the contemporary district and school administrators' censorship

practices, opponents of censorship within public education's realm contend censorship should only be required "...when it appears to be the only way to avoid or mitigate provable physical, social, emotional, or intellectual harmful outcomes for students" (Petress, 2005, p.248).

Foucault in Education

The diverse scholarship using Foucault in relation to education tackled topics from internet filters to critical race theory in public schools. Educational scholars have used Foucault's concepts found in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), particularly his ideas of power relations, to understand the multiple powers at work in educational institutions today (Aston, 2017; Ball, 2018; Butin, 2006; Niesche, 2015; Peach & Bieber, 2015; Peters, 2017; Richards, 2015; Tesar, 2014). Foucault discussed power and discipline dynamics in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978) text (Ball, 2018), yet, many scholars drew from *Discipline and Punish* (1977) because of its direct salience to education.

Related to online education, scholars used Foucault to understand better the complexities of power relations between professors and the governing institutions (Peach & Bieber, 2015) and the online surveillance known as the Panopticon Internet (Aston, 2017; Peters, 2017; Richards, 2015). Due to the rise of learning management systems and more highly structured online courses, professors lost the power to create online classes the way they, as trained professionals, saw fit: "online education is used in brick-and-mortar institutions as a mechanism through which power is exercised by and against professors who teach online courses" (Peach & Bieber, 2015, p.26). University administrators micromanaged and time-controlled online professors more than other traditional non-online professors. Also related to the power relations of online classrooms was the notion that administrators surveilled faculty and students (Aston, 2017; Peters, 2017) who often lost their freedom to speak, think, and read what they wanted (Richards, 2015).

Restricting online access to materials allowed administrators to govern students and keep them docile by not allowing students to have open access to materials that can help them think and learn. Students lost their right to intellectual freedom (Peters, 2017; Richards, 2015).

Although limited in focus, a few researchers used Foucault to illuminate power struggles concerning administrators (Niesche, 2015; Tesar, 2014). Niesche (2015) discussed administrators as Foucauldian subjects. The school domain is one area that

...constituted subjects in particular ways but also allowed individuals to constitute themselves as subjects. Even though Foucault's work is historical, his focus on the formation of subjectivity through a range of different government apparatuses, techniques and practices continue to contain relevant conceptual understandings for contemporary situations such as education and school leadership. (p.135)

School administrators are part of the power relations in a school. Administrators must uphold policies and discipline students and teachers. In the traditional sense, people portray power as being stagnant. One group has the power, and the other group does not. In Foucault's understanding, power is not stagnant but rather is forever changing based on the discourses shaping a community. The school community watches administrators and administrators are made to follow expectations passed down by the community, state, the school board, and other governing bodies (Niesche, 2015). Researchers used the notion of governmental power and rationality, known as *governmentality*, to understand how administrators acted upon others (Niesche, 2015; Tesar, 2014). The government of the community can turn administrators into "self-censoring docile bodies" (Tesar, 2014, p. 866) and "perpetually assessable subjects" (Niesche, 2015, p. 133). In these power relations, administrators might self-censor their actions

to adapt to the community's mindset (Tesar, 2014). This literature added to the complexity of censorship and the ways administrators become both the censors and the self-censored.

Although the educational scholarship I reviewed primarily focuses on Foucault's concepts of power and knowledge, some scholarship used Foucault's concept of discourse to conduct discourse analysis. However, some discourse analysis in education only focused on the "recurrent words and phrases in policy texts or interviews" (Ball, 2018, p.9). Words and language are only one part of analyzing the discourse of an educational community. From a Foucauldian standpoint, discourse focuses on "the structures and rules that constitute a discourse rather than the texts and utterances produced within it" (Ball, 2018, p.9). Discourse analysis should analyze more than just words and should "enable an object to appear" (Ball, 2018, p.9). The object is the item through which power manifests. In the case of educational discourse, the object could be a classroom, a school building, a text, a piece of curriculum, all curricula in a subject area, or particular topics discussed in class. Analyzing discourses at work in one school district, I examined multiple factors that influenced administrators' censorship-related decisions.

Discourse of Childhood

Complex social, philosophical, and cultural issues shape practices of censorship. One such issue involved differing philosophical conceptions of the child. Views on childhood are historically and socially constructed. Depending on a society, family, or community's conception of the child, what constitutes appropriate materials will vary. Smith (2014) described dominant and normative discourses as influential in views of childhood:

While there may be any number of overlapping and conflicting discourses of childhood at any particular point in time only some will be regarded as authoritative or 'true.' These dominant discourses influence the way in which parents and other adults think about and

act towards children, but they also shape ideas about how parents *should* think and act.

Discourses of childhood, then, are thus associated with particular norms in terms of the parent-child relationship... (Smith, 2014, p.3)

Some philosophical views of the child consider the child as a little adult, and thus there is no actual period of childhood on which adults focus protecting children from the harsh realities of adult life. In medieval times “the idea of childhood did not exist” (Aries, 1962, p.128). For example, people in the pre-modern centuries described the child as being distinguished by “a distinctive set of gender expectations, and pressure on children to sustain their families” (Marten, 2018, p.27), which meant responsibilities to work and care for other members of the households.

A child does not become an adult overnight. Children go through distinct stages of development before reaching adulthood. For example, modern concepts of childhood “associate childhood with innocence and an understanding of the child as malleable in response to education” (Marten, 2018, p.29), and children are seen as sensitive and “who needed to be both safeguarded and reformed” (Aries, 1962, p.133). More modern perspectives showed the child as an innocent being that communities and parents must protect and nurture until adulthood (Aries, 1962; Marten, 2018). In this view, the parent controls the world to which the child is subjected to maintain innocence as long as possible.

Because the concept of childhood and the materials deemed appropriate for a child is dynamic and context-specific moving targets, school administrators must balance those dynamic factors with what is appropriate for children with the community’s standards.

While there may be any number of overlapping and conflicting discourses of childhood at any point in time only some will be regarded as authoritative or ‘true.’ These dominant discourses influential at a given historical moment will shape how parents and other

adults think about and act towards children. They also shape ideas about how parents *should* think and act. Discourses of childhood, then, are thus associated with particular norms in terms of the parent-child relationship. (Smith, 2014, p.3)

The role administrators hold situates them in power relations alongside others in their circulating system of power (Foucault, 1977). They lead the school, shape the school culture, influence the dynamics of the faculty and school environment, attempt to keep every student in line disciplinarily, and ensure the school is setting kids up to learn the curriculum and be successful. Administrators play an essential role in deciding about censoring materials for children, navigating the community discourse regarding appropriate material for a child, and not infringing upon children's First Amendment Rights. Administrators will likely never fully satisfy all community members' concerns due to differing philosophies of the child and whose rights matter most in deciding appropriate materials for children, whether the parents or the educators.

The conception of childhood changes not only from generation to generation but also from community to community and household to household. Within a community or school district, every person and household can have a different view of childhood and what constitutes materials as educational and appropriate. Depending on the period of history, the country, state, school district, or family household, the conceptualization of what it means to be a child and how to educate and keep them safe will change. For example, some of the first formal schools deeply entwined education and religion (Marten, 2018; Smith, 2014). In the Jesuit schools, students attended school to learn more about religion (Smith, 2014, p.119). Beyond the religious purposes of early schools, the school also serves a democratic purpose:

Public schools existed for a multitude of purposes: to create a prepared and "productive" citizenry; to provide instruction in basic skills, like arithmetic and literacy; and to offer

widespread access to the liberal arts—to “critical thinking, imagination, morality, and insight.” (Moss, 2018, p.55)

Schools reflect a broad range of beliefs and practices regarding teaching, but at the core of schools is a democratic responsibility to make students good citizens. To make good citizens, educators must teach children how to think critically, guiding students to seek information to gain their own knowledge and perspectives on topics.

External Factors Administrators Face According to Scholarship

Parents and School Board

Administrators continually face outside factors that influence their decisions concerning which school materials to purchase, remove, or allow teachers to teach. Literature showed that students’ parents exert the most consistent and forceful pressure on principals. Their complaints comprised 97% of the objections to public schools’ books and internet access in the US (Ishizuka, 2002; Koss et al., 2010; Thomas, 2020; Zalaznick, 2022). Parents exercised tremendous power and influence over administrators’ selection of materials. Parents’ need and desire to protect children largely spurred their pressure on principals. Whether they were for or against a print, visual, or digital resource, all parents believed their actions to gain or ban various resources from schools protected their children and sometimes all children in a school or district (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2015; Kravitz, 2002; Magnuson, 2011; Maycock, 2011; Mitoraj, 2000; Moskalski & McBride, 2015).

Considered leaders whose actions reflect their constituents’ values and the districts’ students’ best interests and well-being, school board members also tremendously influenced administrators’ censorship decisions. Moskalski & McBride (2015) and the “Ohio Principal” (2009) researchers showed examples of school boards’ power to remove library materials from

schools. In 2015, twenty Ohio parents attended a school board meeting and objected to three LGBTQ-themed books that “could harm the minds of young people” (Moskalski & McBride, 2015, p.49). After evaluating the three LGBTQ books in question, the reconsideration committee voted to keep two out of three books in their district’s school libraries and reported the school board’s decision. The committee contained seven members who “represented all stakeholders” (Moskalski & McBride, 2015, p.50). The school board accepted the reconsideration committee’s vote, removing one sexually-charged book (Moskalski & McBride, 2015). The school board did not question the guidelines used to evaluate the book or which stakeholders comprised the committee (Moskalski & McBride, 2015).

In contrast, Adams (2007) and Mitoraj (2000) addressed how school boards can choose not to censor school materials. In both Adams’ (2007) and Mitoraj’s (2000) examples, the school board became involved with particular print books’ legitimacy in libraries and the curriculum. One example focused on the book *Deliverance*, which the school board decided to keep in the high school curriculum due to its literary merit. The school board decided to listen to teachers and principals, respect their expertise, and allow senior English students to study *Deliverance* (Mitoraj, 2000) despite several parents’ objections when they claimed the book’s maturity level exceeded that of seniors (Mitoraj, 2000, p.105). Adams (2007) addressed another school board forming a committee to evaluate books and a forum where parents could discuss their concerns over sex education and LGBTQ books they thought were too mature for their children. The school board listened to concerns and voted to keep the books in school libraries (Adams, 2007). School boards exerted pro-censorship and sometimes anti-censorship power, influencing an administrator to support the school board’s stance to avoid future potential problems or go against the school board’s position.

Values and Morals

Belief systems also shaped censorship impulses. Parents' and school board members' values and morals determine why they exert pressure on administrators to censor or not. To protect their children, parents often determine which materials might harm their children based on their values and morals (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2015; Kravitz, 2002; Magnuson, 2011; Maycock, 2011; Mitoraj, 2000; Moskalski & McBride, 2015). Parents' targeting books revealed a pattern of challenging books with LGBTQ content from kindergarten through twelfth grade: whether the early childhood book *And Tango Makes Three*, or high-school level LGBTQ-themed books, the similarities are strikingly similar (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2015; Kravitz, 2002; Magnuson, 2011; Maycock, 2011; Moskalski & McBride, 2015). Parents can ban books from schools as a protective act because they believed the content could emotionally harm children. In the other camp, parents who opposed books' removal from school libraries and classrooms thought that banning books could not protect children (Magnuson, 2011; Maycock, 2011). These decisions reflected some of the philosophical differences about children noted earlier. No matter which side parents took in the censorship debate on a given text or incident, parents' choices were often driven by their need to protect their children and, often, all children. They often framed their concerns and the potential damage of a text in strident terms. This refers to the third-person effect, which "hypothesizes that when exposed to a controversial media message, a person will overestimate the amount of influence that message will have over other people" (Davison, 1983, as quoted in Magnusson, 2011, Third Person Effect section, para.1).

Although district administrators and teachers were sometimes responsible for district textbook adoptions, school boards have the right to oversee textbook adoptions (Kravitz, 2002; Petress, 2005). School boards should reflect the community and its citizens' values; they can

pressure textbook manufacturers to create textbooks that support their community's values and beliefs. At the same time, textbook manufacturers actively work to persuade school districts to buy their textbooks to make money. Especially important to remember that the school's hidden curriculum and community politics resides at textbook purchasing's core. Martin (1995) defined a school's hidden curriculum more broadly as:

Transmitted by school's architecture, its seating arrangements, its rules about how to walk in the halls, the language its teachers use, the art work on the walls, the instructional games children play—in other words, by any and everything but school's "formal" curriculum—its lessons convey attitudes and values to our children without their knowing it. (p.74)

More specific to thinking about perceptions of censorship, censorship, and censorship policy-making, Erikson, Luttbeg, and Tedin (1991) defined a school's hidden curriculum as "the informal and decidedly antidemocratic set of teaching practices and power relationships by which the school operates" (as cited in Martinson, 2008, p.211). As the community and school district's leaders and politicians, school boards exercised great power and influence over the district and school administrators, the school resources and activities, and access to these resources and activities.

Parents' Rights Vs. Schools' Rights

One enduring issue continuing to shape censorship, especially in the context of my study, is the debate of who has the right to choose and ultimately censor materials for students. There is sometimes a conflict between school missions and parents' rights salient to my study. Several core questions inform school censorship issues, including those in the district under study: Who has the right to decide what materials and access are appropriate for students? Which dimensions

constitute safe and appropriate for students? Who has the right to censor these materials? What are students' rights in deciding which material is appropriate? How do administrators navigate when parents' wishes to censor conflict with the schools' mission to provide broad exposure to social issues? Censorship sometimes poses parents' rights (decisions about their children) against schools' rights (the responsibility and purpose of schools in a democracy).

Parents can restrict access to materials deemed inappropriate for their children while at home. In one scholar's opinion, parents also have the right to request their child not to have access to a specific book at school, "The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed" (Olson, 1994, p.10). Yet, these are decisions that can affect more than one individual. According to the literature, some parents on school boards believe they can restrict books for all students in the school district (B.G., 2002). Therefore, these decisions raise concerns about some parents' rights over other parents' rights. They also raise concerns about children's rights in restricting access to books in a school district.

While students are in school, administrators undertake parental responsibility in loco parentis: "*In loco parentis* refers to a relationship in which a person puts himself or herself in the situation of a parent by assuming and discharging the obligations of a parent to a child" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). In *Democracy and Education* (1916), educational philosopher John Dewey describes a public school as an "assimilative force" that is an "eloquent testimony to the efficacy of the common and balanced appeal" (p. 25). The balanced appeal refers to youth from different backgrounds, religions, and experiences coming to a commonplace in which they can learn and grow. Administrators engage in loco parentis for not one but all children in their care. This role entails offering an inclusive curriculum that does not discriminate based on sex or religion. In this viewpoint, administrators have the right to allow a diverse curriculum while at

school. But, the difficulty comes in determining the boundaries when schools stop acting in loco parentis. Schools now commonly use and send home digital devices and online books, thus blurring the line between school and home responsibilities. At what point are the administrators unable to act as the parent? This blurred line has no clear answer and contributes to the complexity of censorship decisions.

Power Struggles

To add to the complex issues involved with censorship, the issue of who *should* control the child's access to information is at the heart of disputes about educational materials, especially in my study. Schools in a democracy are central to exposing children to new ideas and protecting them from harm. As Smith (2014) noted, "Dominant discourses of childhood are [...] closely intertwined with the strategies and practices by which power is exercised over children in domains other than that of family, of which the most significant in Western culture is the school" (p. 3). Before a child attends school, that child only knows the environment and knowledge the parents and community provide. When they begin to attend school, educators and administrators become surrogate parents who educate and keep the child safe and prepare them for roles as citizens. Yet, as noted in my introduction, the terms appropriate and safe materials are by no means consistent and shape battles over children's exposure to topics and issues.

Since schools first appeared in the US, "Parents and schools have alternated between advocacy and contestation of one another's aims" (Lassonde, 2001, p.496). Ostensibly, schools control children's education at school, and parents control family morals, values, religion, etc. A common motif in the history of children's education is the "importance of the parental role in the child-rearing process" (Smith, 2014, p. 109). Public schools become surrogate parents in instructing and disciplining children. Given this personal arrangement, parents' concerns are

understandable if they think a school district is not teaching their child in a manner they see fit. However, public schools serve the public and provide broad exposure to issues, topics, and skills relevant to the social and national context in which the child lives. Such goals will not align with every parent's individual preferences. School and community censorship can deny students exposure to social issues that will affect them, varied perspectives on the complex world, and practice in becoming critical thinkers; students can be "unprepared to function as members of a democratic society" (Dority, 1994, p.36).

Another factor contributing to the ebb and flow of censorship in schools is power. One definition of power is the ability to influence people. Censorship reflects multifaceted expressions of power influenced by discourse and who controls relationships. As it relates to schools, power involves all discursive environments and parties of a community: administrators, faculty, staff, parents, students, and other concerned community members. Discursive environments include many community spaces such as individual classrooms, school buildings, libraries, school board meetings, and administrator meetings. All community members are essential to analyze to understand power relations in a school district; considering how roles function in these environments is helpful for understanding the role they play in censorship.

Power is ever-changing and manifested in many ways. Discipline is a means of managing people. It is a type of power that involves using an instrument or surveillance in a particular space (Foucault, 1977). In this case, discipline refers to managing and creating docile bodies. Based on Foucault's (1977) concepts, disciplinary mechanisms relevant to censorship could include internet filters, teacher supervision, administrator supervision, security cameras, school police officers, and school policies and rules. Administrators' roles involve attempting to create a complex environment. This environment is a space where administrators discipline children

while also being watched and sometimes disciplined by parents whose role is to protect their children in whatever way they see fit. The school system creates roles for administrators, parents, students, teachers, and community members that are all different parts of the knowledge and power nexus; the roles are ever-changing due to the complexity of the nature of the roles.

District Administrative Censorship

I engaged with the literature to understand the context of school censorship issues and situate issues school leaders, educators, and school community members need to consider about the role administrators play in the power relations in a school district. At the forefront of the literature is the recognition that administrators want to communicate with parents and engage them in school policies (Anderson, 2016; Curry, et al., 2016; Johnson, 2005; Poore, 2019; Sternke, 2019). Parental involvement is a major school and research issue. Administrators want to engage parents in helping with information literacy skills (Anderson, 2016; Poore, 2019) and overall school performance (Sternke, 2019). Parents are seen as essential community members and major stakeholders for the schools. Research indicates administrators engaging with parents and the community led to several instances in which district administrators became involved in district or site censorship. One reason was their fear of community members' perceptions about their districts or schools. The two school venues of most concern in the public's eye pertaining to censorship are library-media centers (Adams, 2007; Doyle, 2018; Flanagan, 2017; Hall, 2021; Hickson, 2022; Moskalski & McBride, 2015; Scales, 2010) and digital media students may access in school sites (Adams, 2010; Batch, 2014; Batch, 2015; Johnson, 2013).

Library-Media Center

Scholars noted that library media centers could be the target of some censorship decisions. Superintendents became involved in censoring library-media centers' resources for

three reasons: (1) superintendents feared potential parental complaints, (2) the site principal needed assistance, and (3) site censorship issues escalated to the district level. Seeking to prevent parental complaints, controversy, and even the Parent-Teacher Association and school board's censoring of school materials, superintendents sometimes prematurely intervened when anticipating the district's community might deem materials or invited speakers' content inappropriate. This premature censoring helps ensure unwanted and harmful attention never spotlights the district or school. Adams (2007), Doyle (2018), Flanagan (2017), and Scales (2010) cited ways district administrators involved themselves in library material selection and retention and school events before parents complained. One district's superintendent revoked the controversial author Ellen Hopkins' district visit because her books depict drug use and abuse (Scales, 2010). The superintendent anticipated the visit would draw unfavorable attention to the district. Reacting to this visit cancelation, other districts' elementary and secondary administrators revoked book orders to ensure Hopkins' books would never appear within their district's school libraries and incite parental objections (Doyle, 2018; Flanagan, 2017).

In two other examples, this time about sexual rather than drug content, a superintendent became involved in site-level censorship after a parent complained to the site administrator about three sex-education and LGBTQ books in ways that caused the issue to escalate to the district level (Adams, 2007; Moskalski & McBride, 2015). After a group of parents in one district complained at a school board meeting, the superintendent formed a committee to evaluate the books (Moskalski & McBride, 2015). After talking to the school librarian in the other district, a parent contacted the superintendent, who formed a re-evaluation committee (Adams, 2007). In the first example, the committee censored the books by placing the sexually charged books in a restricted area accessible only to teachers and parents (Adams, 2007); however, in the second

example, the committee chose not to remove the books from student-accessible shelves (Moskalski & McBride, 2015).

Digital Media

Unique to the district level, the second form of district-level administrator censorship revolved around students' and teachers' internet access. With more and more schools moving to one-to-one technology—i.e., every student has a school-issued technology device—and with administrators pushing teachers to incorporate technology into their lessons, the ramifications of administrators' allowing or denying various kinds of internet access increased in their significance. To understand why school districts' internet filtering is currently in the spotlight, one needs to understand state legislation on filtering. Because filtering is one avenue legislators use to assert control, state legislators encourage districts to meet the Children's Internet Protection (CIPA) requirements; all state legislatures have introduced and promoted legislation favoring school districts' internet filtering (Adams, 2010; Krueger, 2011). CIPA requires schools to meet three website-filter/block categories to receive federal funding: filtering or blocking (1) obscene material, (2) child pornography, and (3) other material harmful to minors (Johnson, 2012). While state legislators support internet filters, districts often filter beyond the CIPA requirements (Johnson, 2012), usually because district administrators want to ensure assessors find nothing to construe as inappropriate, knowing “inappropriate” is a moving target differing from district to district (Batch, 2014; Batch, 2015).

Federal and state legislative districts' internet filtering practices encourage district administrators to protect themselves now and in the future by over-filtering—just in case. However, several school administrators met CIPA guidelines by not over-filtering and allowing more open internet access (Durflinger, 2015; Krueger, 2011). Durflinger (2015) stated the

importance of providing a safe online environment while still allowing students to access the internet: “The ubiquity of personal technology in our lives today requires we strike a balance between student empowerment and student safety” (p.11). Some administrators struck a balance by allowing students to have a filtered internet and meet CIPA guidelines while still allowing social media and YouTube access on school devices (Durflinger, 2015; Krueger, 2011). This literature highlighted the rationales behind implementing filters on school devices and the varied avenues administrators could take to protect students while allowing access to online material.

Another way district administrators ensure their districts meet federal policies is through their filtering decisions. School technology scholars suggested that rather than a single person, such as the district's technology director (Johnson, 2013), a collaborative committee larger than two and including teachers and library media specialists (Johnson, 2005; Johnson, 2012; Mann, 2018), should make filtering decisions (Johnson, 2010; Johnson, 2012; Mann, 2018). Due to time or other factors, district administrators may arrive at filtering decisions by gathering information, getting feedback and input, and then finalizing the decision based on the feedback and needs assessment. Krueger (2011) examined a rare example of a superintendent in Ft. Worth's Birdville School District who chose not to form a committee but to listen to his community's growing needs. The superintendent decided to forgo using filtering software; he instead provided professional development for teachers on using the internet, aiming to help students succeed in a digital world. The superintendent critically engaged with student needs and potentially parental concerns to make the best leadership decision for his school community.

Administrator Driven Self-Censorship

Perception is a strong force dependent upon personal beliefs and community culture. Using self-censorship requires one to censor decisions based upon their perception of how others

may view oneself or one's decisions; administrators may see such censorship as the only way to feel safe in their administrative position and free from negative criticism. Administrators often face legal consequences (Copland & Manhattan Institute, 2021; Harris & Alter, 2022; Horowitz, 2010; Krent, 2012; Wasser, 2007). Community members could sue administrators and the entire school board if a policy were deemed ineffective or inappropriate. Besides legal actions, any unhappy parent or community member can slander an administrator online (Jones, 2019; Young, 2021) for any disagreement in policy or curriculum decisions. Also, community members are becoming more openly hostile through legal avenues and communicating in threatening ways (Horowitz, 2010; Johnson, 2005). This literature suggested that community members viewed administrators as powerful actors in the school environment.

The dynamics of power relations in this section are all interrelated, though I separate this section into smaller pieces for the literature review to render the significant themes discrete. In my approach, I consider administrators as situated in a network of power relations in which fear can generate disciplinary mechanisms that shape administrators' work. For administrators, fear of legal or social reprimand or job security is always present. Understandably, they may self-censor when making policy and curriculum decisions based on these fears. Here administrators' individual perceptions and beliefs differ from the roles administrators maintain. Administrators as individuals may believe one way, but in their roles as administrators, cannot base decisions on their beliefs. There are always many moving pieces to administrators' lives and work choices, all vying for their time and attention. Similarly, as scholarship has noted (Antell et al., 2013; Dawkins, 2018; Kravitz, 2002; Martinson, 2008), students and library-media specialists self-censor to protect themselves, not always from parental or administrators' disapproval.

Student and Library Media Specialist Self-Censorship: The Fear Factor

The rarest type of student self-censorship occurs when students fear administrator or advisor disapproval. Martinson (2008) addressed how students, school-newspaper journalists, fearing retribution from school administrators or their newspaper advisor, often self-censor because they felt pressured to forgo writing articles on controversial topics or to restrict the kinds of information they include in some articles. In addition to fearing verbal retribution, curtailed privileges, or an altered relationship with an administrator or advisor, student journalists feared the shame of an administrator or advisor pulling an article from publication or removing the journalist from the writing staff.

School library media specialists (LMS) self-censor when fearing administrator disapproval (Antell et al., 2013; Dawkins, 2018; Kravitz, 2002). A qualitative study of North and South Carolina library media specialists illuminated that they self-censor when selecting library materials if they think administrators might object to them (Dawkins, 2018; Doyle, 2018; Hinton, 2019; Whelan, 2009). Library media specialists particularly self-censored when selecting materials about sexuality, especially LGBTQ materials (Antell et al., 2013; Hinton, 2019; Hixenbaugh, 2022; Whelan, 2009). Fearing what administrators might say or believe about them influenced library media specialists' self-censorship when ordering materials (Antell et al., 2013; Dawkins, 2018). This literature implies that some librarians do not want to be seen as too liberal.

Self-censorship does not always stem from a fear of administrators' perceptions. In rare cases, library media specialists self-censor such resources as LGBTQ materials out of personal bias. Like those anticipating administrator disapproval, LMS's self-censoring from personal bias reflects fear; they often fear that putting too many LGBTQ books in the collection might reflect the community that they are advocates for the LGBTQ community (Antell et al., 2013). The

community may be offended that they perceive the collection as biased and promoting a lifestyle against its beliefs. Although this perception caused library media specialists to self-censor, the professional librarian community does not encourage self-censorship (ALA, 2017). Both students' and library media specialists' self-censorship revolved around fearing administrative and community disapproval and the consequences. Interestingly, perceptions of another's perceptions, and the resulting fear, recurred throughout the literature, adding a layer to the district's already multilayered phenomenon and school administrators' perceptions of censorship, actual censorship, and censorship policy-making.

Administrative Self-Censorship: Community Perceptions

Site administrators censored themselves because they feared parents' or other community members' perceptions (Scales, 2010, 2015). Administrator self-censoring revolved around student publications and the library-media center (Kennedy, 2017; Scales, 2010, 2015).

Student publications. Kennedy (2017) and Martinson (2008) highlighted administrators' early involvement with student-produced print publications. This is a complicated arena for administrators to navigate because, despite their personal opinions, school-sponsored speech is unprotected speech due to a: "1988 Supreme Court decision that gave wide latitude to high-school administrators to review and censor student publications" (Young, 2004, p.A35). Administrators can monitor and restrict the material printed in such school publications as newspapers and yearbooks. Administrators must decide which materials to allow in school publications and which the community might deem inappropriate. The literature showed that administrators censored content related to sexual orientation or sources deemed controversial within their school's culture or that administrators anticipated might offend some students or parents (Kennedy, 2017; Martinson, 2008). Martinson's (2008) research depicted administrators

hiring faculty newspaper and yearbook advisors who held the same beliefs and values. These faculty advisors, in turn, selected a student newspaper staff that tended to hold beliefs and values similar to their faculty advisors (Martinson, 2008). By hiring faculty advisors with values similar to the community's, administrators hoped to avoid controversy before it happened (Martinson, 2008). Kennedy's (2017) research revealed administrators' involvement in student-produced publications even when student publications' productions had not received complaints.

The research literature showed that school administrators frequently censored student publications because they feared offense or backlash over material they identified as controversial (Kennedy, 2017; Martinson, 2008). Consequently, school administrators censored student publications' content to reflect their values (Kennedy, 2017; Martinson, 2008). Kennedy (2017) cited one instance when the school administrator decided not to allow quotations underneath two gay male students' pictures in the yearbook. The comments pertained to the two young men's sexuality humorously. The site administrator believed the comments, due to their reference to sexuality, were inappropriate for a school-sponsored outlet to publish and might offend other students and parents, so he removed the quotations.

Library-media center materials. The most prevalent type of site-level administrator censorship pertained to educators censoring library materials and special events. Although I focused on secondary school administrators' censorship, examining research in other areas helped contextualize these practices. I examined research on elementary school administrators' censorship to help determine whether censorship patterns existed between the two school levels and how administrators from both levels may influence the district and perhaps even state policies and practices. Also, I examined any research related to administrative curriculum and community experience to get the best overview possible.

Principals tended to censor library materials they anticipated may cause unwanted attention from parents (Adams et al., 2015; Kennedy, 2017; Scales, 2010, 2013, 2015). Scales (2010) cited one elementary principal telling the school librarian not to read Mother Goose stories at storytime. He predicted parents might object to the stories' violence, characterizing the text as developmentally inappropriate. Although no complaints occurred, the principal's concern led to his ban on Mother Goose stories from storytime. The secondary site and district leaders also prematurely censored library materials. In the article entitled "Ohio Principal Judges Magazine by Its Cover" (2009), a middle school principal removed a gaming magazine featuring a "violent figure" on the cover (p.22). Neither parents nor students complained about the cover or magazine content (Adams et al., 2015; Doyle, 2018; "Ohio Principal Judges Magazine by Its Cover," 2009; Scales, 2010, 2013, 2015).

Similarly, Doyle (2018) and Scales (2013) portrayed one administrator's self-censoring library materials when instructing his middle school librarian not to order all the books from the John Newbery Honor Books for Children. Members of the Newbery and Caldecott Award Selection Committee consider Newbery Honor Books to be of the highest literary quality for students in kindergarten through eighth grade (Scales, 2013). Elected members of the American Library Association and Association for Library Service to Children comprise the fifteen-seat Newbery and Caldecott Award Selection Committee (American Library Association, 2020). In Scales' (2013) example, parents had already questioned some Newbery Honor Books' appropriateness that year. To avoid potential parental complaints, the administrator told the middle school librarian not to order the Newbery books automatically but to vet the books thoroughly before deciding which books to purchase (Scales, 2013). In another skirting of parental complaints, an elementary school principal instructed the librarian not to order *George*,

a book about a transgender person who was an elementary-school student intended for upper elementary students and middle-school students (Doyle, 2018). Both instances involved an administrator preventing a book purchase because parents *might* complain. Because, in these instances, parents in other districts had already challenged the books' appropriateness, the principals may have reasoned that parental challenges to the books were likely or inevitable (Doyle, 2018; Scales, 2013).

Library-media center events. Lastly, administrators feared that featuring a book or hosting a controversial author or event might communicate to the public that the school administrator—the *public school*—promoted or upheld the book's or event's content. In one instance, a high school principal did not want his librarian to feature the book *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass* (Scales, 2015) on the school's website fearing such attention might imply the school supported violence (Scales, 2015). In the examples, although no one formally complained to either school or district administrators, those administrators self-censored—voluntarily initiated censoring—before anyone could question their judgment, their “right actions” in keeping students safe.

CRT Censorship and State Legislation

Another topic of high interest related to censorship is how CRT has emerged since I completed my data collection (Camera, 2021; Conwright, 2021; Copland, 2021; Joseph, 2021; Leblanc & Wolf, 2021; Sawchuk, 2021; “Texas’ Battle Over School Books,” 2021) and the potential new bills related to CRT in schools (Forman, 2022; Goldberg, 2021; Lopez, 2021). Although I discussed legislation in chapter 1 in terms of students’ first amendment rights, in this section I will focus on legislation that solely focuses on CRT censorship. Many new state policies focus on banning CRT or any talk of race that could make people feel uncomfortable

due to their race (Adams et al., 2021; Forman, 2022; Goldberg, 2021). Since administrators' roles consist of educating students and following the state and national laws, the new laws are yet another layer of administrators' roles.

The number of states with or are in the process of trying to approve anti CRT bills continues to grow:

While only a handful of these bills, introduced since at least February, explicitly mention critical race theory, they all contain similar language and goals, and deem teaching of historical racism and its impact on modern U.S. society divisive or racist. (Adams et al., 2021, para.2)

Out of the twenty-two proposed bills, state legislatures have passed five into law (Adams et al., 2021). Since people objecting to CRT see it as a dominant force in the classroom and library curriculum, administrators must comply with the state laws in which they work. Administrators have to make clear what teachers are allowed to teach under the new law even though one state CRT bill states, "Nothing in this rule shall be construed to prevent the teaching of history, social studies, English language arts, biology or any other subject matter area consistent with the [State] Academic Standards" (State Department of Education, n.d., p.1). As noted earlier, those objecting to or supporting CRT have not clearly defined what CRT entails and therefore left the theory, and its censoring, open for diverse interpretations (Sawchuk, 2021). The lines in which a school is not discriminatory towards people are vague. New and proposed CRT bills add another layer of complexity to a community's discourse that administrators must navigate and manage, or administrators may potentially lose their jobs (Lopez, 2021), reflecting the constantly changing terrain of materials becoming sites of concern in schools.

Filling the Gaps

Current censorship scholars focus primarily on ways district and site administrators censor or attempt to censor schools' print, visual, and digital media resources and special events. My study helps to fill the gaps in contemporary, qualitative research on censorship: 1) by enhancing scholarship on district and site administrators' perceptions and perspectives of visual, print, and digital censorship and students' access to resources and 2) by addressing the multilayered forces evident as part of the discursive environment that influences administrators' perceptions of censorship, censorship, and censorship policy-making. I make a case for the value of context-based understandings of censorship practices.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

My qualitative case study focused on secondary administrators who worked in one school district. I have intentionally and consistently rendered particular aspects of the data ambiguous to protect the school district's confidentiality and details. It manifested in my study by using the letter X or symbol __ instead of the district name or the district's first letter, rounding district demographic numbers, changing names and genders of the administrators interviewed and referring to the state as a Midwestern state only. To assist in keeping my participants anonymous, I will sometimes refer to them as administrator, administrators, or by a pseudonym. I focused on one Midwestern school district to understand better which factors influenced administrators and their decisions related to curriculum censorship. Research lacks case studies and action-oriented inquiry that focus solely on administrator perspectives related to their censorship experiences and decisions. I wanted to study only secondary administrators and explore their unique roles in the school. Also, I wanted to study how their roles influence their censorship decisions. As I collected and analyzed data, I realized how power relations in the school and community could shape administrators' experiences. Administrators are both acted upon by community members and exercise power over others, such as teachers and students.

I will explain the rationale for my study and why I decided to study the phenomenon of censorship as a qualitative study; then, I will provide a district and present censorship context to clarify the discourses involved in the school district. Critical theory is the theoretical perspective of the study because it “aims to critique existing conditions and through that critique bring about change” (Patton, 2015, p.692). My study highlighted administrators’ perspectives on censorship decisions by studying the perceptions of secondary school administrators from one Midwestern school district. I analyzed forces that contributed to their decision-making that perpetuated censorship. It also showed how multiple discourses and roles in the education system rely on each other for power and meaning, which adds to the complexity of how censorship occurs.

My epistemology is constructionism (Crotty, 1998) because I approached this study with the belief that there are multiple perspectives related to how administrators view and react to censorship decisions (Crotty, 1998). All perspectives are valid to offer insight into censorship and censorship decisions: “When we describe something we are, in the normal course of events, reporting how something is seen and reacted to, and thereby meaningfully constructed, within a given community or set of communities” (Crotty, 1998, p.64). My ontology is modified realist ontology. Since I have worked and know some administrators in the district that is my case study, my reflexivity and positionality offered me a unique perspective in conceptualizing this study, carrying it out, and analyzing the data; I have a working knowledge of some of the administrators’ situations in their interviews. My methodology is a case study with an action orientation. My original intent was to conduct an action research study, working with administrators to make a change related to censorship-related policies. Action researchers assume “people in a setting can solve problems by studying themselves” (Patton, 2015, p.250). Initially, I wanted to “understand and solve a specific problem as quickly as possible” (Patton,

2015, p. 248) and “implement actions to address educational issues” (Tomal, 2010). I wanted to enact change and work collaboratively with administrators. Still, I realized I could not enact change when I had not yet studied one school district first to understand and critically analyze how administrators made decisions within their context. I have an action research orientation because I implemented part of the action research methodology when conducting my case study: “In action research, the researcher is concerned with using a systematic process in solving educational problems and making improvements” (Tomal, 2010, p.14). A case is a “bounded system” or “case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, as quoted in Patton, 2015, p.259).

The bounded system of my study entails one school district, and the cases are nine secondary administrators. I oriented my study to surfacing context-based information that I can use in the future to contribute to change. My case study involved administrators’ perceptions and experiences of censorship in one Midwestern school district. I created and collected demographic surveys, examined district documents, completed field observations and notes, and conducted interviews with secondary school administrators using open-ended interview questions. Every method aligns with my qualitative methodology.

District Context

The school district where my study took place is higher-income than many surrounding school districts. The school district has had a high parent involvement through Parent Teacher Associations and school board meetings. The community has consistently voted to approve tax increases to help fund school maintenance, new school construction, and other education-related expenses—the community continually supports and funds schools in the area. Parents are

encouraged to participate in school board meetings and voice their opinions to the district administration and school board members. The city has a well-kept downtown area, beautiful parks, and many well-established and profitable businesses.

The district is a suburban school district with around 25,000¹ K–12 students; 3,000 educators working for the district (District school website, 2018).² Moreover, specific to my research, 12,000 plus students attend secondary schools (Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, 2018): six middle schools, three high schools, and one alternative high school.³ The district’s student demographics are 62% Caucasian, 11% African American, 11% Latinx, 5% Asian, 2% Native American, 8% Mixed, and 1% Immigrant (see Appendix I, Figure 1). In its specialty programs and services, 21% of students are in the Gifted and Talented Program, 12% receive special education services, 20% are in Title I, and 5% are English Language Learners (ELL) in the ELL program. For free or reduced lunches, 27.7% of students qualify (District school website, 2018).

¹ To help keep anonymity of the district, I have rounded population numbers.

² I am using this generic title for the district's website to keep the district anonymous.

³ Please note that I use the naming conventions from the U.S. Department of Education’s (2015) National Center for Education Statistics guidelines for district locale labeling. To keep anonymity, I use the district label for the school district’s names, not their real names.

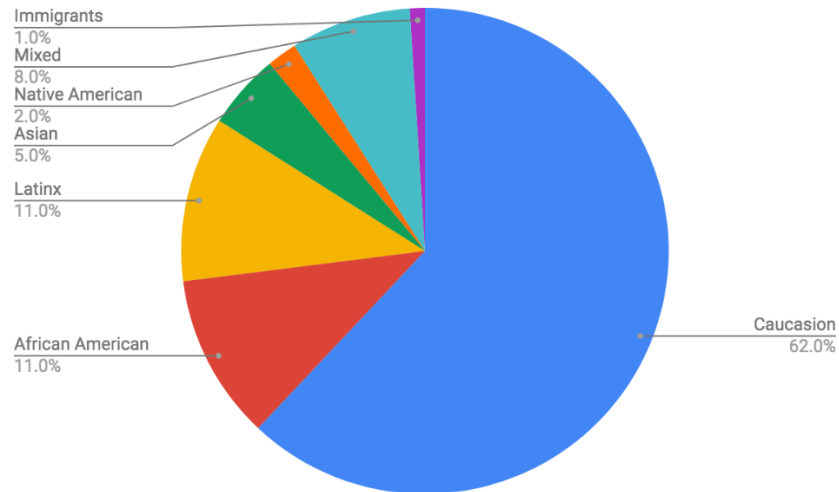


Figure 1. Student demographics for students in the school district.

This Midwestern state’s average household income is \$65,000 (Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, 2018; see Figure 3). Compared to the neighboring large, urban school district, whose yearly household income averages \$50,000, the suburban school district I studied is well off, with an average annual household income of \$105,000 (Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, 2018). One of the largest districts in the state, a neighboring school district serves over 40,000 students, employs 5,000 individuals, and reports student demographics as 14% Caucasian, 23% African American, 53% Latinx⁴, 2% Asian, and 3% Native American (see Figure 2).⁵ The neighboring urban district offers all its students free breakfasts and lunches (State Urban Public School, 2019).⁶

⁴ Latinx is a gender neutral terms for people of Latin America origin.

⁵ Please note that I report the demographics using each district's labels, which is revealing but beyond the scope of this study.

⁶ To not give contextual clues related to surrounding school districts that could reveal the name of the district, the generic name "Rural school district website" will be used when referring to the closest neighboring rural district.

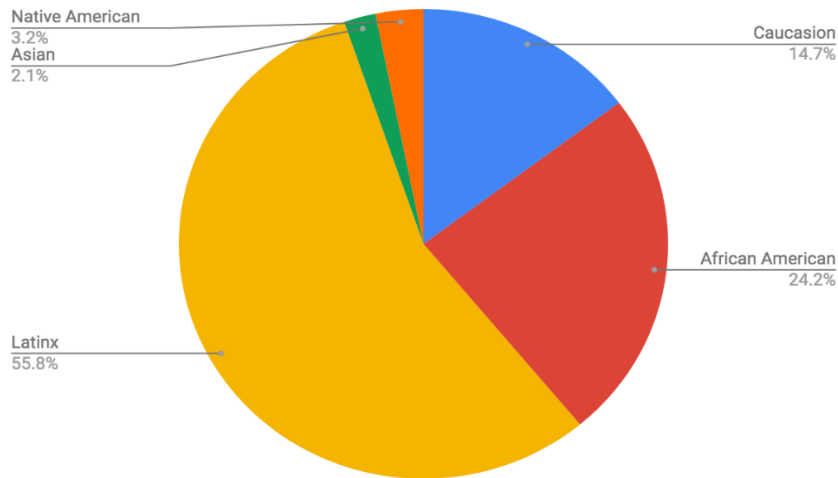


Figure 2. Student demographics for students attending the neighboring urban school district.

In contrast, the district under study's other neighboring school district is rural, serving 6,500 students in five elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school (Rural school district website, 2019). Significantly higher than my study's suburban district, this rural district's average annual income is \$142,000 (Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, 2018; see Figure 3). The district's website does not include racial demographics, perhaps because the district likely serves exclusively Caucasian students. All three school districts exclude demographic information related to gender from their websites.

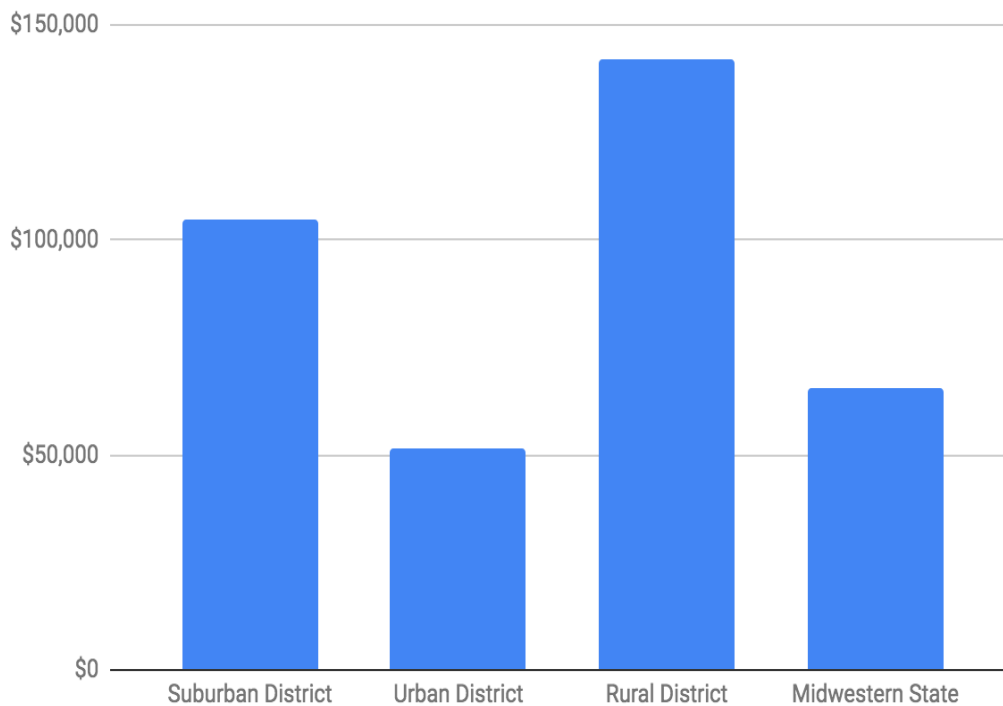


Figure 3. The average income for the Midwestern state in the study and the three districts referenced in this chapter.

Because I focused on district and site administrators' perceptions of censorship and censorship practices in one, Midwestern, suburban school district, administrators' demographics became especially significant. District-level administrators include the District Superintendent; two Associate Superintendents; and the District's Executive Director, Chief Operations Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Chief Human Resources Officer, Director of Community Relations, Director of Special Services, and Director of Technology. Each middle school has one principal and up to two assistant principals; each of the high schools has one principal, four assistant principals, and one specialty principal. At the time of study, secondary site administrators included thirteen females and twenty males; two African Americans, two Latinos, and twenty-nine Caucasians.

Secondary site administrators also consist of guidance counselors and library media administrators. Every middle school has three counselors and one library-media administrator; each high school has six counselors and two library-media administrators (District school website, 2018). Because they do not have the position or means to enact changes in censorship policies and practices that might change perceptions, I did not include them in my research.

In addition to the district's student and administrator demographics, the district's technological context is also vital to any censorship study. The suburban school district under study provides one-to-one technology devices to all secondary students (*Digital Conversion Guidebook*, 2018). The devices filter content and keywords using a filtering software called iBoss. The software is on every internet-connected device in the district ("Dear __ P.S. Parents," 2018). One-to-one technology means every secondary student receives a Chromebook as an instructional learning device. Students acquire and retain their Chromebooks for their middle school years; they collect and keep another Chromebook for their high school years. With one-to-one Chromebook technology becoming increasingly common, the district has faced more censorship and controversy among parents, teachers, and administrators concerning students' access to information. Since the Chromebooks are school-issued, administrators lock them to only educational digital media.

Epistemology, Ontology, and Theoretical Perspective

While the researcher's theoretical perspective is "the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria" (Crotty, 1998, p.3), the researcher's epistemology is "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 1998, p.3). The researcher's epistemology and ontology must also align, for epistemology reflects the kinds and nature of the

researcher's truth and knowledge claims, while ontology reflects what the researcher determines exists or is real (also affecting the researcher's truth and knowledge claims). As the underlying epistemology of emancipatory/critical theory's theoretical perspectives, constructionism is my epistemology. Humans construct knowledge. Due to their different experiences, individuals' knowledge and realities will also differ. There is no one meaningful reality. All realities are meaningful. The ontology that aligns with constructionism is lightweight realism.

In my epistemology, constructionism, truth (often called truth with a small "t") is multiple and unknowable with certainty. According to Chalmers et al. (2009) essay in *Metaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology*, the two main philosophical ontologies (realism and anti-realism) have morphed into three: realism, lightweight realism, and anti-realism. Most often aligned with a constructionism epistemology and with such theoretical perspectives as the many forms of interpretivism and emancipatory/critical theory, lightweight realists hold "that while there are objective answers to ontological questions, the answers are somehow shallow or trivial perhaps reflecting conceptual truths rather than the furniture of the world" (Chalmers et al., 2009, p.2). Crotty (1998) asserted that a meaningful reality is "constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world" (p.42), the ideal reality being the one best serving society.

I believe humans co-construct knowledge with the world to make sense of it, so constructionism in my epistemology. In keeping with my ontological stance of lightweight realism, I hold that there is a reality that I can research but that I cannot be sure about how the concepts in my research fully reflect reality. In fact, in a critical perspective, all realities are mediated by power interests. Specific to my study, I approached the issue of censorship as a socially constructed phenomenon. While individuals may perceive censorship's reality,

justification, meaning, and value differently, the community—including parents, the school board, district and school administrators, librarians, teachers, and students—and its members’ cultural, political, and socio-economic values and power dynamics—I believe, influenced censorship’s construction in a given school district and school site. Although each stakeholder and co-creator of the censorship phenomenon may perceive censorship’s reality differently, no individual’s censorship reality is more valid than another’s.

A theoretical perspective is “the philosophical stance informing the methodology and thus providing a context for the process and grounding its logic and criteria” (Crotty, 1998, p.3). My philosophical stance that informed my methodology is the critical theoretical perspective because it presumes that power shapes the social and educational world. Censorship is a practice of power. It can reflect the interests of dominant groups, advocating for their view of censorship as reality. Research carried out under a critical perspective “aims to critique existing conditions and through that critique bring about change” (Patton, 2015, p.692). Its three main tenets reflect my goal to understand how administrators enact censorship decisions, how external forces shape their decision making, and how we enact change in censorship practices: “(1) inquiry into situations of social injustice, (2) interpretation of the findings as a critique of the existing situation, and (3) using the findings and critique to mobilize and inform change” (Patton, 2015, p.692). My study reflects the first tenet— “inquiry into situations of social injustice”—for I posit that censorship in secondary schools is unjust because those in power create and enforce policies that restrict students’ information access which in turn shuts down students’ learning, knowledge construction, judgment formation, independent learning, and full growth into educated, participating citizens.

Aligning with the second tenet— “interpretation of the findings as a critique of the existing situation”—my interpreting findings meant analyzing and critiquing the practices within the current district. School administrators’ perceptions of censorship, actual censorship, and censorship policy-making mean critiquing the cultural, political, and socio-economic factors within their suburban school district that influence administrators’ censorship perceptions, practices, and policy-making. I aimed first to understand administrators’ perceptions of censorship and censorship practices and policy-making that facilitates administrators’ censorship perceptions. Understanding is essential to steps in the critique and change process. By bringing awareness to censorship perceptions, I wanted to illuminate how administrator practices and policy-making might implement decisions that guide, safeguard, and open possibilities for students’ and students’ voices. My research aim aligned with the third tenet— “using the findings and critique to mobilize and inform change” (Patton, 2015, p.692).

My second aim was to make researchers, administrators, and community members aware of the complex nature of censorship in school settings. Censorship is fluid and contingent on the community discourse and power relations which are not binary. Power relations in a school district are multifaceted rather than grounded in the idea of administrators versus everyone else. Administrators and community members advocate for student learning, but their role in such advocacy may differ. All community players must be aware of this element of censorship to work together to improve education for students. Part of this realization is that students need avenues to advocate for their education rather than become docile objects of manifesting power.

Methodology

The methodology of a study is the philosophy of method: methodology is “the strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods to the

desired outcomes” (Crotty, 1998, p.3). I used a case study as my methodology. I aimed to study the phenomenon of censorship holistically and in a bounded area of one school district (Stake, 1995). My case involves the parameters of one suburban school district. I focused on secondary school administrators. Stake (1995) stated, “The case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing” (p.2). The specific problem I focused on is district and site administrators’ perceptions of print, visual, and digital censorship, censorship, and censorship policy-making in one large, suburban, Midwestern school district. I focused on district and site administrators because they are directly positioned to enact policies and practices due to their administrative roles.

I analyzed censorship by examining how community discourse’s power relations interact with and sometimes influence district and school administrators. Power relations can influence how administrators perceive censorship; react to pressures involved in making censorship decisions; make the print, visual, and digital media censorship decisions; and censor students’ access to print, visual, and digital media by examining how these decisions influence and affect students, teachers, the community, and school and district policies. With my findings, I aimed to increase administrators’ awareness of the forces working in censorship and their role in the dynamics of power relations in the school district. Second, with my findings, I aimed to increase community awareness of power relations and the many roles of school community members working together with administrators. I considered how interrupting censorship means awareness of how it is sustained and potentially changes how administrators manage parents, students, and other community members to ensure vocal parents are not the dominant power players at work in the district but that all members have power and voices. It takes all community roles for a district to educate students or censor educational materials. My final chapter will address the implications of my discoveries in my study for research, theory, practice, and particularly action.

Rationale for Qualitative Study

Qualitative methodologies provide a means for analyzing abstract and non-measurable information (Mason, 2013). Qualitative inquiry is “grounded in a philosophical position which is broadly interpretivist in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, or both” (Mason, 1996, p.4). Yet I use a critical orientation in how I approach my research because I advocate for free exchange of information in schools and see censorship as an issue that is important to understand, and to change, and research can engage in this orientation to change. In a qualitative study, the researcher “inquiries into, documents, and interprets the meaning-making process” and “qualitatively studying how things work [means] getting inside the phenomenon of interest to get detailed, descriptive data and perceptions about the variations in what goes on and the implications of those variations for the people and processes involved” (Patton, 2015, pp.3, 6).

I selected qualitative methodology as best suited for investigating how district and site administrators perceive censorship, actually censor, and make censorship policies because I wanted to: 1) acquired “detailed, descriptive data” (Patton, 2015, p.6) about administrators’ perceptions of censorship, actual censorship, and censorship policy-making in light of the community’s multi-layered cultural, political, and socio-economic influences; 2) delved into the phenomenon of district and site administrators’ censorship practices in a particular site of study; 3) moved “inside the phenomenon of interest to [collect] detailed, descriptive data and perceptions about the variations in what goes on and the implications of those variations for the people and processes involved” (Patton, 2015, pp.3, 6). To study variations, I examined the district and school-site administrative levels to see how their positions may affect the types of censorship pressure they experience.

Participants

My participants are the center of my case. The school district has established many administrative positions, including district-level administrators and site-level administrators. The district administrators oversee administrative roles such as curriculum and operations for the district. The top administrative position is the district superintendent; the next level of administrators are associate superintendents, specializing in different academic areas of expertise: elementary, secondary, and curriculum. The superintendent and associate superintendent must have experience as school administrators, pass state-certified teaching tests, have a master's degree in school administration, and have a certification in school administration. The administrator of technology is in charge of district internet filters, school devices, and the implementation and control of a secure internet network. This position does not require a school administration degree or certification but must have experience managing computer systems and networks. Other administrative positions not explored in this study include district curriculum specialists. They must have experience as classroom teachers in the areas they manage curriculum, textbooks, and materials.

Site administrators oversee and manage their school site curriculum implementation and operations. Also, each site has one head site principal and one or more assistant principals. All site administrators hold master's degrees in administration and certifications in school administration. The state mandates for administrators require two years of teaching experience in a public or private school classroom; the district requires more than the state requires.

Identifying Public School Administrators

The following section will explain how I defined public school administrators to clarify who constitutes a secondary administrator in the span of the study. I selected participants

purposively because I needed diverse levels of experienced secondary administrators to get meaningful data: “The purpose of a purposeful sample is to focus case selection strategically in alignment with the inquiry’s purpose, primary questions, and data being collected” (Patton, 2015, p.264). My participants met the following selection criteria: district-level or secondary-school administrators in the suburban, Midwestern school district I studied.

Throughout the study, I used “administrator” when referring to district and site administrators. Before discussing district and school administrators’ perceptions of censorship, censorship, and censorship policy-making, I will identify the many levels at which administrators made censorship decisions affecting public school districts and individual public schools. State-level administrators include the state’s legislature that passes education legislation, its superintendent of education, and curriculum directors. District administrators in this study include the district’s superintendent, associate superintendents, curriculum directors, and technology administrators at the school district level. Individual school-site administrators include principals, assistant principals, school counselors, and library-media specialists. These titles vary with across roles in different contexts. Rather than conveying that these job titles are static or reflect consistent job duties, the titles reflect some administrative roles in the extant literature and the schools under study. I do not want to render stable the meaning of these categories. This is not a post-positivist study, and this is not a direct transfer to making claims only about those roles. Although administrators at each level influence public schools’ censorship policies and practices, I focused on district administrators and site principals because their roles in schools can enact censorship-related decisions and change. Administrators are a consistent point in the dynamics of power relations in a district due to their leadership roles. The

next section will examine current scholarship on the external factors influencing district and site administrators' perceptions of censorship, censorship, and censorship policy-making.

Methods

Methods are tools for collecting data. Patton (2015) stated, "Qualitative inquiry includes collecting quotes (sic) from people, verifying them, and contemplating what they mean" (p.14). Qualitative data consists of "words, stories, observations, and documents" (Patton, 2015, p.14). Since I conducted a context-based case study, I needed to gather data holistically (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015): "Holistic means that researchers should consider the interrelationship between the phenomenon and its context" (Yazan, 2015, p.139). I gathered data that showed me the interrelationship of censorship in the context of the school district's discourse. So, I implored multiple methods to see the broader context and connections of censorship as fluid and dependent on the specific school context in my study. My methods consisted of a demographic survey, document collection and examination, field observations and notes, and individual interviews with nine administrators for my qualitative study. I used a script to solicit participants. The script described the general guidelines of my study, so administrators knew what the study entailed and the time commitment involved. I have included this script in Appendix IV.

Participant recruitment

I collected qualitative data through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations during administrators' meetings. After receiving permission from the Curriculum Associate Superintendent, I approached secondary administrators. If administrators consented to participate in my study, I had permission to contact them about interviews. If an administrator did not respond to my initial participant request, I did not have permission to contact those administrators again.

I emailed all thirty-four district secondary administrators requesting their participation. Nine administrators agreed to participate: three district administrators, two high-school administrators, and four middle-school administrators. Five of the nine administrators identify as female and four as male. To offer more anonymity for participants, I also changed some administrator-identified genders in my written analysis. Participants completed an inventory sheet concerning their educational experiences, reasons for becoming an administrator, and how these experiences and reasons, combined with their demographics, influenced their decisions and actions. Seven of the nine participants completed the participant inventory sheet.

Although only seven of the nine participants completed the inventory sheet, all nine met with me for the first round of interviews. I transcribed the nine interviews and sent each administrator-participant their interview transcription for member checking. Seven participants confirmed transcription accuracy; two participants did not fill out the inventory sheet and did not respond to the member check. I sent follow-up emails to the two participants who did not respond to check for transcription accuracy. In my document, "Consent Form: Censorship in Secondary Public Schools," I state, "The audio recordings will be transcribed *verbatim*. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified" (Sterba, 2019). After several requests over five months, these two participants did not verify their interview transcripts for accuracy, so I moved forward with my analysis. After conducting the first round of interviews, data emerged, highlighting the need for follow-up interviews. Six participants replied to the follow-up questions via email. One participant decided to have a follow-up interview in person. Two participants chose not to engage in follow-up interviews. I then recorded, transcribed, and sent participants their transcriptions for verification. In Figure 4, I summarize each participant's contributions.

Figure 4. List of participants and the data gathered from each participant.⁷

	Participant Inventory	Initial Interview	Member Checking	Follow-Up Interview	Member Checking from Follow-Up Interview	Attendance at Observed Meetings
Alison	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	K-12 Curriculum Meeting Secondary Curriculum Meeting School Board Meetings
Denise	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Secondary Curriculum Meeting School Board Meetings
Rita	X	Complete	X	X	X	School Board Meetings
Tim	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	School Board Meetings
Betty	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Not Required
Grant	X	Complete	X	X	X	Not Required

⁷ Due to COVID-19 dynamics of school board meeting changed from March 19 onward. School board meetings were conducted via zoom and broadcasted through YouTube from March 2020 until February 2021. After that date, school board meetings were conducted in person and streamed on the District YouTube channel. Only the school board members, superintendent, and people who are on the agenda to speak are shown on the videos, so I cannot tell which administrators were present.

Lilly	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Not Required
Courtney	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Not Required
Kate	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Complete	Not Required

Participant Consent Form (see Appendix V)

I stored recorded interviews on an audio recording device that is password protected.

Only I and my advising team had access to the audio recordings of the participants' interviews. I will delete the audio files at the end of the study. I stored the transcribed interviews on my personal, password-protected computer that I have kept in my possession. Only I use my personal computer and audio recording device.

Case Study

Data Sources

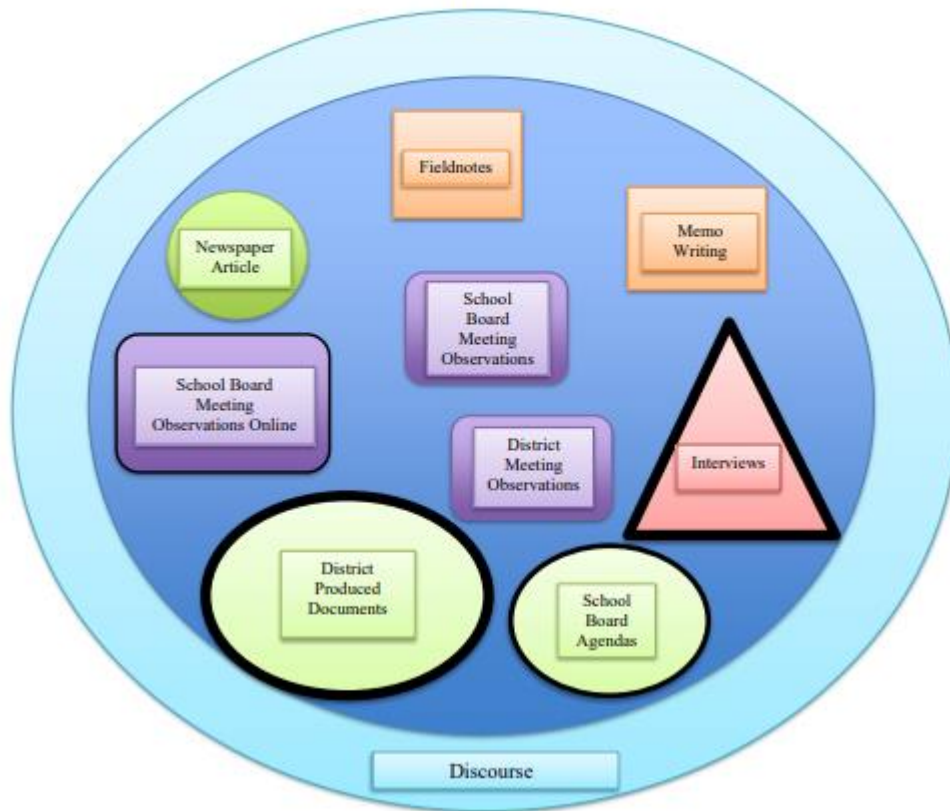


Figure 5. The data sources I collected to understand the discourse of the school district better.

Demographic Survey

To better understand each participant's positioning, I created a demographic survey for participants to fill out before I interviewed them. This allowed me to know their educational, professional, and personal background because these areas may influence their values and opinions as people and as administrators. All participants completed a demographic survey highlighting their professional work experience in education and their backgrounds. Their education-work experiences and personal backgrounds necessarily influenced their perceptions

of censorship, censorship decisions, and censorship policy-making (see Appendix VI for the survey).

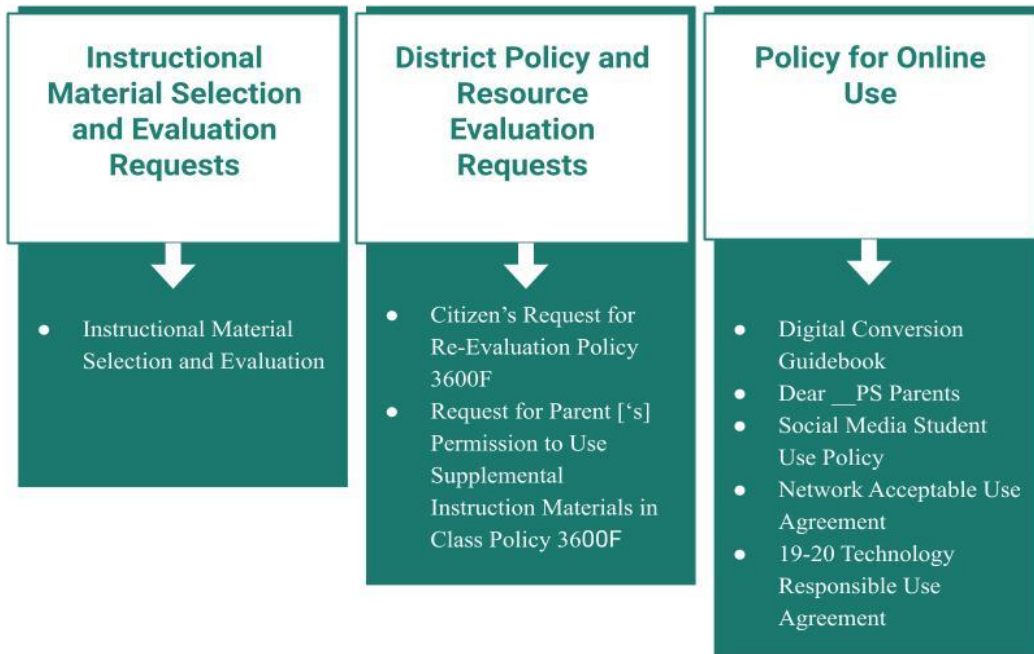
Document Examination

In addition to the participant inventory sheet, I collected three kinds of district-website documents: those related to 1) instructional material selection and evaluation; 2) district policy and resource evaluation, and 3) policy for online instruction and internet access because the school district is a one-to-one Chromebook district. To understand how administrators made these decisions in the context of the community discourse and how administrators' roles enabled them to manage and make decisions for students, teachers, librarians, community members, and school and district policies, I began by examining and interpreting such documents as district resource-selection policies and school board notes related to censorship topics. Such inquiry provided insight into administrators' resource evaluation and meaning-making processes when making censorship decisions since school districts have the daunting task of ensuring their policies reflect majority viewpoints within the school district, documents related to district policies and protocols, and at least in principle, reflected community members' ethical cultural values.

I examined the district's definition of censorship, such as "District Selection Policies." Media selection policies outlined the guidelines media specialists follow when ordering and accepting print, visual, and digital media into this public-school district's libraries. Because selection policies vary by district, examining the researched district's policies—its expectations and restrictions—contextualized administrators' perceptions and censorship decisions within the district's definition of censorship, resource-selection criteria, and policy framework. Also, I examined district policies and documents related to curriculum selection, appropriate internet

usage, and information provided to parents and the community about school-issued Chromebooks and the internet filter used. I also attended to finding and analyzing any absences or silences present in documents; this helped me see what elements are not at the forefront of administrative policies and documents that may have influenced administrators' perceptions.

Figure 6. Chart of district documents and their categories.



To understand what the community expects district administrators' and educators' roles to be as curriculum experts, I examined district policy documents and Resource Evaluation Committee documents to identify criteria for selecting such school materials as books, magazines, videos, and databases. I selected these documents because each document's title indicated that the contents are related to censorship issues. Because the district is a one-to-one

Chromebook district, all secondary students receive a school-issued Chromebook. Therefore, I analyzed the *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018) and “Network and Internet Acceptable Use Agreement” (n.d.) because, in these documents, district administrators outline for community members the District’s criteria and justifications for online instructional materials-access and students’ internet access on school-issued Chromebooks. I also analyzed documents even more specifically addressing online instructional materials and internet access by examining the district-website-posted “Dear__P.S. Parents” (2018), “19–20 Technology Responsible Use Agreement” (2019), and the “Social Media Student Use Policy” (2017). (See Appendix XI for Print Data Justification Chart.)

Field observations and fieldnotes

I attended three in-person school board meetings, and fifteen streamed online school board meetings in which I observed how administrators and parents chose or chose not to participate in the meetings. I am not providing the public participants’ names to ensure their anonymity and the anonymity of the district’s name for the school board meeting agendas are public. I summarized my key fieldnotes showing public participation and directly quoted parent participation on the district’s YouTube channel. Context to the March school board meeting that follows is essential. The COVID-19 Pandemic spread in the US at the beginning of the spring semester of 2020. The school district was 100% virtual from mid-March until the end of school in May due to high COVID-19 infections. The meeting I took notes from on this date took place almost one year after the pandemic changed how the district approached learning. In the 2020-2021 school year, administrators and the school board decided to implement a hybrid model in which schools would attend virtual learning from home three days a week and in-person learning on school grounds two days a week.

Fieldwork involved observing and writing fieldnotes during observations; the researcher treated these fieldnotes as data. The fieldnotes I wrote during field observations “describe activities, behaviors, actions, conversations, interpersonal interactions, organizational or community processes, or any other aspect of observable human experiences” (Patton, 2015, p. 36). In fieldnotes, the researcher “detail[s] the social and interactional processes that make up people’s everyday lives and activities” (Emerson et al., 1995, p.15). When I observed, I wrote fieldnotes through jottings. Jottings are “a brief written record of events and impressions captured in keywords and phrases” (Emerson et al., 1995, p.29) that helped me remember key events and phrases when writing my detailed fieldnotes. Because I investigated administrators’ perceptions of censorship, their perceptions of the external forces that influenced their censorship decisions, and how they ultimately decided to censor resources or access to resources, I attended district board meetings, both in-person and online, and district administrative meetings.

Attending and analyzing school board meetings and notes illuminated how such community members as parents, teachers, students, and administrators view the importance of educational excellence and power relations between the school board, administrators, parents, students, and community members. School board meetings are public with published minutes, so I did not need a consent form to attend these meetings. The meetings showed the school board, parents, and administrators focus on high educational standards and the invitation to participate administrators gave to parents. I assigned pseudonyms to participants so they would be anonymous (see Appendix X for administrators’ abbreviations chart).

Interviews

I conducted interviews with district and site administrators posing open-ended, structured questions concerning administrators’ perceptions of censorship, their perceptions of

the multi-layered cultural, political, and socio-economic influences upon their censorship decisions, and how they arrived at censorship decisions and policy. Each participant in my study participated in one thirty- to sixty-minute interview. I audio recorded all interviews, transcribed them *verbatim*, wrote jottings to record body language, and changed participants' names to protect confidentiality. Open-ended questions were appropriate for my study because "open-ended interviews add depth, detail, and meaning at a very personal level of experience" (Patton, 2015, p.24). I asked three open-ended questions and asked follow-up prompts dependent on the responses. The administrators' roles kept them very busy, so it was vital for me to keep interviews direct. Interviewees answered the following questions.

1. What is your experience when making decisions about print and digital materials for the school or district?
2. Do you ever experience external pressures? If so, from whom? Could you tell me more about those situations?
3. Do you ever experience internal pressures? If so, from whom? Could you tell me more about those situations?

After examining the interview transcripts, I determined I needed to follow-up with additional questions in a second interview session. Due to administrators' packed schedules, I allowed participants to conduct their second interview through phone, in-person, or email communication (see Appendix IX for follow-up interview questions). Each interview lasted thirty minutes to an hour and a half, depending on the interviewee; nine administrators participated in the initial interview and seven completed a second interview. They provided

additional information related to their administrative roles and the daily decisions related to censorship. I also used probes and prompts after asking questions based on their responses.

Data Analysis

My “study stands on its own as a detailed and rich story about a person, organization, event, campaign, or program” (p.259). A case must be a “bounded system” (Patton, 2015, p.259) that uses multiple rich data points to explore one case in detail. My bounded case is the nine secondary administrators I interviewed within the context of the district. I used multiple data sources to analyze these administrators’ administrative roles and experiences related to censorship issues.

I analyzed my data inductively. As I analyzed my data, focused on administrators as powerful figures in censorship decisions, I noticed power relations between administrators and parents at work. I looked for patterns within and across data sets. Then as I looked further into the documents and interviews, I realized power relations are more complex than just two groups vying for control. The school board, teachers, librarians, administrators, parents, and community members are all part of a school’s power relations. I analyzed data in two steps: in-vivo and structural coding. I started with in-vivo coding because I wanted to analyze what words and concepts administrators brought up to narrow their perceptions and member terms. I then conducted structural coding on the interviews to see if I was addressing my initial research questions. Through this process, I noticed I needed to conduct a follow-up interview with some administrators to understand why they felt certain curriculum materials or topics were controversial for some community members. As noted above, I completed these interviews two to ten months after the initial interviews.

Theoretical Grounding of Analysis

I began this study without a theoretical framework, so I did not go into my research knowing I would look at my data with a particular lens in mind. I did not want a pre-selected lens to make meaning of the data. I analyzed the data to see what themes I could create and then picked a theoretical lens to analyze the data *posteriori*. After I gathered and analyzed data, I began to think more critically about administrator's complex roles in schools where they cannot let their personal feelings dictate how they handle a material complaint. For instance, all administrators I interviewed were administrators as well as parents and some were members of the "community" where the study took place. They had to balance their personal views of censorship, and what is acceptable for their children may vary from what other parents deem acceptable. Students are still minors, so administrators must also manage parents and guardians. Communities help fund school districts, so administrators must also manage community expectations. My data illuminated varied power relations related to administrators' roles.

In my data analysis stage, I decided to use French historian Michel Foucault's concepts of power-relations as my theoretical lens *posteriori* to analyze and gain meaning from my data. Foucault's (1977) theory of the knowledge-power tension seemed fundamental to examining secondary, public-school censorship. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault focused on the power-knowledge tension manifesting in individual and institution relations. The tension between these forces occur because "power and knowledge directly imply one another...there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (Foucault, 1977, p.27). Power is always manifested in accepted forms of knowledge, accepted norms, such as what constitutes 'acceptable' or 'unacceptable' materials for children. His theory on power

relations helped me analyze my data and illuminate the complexity of power relations in the district in which my study took place. Power relations in a district or school involve many players, roles, and positions unique to a given system. It might include national forces as well as local administrators, parents, teachers, the school board, students, and community members. All players contribute to the power relations in a school district, although not equally at any given point in time. Other community considerations like politics and cultural norms influence power relations and add to the complexity of censorship and administrators' management.

Also, I use Foucault's theory of disciplinary mechanisms of space, time, and movement, which the school institution normalizes to create "docile bodies." An institution needs a space conducive to constant surveillance to normalize and control the Panopticon. This disciplinary technology allows anonymous powers to organize, see, discipline, and punish individuals at once in a single space and time. Foucault (1977) stated that the Panopticon's primary function is "to [ensure] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (p.201). Over time, individuals internalize the Panopticon's organization, surveillance, and discipline, therefore, behaving according to their training even outside the Panopticon's parameters.

Keeping Foucault's concept of power relations in the forefront of my discussion, I will begin with the theme of *Community Expectations*. The data supporting *Community Expectations* illuminates that parents represent a significant part of the school community, and administrators consider parent voices most when making censorship-related decisions. Community members' expectations were central to administrators' responses to parents' challenging state- and district-approved curricula and resources. Since administrators' jobs are seen as public leadership jobs and rely on community support to operate, administrators must manage community expectations

so the community will see the district in a positive light. Schools need the continued support of community members to succeed in supporting students' educational needs.

Community Expectations lead to the second theme, *Administrators' Hyper-Consciousness of Parents' Concerns*. Data analysis revealed that many situations related to censorship stem from administrators' being hyper-aware and often inviting community members to become equal participants with education experts, including administrators, technology directors, curriculum specialists, library media specialists, and classroom teachers, in making education decisions controlling *what* students access and *how* they may access it. The district's publicly posted documents, administrator-meeting observations, and administrator interviews depicted the district administrators' decisions to invite community members to share curricular and resource decision-making with state-licensed and certified education experts, which is why the next themes focused on showing how *Administrators' Consciousness of Parental Concerns Manifest as Including Parents in Decisions*. Administrators often use the fourth theme, which stems from the third theme, of *Negotiations as a Means of Managing Parents* to manage parental expectations. Administrators invited parental participation to manage parents and their complaints, which often led to negotiating with parents. Since data revealed that administrators directly addressed parents and their concerns, *Managing Parents* became a theme.

Although administrators publicly invited and even expected parents to contribute equally to curricula and resource selections with state-certified education specialists, administrators did not publicly invite students to participate in school decisions. This led to my fifth theme, *Who is Missing from the Discussion?* As I analyzed district documents, I noticed that students are talked about but not directly addressed. Administrators directly addressed parents in policy documents but not students. After interviewing administrators, I saw the students missing again. Although

schools exist to educate students, only two administrators discussed students advocating for their education. The data elucidated that neither district administrators nor their public communication through district policy documents and forms include students within the community of those invited to contribute to the curricula- and resources- selection process. This exclusion is one of many contradictions in the data. The last theme, *Ambiguity*, is a mechanism for administrators to manage the community while allowing parents to act upon administrators.

Representational Choices

How I choose to present my study is equally as crucial as the ethics and quality of my study. Because I treat my work as constructionist and critical, I see my presentation of my work “as [a] construction[s] instead of objectified products” (Luttrell, 2010, p.203). Since a dominant part of my research analysis focuses on direct administrator experiences from interviews and the discursive administrator speaking through district documents, I chose to represent my case study in narrative format to allow their voices to stand out. For this reason, I refer to administrators as their pseudonyms, administrator(s), or not at all to keep with the narrative format. I do not create an APA in-text citation for a personal interview every time I reference or quote an administrator. I intentionally chose this to keep my analysis and finding to integrate participants and increase flow important in qualitative inquiry.

I provided a chart in Appendix X that includes administrators’ pseudonyms and shows the school levels of administrators I interviewed. The level of each administrator is vital in context because each level has a shared role as administrators, and often their roles intertwine. I put administrator quotes from interviews in quotation marks and italics, so their word stands out since this case study revolves around their perspectives. I bolded words and phrases from

interviews, documents, and observations to emphasize how those words connected to each theme.

Ethics in Qualitative Research

Ethics Criteria

Qualitative ethics criteria are essential to establishing transparency and trust with participants. Ethical guidelines “are for the most part about protecting the individual” (Luttrell, 2010, p.103). I put many layers in place to protect my participants’ identities. I changed participants’ names and sometimes genders. Also, I do not mention any revealing data such as school site, work history, or personal data on demographic surveys.

Transparency was vital to gaining and maintaining participant trust. Before conducting interviews, I ensured all participants understood how I would put layers of protection in place by “Advocating anonymity” (Luttrell, 2010, p.724) and established through my Informed Consent Form how I was conducting my research. After interviewing participants and transcribing interviews, I sent transcribed interviews to each participant. I asked them to tell me if I did not correctly represent their perceptions in my transcript. I wanted to ensure participants had a chance to review, approve, add to, or possibly amend any part of their interviews. No one chose to add or counter any information. Since my study revolves around administrators’ perceptions of censorship and censorship-related practices, I portrayed each participant’s unique voice in each transcript even as I recognized they were fulfilling a role within a hierarchy.

Another way I gained and maintained trust was by attempting to alleviate any discomfort that may appear when I observed or interviewed administrators. Because part of qualitative research involves observations and interviews, I never wanted the participants to feel

uncomfortable due to me, the observer, being “obtrusive in the field” (Luttrell, 2010, p.426). When I observed administrator meetings, I was cautious not to take too many fieldnotes as I did not want to make the participants feel judged or scrutinized. After in-person meeting observations, I took limited notes and wrote more extensive notes. Adhering to ethical guidelines in qualitative research is essential in establishing participants’ trust, protection, and anonymity. Without ethical standards in place, the quality of my research strategies and data would falter.

Quality Criteria

The credibility requirements vary depending on the study type, but at the core of qualitative research are “four distinct but related inquiry elements” (Patton, 2015, p.653). The four fundamental elements for qualitative quality criteria are systematic, in-depth fieldwork, systematic and conscientious analysis of data, the credibility of the inquiry, and readers’ and users’ philosophical belief in the value of the qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2015, p.653). My qualitative study is credible given all four standards.

I observed administrators in as many avenues as possible over two years to establish my credibility as a researcher. I observed and read through many school board meetings and invitation-only administrator meetings. I did not just observe once or twice, but I continually observed for over two years. I read through old board meeting agendas spanning three years, observing in-person and online school board meetings. Moreover, due to my positionality as a librarian specialist or teacher, I was able to get permission to observe district administrative meetings.

I consistently evaluated all of my data over two-plus years, which allowed me to code, arrange, analyze, and rethink my data from multiple vantage points. Some administrator perspectives did not resonate as integral early in my analysis. For instance, the overall lack of

administrators discussing students in an advocacy role was not apparent in my data until two years into my analysis. Over time and re-reading and re-analyzing interviews, I noticed I could not just note *what* the administrators said but what they were *not* saying.

Because “At the core, qualitative analysis depends on the analyst's insights, conceptual capabilities, and integrity (Patton, 2015, p.653), I ensured I gained as much knowledge as possible about qualitative research. As a qualitative researcher, I am knowledgeable through multiple course work in qualitative methods of inquiry, and my advisor and university faculty helped me gain more knowledge in the field. I took Qualitative Methods I, Qualitative Methods II, Photo Methods, and Creative Qualitative Methods classes. Before starting my dissertation and data gathering, I wanted to ensure I had studied multiple qualitative methods, so I would know how to best approach my study.

Since my study is a case study but includes action research elements because I wanted to bring awareness to the school district and possibly enact change, my study has additional quality criteria specific to action research: “focus inquiry on informing action and decisions,” and “relevance to real-world issues and concerns” (Patton, 2015, p.681). My entire study revolved around understanding administrators’ perceptions of censorship decisions. I hoped to direct my findings for all community members, not just administrators, to understand how they are part of the power relations and, ultimately, censorship decisions made in the district. With the passing of CRT bills and book banning on the rise again in the US, censorship is a topic of tremendous importance in the current American discourse. School communities need to understand that censorship decisions are driven by complex perceptions of childhood and parental and school rights, among other multifaceted layers. To discuss censorship and possibly enact change, all parties must understand their vital role in community power relations.

I have outlined how I have met the credibility standards set forth by Patton (2015). I have looked for patterns and watched “for unexpected patterns” (Patton, 2015, p.653). By staying open to the data, I found no exceptions to some of my themes in the different ways administrators manage parents, teachers, and students in different situations.

Limitations of study, reflections on methodology and process

My case study can illuminate the inner workings and complexity of roles and how the discourse of one school district operates. My study shows how administrator roles and censorship decisions happen, not in theory or generalized, but on the ground in a real school district. It is an in-depth look at the community expectations, educational roles, and how the discourse of a community influences censorship decisions in one school district.

Every grade level in the school district has a unique and complex set of community expectations and roles. My case study involved secondary administrators from one school district. Since my study focused on one case, my findings cannot be generalized to all school districts and administrators. Also, censorship findings related to the discourse of one school district and only the secondary administrators in one district cannot represent the censorship experiences of administrators in elementary schools either.

Researcher Reflexivity and Positionality

Reflexivity “involves thoughtful analysis” and “disciplined self-reflection” (Finlay, 1998, p.453). Some consider the reflexivity process as a way of acknowledging research bias (McCabe & Holmes, 2009, p.1520) but also as a beneficial research instrument (Finlay, 1998; McCaleb & Holmes, 2009) and “as a tool for gaining new depth in research” (McCabe & Holmes, 2009, p.1521).

Although connected to helping me gain more depth through studying censorship, my reflexivity and positionality served different functions. Reflexivity functions as “disciplined self-reflection” (Finlay, 1998, p.453), while positionality functions as realizing my researcher position in the context of my study. I acknowledge my reflexivity because, as a researcher, I am a tool for research and analysis: “...we are part of the equation, so we need to look inwards as well as out” because “systematic reflexivity can unfold new understandings” (Finlay, 1998, p.455). I see my positionality as beneficial to my study since I used my in-depth knowledge of the district of study and its community to enrich my analysis. Living, working, and raising a family in the same district I am studying gives me a depth of knowledge and experiences that I can only know by being immersed in the community.

Nevertheless, I am an outsider as well. I am not, nor have I ever been, a school administrator. Having no training or degrees in educational leadership, I yearn to understand the complexities of censorship perceptions and decisions from the perspectives of people who hold power roles in the district: how often do censorship issues arise? How do administrators deal with censorship of parental complaints as an administrator, and a person who is also a parent and former teacher? How do administrators navigate power discourses in the district? Having experienced censorship complaints from a library media specialist and English teacher perspective, I want to extend my knowledge by learning from others’ perceptions because censorship is about more than one individual censoring another. Censorship involves the system and all the multiple roles in it. Administrators make censorship decisions concerning parents, teachers, and community expectations. Sometimes administrators base their decisions on fear of job loss, teachers, and parents.

A researcher's positionality can "shape the researcher's conceptualization of the research problem, the questions asked and the theories the research approaches adopted" (Nompilo, 2021, p.219). I must balance my roles as a current English teacher, former library media specialist, and technology consultant and my identity as a researcher. As a researcher, I have "some level of insider understanding of the culture or experience of the research participants in the social contexts prior to the start of the research" (Nompilo, 2021, p. 219). I know the administrators I interviewed, whether through a casual professional encounter or a more profound connection from extended social networks. So, my positionality is based on working at one point in the district I studied. Knowing some administrators interviewed shaped how I approached my topic, interview questions, and data analysis. I went into the study with my own educational experiences governing administrator perceptions of censorship policies and decisions.

As a core belief from my upbringing, educational training, and positions, I follow the American Library Association (ALA) line of thought. I focused on administrator perceptions instead of library media specialists' or English teachers' positions because I wanted to understand administrators' roles in censorship decisions. The ALA (2017) contended that censoring ideas and information violates individuals' Constitutional rights under the First Amendment in the "First Amendment and Censorship" document:

Americans have interpreted the right to speak, and the right to publish under the First Amendment have widely to protect individuals and society from government attempts to suppress ideas and information and to forbid government censorship of books, magazines, and newspapers as well as art, film, music, and materials on the internet. (American Library Association, 2017)

Administrators' roles and the context of each situation and how they negotiate these complexities change in context. I support students' First Amendment Rights and advocate for free access to information. I understand my interviewees may not share the same position or agree to a lesser extent. Also, they sometimes make decisions that do not align with their personal beliefs.

Also, my positionality needs to be acknowledged and leveraged as a researcher tool. Patton (2015) states, "every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied" (p.706), and "the perspective...the researcher brings to a qualitative inquiry is part of the context for the findings" (p.73). Since "self-awareness, then, can be an asset in both fieldwork and analysis" (Patton, 2015, p.73), as a researcher, I have reflected upon my experiences, opinions, and feelings about censorship, so I am both aware of and attentive to my critiques of censors and censorship within public school districts and school sites. There are influences from my life that required my unwavering attention during my research.

Although I am passionate about knowing why print, visual, and digital censorship occurs, digital censorship seems to grow more important than other types because books, newspapers, websites, and other online sources blur the lines between fact and propaganda more than uniquely print media has previously. For example, I do not believe administrators should tell librarians or teachers they may not teach a book or include it in the school or classroom library because it contains controversial subject matter. I believe a school district should serve its entire community. Similarly, administrators should provide students access to online materials and information to construct knowledge and make informed decisions. My anti-censorship passion drove my study, is aligned with my critical theoretical perspective, and, therefore, particularly merits my attention.

When I interviewed my participants, they may have felt more at ease because some knew me from my years of work within the Midwestern district I studied. Participants were receptive to my questions and gave me honest answers. I have worked with teachers, students, librarians, technology administrators and staff, and district and school administrators during my teaching career. My teaching and library media experience helped put my participants at ease and open about their experiences. Specific to my research with district and site administrators, I have worked with many administrators I interviewed. I also recognize that our mutual comfort and familiarity could have blinded me to things they said or did.

I am a mother. I want my children to be allowed free access to books and other school materials. As a child, I did not experience censorship during my at-home education, influencing my anti-censorship passion. Because much of my formal education has been in library science, whose professionals are anti-censorship advocates and activists, and in arts and humanities education, where issues of diversity, equity, and social justice have been at the forefront, I believe my educational background influences both my reasoning and feelings against censorship. My bachelor's degree in secondary (English) education, my master's degree in instructional media, my ongoing doctoral work in arts and humanities education, and my experiences as a secondary teacher, librarian, and district-technology administrator influenced my views on censorship and its relation to education.

I am privileged in ways others may never experience, for I am a middle-class, heterosexual, Native American, married woman with children, and I have a well-educated, working husband. I work in a predominantly female profession in an affluent, predominately White town of college-educated individuals, part of a large metropolitan area of over one million residents in a conservative, Midwestern state. I live around the community where I work. I come

from a similar socio-economic background as my participants, even though my husband and I do not currently share the community's general affluence. While any similarities I have with my participants may have facilitated our connections, I recognize that they may also blur issues needing critique. In this study, as a critical researcher, I consciously and consistently worked to make my positionality a tool to view and analyze my data.

CHAPTER IV

POWER RELATIONS AT WORK

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the themes I constructed from synthesizing and analyzing my data through various inductive approaches and Foucault's concepts of power relations and surveillance. I did not begin my study trying to test a theory about why I think censorship was occurring, nor did I have any preconceived ideas about what administrators would say in their interviews. Through in-vivo analysis, I observed that specific key topics and words emerged from the interviews. For example, when they discussed their experiences with censorship, their experiences fell into two categories: Pressures they felt from external forces and pressure they put on themselves or internal pressure. After these two types of experiences emerged in the interview data, I broke down their experiences more to see that their feelings of being pressured from the community and from within were accompanied by emotions driven by wanting to protect students and fearing negative feedback or interactions with the parents. Through my inductive analysis approaches, I got to the core of the types of pressures administrators were facing, which helped me understand the multiple layers of power relations at work and the basis of developing many of my themes, such as *community expectations* and *administrators' hyper-consciousness of parents' concerns*.

I will present seven themes. Although administrator perceptions of censorship do not follow a linear pattern and overlap in various ways, I will present my themes in ascending order by each theme's foundational relevance to power relations. The first theme is the foundation for understanding the themes that follow. I will start with the broader community discourse and then analyze smaller parts of the community discourse. The data showed that *community expectations* are the foundation for administrators' perception and implementation of censorship practices. The second theme pertains to *administrators' hyper-consciousness of parents' concerns* in the community where they work and describe making decisions about censorship for the schools based on parental concerns or the anticipation of parental concerns. This reflects administrators' interpretation of parents as vehicles for more extensive community surveillance of their decision-making and a site they need to manage. The third theme *administrators' consciousness of parental concerns manifests as including parents in curricular decisions* stems from the previous theme because administrators manage parents by including them in school decisions. The fourth theme revealed itself when I analyzed how administrators include parents in decisions: *negotiations to manage parents*. The fifth theme, titled *managing teachers*, showed how administrators manage teachers differently than parents and how that relates to the power relations at work in the school district. The sixth theme highlights students' missing voice in curricular decisions due to the hyper attention given to parents and maintaining community expectations; this theme is titled *Who is missing from the discussion?* The seventh theme is *ambiguity*. The data shows *ambiguity* in district documents that allowed space for administrators and parents to both censor and resist censorship. The meanings of terms are constantly in flux, and this instability created both opportunities and issues.

Together, these themes demonstrated the primary discourses evident in my data involved in the power relations in the school district. The community is the foundational audience that encases the other community roles that administrators must manage: parents, teachers, and students. From the ambiguous terms found in district documents and the community expectations for involvement in school decisions, administrators gave select parents substantial power in curriculum decisions. The themes reveal that the community views students as discursive objects around which censorship discussions circle rather than having students play a significant active role in the censorship decisions which affect them. Administrators, parents, and teachers often speak on behalf of a student they see as representative of the majority or all students; Administrators concerns from students themselves were absent in the data.

Community Expectations

When deciding the appropriate wording to represent this theme, I chose words most administrators used during their interviews; administrators used the terms “*demographic*,” “*district*,” and “*community*” when discussing the community. They also used personal pronouns like “*our*” when discussing their schools. It was not their school but “*our*” or “*my*” school, which showed they felt part of the community. In my study, I define community as the discursive district community as a whole. I will not examine individual community members such as parents, educators, and students in this section. I will solely focus on the “community” constructed and represented in the district documents, school board meetings, district administrator meetings, and administrator observations that represented community values and expectations. Community expectations refer to beliefs about their role in the educational process, including curriculum selection and evaluation, as represented in materials collected for the study. During the interviews, the administrators’ emphasis on community expectations elucidated how

the community in which the schools rest influenced all educational system areas and why these expectations are essential to interpreting administrators' reactions to community pressures; administrators' reactions to community expectations often lead to censoring, changing, or adding to an existing policy. Understanding the community expectations helped explore causes of censorship.

The district documents, meeting observations, and administrator interviews depicted the community's underlying expectations. Administrators used the terms “*expectations*,” “*expect*,” “*expects*” (HSVP Betty, DA Denise, MSVP Kate, DA Rita)⁸, “*involved*,” “*actively involved*” (HSVP Betty, MSVP Lilly, HSP Tim), and “*our*” (DA Alison, MSP Grant, MSVP Kate, MSP Lilly) when talking about the community. Administrators' use of “*our*” to discuss different parts of the community illustrates that administrators believe every community member is part of their school, including the administrator. It is not *the community* but *our* community, showing a strong sense of belonging and identification.

Academic Expectations

To better understand the multiple layers at work that administrators must face, I will give some general district testing context to show how well the district has performed and continues to perform on standardized tests. Knowing the testing data will set the stage for community expectations related to educational excellence.

Students and parents have a high expectation of earning a college degree. The district has one of the highest average ACT scores in the state (American College Testing, 2020) and is higher than the national average (Anderson, 2019). Students go above average on the ACT, but

⁸ I use abbreviations before the participants' pseudonyms to distinguish what administrative positions are held by the administrators who participated in this study. Refer to “Participant Position Chart” for reference.

most of the district's high school graduates also attend college (Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, 2018). The data showed that 60% of parents in this community have a bachelor's degree or higher, double the state average (Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, 2018). With a high percentage of parents with higher education degrees, parents in the community expect their students to earn a degree after high school.

Administrators are aware of the community's expectations for performance and support for their children. DA Denise explains the influence of community on schools: "*Typically, in my experience, in a public school, the general tenor or **nature of the overall community does permeate the environment of a school and its decisions about everything.***" She believes the community has a strong influence on the school environment. The administrators discussed how the community's expectations involved students earning an exceptional education.

The community's high expectations of educational excellence were also apparent at School Board meetings. The School Board meeting focused on the Academic Indicator Report showing how well students did on state and national assessments. The district outscored the State in every assessment area, including the ACT, the national college-entry exam the district uses to indicate students' preparedness for college rigor. The district administrator also discussed that Advanced Placement (A.P.) scores were higher than most districts.

Administrators perceive that the community has "***much higher expectations of everything** from academics and what happens in the classroom to sports and extracurricular and this too digital conversion.*" As for technology and print resources, evidence suggested the community also expects high educational excellence and to be actively involved in technology and print decisions. I will show how the administrators' perceptions of community expectations directly affect how the administration perceives and deals with censorship decisions.

The “Social Media Student Use Policy” (2017), “Network and Internet Acceptable Use Agreement” (n.d.), and the “Dear ___ P.S. Parents (2018) documents reflect the community’s expectations and primary focus on educational excellence in digital resources and curriculum. The community expected the curriculum and the district’s technology to enhance learning. “Social Media Student Use Policy” (2017) showcases these expectations because it “recognizes the value and benefit of using electronic media to communicate digitally with students, staff, and families to engage stakeholders and enhance the learning experience” (p.1). This document suggested that school-issued technology exists to engage and support the community’s involvement with students’ academic learning experience.

Managing Community Expectations

Administrators are not only aware of community expectations but also manage expectations through district documents, School Board meetings, and curriculum decisions. In some cases, administrators are members of the community. Administrators’ roles in schools put them in the constant need to manage the *perceived* community expectations. I use *perceived* because sometimes the impressions are not overtly expressed; administrators may rely on the *perceived* expectations of the community, which administrators indicated originated from a minority of parents, to influence their censorship decisions.

Some of the district administrator meetings focused on managing test score perceptions at the upcoming School Board meeting. Mainly, the community expects students to excel and score high on standardized tests. To manage community expectations, administrators discussed ahead of time in meetings on strategies to address the test scores at the upcoming School Board meeting. They decided to present the data to illustrate why the test scores went down and how those test scores did not correctly reflect students’ learning. Administrators anticipated and then

decided on strategies they would use to address potential community concerns. They presented the data to highlight how the national and state testing committees put new formatting in tests that negatively impact student test scores, suggesting that administrators were not at fault. Even though administrators anticipated and attempted to manage how the community perceived test scores at the upcoming meeting, the School Board raised concerns over the lower test scores. After the district curriculum administrator explained why ACT and other test scores went down in the current school year, one School Board member wanted more justifications. This interaction shows the community's focus on being informed about test scores and showcasing the community's top priority on academic excellence.

The district set up expectations aligned with the community's expectations to be involved in school life and decisions. Seven of the nine administrators interviewed discussed how community educational expectations influenced their digital curriculum decisions. This perceived community concern, which originated from a vocal minority of parents, led to administrators creating a new restricted access tier on school-issued technology devices. The restricted tier allowed students to *“still have access to Chromebooks. So they can still apply what they need to in class, but they wouldn't have access to the images that come through.”*

Administrators also managed community expectations of the print curriculum. District print curriculum encompasses print resources such as classroom novels, library novels, library nonfiction, and print textbooks. Administrators wanted to ensure the print curriculum is *“representative of the student”* and *“some families that we serve.”* I have chosen to bold *some* in the quote to emphasize that they focused on managing community expectations when making curricular decisions. In attempting to be equitable for all students and manage community expectations, administrators *“offer an individual choice for families”* by allowing parents to

object to classroom novels that were part of the secondary English curriculum; administrators respond to and manage established community expectations.

Administrators' awareness and management of the community's high standards led administrators to focus on a narrowed section of the community who are the most vocal, discussed in the following theme: *Administrators' Hyper-consciousness of parental concerns*.

Administrators' Hyper-Consciousness of Parents' Concerns

I have collected data on administrator experiences and responses as analyzed through district documents, observations, and interviews. All collected data highlights that one of the administrators' central experiences and roles is being aware of and managing the portion of the community that most influences their decisions: parents.

The theme of administrators' consciousness of parents' concerns was a primary characteristic of the data. Administrators' attention to parents as the focal point of the community was found in the addressing of parents in district documents and attention to parental perceptions and interactions at School Board meetings. As I analyzed the data, I noticed that administrators regularly referred to parents' concerns as a primary part of their administrative role, especially in censorship-related decisions. They put a great deal of thought and energy into ensuring they meet parents' needs. They considered parents' needs when thinking about curricular decisions and both by indirectly and directly inviting parents to be a part of the curricular decision-making process. Indirect invitations refer to data where parents are the implied or emphasized stakeholders. Direct invitations include when the district actively seeks out parent input and encourages them to participate in curricular decisions.

Administrators incorporated parents into their censorship-related curricular decisions by creating alternative reading lists, temporary alternative learning locations, and restrictive internet

filtering software and access tiers. For example, due to parental concern, administrators created a separate and very restrictive internet access tier just for one student whose parents wanted to further restrict their child's access to the internet on school-issued devices. At the time of the data gathering, administrators used the restrictive access tier when parents wanted a more controlled online experience. This example did not just show the censoring of online materials for one student; this interaction manifested in censorship for all students.

This situation also re-surfaced many questions I have asked previously in reflecting on censorship practices. How much should administrators allow parents to have over curricular decisions? What is the administrators' role in the parent's and other community members' hierarchy? Should one parent's complaint lead to potential censorship practices affecting all students? Or do such decisions then cross over into censoring and denying other parents the ability to advocate for their child's access to online information?

After considering these questions, I recognized the many nuances of the censorship phenomenon stemming from parental expectations and involvement. The first nuance is the tiny minority of *actual* parental complaints, according to administrators. There was no record kept for such complaints that I could access. I relied on administrators' perceptions shared in the interviews. Several administrators commented on this minority. Each nuance was crucial in helping show the prominent theme of administrators' hyper-consciousness of parental expectations, anticipating and inviting participation in controversial issues, and the acute focus on parents' concerns—rather than teachers' or students', for example—in describing administrators' processing. I chose to analyze the data about the theme of *administrators' hyper-consciousness of parents' concerns* before other themes to help establish administrators' broad

experiences with and perceptions of parents before exploring the complexities of these experiences through specific nuances.

Vocal minority represent the collective *We* in the community

The administrators' role is to manage the imagined *We* in the District (Harlow & Bailey, 2022). When administrators discuss *We*, they are generally referring to “students, staff, and families” as the primary “stakeholders” (“Social Media Student Use Policy,” 2017, p.1). One administrator mentioned teachers as stakeholders but said as an afterthought: “*parents and the students are the two major stakeholders and the teacher.*” Since administrators did not consistently refer to students or teachers as significant stakeholders in district documents, meetings, or interviews, I inferred that as related to the issue of censorship for administrators in this study, administrators tended to perceive parents are the primary stakeholders, actors, and agents in these decisions. Gaps and silences in the data, such as who is not mentioned, are essential to analysis (Mazzei, 2007). Parents are the *We* that had the most influence on their censorship-related decisions.

Parents represent Community surveillance of schools for administrators.

Parents were the primary surveillance mechanism and representatives of the community *We* influencing administrator decisions. Administrators implied that parents are the primary agents and stakeholders in “the community”. Since parents expect administrators to include them in curricular decisions, some parents were quite vocal when administrators did not meet their expectations and did not include them in curriculum decisions. Due to pressure from this vocal minority of parents, administrators managed those parents who spoke up, regardless of whether these parents represented the “community” as a whole.

For example, one parent at a school board meeting available online (___PS Webmaster, 2021) expressed his frustration at the district administrators' decision to go to a hybrid learning schedule during the early months of the pandemic despite his feelings on the matter: "*Open our school for in-class learning five days a week ...Your website claims you are empowering all students to succeed in a changing society. You have not achieved this mission in the last eleven months.*" Five out of the six parents who spoke during the public participation section of the meeting demanded that the school return to in-class learning five days a week. As a result of vocal parent complaints, the superintendent and the school board complied with these vocal parents even in challenging teaching circumstances by voting to open schools four days a week with one virtual learning day.

Although parents are not involved in curricular or school process of classroom novel selections—as this is a professional school responsibility—administrators are inviting parents to critique classroom novel selection. This invitation to be closely involved in the process and to review materials for their perceived appropriateness for their children appears in the "Citizen's Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials" (2012), "Instructional Material Policy" (2012), and the "Request for Parent Permission to use Supplemental Materials in Class" (n.d.). Also, administrators invite parents to participate in surveilling students' access to web-based resources from their school-issued Chromebooks in the documents "Dear__P.S. Parents" (2018) and *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018). These documents exist to enable parents to survey the curriculum's appropriateness, both print and digital, to give them input into their children's educational resources. There is no open invitation to participate in the classroom novel selection process in district documents, so perhaps exclusions in such processes as documents can also motivate parents to attempt to surveil novels in the English curriculum.

Parents' expectations to be included

The data found in district documents, observations, and administrator interviews illuminated that parents have a significant role in the community. Administrators focused on parents as the dominant voice for the school community. They perceived parents as expecting to be included in educational decisions; this parental expectation manifested when administrators informed parents why administrators were implementing specific curricula and devices. Materials such as the “Dear__P.S. Parents” (2018), *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018), and “2019-2020 Technology Responsible Use Agreement” (2019) addressed the justification for administrators choosing Chromebooks and how schools incorporated devices into the school curriculum. They use language such as “taken many steps,” “create a safe learning environment,” and “help you as a parent to understand” to ensure parents understand the devices are required and the careful process administrators and technology personnel have undertaken.

District administrators and the school board approved and purchased devices for students, an expensive purchase, and they wanted to make sure parents were in the loop on the rationale for these decisions. Administrators conveyed to the community that they are mindful and efficient with which their digital devices they purchased for students. The *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018) demonstrated this expectation by outlining why and how students are to use Chromebooks in the secondary school setting: “At the beginning of the school year, the district will issue a technology package: A Chromebook, charging cord, and protective carrying case to each qualifying student” (p.1) and “The district chose this device as the best fit for the needs of the students in terms of processing speed, ease of operation, productivity, and cost-effectiveness” (p.1). These documents illuminated how administrators perceived part of their role as anticipating and addressing parents’ desire to be kept informed about costs and value.

Administrators understood that one facet of their role is to be parents in loco parentis, but they did not want to overstep their roles:

*If they [parents] don't want to read, or if **they don't want their child to read a certain novel**...they don't want their kids exposed to what they feel is that age is not age-appropriate. Or it's in direct conflict with their religious beliefs or morals.*

Administrators managed parental expectations when making technology-related decisions.

*I just think **our parents have high expectations, and I think that has driven us from the very beginning to meet those expectations, and that's...every stage of the decision-making process that has been part of it [deciding what students can access online.]***

These “**high expectations**” connect to administrators’ awareness of the community’s discursive expectations, which revolved heavily around academic excellence and community involvement in curricular decisions. As seen in the literature, community expectations can also potentially affect an administrator’s job security (Lopez, 2021). According to the literature, when stating his support of the current events after George Floyd’s death by the hands of police, a head principal in Texas received much community support for his stance (Lopez, 2021). He knew stating his opinion could be controversial and possibly lead to further action, but he felt a responsibility to say something to his school community. Years later, when many states passed CRT laws, that same school communication email was the primary piece of evidence parents used to demand that he step down from his principal position (Lopez, 2021). Administrators are also aware of the community’s role in their job security.

Administrators describe *anticipating* parents' concerns and complaints about materials and school decisions.

Throughout the interviews, administrators consistently discussed that part of their role in their schools' entailed *anticipating* parental complaints to avoid potential issues. As noted earlier, the data suggested that the community expects to be heard. Part of administrators' roles is to anticipate community complaints. They can avoid issues before they cause additional complexities for their schools and negative PR for the district. Administrators must maintain an image set forth by the district community's context. Managing community impressions of their ability and competency is part of educators' roles (Bozbayindir, 2020).

Their anticipating issues manifested as censoring print materials, online materials, or creating alternate English courses. An administrator can manage only so many issues, so anticipating issues that might arise can save them time and future problems. They must navigate administrative and in-loco parentis roles for students at school as part of their complex roles. They are sometimes members of the community as well. This part of their administrative role means anticipating *which* materials and technologies parents might want or oppose. I have organized the interview data according to what concerns administrators indicated parents brought to them regarding the English curriculum, math curriculum, and online media access. I have highlighted the language administrators' experiences with parents attempting in bold-faced type.

Administrators Anticipating English Curriculum Issues.

Administrators described how, due to their roles in navigating parental concerns, they began to anticipate parental concerns related to potential censoring of materials, such as texts within the secondary English curriculum, and how teachers approached the teaching of certain novels. Administrators' orientation to parental concerns means that they directed part of their

labor sometimes to anticipate future problems and concerns rather than only responding to the ones that emerged. They considered which curricula might emerge as controversial.

One instance of administrators' anticipatory work with parents related to how a teacher approached the sensitive content of a novel. One high school administrator invited parents to question, in advance of teaching the novel, how English educators would address the controversial rape scene in the novel *The Kite Runner* and assured the concerned parents that educators would not address the scene in graphic detail.

*We're going to try to just have the parent understand **the degree to which that particular controversial part might be referenced.** How much conversation may be going on about it? And hopefully, they'll kind of understand that, you know, most of the time, **it's not a direct focus on that one or those two paragraphs,** or maybe a page and a half, whatever the content may be, but it does help create the larger picture.*

This situation showed how administrators anticipated parental responses and attempted to contextualize the page count of the potentially controversial scene in advance of its use in class. In this instance, HSVP Betty explained to parents, whether they had voiced concern or not, that the rape scene is not a central point of discussion in the book. She anticipated parents were likely objecting to the entire book based on the boy-on-boy rape scene.

Administrators anticipating parental concerns extended to the reading selections found in the school libraries. Even though few parents complain about adopted library books in secondary school libraries, administrators still anticipated that some parents *might* complain: *"We seem to not have to deal with that [parental objections to library books] very often. But when we do, those come from people with **a more conservative mindset,** and we want to **respect them as well.**"* School administrators anticipated and encouraged parents from varied backgrounds to

voice their opinions about curricular decisions also as a form of respect. Even though administrators mentioned that they do “*not have to deal with that very often*” because very few parents voiced their concerns and filled out a formal complaint, administrators knew that some vocal parents might object to books that some members of the “community” might consider inappropriate.

Administrators Anticipating Online Curriculum Issues.

Administrators stated they “*put a lot of pressure on ourselves because we want to do it [content filtering and the digital conversion process] right.*” This quote means administrators wanted to do the best job they could on managing the filtering process and anticipated parental concerns when making technology decisions. Administrators anticipated what might happen if students were allowed to communicate with people outside and inside the district. They sometimes over-blocked websites because “*there's a whole lot of potentially dangerous information and imagery out there.*” The administrators and parents viewed children as in need of protection. Although a worthy goal, an alternative perspective is that secondary students are young adults who need to learn to evaluate and navigate the internet and process the information and imagery they encounter critically with support from educational professionals.

Besides anticipating before something inappropriate occurs, one administrator with many years of experience expressed how past experiences with a few parents greatly influenced how she approached content filtering: “*a big one [consideration when deciding what websites will be blocked] is that criteria that we don't want them to have one-on-one communication with people outside the domain and for their own safety. That rules out so many websites*” and how this anticipating of parental concerns led her to realize “*gosh even when...communication between our own students sometimes can be inappropriate.*” This situation contributed to the

administrator anticipating that websites such as Scratch.org, Change.org, and Cool Math Games could allow students to communicate with people outside the school district, even in recognizing student communication within the school might be a problem at times. Overall concern about children's safety and potential dangers "out there" in the world and the perceived "parent's" concerns led this administrator to block broad access to websites in anticipation that some parents might complain.

Administrators' Consciousness of Parental Concerns Manifests as *Including* Parents in Curricular Decisions

Giving parents a voice is just one of the administrators' roles, and an important one in many areas of community and school partnerships. Administrators wanted to continuously engage with and involve parents in educational policies and practices because higher parental involvement can be favorable for a school and have positive benefits. The discourse of the community is one where parents expect their concerns to be heard and taken into consideration in curriculum decisions. This theme pertained to the desire of administrators to meet parental expectations by including vocal parents; this involvement can lead to censorship. Administrators described how they must consider parents' concerns, often leading to accommodating their concerns. Yet, giving parents a voice in this way can also lead to censorship.

Including Vocal Parents

The administrators' consciousness of and description of parents' concerns or anticipating parents' concerns before they have even been expressed in parental interactions revolved around parents wanting to voice their concerns and sometimes control curricular decisions. Although voicing concerns and being involved in curricular decisions do not fit the traditional definition of

ensorship, “the suppression of words, images, or ideas that are ‘offensive,’ happens whenever some people succeed in imposing their personal political or moral values on others” (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022). However, when administrators asked me to clarify what I meant when I asked, “What is your experience when making decisions about print and or digital materials for your school?” I explained I was curious about their experiences with print and digital resources such as “Chromebooks, Media Center, novels, curriculum, websites.” Before I clarified my question, most administrators appeared a little confused about why I was asking them these questions rather than library media specialists or just assistant principals whose primary roles include implementing the curriculum. Some assistant principals’ primary focus is on a specific grade level, discipline, testing, or curriculum. Before clarifying my question, administrators whose role was not curriculum orientated were confused because they did not see their roles pertaining to censorship decisions.

This interaction made me realize that some administrators do not see themselves as dominant agents of the curriculum. They do not see themselves as explicitly involved in censorship, even concerning the curriculum decisions they managed, and their anticipation of and accommodation of parental concerns. Administrators seemed to narrate any parental effort to be involved in curriculum decisions as a potential situation to manage. As a result, their administrative role involved a variety of nuanced navigations, which encompassed being aware of parent concerns and including vocal parents’ concerns. As noted earlier, Administrators’ awareness of parents focused only on “A *tiny vocal minority that has had concerns.*” This quote reflected administrators’ perceptions of a minimal but influential number of parents who had concerns and spoke up at the School Board or during personal interactions. Some complaints came from “*VERY vocal*” parents. Administrators described managing vocal parents by *including*

their perspectives in decision making. They created alternate reading lists so that parents can choose an alternate novel for their child; they also created an internet filtering tier “*just for their child*” or created an “*alternate reading list*” for English courses. Administrators never said they directly feared vocal parents, but they felt their role was to “*respect them*” and not “*overstep our role as educators.*”

On one occasion, administrators’ attempts to include parental expectations to be involved created a space of parental resistance where two parents took control of a School Board meeting. During this meeting, several parents expressed their frustration and anger about how administrators managed students’ educational needs during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Administrators and the school board decided to implement a hybrid model in which schools would attend virtual learning from home three days a week and in-person learning on school grounds two days a week. Two parents who spoke during the public participation segment of the meeting expressed anger and disappointment because administrators were not meeting their educational expectations for their children. When their five-minute allotment was up, and the district administrator stated their time was up, both parents stated, “*I’m not finished.*” District administrators allowed the parents to keep talking, even though it was against protocol. This is one instance where administrators did not manage two parents. Although this exchange is not focused on censorship, it revealed how vocal parents demand to not only be heard but accommodated, and the district administrator overtly *included* their perspectives in that space.

Administrators covertly and overtly invite parents to have a role in censorship decisions as “experts.”

Administrators encouraged parents to participate in curricular decisions through publicly posted documents and school board meetings. Analyzing district documents, my administrator-meeting observation fieldnotes, and my interviews with administrators showed that few parents accepted this invitation; however, those who accepted the invitation often moved beyond the invitation to partner with educators and instead to seize control over curricula and resources. The data reflected instances of such parents moving from partnership to control to censorship: “the suppression of words, images, or ideas that are ‘offensive,’ happens whenever some people succeed in imposing their personal political or moral values on others” (American Civil Liberties Union, 2022). Partnership means two or more individuals or groups, administrators, parents, and educators, collaborating toward a common goal. In this district, that common goal is creating policy. Control means one individual or group of individuals regulate policy decision-making—sometimes dictating its content. Censorship can occur when partnerships turn to control. When administrators invited parents to participate in school-policy decision-making, they risked such intended partnerships turning to control and, ultimately, to that specific kind of control called censorship. Administrators’ discussion of censorship issues often focused on the internet filters and specific literary texts concerning children’s access. Administrators directly allowed parents to censor students’ materials by covertly and overtly *inviting* parents to have a role in what students can access.

Administrators overly invited parents to participate with education experts to select curricula, curricular materials, and supplementary resources. Administrators overtly addressed and invited parents to participate in what is allowed in the school libraries (“Citizen’s Request

for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials,” 2012) and what teachers can teach (“Instructional Material Policy,” 2012; “Request for Parent Permission to use Supplemental Materials in Class,” n.d.). The contents in the above documents invited parents to participate in curriculum decisions, thus, placing parents in the same role as educators. A particularly notable example is when materials described asking parents to voice their opinions on “*what age group would you recommend this material*” (“Citizen’s for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Material,” 2012, p.1) and to express they (the parents) are “*aware of the judgment of this material by experts in the field and/or literary critics?*” (Citizen’s for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Material, 2012, p.2). This document suggests that parents’ ideas about age groups are essential for teachers and administrators. Not only did administrators invite parents to offer their opinions on the appropriateness of library content, but they invited parents to give suggestions on what should be in the library: “*What other instructional material of the same subject and format would you recommend in its place?*” (“Citizen’s for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Material,” 2012, p.2).

Through the existence of the “Citizen’s Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials” (2012), “Instructional Material Policy” (2012), and “Request for Parent Permission to use Supplemental Materials in Class” (n.d.), administrators have invited parents to be the role of an educational expert. Administrators asked parents questions that required far more expertise than most parents have in educational matters. In the “Instructional Material Policy” (2012) document, administrators provided criteria for library media specialists to follow when selecting materials—specific to the District and perhaps beyond what they learn in their master’s degree program...one criterion being the “*appropriateness of content considering developmental stages of students*” (p.2). Although library media specialists are state-certified, often experienced experts in materials selection, must follow professional standards and guidelines, and must

acquire the site administrator's approval of all purchase orders, administrators subtly position parents with no such expertise or experience at a level above library media specialists and principals alike, for they may veto any materials in the library without having the knowledge, background, or research evidence to validate their objections. The document does not contain any statement requiring parents have to back up their answers beyond their personal beliefs by providing research supporting their answers to this or any question answered in the document.

Invited by administrators to participate, parents must provide permission for teachers' supplemental materials provided in class. Although "*The building principal has given approval for this material to be used for classroom instruction,*" administrators remind parents that they "*have the right to remove their child from the study...*" ("Request for Parent Permission to use Supplemental Materials in Class," n.d., p.1). Parents must sign if they "*give permission for this material to be presented to my son/daughter*" or not ("Request for Parent Permission to use Supplemental Materials in Class," n.d., p.2). This subtle language indicated that parents must *actively* opt out because they must sign permission rather than passively *not* sign a document. Perhaps this helped effectively manage parents because it signaled and required the expectation of parents' active involvement and anticipated and circumvented possible complaints.

Because they required teachers to ask parents' permission and wrote the document addressing parents as experts, administrators invited parents to participate in an educator role. The mere existence of this document overtly positioned parents more than a participant but as curriculum experts of higher standing than teachers, curriculum specialists, and principals. Administrators seemed to be inviting parents to monitor teachers, evaluate their judgment, and veto any materials teachers select to supplement the state- and district-approved textbook.

Another more detailed example of how administrators invited parents into the process is through policies related to instructional materials. In the “Instructional Material Policy” (2012) document, administrators invited parents to object to the curriculum and placed parents at a higher voting power than secondary school educational experts. The difference between administrators’ invitation in this document and the “Request for Parent Permission to use Supplemental Materials in Class” (n.d.), “Citizen’s Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials” (2012), and the “Instructional Material Policy” (2012) is, in this document, administrators allowed parents to hold the same amount of expertise and censorship power as their administrator role. Administrators will form a panel when a parent fills out the “Citizen’s Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials” (2012) document. If formed, the district-level panel will consist of several educators and five parents: Personal family preferences will take precedence.

One (1) principal at the appropriate level (elementary (K–5) or secondary (6–12) but NOT from the building involved; One (1) counselor or assistant principal at the appropriate level (elementary or secondary); One (1) library media specialist at the appropriate level; Two (2) teachers competent in the relevant field at the appropriate level (but NOT directly involved in the complaint); Five (5) parents from the appropriate level; One (1) non-voting student (secondary committees only). (“Instructional Material Policy,” 2012, p.4)

By allowing five parents to be a part of this committee and vote, administrators not only invited parents to participate but weighed the committee with parents who may or may not necessarily have either the necessary education or experience and who may participate without reading, reviewing, or researching the material(s) in question, and who may nevertheless potentially

control half the vote. If a parental complaint goes to the district level and the district committee votes to remove the material, administrators must eliminate that material from their schools. One parent's complaint has the potential to deny material for that parent's student and *all* students.

Thus, administrators go from inviting parents to voice concerns about print curriculum and supplementary curricular materials to inviting parents to participate in restricting students' access to web-based resources gathered through their school-issued Chromebooks. The invitation began in the "Dear__ P.S. Parents" (2018), through which district administrators encourage parents to "*Use the 'Need Support' link on the Technology Resources page to report any inappropriate content or websites to our technology staff, or simply send an email to ____technology@____.net*" (p.2).⁹ The administrators' management of parents, coupled with administrators' desires to avoid confrontation and conflict, transformed their invitation to participate into an invitation to monitor and control curriculum decisions. The administrators "*Assume parental permission*" ("2019-2020 Technology Responsible Use Agreement for Parents/Guardians in X Public Schools for Students in Grades 6–12" (added 2019), in *Digital Conversion Guidebook*, 2018).

School board meetings, always open to the public, are an arena for administrators to be able to hear from and manage parents. Still, in the process, administrators created an opportunity for parents to influence education policies and decisions at School Board meetings and the yearly public forum: "*... the board has a **patron sounding session**... like a forum via a public forum.*" Any community member may ask to speak at a School Board meeting or come to the public forum and speak about or ask questions about any topic related to the District's schools, schooling, and education practices. The "public" nature of public schools makes such spaces

⁹ To ensure anonymity, I have removed identifiers from the school's email address.

appropriate and important areas for community voice. I analyzed three years of School Board Agendas, and at every meeting, there was an invitation for the public to participate. This is likely a common practice in other districts as well. There was a specific section on every agenda titled “Public Participation.” When parents chose to participate, they had five minutes to discuss their agenda before the meeting. Administrators overtly welcomed public participation at board meetings to hear from parents. These examples are found in district-produced documents, curriculum panels, and School Board meetings to allow parents to participate as well as to sometimes claim an unofficial administrative role that matters to school administrators.

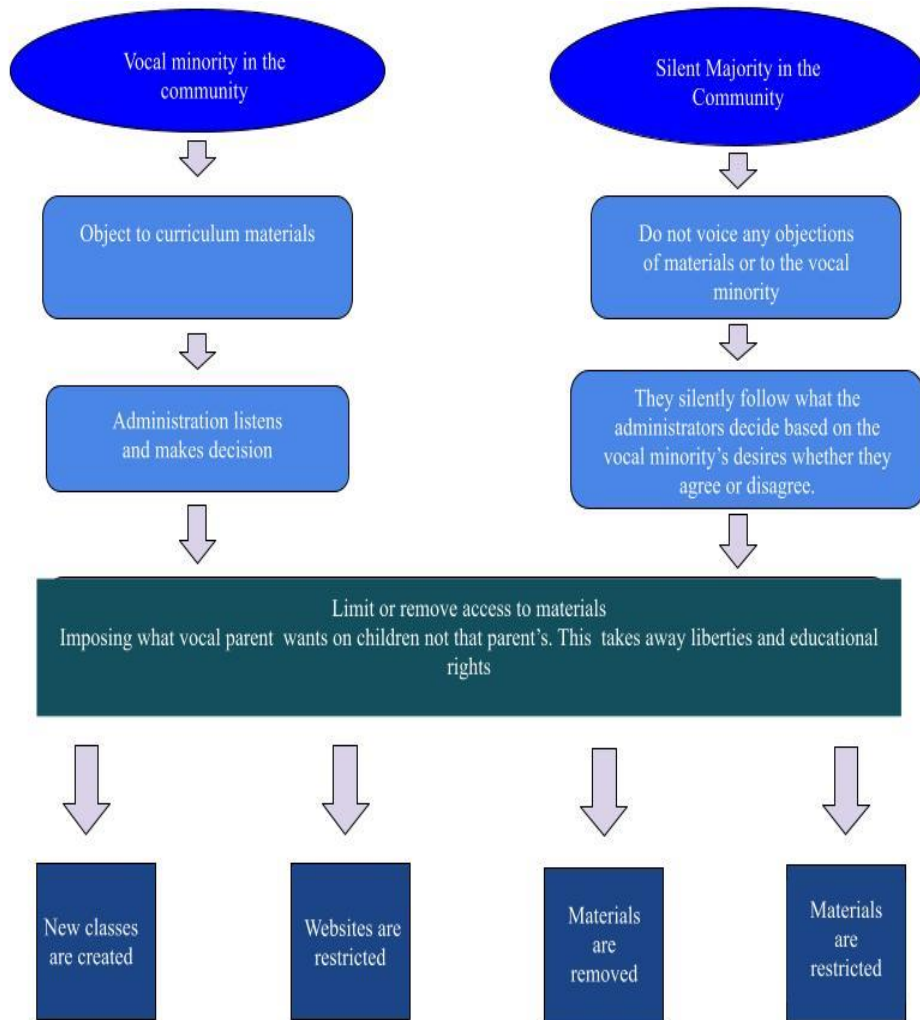


Figure 7. Chart showing how administrators manage community expectations and concerns.

Negotiating as a Means of Managing Parents

They anticipated parental needs, which led to *negotiating* with parents as part of administrators' roles. Administrators discussed negotiating with parents in the context of English

and the online curriculum. English curriculum pertains to the novels, short stories, or poems students must read in the English curriculum. Online curriculum pertains to what websites or databases students can access on their school-issued Chromebooks. Administrators described how, due to their roles, they felt like they needed to respect parents' wishes and the small number of very vocal parents who wanted to change the curriculum to meet the needs of their children. As noted previously, several phrased this by saying, I "***don't want to overstep our role as educators.***" This complexity predominated when administrators actively worked with parents to try to navigate a solution that *contained* the scope of the censorship.

Administrators negotiated parents' concerns in various ways focusing on specific types of texts—the "what" focus of censorship practices. They described offering an alternate novel and an alternate location for the child to read. This is a form of negotiation to attend to parents' concerns. Administrators discussed experiences with parents "***that went all the way with battling a certain book that was in being used in class. They did not... they just did not like that... we were using that [novel].***" When a parent did not want their child to read a novel or short story, administrators "***offer an alternative***" from "***a set of like ten different books that they could choose from to read an alternate...from an alternate reading list.***" administrators also described giving parents what they want in the secondary English classroom curriculum (DA Denis, HSVP Betty, MSVP Courtney, MSVP Lilly). Participants provided two examples of negotiations they or other administrators made to give a parent more reading options for their child. Negotiations included offering an alternate book to read or letting the child read an alternate book and removing them from the classroom environment. Both negotiations involved the teacher having to create content for a book that only that child was reading. However, negotiating the parent's request on a case-by-case basis contained the scope of the curricular intervention.

During the period I gathered data, concerns surfaced in popular culture about a book called *The Kite Runner*. It described the journey of a man who has to learn how to atone for his betrayal of a dear friend. In this data, administrators described the book parents questioned the most as *The Kite Runner*: “***The Kite Runner is the most recent book to have some objection [from parents].***” Objections pertained to the boy-on-boy rape early in the book. The rape scene is not described in graphic detail in the novel, but the reader will know a bully rapes Hassan who sees him as less than human due to Hassan’s place in the social class system in Afghanistan. To navigate the objections to the novel, administrators gave parents’ an “*individual choice for families.*” As a negotiation, administrators offered a choice of alternative novels for their children to read. With this compromise, teachers could still teach the district-approved novel to other students, and parents still got to control/participate in their child’s reading curriculum.

Sometimes this compromise consisted of administrators physically removing students from the classroom. Suppose a parent did not want their child to read a classroom novel and preferred no exposure to its content through classroom discussions. In that case, the teacher would relocate the child to the library to read and work independently. Some administrators believed this compromise was detrimental to the child:

They miss a lot of instruction that happens in the discussion of a book. So they either leave and go to the library, or they stay there and are still subjected to whatever it was their parents didn't want them to hear. So... that's it, that's difficult.

Parents presumably got what they wanted with this compromise. However, the child may have felt ostracized or singled out when others participated in the discussion, as one administrator noted: “*I'm sure they're embarrassed.*”

Administrators would *negotiate* with parents about the context of the online curriculum as well. The online curriculum entailed what students could access on school-issued devices. This included websites, databases, online books, and online images. Since schools require students to use school-issued devices, administrators would negotiate with parents on what their children could access online, which meant restricting what children view online, including information and images.

As my previous examples detailed, these decision-making processes revealed more than administrators responding to parents. The data revealed that since administrators see managing parents' expectations as part of their role, they often would negotiate with parents to allow them to decide the degree of restriction to their child's internet access and the required reading materials. Also, it appeared that some administrators' navigations were intended to affect the minimum number of children. For example, when a parent vocalized concerns about the materials their child could access on the school-issued Chromebook, two administrators listened to this one parent's complaint; then, they employed restricted access, which censored that child's online access by parental request. It did not directly affect other children.

Still, the restricted access meant for this one child became a disciplinary mechanism for other students. Administrators now use the restrictive access tier for all students. Suppose administrators and parents decided a student should not have access to the regular student internet tier. In that case, administrators would restrict student access to online materials by deploying the more restrictive internet tier to a child's school-issued device per parent request. This instance of administrators managing parents morphed into a censorship opportunity for all children in the school district, not just for the initially intended child. There are broader repercussions at work here.

*...from **that [parental complaint] came out the restricted access** to where students can use the resources and still have access to Chromebooks. So they can still apply what they need to in class, but they wouldn't have access to the images that come through.*

In this example, administrators listening to the parent also had broader repercussions. Because of one “*VERY vocal*” parent, the district administrators “*created a separate filtering tier just for their children.*” Intended for one parent’s children, administrators could now use the restricted access tier for any student who circumvented the filtering software and accessed inappropriate online materials: “*we created a separate filtering tier just for their children. And it turns out we were able to offer that to other children and schools as a disciplinary issue if they need to keep kids focused.*” By negotiating with one parent, administrators covertly allowed that parent to have a more considerable influence in accessing online materials for all children. This situation allowed one “*VERY vocal*” parent to surveil what other children, not just their own, could access, which could infringe on other students’ First Amendment Rights.

Subtle criticism of parents’ curriculum knowledge when negotiating

Although administrators continued to variously anticipate, respond to, and negotiate parental preferences about English and online curriculum, there were instances in which they subtly critiqued parents’ limited knowledge of the online curriculum. This reflected that they may not agree with the parents’ perspective or rationale despite their decision to support it.

Although the online curriculum is filtered, administrators stated that some “[*parents*] don’t want their children exposed to the world” and “*they don’t know about the curriculum.*”

Administrators’ occasional critiques of parents’ knowledge and beliefs revealed a concern about shielding a child’s access to information, which is an interesting nuance. Administrators acknowledged that parents are not educators or curriculum experts in these cases. However, as

noted above, they regularly described complying to give parents what they wanted in other cases. They do not always agree with the parents limiting their children's exposure to diverse aspects of the world, yet, they still allowed parents to have a voice and negotiate what is academically appropriate for children.

Administrators also subtly criticized parents' concerns when discussing the math curriculum. The new math approach was not what parents knew and expected how their children would learn:

Parents think of math as plug and chug drills, drills. That's what they've grown up doing. I still think you're still trying to influence years' worth of tradition and just a way of thinking of how math should be. And so that's hard for people.

Also, "*some parents like that traditional [math approach]*."

Administrators shared that most parents did not know the details of school infrastructure, policies, and testing. Parents are not educational experts. Still, administrators were highly conscious of parents' curriculum concerns and negotiated with parents about the English and online curriculum. They did not negotiate with parents about *how* students access the online curriculum or *how* teachers approach the new math curriculum. The data reflected another way administrators thought about censorship and control of materials as part of their role.

Administrators refusing to negotiate with parents

Although most of the data showed how administrators negotiated with parents on curricular decisions, some data illuminated that administrators were not always willing to negotiate. The one situation administrators would not negotiate related to a new math textbook adoption. This situation was not a censorship issue; however, it had implications for understanding administrators' other decisions. If approved by the school board and bond, school

districts can choose a new textbook for predetermined subject areas every few years. The district's textbook committee, composed of administrators, teachers, and parents, decided. With guidance from administrators, the committee voted and recommended the textbook they felt was the best curriculum and pedagogy fit for the school district. Although administrators included a select number of teachers and parents on the committee, many teachers and parents were not happy with the new recommended math textbook. Administrators discussed parents and teachers questioning the new math pedagogy endorsed in the new textbook. I have bolded sections that show why parents objected to how educators taught math and how administrators reacted to these concerns to show how the administrators always supported the new math pedagogy.

Parents objected to how educators were teaching the new math curriculum:

[Parents think] you should tell them [students] how the problem...the math problem is supposed to be done. Show them how it is supposed to be done and let them practice it instead of giving them a problem and saying, how do you think you should solve this?

The new math curriculum is a “*more direct relevant application*” that has “*experimental types of situations that then, you know, require a more direct relevant application.*”

Although parents and teachers objected to the new math curriculum and the new way to teach math (math pedagogy), administrators did not compromise since both complaining parties participated in the math textbook selection process. So, the district and site administrators implemented the new math curriculum with no changes, despite some parental and teacher complaints. This description showed that administrators perceived part of the role of managing parents' attempts at censorship as tied to novels and textbooks. Textbooks are the core of many classes and are often referenced in the interview data, so textbooks fall under classroom materials like classroom novels. Textbooks expose kids to information deemed essential in each

content area. One difference between novels and textbooks was administrators' willingness to stand their ground on this issue. The former was far more inexpensive and seamless to replace than bulk textbooks, and the content was less controversial in terms of values and risks.

Although welcoming and inviting parents to participate in school decisions in various examples, administrators did not negotiate when it came to secondary students having access to a school-issued device which showed that the time and taxpayer money that purchased devices took precedence over parents' concerns. The administrators invited and welcomed parents to voice their concerns in the "Dear__P.S. Parents" (2018), *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018), and "2019-2020 Technology Responsible Use Agreement" (2019) district documents, the district administrators also were not willing to negotiate in how students would access online material through school-issued Chromebooks. Since administrators "*think every parent has a right to question what's being taught in the classroom to their children,*" they tried to bend to what parents wanted for their children. However, when challenges focused on processes related to school-issued Chromebooks, administrators fully supported that students had to keep their devices at home and bring them to school every day.

Negotiation and Curricular Control Fails: The Limits of Attempts to Censor

Even with the internet filters in place and the negotiations administrators have made creating restricted access tiers on school-issued Chromebooks, blocking any websites that might offer one-to-one communication with the public— administrators could never fully appease parents because students can "*get into stuff they shouldn't get into even though our Chromebooks are blocked.*" Administrators "*go a lot farther in terms of content filtering and trying to bend and give the parents what they need.*" These two contradictory lines expressed how administrators' hyperconsciousness of parental expectations did not mean they always appease

all parents, even though their role is to manage parents. Even though administrators discussed putting a lot of time and effort into surveilling students' online curriculum access, they recognized that they would never entirely be successful.

Managing Teachers

Although the primary focus of administrators' experiences with censorship focused on managing parents, as noted previously, they mentioned teachers' voicing their opinions in only two instances. Administrators discussed teachers in two instances concerning online content censoring and the new math textbook adoptions. Regarding online content, administrators asked for teacher feedback through an electronic survey about whether to block the website Cool Math Games. They listened to the teachers' concerns over the website and considered their opinions when they decided to block the popular website. When teachers were upset about the new math textbook adoption, administrators did not offer a survey for teacher feedback. They ultimately decided against letting teachers' opinions change their textbook adoption.

Regarding references to teachers in the interview data, I noticed administrators varied in their approaches to listening to teachers and involving them in the decision-making process. When it came to a popular website that administrators saw as distracting to students, administrators described seeking teachers' opinions. They used their opinions as a crucial part of blocking the website Cool Math Games. However, administrators did not actively seek out teachers' opinions regarding math textbook adoption. These two instances highlighted the different ways administrators involved not only parents but teachers. Administrators described managing teachers in the district differently than they did parents. In the Cool Math Games decision, administrators actively sought out teachers' opinions and expertise. As related to implementing new textbooks and classroom curriculum, administrators did not seek out all

teachers' expertise and opinions when making decisions. Primarily administrators described instances when they overrode teachers' concerns by implementing curricular decisions that parents supported despite teacher concerns. The administrators' strong desire for teachers to restrict their curricular content to pre-approved, state- and district-selected content (primarily state-adopted textbooks) emerged from my district-curriculum meeting fieldnotes. The primary agenda items for the two meetings included: debriefing the District's curriculum professional development day in terms of success, addressing topics for the following site curriculum department-head meeting, and identifying teachers' professional development needs for preparing to address ACT and PSAT standards.

This data highlighted how administrators are managed by some parts of the community (parents) while also being placed in a role that must manage teachers. On a few occasions, they mentioned teachers, the attending administrators, and curriculum specialists focused on ensuring teachers implement the district-bought and district-supported curriculum and how to monitor teachers to ensure they did not supplement these district-purchased textbooks. Administrators' and curriculum specialists' actions to prevent teachers from supplementing district-purchased textbooks might contradict what teachers wanted to do in their classrooms. By managing teachers by promoting only district-approved curriculum and resources, administrators seemed to manage the few teachers mentioned in the data in the same restrictive way.

Manage by not negotiating with teachers

Administrators conceptualize managing community expectations as part of their role; however, teachers—who are members of the “community”—were not at the forefront of their concerns. In one school, math teachers questioned the new math curriculum and pedagogy as unnecessary; however, administrators still did not change their decisions:

*I've seen that in math the last couple of years. The district adopted a digital platform, through Discovery Ed and...and it's **more application-based** relevance, as opposed to algorithm and just, you know, redundant practice, which is the Science Guy. **I really appreciate it, and I understand it.** But a lot of teachers, a lot of math teachers don't because that's it breaks out of the mold of its analysis, whereas historically, **math has been just very routine** ... step by step. And you just worry about memorizing the equation, you know, and then working the algorithms and finding a single answer.*

Administrators acknowledged that some math teachers did not like the new district-adopted curriculum, but they did not change it.

At one school site, *“**It was almost flat-out Mutiny.** A matter of fact, the Superintendent had to have a meeting with. **I mean, it was the teachers.**”* Math pedagogy and textbooks have not changed much in the district. With the reaction of parents and math teachers, they did not see the change as necessary for student learning. Members of the math textbook committee selected the new math textbook. Administrators explained how they selected educators and parents to be on the textbook committee; then, the committee sent their choice to the School Board for approval. Since administrators put a lot of time and money into the textbook adoption, they were unwilling to bend and give teachers what they wanted—which was to go back to the old math pedagogy and textbooks. Besides one administrator discussing the textbook committee and its function, no other data explained why or even mentioned why the district chose new textbooks. Perhaps the lack of communication was one factor that caused math teachers to be upset. While this is not a censorship issue, it does reflect administrators’ varying willingness to stand firm on some curricular decisions with teachers and not others.

Who is Missing from the Discussion?

The Voices of Students

An important manifestation of the data is that very few administrators referred to students as agents of concern related to censorship decisions and experiences. In other words, they did not refer to actual students, students' rights, students' voices, and students' opinions concerning censorship. When administrators referenced the "student," they referenced the student as a general figure around which censorship decisions circulated. Two administrators directly addressed listening to student concerns about the internet filters blocking educational websites. Administrators discussed students as having a voice in curricular decisions less than any other school community member. Although district documents were a significant data source in my study, only one document overtly addressed students, in any capacity, instead of parents. The *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018) addressed students by referencing the school motto. However, they did not directly address students in this or any document.

The administrators did not mention students' concerns at the forefront of their censorship-related decisions. The lack of concern administrators showed students as foci in their decisions and processing about censorship reflected a significant and interesting data absence. I interpreted this absence as connected to the community's discourse on childhood. Discourse is how people gather knowledge and is a mechanism for power (Foucault, 1978): "We must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable" and consider "the multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies" (Foucault, 1978, p.100). For example, modern concepts of childhood "associate childhood with innocence" (Marten, 2018, p.29), and children as needing "to be both safeguarded and reformed" (Aries, 1962, p.133). The parent or guardian commonly controls the

version of the world their child sees from this perspective. Parents can try to control a child's access to the materials about their world aligned with their beliefs and their view of childhood. Parents can restrict their child's access to controversial material as long as possible, which aligns with this perspective of the child needing protection, not exposure. Administrators supported this concept of childhood when they over-filter websites because of the possibility of one-on-one communication with students or people outside the district that might be "dangerous."

There are few references to children's voices, opinions, or resistance, in the data. Because the concept of childhood and the materials deemed appropriate for a child is an ever-moving and context-specific target, school administrators must balance what is appropriate for "children" broadly as a conceptual category by their community's standards. The data and *absence* of data suggested administrators viewed students as a discursive object to which the administrators and the community referred and the purpose of their work—but never referred to examples of flesh and blood students' speaking out about parental or school censorship, or referred to example of their inclusion in the discussion, or let them influence censorship-related curricular decisions. They did not directly address the students in documents as they did to parents in the "Dear __P.S. Parents" (2018) document.

The discourse of this community illuminated that "the student" as an object of policy was the focus of parents and administrators concerns but student voices were not part of administrators' navigations of censorship decisions and issues. In this sense, parents and administrators took on a co-parenting role in which they tried to educate and protect "the children," although they may not have the same ideas about what this means, or what the student wants. The children are the discursive and actual object around which administrators and parents develop, control, and manage curriculum to develop the protected and successful student. What

constitutes safe, appropriate, and educational are all ambiguous terms where power relations can and do manifest in administrators and parents' decisions. In speaking for the children and making all educational decisions based on expectations of "the community," usually meaning vocal parents, administrators and parents did not allow avenues for children's voices to be expressed and heard.

Only one of the district documents overtly addressed students. Administrators passed down already voted upon decisions to remind students to follow current policies and procedures in other documents. Although all administrators made decisions with a general group of students in mind, only two administrators directly addressed listening to students' curricular or censorship concerns. For example, administrators explained the technology plan in the district document *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018). The district's technology motto was in the document: "The digital conversion will support ___ Public Schools' mission to empower all students to succeed in a changing society" (p.1). This statement did not always hold. For example, one administrator discussed that students could not access social media sites on their school-issued devices. Many universities and companies have Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts to connect to students and disperse information. By not allowing students to access social media and other blocked sites, the administrators did not fully allow students to live up to the technology motto "to empower all students to succeed in a changing society" (*Digital Conversion Guidebook*, 2018, p.1). Through blocking sites, administrators became agents of surveillance. By only allowing students to access a restricted internet, the administrators did not thoroughly teach or allow students to become safe consumers of knowledge.

Only two administrators directly addressed students speaking up about concerns with policies related to online filtering censorship. Both administrators discussed how some students

questioned the rationale for blocking two educational websites: Cool Math Games and Scratch.org. They understood students' frustrations with the websites being blocked: "*there is frustration that the Chromebook can do 100 things, and we are putting this fabulous tool in their hands and ... but we are only letting them do 30 things with it.*" However, administrators still decided to block both websites in question because the websites allowed "[students] to have *one-on-one private communication with someone outside of our domain*" and that is "*a liability to the district.*" Although they listened to students' concerns and made good points, both administrators dismissed these students because their broader and understandable goal was protection and liability for the district.

Lack of avenues for student participation

Only one administrator discussed the one-way students can participate in school decisions: the "*Student, teacher, advisory council.*" This administrator was quick to say that even though only a few students participate, they just attend to "*come and listen*" to the school decisions already made. The meetings are more for "*information dissemination*" so administrators can tell students about new school implications. Students did not get to have an active and deciding voice in these meetings.

Administrators' primary orientation in answering my interview questions revolved around their concept of community. Administrators did not describe processes or parameters in which students could voice their opinions. These processes did not emerge organically in the conversations. Although students outnumber the small numbers of vocal parents, administrators rarely described hearing student concerns. Students are not educational experts, but public schools would not exist without them; therefore, students are an essential part of the school

community. The “community” seems to mean administrators, teachers, and parents. Students are not a significant part of the community. They are acted upon rather than actors.

Managing Students

Administrators managed students differently than they managed any other member of the community. Administrators primarily managed students by implementing curricular decisions despite students’ concerns when they occurred. For example, as noted, several students were upset when two websites, Cool Math Games and Scratched, were suddenly blocked on school-issued Chromebooks. Armed with valid questions, one student emailed a district administrator directly, while many other students signed an online petition to unblock the two websites. Cool Math Games was a math game website, and Scratched was a learn-to-code website. Both math and coding are appropriate educational subjects, so students wanted administrators to justify why they blocked these websites. Even though administrators stated that students “***feel they have a stake ...in creating the environment and making the decisions, which they do.***” They still did not take students’ concerns about the websites seriously: “***Kids led protests about it and were sending mass emails about bring back Cool Math, and it was quite comical.***” Students also “***went out to change.org, and there were like dozens of change.org surveys passed around for signatures.***” These forms of youth advocacy for educational access are common in schools historically. There was no information about how administrators responded to students. Yet administrators dismissed student concerns by doing what they felt the community expected, which is not to allow students to communicate with people outside of the district community on their school-issued Chromebooks:

*A website or an app [that] allows them [students] to have **one-on-one private** communication with someone outside of our domain, we don't let that ...we don't allow that. That is just a danger to the student, and it is also **a liability to the district.***

Administrators manage students with parental expectations related to education and the safety of students in mind.

Ambiguity

(Perception of what is controllable)

After gathering and examining all data, the theme of ambiguity arose. This theme is significant because Foucault described how ambiguity unleashes and enables power relations. District documents, interviews, and observations are full of vague terms that administrators and parents can interpret in many ways, which allows all school community members to place their values and beliefs on these vague terms. The vague terms in policy documents and interviews were not a minor issue; the legal, policy and conceptual terms are essential to establishing and maintaining a diverse and equal education for all children. Having no common ground for what constitutes education, appropriate and safe materials, school environments are the first stage of allowing censorship to come into play because all community members want to impart their beliefs on the school curriculum. Even so, the ambiguity in documents offered spaces for resistance too. Ambiguity can create both places for expression or power and places for resistance.

Ambiguity is significant from a Foucauldian analysis in the sense that he saw ambiguity as a place of resistance. I saw this place of resistance when district documents and administrators used the terms “*inappropriate,*” “*safe,*” and “*educational*” without consistently defining and using these terms because of the ambiguous nature of many censorship policies. Administrators

and parents did not clearly define what makes curriculum materials age-appropriate, safe, and educational. They could not do so, as the terms are unstable and contested within communities. These policy points became tools for parents to advocate for censorship; However, this ambiguity also enabled administrators to maintain some control in a system of surveillance. Administrators, for instance, described the lack of parental knowledge about content knowledge as causing issues that could lead to censorship. Allowing parents to voice their concerns helped administrators manage their concerns and intervene in broad censorship. This theme got to the core of censorship in my case study. Using (inevitably) ambiguous terms that provide flexibility for school districts (guidelines rather than dictates) also kept power diffuse and shifted.

In sum, the study illuminated that the heart of censorship was multifaceted and relied on the ever-changing complexity of administrators' roles and how their roles intertwined with community concerns expressed through parental concerns.

Vague terms create space of power and resistance

I analyzed district website documents and administrator interviews to identify district expectations and discern if they correlated to community expectations reflected at School Board meetings. Also, I analyzed how ambiguity produced spaces of power and resistance. The terms found in the administrator-produced district documents and the administrator interviews are vague. Language has unstable meanings. The concepts welcomed multiple community interpretations, allowing administrators and parents' involvement in the discourse of the school.

The emphasis on academic progress showed the community's educational priority. Terms like "*a good learning environment*" and "*opportunity to learn and to grow*" invited parents to interpret what was meant by "*good*" and "*learn.*" Is a good learning environment encompassing a diverse curriculum and access to non-filtered internet access so that students can explore new

information in a safe school environment? Or is a good learning environment one that restricts texts and website use within only parents' dictates? The safe, appropriate, and educational requirements vary depending on the parent.

What constitutes educational?

The first ambiguous term was *educational*. What constitutes educational was not directly or consistently addressed. District documents addressed that school technology and curriculum should “enhance **the learning experience**” messaging sites in a “**manner that distracts from or disrupts the educational process** is prohibited” (“Social Media Student Use Policy,” 2017, p.3). What does it mean to enhance the learning experience? Is enhancing the learning experience not the same as saying it is educational? This district document still did not explain or define what was educational. Administrators also never overtly addressed what educational means either: “*We want to ensure that we are giving our kids every opportunity to learn and to grow*” because “*The number 1 thing our parents want is a good learning environment.*” A good learning environment can vary depending on a family’s perspective.

The *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018) stated the main objectives of digital conversion and education pertained to giving students the means to do the following: “Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving, Communication, Collaboration, Inquiry, Individualization and Choice” (p.1). This list suggested that for online materials to be educational, they must meet the above objectives. If that is the case, the administrators contradicted their term usage of online educational materials because they did not allow students to access all online materials and novels that educators had determined to meet the objectives. After all, students could not access social media sites on their school-issued devices. By placing

internet filters on student Chromebooks, administrators supported a mechanism of surveillance that allowed all individuals to be seen, organized, and disciplined in one space.

A school must determine what the community expectations are in terms of a successful education: *“It’s like graduation rates and ACT scores and college acceptance and job readiness...I think those are the ultimate proof that this is effective learning.”* The administrators’ use of vague and ambiguous terms in interviews and district documents opened the door for the community’s interpretations, which could lead to the questioning and possible censorship of the types of materials students could access in print and online. It could also open the door for spaces of resistance through dynamic interpretations.

What constitutes appropriate and safe?

Due to the ambiguous terms *appropriate* and *safe*, administrators and parents can have conflicting ideas on what curriculum matches these descriptors. Administrators addressed these terms in several district documents. In the “Network and Internet Acceptable Use Agreement” (n.d.), administrators made it clear they wanted to educate students on how to be **“safe and appropriate online”** (p.2), which includes **“interactions with other individuals** on email, messaging, and social networking websites” (p.2). In this document, appropriate and safe are not only vague but also contradictory because other documents and interviews revealed that students were not allowed to communicate on social media platforms or email anyone outside the XPS email domain, so it seemed irrelevant that educators were teaching students how not to have “interactions with other individuals on email, messaging, and social media platforms” (“Network and Internet Acceptable Use Agreement,” n.d., p.2) in the context of school.

The print curriculum was “**chosen for their literary, cultural, historical, artistic, technical, and scientific merit; for their contribution to the overall curricular goals and objectives of the school system; and for their appropriateness to the grade level(s) for which they are intended**” (“Instructional Material Policy,” 2012, p.3). The phrase “appropriateness to the grade level(s)” was vague. A vast amount of maturity and preparation exists in this secondary student age group, ranging from 10 to 18, so perhaps administrators were being purposively vague to allow themselves room to be flexible in the circumstances they encounter.

“Enhance learning” can mean a multitude of things. The “Social Media Student Use Policy” (2017), “Network and Internet Acceptable Use Agreement” (n.d.), and the “Dear __ P.S. Parents” (2018) documents reflected the community’s expectations and primary focus on educational excellence and how those expectations had ambiguous definitions. The district documents “Dear __ P.S. Parents” (2018) and “Network and Internet Acceptable Use Agreement” (n.d.) showed how the community wanted all online materials to be educational only. The district administrators had these documents online via the district’s website; the district informed the public that they used content filtering software to “block access to internet content that is inappropriate, has no instructional value, and would allow students to communicate directly with people other than _ P.S. students and staff” (“Dear __ P.S. Parents,” 2018). This document did not address what “inappropriate” means regarding community standards—and the community itself, parent to parent, teacher to student, has conflicting beliefs. However, the district document “Network and Internet Acceptable Use Agreement” (n.d.) explained what constitutes “inappropriate” Chromebook usage. The inevitable ambiguity of terms and language reflected some complex conditions around the occurrences of censorship.

An ambiguous *We* reflects a disproportionate involvement from a vocal minority of parents

Which community members constitute the *We* changed based on which data point was analyzed. By analyzing the pronoun, *We*, I noticed that administrator and district documents “reflected a shifting emic sense of a ‘we,’ a community based on common interests, identities, or causes” (Harlow & Bailey, 2021, p.10). District documents stated that *We* were the stakeholders in the district, consisting of “students, staff, and families” (“Social Media Student Use Policy,” 2017, p. 1). However, one administrator stated, “*parents and the students are the two major stakeholders and the teacher.*” Parents were the primary stakeholders mentioned. In this administrator’s quote, the teacher was an afterthought because he said, “*and teachers*” after a pause and at the end of the sentence. In the *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018), the technology plan was the “Schools’ mission to **empower all students** to succeed in a changing society” (p.1). In contrast to other documents and interviews, this document emphasized that the primary stakeholder was the students in the context of digital conversion.

The data showed there was an ambiguous shifting sense of *We* in the community. I used the personal pronoun *We* instead of *them* because administrators were part of the *We*; administrators were part of the community and managed the community and students. As noted earlier, although the *We* referred to “the community” it translated to the part of the parent community that was most vocal. The data showed that *We* are the parents who spoke at school board meetings or through the administrator, communication objecting to the school curriculum, which could entail school technology access, school-issued Chromebooks, novel selections, selected readings in the English curriculum, math curriculum, or teaching pedagogy.

I made meaning of the *We* by associating it with the imagined community (Anderson, 1983) in the school district, as others have used in teacher activism research (Harlow & Bailey,

2022). The *We* were contradictory depending on which data source was analyzed. This theme initially emerged as one warranting more attention when administrators interviewed showed ownership and possession when referring to their school community and job roles. As I continued to analyze all data sources, the concept of *We* took on even more dimensions. Not only were *We* setting the parameters of community members and whom education was supposed to benefit, but *We* also had an implied hierarchy of community members' power influence on curricular decisions, as I discussed in the first theme section.

Although administrators stated that a small number of parents, “*three to five parents in any given year,*” complained about administrators' decisions, administrators put a disproportionate amount of value on those voices: “*The vocal minority can become very vocal.*”

Managing parents through ambiguity

As seen in earlier themes, administrators sometimes did not negotiate with parents but instead held their ground. Administrators held their ground when it came to all students having and using a school-issued Chromebook and learning the new district-adopted math curriculum. However, the ambiguity and contradictions found in district documents and administrator interviews might have provided further opportunities for administrators to manage and negotiate with parents. Because most guidelines for internet filters are “*informal guidelines,*” administrators had more wiggle room on what they allowed students to access.

In contrast, the internet, good education, good learning environments, and other terms central to administrators' processing and district documents were an ever-moving target. The online material in question may not exist anymore when a committee meets. Also, with so much ambiguity involved, administrators and technology department staff, by human nature, will not treat every parental complaint in the same manner. By acknowledging, “*There is a whole lot of*

*information out there [on the internet]. There's a whole lot of **potentially dangerous information** and imagery out there,"* the administrator's use of "**potentially dangerous information**" was vague and encompassed enough to let the *We* know they were listening to an awareness of potential issues related to online filters and curriculum. Still, they managed it the best they could. Administrators managed parents so they could "**look as good as possible.**" The community discourse manifested itself as surveillance, which administrators could manifest internally in many forms, including self-surveillance. This anticipatory need to maintain a positive image was a way administrators managed community impressions.

In my study, ambiguity was significant in power relations; Foucault described how ambiguity could unleash and enable power relations. Also, the ambiguity created both places for expression of power and places for resistance. Administrators both expressed their power in district documents related to school-issued Chromebooks and digital conversion (*Digital Conversion Guidebook*, 2018; "2019-2020 Technology Responsible Use Agreement," 2019) and allowed ambiguity where parents could more easily raise concerns, such as located in the "Citizen's Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials" (2012) and "Request for Parent Permission to Use Supplemental Instructional Materials Class" (n.d.) documents. In this district, ambiguity allowed the vocal *We* of parents to represent the entire school community, which enabled them to play the most significant role in the power relations in curricular decisions.

CHAPTER V

DISCOVERIES AND IMPLICATIONS

Overview and Purpose

This study focused on nine administrators' perceptions and experiences with censorship-related decisions and policies in the context of one school district. There were two purposes of the study; at a local level, the study aimed to illuminate administrators' perceptions of censorship in print and digital forms, their censoring of students' access to resources, and their censorship policymaking. My focus was to understand, to critically analyze, and to consider ways to enact change. Expanding beyond the confines of the case study, the purpose was to investigate how a community's cultural, political, and socio-economic dynamics influence the phenomenon of school censorship. The two purposes led to the research questions: (1) How do these administrators perceive censorship, censor (events and print, visual, and digital media and students' access to the information within these media), and make censorship policies? (2) How do such multi-layered forces as the discourse of a school community influence its public-school, district, and secondary-school, site administrators' perceptions of censorship, censorship practices, and policy-making? (3) How can administrators enact change in censorship practices?

The study proceeded from a constructionist epistemology, critical theoretical perspective, and case study methodology with an action research orientation. I was interested in understanding and making change in administrators' practices of censorship in the district. I used qualitative methodology because it was best suited to investigating administrators' perceptions and experiences; I also included an action orientation toward change. I interviewed all nine secondary administrators one time and completed a follow-up interview with seven administrators. I also asked participants to complete a demographic inventory sheet to understand better their teaching, administrative, and personal experiences that may have influenced their censorship-related decisions. Throughout this critical study, I considered my positionality. I am a secondary public-school educator from an anti-censorship family, and I have managed censorship-related situations as a library media specialist and English teacher. My positionality was a beneficial research instrument (Finlay, 1998; McCaleb & Holmes, 2009) and "a tool for gaining new depth in research" (McCaleb & Holmes, 2009, p.1521). I also observed school board meetings and administrator meetings. I analyzed school board minutes and district documents to ensure I analyzed the phenomenon of censorship from multiple data sources to understand best how administrators perceived their role in censorship.

I originally began my study as an action research study because I was interested in intervening in the censorship practices in the district as part of the methodology and outcomes. This was my orientation as an anti-censorship educator subjected to an administrator's censorship decisions earlier in my career. Yet, I did not design my study to involve administrators and other personnel as change agents within the study, common to this methodology. Instead, I focused on understanding administrators' experiences with censorship practices in one school district to consider how processes of censorship worked. As I explored

and understood the nuances, I made them visible to critique. As I continued analyzing data, I started to think about censorship as more of a system than administrative acts. Although I saw administrators as situated in hierarchies of power and potential instruments of oppression in terms of restricting access to information for students, I also understood that they did not hold all the power within a community. My analysis reveals that power is everywhere and shapes the roles of every community member and educator. By focusing on secondary school administrators' experiences and perspectives and analyzing them through Foucault's power relations and surveillance theories, I elucidated the complexity integral to censorship practices and decisions, as evidenced by studies of some administrators in one school district. It is important to understand this complexity and the nuances of censorship processes to intervene in censorship and find places of resistance. I believe that censorship in secondary schools is unjust because those in power create and enforce policies that could restrict students' information access, which shuts down students' learning, knowledge construction, judgment formation, independent learning, and growing into educated participating citizens.

Some action research components remained present in my study and will manifest as actionable steps in my implications section. I discovered how vital community discourse and expectations were in this, and likely all, school districts. Administrators were conscious of and considered community expectations and values when making curricular decisions. Since no one district is alike, power relations and censorship will play out differently given the context of the school community and which voices speak for the community. This chapter will briefly return to the Foucauldian lens I used to interpret the data. Then, I will move to the findings sections, where I will discuss how they answer my research questions. I will conclude by suggesting actionable next steps to address the discoveries to ensure more equity of community voices.

Drawing from a critical tradition of inquiry, I believe research can contribute to critiquing acts of oppression in schools, such as censorship, reflecting structures and hierarchies of oppression in larger social structures. Yet, after gathering and analyzing my data deeply, in conducting my analysis using Foucault's concepts of power relations and surveillance, I also surfaced how the attention to administrators/ students/ parents and community as discrete entities belies the value of considering the interconnected power relations in a system of surveillance that both could produce and repress power. Power relations position roles within the system in dynamic ways that keep censorship a site of ongoing wrestling with who has power over "the child" and the ambiguity that could provide spaces for censorship-related resistance.

Foucault Lens: Power Relations, Self-Mastery, and Disciplinary Mechanisms

Foucault's concept of power relations is my theoretical lens to analyze and gain meaning from my data. It emerged as a productive lens inductively from data analysis. Foucault's (1977) theory of the knowledge-power tension seemed fundamental to examining secondary, public-school censorship. Also, his self-mastery (1986) concept developed in his book *The History of Sexuality Volume 3: The Care of the Self* supported the idea that people can have power over their development because power relations can shift. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault focused on the power-knowledge tension, manifesting in the relationship between individual and institution: "Power is everywhere" and "comes from everywhere" (Foucault, 1978, p.93). Since power is dispersed and pervasive, power occurs all the time. All community members can intervene in power relations.

I used Foucault's emphasis on how power functions and creates the desired behavior. Also, I used Foucault's theory of disciplinary mechanisms of space, time, and movement, which the school institution normalizes to control; schools orient disciplinary mechanisms to create

“docile bodies.” Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977) stated that the Panopticon’s primary function is “to [ensure] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (p.201). An institution needs a space conducive to constant surveillance to normalize and control the Panopticon. This disciplinary mechanism allows anonymous powers to organize, see, and discipline individuals—what are the forces that control the community? Over time, the individual internalizes the Panopticon’s organization, surveillance, and discipline, therefore, behaving according to their training even outside the Panopticon’s parameters. The community functions in part of the system of surveillance in which administrators are a part. Administrators become instruments of the gaze of the community—are these the people who are in the Panopticon through the gaze?

Foucault’s examination of power relations and disciplinary mechanisms highlighted that they can exist within social discourses and manifest in institutions and communities. Discourse involves a community’s perceptions, use of language, beliefs, and understanding of authoritative forms of knowledge in that community. Also, by analyzing the discursive elements in the community in this study, I revealed that community “discourses produce objects about which they speak” (Ball, 2018, p.9). The “imagined student” was one of the discursive objects. Every power relation interaction between administrator and parents revolved around “the student.” A school is a place for such power relations through the school strategies consisting of school-issued devices, surveillance mechanisms on those school devices, and a restricted print curriculum.

Findings

I analyzed data using in-vivo and structural coding techniques, applied thematic analysis approaches and memo writing, and, based on analyzing through my lens of power-relations and surveillance, found seven significant findings.

Finding 1: Parental concerns from a select section of parents are the primary force that shapes administrators' choices, whether or not they are voiced. By attempting to anticipate and responding to parental concerns and surveillance, administrators contribute to perpetuating power relations that deny students full access to school materials.

Administrators may be only variously aware of it, but they seemed in this study to always respond with the gaze of the community in mind. They constantly absorbed and responded to the power dynamics in the Panopticon, in this case, the community gaze. They did not need to be told that others were watching them; they seemed quite aware the eyes of the community were upon them through past experiences and perceived community expectations. As my themes indicated, administrators sometimes *invited* parents to participate in censorship and even *anticipated* issues before parental complaint parents' possible objections to course materials. They sometimes anticipated and foreclosed issues before they occurred. This process could be overt or covert. They were caught up in the system of power relations in making decisions that complied with censorship.

Complying with parents in censorship decisions took varied forms as part of their administrative functions. These decisions had more considerable implications, as seen from a Foucauldian lens. Foucault (1977) stated that the Panopticon's primary function is "to [ensure] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of

power” (p. 201). Although related initially to prisons, the Panopticon applied to the school setting as well (Foucault, 1977), where systems regulate roles, people, and behavior. Over time, individuals, whether administrators or other school roles, can internalize the Panopticon’s organization, surveillance, and discipline, therefore, behaving according to their training even when outside the Panopticon’s parameters. Administrators regularly have the gaze of school-workers, communities, and school boards on them. This surveillance, its embodied response, and its varied manifestations, all contribute to perpetuating censorship practices that affect students.

Finding 2: Attempting to create and maintain a controlled environment through school-issued devices with filters, administrators, through parental interventions, deny students opportunities to practice skills necessary to become critical thinkers.

Administrators at times attempted to create a controlled environment aligned with parental wishes and district policies; this was seen in the data when documents and administrators discussed implementing a restricted online curriculum: “We use the iBoss internet content filter to block access to internet content that is inappropriate, has no instructional value, and/or would allow students to communicate directly with people other than ___PS students and staff” (“Dear__P.S. Parents,” 2018, p.1). All administrators discussed the avenues in place that helped ensure a controlled online environment: “*the district has pretty heavy firewalls in place. We have safeguards in place to you know, if students are typing inappropriate things...the firewalls, the Gaggle is what it's called the digital filtering service informs administrators.*” Filters also do not “*allow them [students]to have one-on-one private communication with someone outside of our domain, we don't let that ...we don't allow that.*” The online environment pertained to what students could access online at school and at home on their school-filtered and

issued devices. Having filters in place helped regulate what information students could access online and, by doing so, assisted schools in meeting the CIPA guidelines. The CIPA guidelines included filtering or blocking (1) obscene material, (2) child pornography, and (3) other material harmful to minors (Johnson, 2012). Although filtering school-issued devices was a surveillance mechanism intended to fulfill CIPA requirements and restrict students' online access to potentially inappropriate material, filters created a controlled environment that limited students' engagement with complex social issues teachers could explore as part of the curriculum.

One outcome of the controlled online environment was that schools were not thoroughly preparing students to “succeed in a changing society” ([District Website], n.d.) because students could benefit from engaging in complex and sometimes controversial materials in a group setting to become critical thinkers. Critical thinking consists of students “organizing, analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating information” (Mancall et al., 1986). In this sense, attempts to create a controlled environment can deny students the practice it takes to become critical thinkers and foster resistance—even to censorship. To make good citizens, educators must teach children how to think critically, guiding students to seek information to gain their own knowledge and perspectives on topics. The literature also supported the idea that students with a less restricted online environment are not necessary to teach critical thinking skills. However, more access to technology “amplifies the opportunities for students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do” (Durflinger, 2015, p. 11).

Allowing students to become critical thinkers was a primary educational goal in this district as outlined in the *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018): “Creativity and Innovation, Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving, Communication, Collaboration, Inquiry, Individualization and Choice” (p.1). Even though employers and universities use social media

platforms to post job openings and communicate with future and current students, students cannot access or analyze social media websites. Another way a controlled environment did not foster critical thinking was by the use of the district's new filtering classroom management software, which: "*You [the teacher] can actually push out custom filters saying during this class period here are the only places you [the student] can go.*" Once again, the controlled environment limited students' opportunities to fully access, analyze, and evaluate controversial and complex information beyond the scope of curricular bounds. After all, the controlled environment selected the information for students.

The implementation of school-issued devices expanded the area of the school's surveillance. Before the digital conversion, the lines between school and home were more defined. When students were on school grounds, administrators and teachers managed and disciplined them. When students were home, parents or guardians managed and disciplined them. By expanding the school's surveillance, administrators blurred lines between school and home. Who is in control of students and what they access online? Parents or administrators? And since administrators described filtering the internet as a "*moving target*" because people create new websites every day, was this a battle that administrators could win? Because even administrators stated, "*there's a whole lot of potentially dangerous information and imagery out there,*" and they could not block everything. Implementing filters created the performance of a "controlled online" environment but could not guarantee it.

Finding 3: Censorship practices manifest in many forms—they are subtle, overt, and dynamic. Administrators, influenced by the gaze of the community, make censorship decisions which include favoring some voices over others, using alternative novels, and filtering school devices.

The data showed that administrators created inequity for students by regulating what materials students could access online and in the English classrooms. Although I discussed filtered online materials in finding 1, how I emphasized how filters and the implementation of school-issued devices caused inequity rather than their surveillance features. By implementing devices for all secondary students, administrators attempted to “Ensure equitable access to instructional technology” (*Digital Conversion Guidebook*, 2018, p.1), meaning all students would have the same device as their peers to use for schoolwork: “students will have access to instructional technology that will support their success in the classroom and beyond” (*Digital Conversion Guidebook*, 2018, p.1). Implementing filters, in theory, would ensure equitable access to information because all students would have the same device; furthermore, the same websites and images would be blocked for all students on school-issued devices. The district’s digital conversion allowed all students to access the same device, therefore by extension, devices with the same filters as surveillance mechanisms. Digital conversion, ideally, made all students technologically equal. Students all had the same restricted device, but as one administrator pointed out, another equity issue was not addressed: ***“a lot of our kids still did not have internet.”***

This situation created another inequity in terms of censorship for students without the financial means to have consistent and reliable internet at home. Batch (2014) stated that filtering online materials can create two types of students: an advantaged class and a disadvantaged class.

The advantaged class has filtered access at school, at home, or on their personal electronic devices; this class/group can freely access information from which to create knowledge and practice media literacy skills. The disadvantaged class is filtered at school, has no or limited access at home, and often has no access to public libraries (Batch, 2014, p.6). This finding aligned with the literature on inequity in school technology implementation. Students at a financial disadvantage were not exposed to the same information as financially thriving students; therefore, schools created an equity issue. This finding raised a question to be addressed and explored in further research studies: Has the digital conversion process accidentally created a greater digital divide, different levels of censorship, and thus informational inequity between students with and without money?

Also, administrators' decisions about censorship can interfere with providing equitable education in access to information regarding what novels students can access in libraries and classrooms. Since administrators "*offer individual choice for families,*" parents can request their child read an alternate novel in an alternate classroom setting. By the child accessing a separate novel and location, they did not have equal access to materials and the teacher and the group learning process that can contribute to critical thinking. Administrators did not mention offering parents choices to request an alternative novel because their child wanted a more mature or challenging read. One administrator expressed concern that these students "*miss a lot of instruction that happens in the discussion of a book.*" By not being present in the room, the student would not have access to the teacher to ask questions or be monitored. Also, the student will not engage in meaningful and thoughtful discussions with peers and benefit from hearing others' opinions and analyses. Furthermore, "*adolescents are so influenced by what's going on*

around them. I'm sure they're embarrassed” because other students can figure out why they are not present in class. Students were not seen or treated equally among their peers.

Finding 4: The discursive student is the main site where administrators and parents enact power relations.

Students were viewed as discursive objects. They were constantly talked about as the objects of teaching and of censorship. Yet, they did not emerge in the data as members of the “community” whose voices were the focus of administrative concerns about censorship decisions. They were primarily absent. There was a lack of interview data mentioning student input and district documents not directly addressing students. If the District was to create students able to be successful outside school, how would they accomplish this goal without inviting students to participate in their education? “The student” was a rhetorical and discursive entity around which the school policies and practices were intended to be enacted; however, students, based on my data, were in no way active participating flesh and blood stakeholders. As noted in chapter 4, the lack of students in the data stood out to me. For example, administrators addressed the letter to parents, not students, in the district document “Dear __ P.S. Parents letter” (2018). Only two out of nine administrators mentioned students when discussing curriculum decisions, which emphasized they were not as prominent voices in censorship activities or protests as were parents.

The absence of direct data that addressed or discussed students as active participants in their education was a form of silent speech. Silence is a powerful and meaningful source of data in qualitative research (Bailey, 2008; Mazzei, 2007) because silence or avoidance of topics is “indeed constitutive of discourse itself” (Bailey, 2008, p. 282). What were the administrators not

saying? Who was absent from the “community”? By not discussing students, they could be suggesting that students were not a significant factor in their decision-making process, because their primary focus was on vocal parents or in-person disciplinary issues. Administrators spoke volumes by not discussing students as voices or even problems in pro or anti-censorship issues. Administrators’ silence about students defended curricular decisions without input from students themselves.

Not only did the majority of administrators not mention students in the interviews, but the observation and interview data also revealed that administrators often silenced students in two key ways: by not openly inviting students to voice their print or online curricula concerns and by dismissing student concerns if they did speak up. The observation data gathered at school board meetings revealed that not one student spoke during the public participation portion. Only parents spoke during the participation time in school board meetings. The absence of students speaking at school board meetings could mean students did not view themselves as part of the community or did not think school board meetings were invitations for them to participate.

When administrators interviewed discussed two instances where students advocated for their learning and questioned why some websites are blocked, administrators dismissed the student concerns as “*funny*” and “*quite comical.*” The adjectives administrators used to describe students when they attempted to take an active role in their learning suggested they did not hold students at the same level as parents. The two administrators did not discuss having a meeting with the concerned students. Although students had valid points about the educational websites, district administrators decided not to meet with students. They continued to block the websites in question because administrators blocked any website “*that has any kind of blogging or interacting, or commenting,*” which “*rules out so many websites.*” Administrators often made

decisions based on their perceptions of what they thought the students viewed and not what they actually viewed online. They were protecting students before knowing how to protect them. This focus on protecting children was also prevalent in the literature. Whether they were for or against a print, visual, or digital resource, all parents believed their actions to gain or ban various resources from schools protected their children and sometimes all children in a school or district (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2015; Kravitz, 2002; Magnuson, 2011; Maycock, 2011; Mitoraj, 2000; Moskalski & McBride, 2015). Administrators may have overtly denied students a voice by dismissing students' attempts to question their decisions or to invite parents to speak on their behalf rather than hear from students themselves.

This finding is informed by Foucault's (1977) concept of surveillance in the Panopticon. This surveillance mechanism was to make it so that a guard did not have to be in the tower to create a sense of fear and compliance in prisoners. People within the Panopticon disciplined their behavior themselves. Eventually, the Panopticon transformed prisoners into being docile and would respond to guards' expectations their presence (Foucault, 1977). Similarly, the school institution will normalize control through its disciplinary mechanisms of space, time, and movement: it creates "docile bodies." By dismissing and describing students as "*comical*," by not noting their actions as agents in their curriculum, administrators communicated that students were not as crucial to censorship decisions as other community members, especially the vocal parents. After students created a petition to get Cool Math Games and Scartched.com websites unblocked, they did not pursue the issue further, nor did administrators discuss any other petitions or students emailing with concerns.

This finding revealed that the community viewed students as discursive objects around which censorship discussions circle rather than having students play a significant active role in

the censorship decisions which affected them. Administrators, parents, and teachers often spoke on behalf of a student they saw as representative of the majority of all students. By speaking on behalf of the *imagined student*, administrators are not allowing a place for resistance for students, which may not adequately equip students to be advocates for their learning.

Finding 5: Due to the ambiguous and interpretive nature of language, tone and connotations, the English curriculum is the main site where community members challenge curriculum and administrators enact their censorship practices.

This finding organically revealed itself in the themes tied to *which* materials were the focus of censorship from interviews and district selection policy documents. Administrators weighed in on decisions across the curriculum. When administrators discussed their experiences with non-digital curricula, they discussed the math curriculum. Math curriculum was non-negotiable because it was a district-wide decision in which all administrators discussed that the new math pedagogy focused on learning math “*in a different way*” that helped kids “*develop the foundation*” of math skills to then be able to apply these skills to real-life situations.

Administrators agreed with this shift from working “*20 or 40 problems*” a day to students learning more practical and less redundant applications. However, when administrators discussed the English or library curriculum, they were willing to negotiate and censor materials in two main ways: Allowing students to go to a separate location to read another district-approved book or placing children in an alternate English class with a more restrictive curriculum. English writing is very fluid and personal, thus contributing to why the English curriculum was expressed in the interview data as “*controversial.*”

The alternate English class consisted of students reading a replacement text which objecting parents approved. There was no public selection policy for the selection of textbooks — meaning there was no ambiguity in terms of what was appropriate or not in math as there was for English materials. The “Instructional Material Policy” (2012) further indicated the emphasis, time, and expertise in selecting print materials. There was nothing related to why committees chose the math textbooks or any strict guidelines on the district website that explained the in-depth workings of the math textbook committee. Was that why the English curriculum is often not only challenged but censored? Because the District spent a great deal of time justifying the English curriculum, they had unknowingly opened themselves up to scrutiny and, ultimately, censorship.

An anomaly stood out in the administrator background surveys. Only one administrator had experience teaching in the humanities field, mainly English and literature. Due to their background, most administrators may not adequately defend why library media specialists, teachers, and curriculum specialists selected novels. Most administrators in the study’s educational expertise as classroom teachers lay in the math and sciences; this could add to their perceptions of being a prime area to negotiate with parents. To add to this complex topic, when I asked one administrator if she ever received any pushback from parents concerning new or existing curriculum, her response surprised me; she discussed how “*the print piece always scares me just because once you put it out there, it’s out there.*” The print piece she described related to the administrator being nervous when sending emails to parents and students about school testing.

Nevertheless, it brought up an interesting point. Print curriculums, such as novels, include the permanency of print. In some ways, such print appears stable, fixed, and enduring,

potentially attracting parental ire and leaving room for social issues to manifest. It parents to question specific passages and content of novels they see as problematic, especially those pertaining content outside the acceptable discourse of the vocal minority of the community—LGBTQ content, physical or sexual violence, or mature language. Yet print also can convey varied emotions, and spur varied interpretations. Administrator Betty stated:

*But, you know, print doesn't always convey emotions. And **so people can kind of read into that what they want**. It's the same as sending an email. You know, I always try to say, type first, step away, review, step away, review again, and then you can hit send.*

As applied to the English curriculum, this administrator revealed how print can convey meanings other than those intended. How one interprets print varies. Students could thus read the same novel but connect very strongly emotionally to it, while another student who read the same book could not connect to the novel. Parents could interpret some textual passages as problematic. With experience as an English teacher, I have noticed how hard it is for students to pick up on an author's tone in what they were trying to convey in a text. The tone pertains to how the author feels about what they were writing. There is no clear-cut way to approach tone. Students have to draw inferences through analysis, word choice, diction, and syntax to conclude the author's tone:

*even in Romeo and Juliet, you know, Shakespeare in general, you know, **there's some stuff in there that's very adult**, whether it's suicide, whether it's **sexual connotation** or activity or whatever the case is. And it's not just Shakespeare. It's, I mean, you know, **art imitates life. Life imitates art**. You know, it kind of ebbs and flows in and out, I think.*

These quotations highlighted the written word's complexity and how even people can view classic literature as controversial. Also, the word “*connotation*” that this administrator used when discussing the controversial and interpretive nature of texts further connected to my point about

tone. Both tone and connotations are not concepts in which applying a concept or equation would help all students reach the same conclusion.

Students will bring in their own emotions, knowledge, and empathy into their understanding of the tone and connotations of texts. This interpretive nature of the English curriculum makes it vulnerable to open readings by community members; therefore, English was more likely to be censored than other content areas as supported not only in the study's data but the literature data from chapter 2 (Adams, 2007; Adams et al., 2015; Kravitz, 2002; Magnuson, 2011; Maycock, 2011; Moskalski & McBride, 2015). This finding allowed for interpreting why administrators intervened and spent a significant amount of thought and time on the English curriculum as a site of potential complaint and censorship. The print was both permanent and continually open to interpretation. Yet in this openness, this finding illuminates how the English curriculum is also a space for resistance due to its interpretative nature.

Finding 6: Even as administrators contribute to censorship, the data also reveals spaces of resistance through school technology and ambiguity in district documents.

Administrators can and did intervene in the community gaze. For example, they sometimes pushed back on parents, or they navigated to ensure the parents' wishes were accommodated in ways that affected just one child. All secondary students had the same school-issued device. Ideally, students would not be able or even attempt to access blocked websites on school-issued devices because they would fear the Panopticon's disciplinary reach. Even if this were to work, students would be reliant on filtered information from others for a lifetime. Administrators offer the school community multiple avenues for resistance. Administrators

employ resistance avenues through school technology, and ambiguity found in school documents.

Technology allowed space for actions and resistance. Filters on school-issued devices attempted to control the uncontrollable. Students devised ways to circumvent school filters, as was indicated by the data. Students could access “*some inappropriate sites*” and “*search for an image that you shouldn't search.*” Even though filters were in place, one administrator admitted there was “*no effective way to prevent them [students] from accessing inappropriate material.*” Besides surveillance measures being unable to create a controlled environment entirely, filters also denied students the opportunity to think critically and completely fulfill the school district’s motto: “*empowering all students to succeed in a changing society.*” What students access on their personal devices was outside of the school’s reach. So, students with financial means could access more information and potentially practice and master critical thinking and information literacy skills than students who did not have financial means.

Further, some students have been able to navigate school filters. For example, two middle school administrators discussed having an issue with a parent who was concerned that the online environment was not controlled enough by the current filters:

*[A middle school student was] able to circumvent some inappropriate sites, and so they [the parents of the middle school student] were furious at the District. **They were furious at us,** and they did not want their child to use a Chromebook...the District was doing everything it could.*

By filtering school devices, administrators created an illusion of a secure and controlled environment. Still, students could find ways to maneuver around filters and access information

and images. As Durlinger (2015) stated in the *School Administrator* journal, “The only way students can learn to navigate the digital world appropriately is if we help them along the way” (p.11). Administrators want to help students navigate online sources but, at the same time, meet CIPA requirements and community expectations. There is no one way to help students become better digital consumers, so each school administration must determine how to best help students.

As addressed in the *Ambiguity* theme in chapter 4, administrators also employ ambiguous language found in district documents to allow a place for resistance. Terms such as “*inappropriate*,” “*safe*,” and “*educational*” suggest multiple potential interpretations, thus allowing space for students or community members to question materials such as reading selection materials. On the other hand, administrators can use these same ambiguous terms to allow wiggle room to implement and justify both print and online materials.

Discoveries in Relation to Research Questions

This section will describe how my findings connected to my research questions and additional points I found beyond the questions. I primarily answered these questions in the material above, but I highlight them here.

Research Question 1: How do these administrators perceive censorship, censor (events and print, visual, and digital media and students’ access to the information within these media), and make censorship policies?

The primary focus of this question was on the many roles administrators perceived as belonging to them in their job and how their censorship role was just one role they had: Also,

this question showed who had the most influence on administrators' perceptions and how that correlated to what and how they chose to censor. The construction of the "community" as primarily those parents making up the vocal *We* were among the most influential. Those who objected to the curriculum, rather than many who supported it, were most visible in administrators' comments. Administrators' perceptions of community expectations and the vocal *We* influenced administrators in multiple ways. Administrators perceived censorship, censored, and made censorship policies as part of their larger role in managing the learning conditions in the school, the stakeholders in the community, and the student's education. That was the role of managing and maintaining the vocal *We* expectations. Administrators' role in such management was complex. If administrators managed the vocal *We* by censoring the curriculum to which the *We* were objecting, the administrators' management role did not just stop. The parents making up the *We* could change agendas and even players. There was always a new topic of concern and new parents questioning the curriculum because power relations were ongoing.

First, administrators censored and made many nuanced censorship-related decisions and supported policies to manage the law, school dynamics, and community expectations. They invited parents to participate, anticipated problems, advanced their voices to the level of curriculum experts, and sometimes refused to comply with their requests. Throughout, based on the available data, they seemed to privilege a vocal *we* in their decision making rather than students, teachers, or silent parents. Part of their job was to set boundaries which included implementing surveillance mechanisms and being surveilled, both in external forms of censorship and internal form such as self-surveillance. Administrators' roles put them in a unique and challenging position. They want to do what is best for students, but they "*don't want to*

overstep our role as educators.” They had to decide how to educate them while respecting the community's diverse opinions and values.

Administrators were thoroughly caught up in power relations and perceived vocal parents as the predominant stakeholders and based many curricular decisions on what materials they thought might provoke parents. They made decisions based on two factors: Administrators *anticipated* what parents might complain about, thus basing decisions on this perception, or administrators based decisions on *past interactions* with upset and vocal parents: *“I mean, you look at some of the music videos, and I think it again comes back to our parental expectations. I know, for example, ___ **Public Schools allows YouTube, and apparently that’s okay.**”* This quote is an example of an indigenous contrast organically found in the data, which means I did not prompt the administrator to discuss how parents influenced their decisions. The administrator suggested that constructing the school as having an “inside” and “outside” was artificial. Technology has permeable boundaries. Students could access YouTube on personal devices, so administrators could not restrict kids from using YouTube for educational reasons or not inside or outside school. YouTube and online videos were not consistently considered educational or not because they depended on the community’s expectations and perspectives.

Another facet of administrators’ roles was managing how the public perceived them and the district impression management by extension. Part of the administrators’ impression management role manifested with surveillance mechanisms such as internet filters on school devices. Administrators engaged in impression management. Goffman’s (1959) concept of impression management examined “the active processes by which people make and manage their social roles” (“Erving Goffman,” 2021, p.1). Administrators perceived part of the role as listening to and accommodating parental expectations, sometimes leading to the censoring of

materials. Administrators described how they sometimes managed parental expectations through censorship. They managed not all parental expectations but the vocal *We*. Since “*a very tiny percent,*” which is “*about 6% of our parents say it’s [the internet filters] not restrictive enough,*” the majority of parents did not complain, but “*a small vocal minority can make*” the district look bad. Mismanaging the vocal *We* would cause “*bad PR*” and “*get a lot of attention.*” The attention was not going to portray the district in a positive light. To maintain the district’s image of “*make[ing] an environment that’s really convenient for the parents and the students*” and appease the Vocal *We*, administrators tended to be more restrictive on their internet filtering. Also, the *Digital Conversion Guidebook* (2018) and “Dear __P.S. Parents” (2018) invited and encouraged parents to voice their concerns and step into a more instructional role.

Research Question 2: How do such multi-layered forces as the discourse of a school community influence its public-school, district, and secondary-school, site administrators’ perceptions of censorship, censorship practices, and policy-making?

My second research question was of utmost importance to me. Due to past experiences with administrator-driven censorship, I wanted to study and understand what factors go into an administrator’s decision to censor or not. Since I was constantly questioned and censored as a library media specialist in my career, I thought perhaps all administrators perceived the library, school curriculum, and censorship as significant parts of their administrative role. My past experiences led me to ponder what factors administrators consider before deciding to censor materials or not? Due to their leadership roles in education, the community viewed administrators as having the most power in controlling curricular decisions. I began my perspective as a critical presentation intended to understand and make a change. I still hold that

view, but my gaze shifted to now I see administrators situated in power relations. They are not sole actors. Power relations were constantly in flux. Power did not just rest on one person or one role. My data illuminated the many layers at work in this school district.

The first and most prevalent layer at work in the data was related to administrators' perceptions of community expectations important to their impression management. The first layer revolved around administrators' perception that the community expected educational excellence: "*The number 1 thing our parents want is a good learning environment.*" Since the term educational and other terms related to education, such as *appropriate* and *safe*, were not clearly defined, administrators tended to base their decisions on the vocal *We* of the community. The vocal *We* were the next layer of the community's discourse. The encompassing *We* of the community were the parents, teachers, and students. Although the pronoun *We* implied the administrators worked together equally with all stakeholders, the data showed that parents were the main influential stakeholders. In the data, administrators invited parents to participate in school-related decisions more than any other stakeholder. Since the vocal parents spoke at board meetings and addressed their concerns to administrators, these parents were the imagined *We* of the community. Administrators thought about what the *We* wanted when making censorship-related decisions.

Administrators made decisions based on the vocal *We*, which led to another layer at work in the community. Administrators not only perceived the *We* as representative of all parents but also all students' parents. This perception caused administrators to perceive the non-flesh student as a discursive object. The non-flesh student was the *imagined student*. Administrators wanted the *imagined student* to be successful and educated according to the community's expectations and standards. However, because of the vocal *We* being at the forefront in administrators'

decision-making, administrators and the vocal *We* used the *imagined student* as a discursive object. The discourse of the community (administrators and the vocal *We*) created the imagined student situated in power relations and the object of the curriculum and censorship decisions. This student forms a common ground for which administrators and the vocal *We* could enact power. Administrators' perceptions of community expectations, which often narrowed down to the vocal *We* expectations and trying to do what was appropriate for the *imagined student*, led to administrators making censorship decisions based on the community's perceived discourse.

Research Question 3: How can administrators enact change in censorship practices?

There are several ways administrators can enact change in censorships practices. Two ways to enact change involve administrators creating new avenues for collaboration and resistance. The third avenue involves clarifying and streamlining existing procedures for optimal effectiveness.

Creation: Create Spaces for Students' Voices

To allow students to have a forum to speak, creating and implementing a designated student participation section in school board meetings and a student educational organization would allow students to be active participants in their education. This actionable step is where administrators can breathe even more life into shifting power relations by creating spaces for students to be active in the community and a place where students can learn about their rights so they can make decisions for themselves. First, adding a student participation section separate from the public participation section of every school board meeting's agenda would make it clear to students that they are part of the public. Although the school board observations and agendas have a "public participation" section, only adults spoke during this segment. This situation brings up an interesting issue. Are students not speaking up because they do not have anything to say?

Or are students not speaking up because they have become passive? By doing this small implementation, administrators would encourage students to speak about their concerns at school board meetings, and their voices are valid.

Another way to allow space for students to voice their opinions is by establishing a Student Organization. This organization could function much like the Parent Teacher Organizations (PTO) that most districts have in place. The Student Organization can be a forum where administrators and teachers invite students to come together to discuss school matters. They would focus on all matters of school matters, not just curricular concerns. With teachers and administrators sponsoring the organization, students will be advocates for their learning. Still, it will also allow administrators to know student concerns and questions, which they can consider when making administrative decisions.

Creation: Digital Filtering Committee

Based on my research data, my suggestions to school administrators are to 1) create a committee that will revise and write policies guiding print and digital censorship so that students and materials that best serve them remain in these policies' focus. It is important to note that due to the endless interpretations that a document can inspire, any policy will always have spaces of resistance and varied meaning. 2) advocate higher education's school administration, school leadership, and teacher education programs and state and district administrators that they include content and practice handling parents' attempts to impose censorship by objecting to curricular content, approaches to and strategies for teaching content, the quantity of online time, and digital access to information and that they provide quality professional development for in-service administrators and teachers. In-service training can focus on teachers and administrators working collaboratively.

However, the research literature suggests a more extensive than two-person committee and includes teachers and library media specialists (Johnson, 2012; Mann, 2018;). A joint committee should make filtering decisions (Johnson. 2010; Johnson, 2012; Mann, 2018). Although these scholars recommended that committees make internet filtering decisions, they also note that district and school administrators in the school district do not follow the experts' recommendations. Humans bring their own experiences and beliefs to the table when evaluating any topic; therefore, a committee is essential to ensuring administrators hear multiple perspectives and opinions, not just the perspectives of the vocal minority. Members of the school community, educators from all content areas, administrators, parents, and students would comprise this committee.

Although technological advances aid schools in many positive ways, the advances are so rapid that no one can keep up with the new digital content created and released every day. The “watch-dogs” — specifically those looking at ethical issues—cannot keep up with the speed of technological advances. Many problems—socially, politically, and economically—stem from ethics in being unable to keep up with advancing technology. Administrators have established procedures for approaching parents' objections over print materials, but no policies or procedures exist for digital materials. By forming a committee of diverse educators, parents, administrators, and students, they are closer to making sure they are both representing and addressing the “public” in educational decisions.

Print Material Guidelines and Implementation

Although policies for committee formation to evaluate parents' objections to print materials exist, parents do not always follow protocol by completing and submitting the required documents. By not following protocol, parents may be creating confusion leading to more time

spent deciphering the next steps. Also, the process needs to be communicated to all stakeholders in a school district: parents, students, and teachers. By involving teachers more, teachers can help administrators manage parents. Since teachers are part of the school community that interacts with students and parents constantly, teachers can help address parent and student curriculum issues as they arise. By doing so, teachers may promptly answer stakeholder concerns, thus, helping administrators and creating a sense of collaboration. All stakeholders are more likely to know what they can do if they have a concern, which leads to more people having the space for administrators to hear their concerns and opinions.

This study has shown many nuances about administrators and their roles in power relations and censorship. All of the nuances highlight that administrators in this study felt surveillanced by the school community. Feeling the community's gaze, administrators anticipated and attempted to manage vocal parents. Anticipating and managing parents are part of the multifaceted roles of administrators. The universal way in which administrators discussed their roles suggests that administrators may need support; support from other administrators that are experiencing the same issues and situations. Also, support in the form of information about First Amendment issues and how they manifest in small ways that could add up to the chipping away of students' rights.

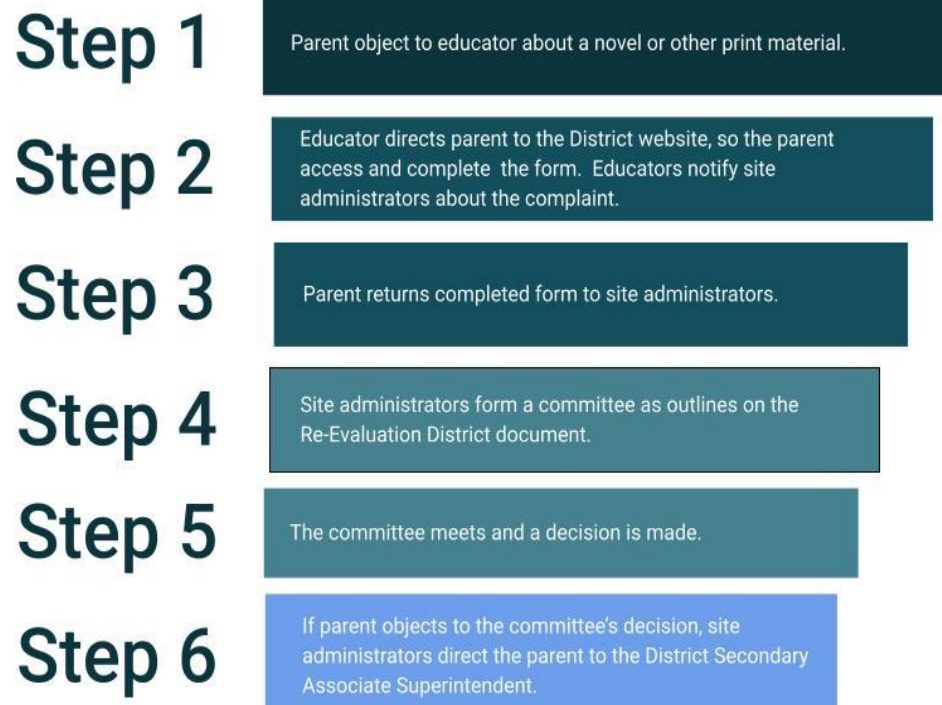


Figure 8: Chart showing the possible procedure order for a complaint about a print material.

Implications

Implications for Research

My findings revealed a different way of analyzing how power relations work in one school district by focusing on administrators through Foucault's theories of power. I considered how administrators could contribute to but were not the sole perpetrators of censorship; they were always part of larger community and school system dynamics. There were many parts at play. My case study explored administrators' challenges when dealing with censorship and

showed powerful site-based examples of how censorship could work in one community. More case studies need to be conducted in other communities because every community will have factors – parents, school board, teachers, students, and community members – that relate to each other in unique ways. How, for instance, do censorship discussions play out when parents are less involved? How are school boards significant in some communities? Just because the vocal *We* (consisting of vocal parents who want more censorship on student materials) has a significant impact on administrators’ perceptions of community expectations in the district studied does not mean that is the same for other districts. Suppose other districts also have a vocal *We* or administrators who work with teachers to resist community pressure.

In that case, my research can show how administrators giving too much control to vocal parents are limiting the ability for other parents and students—whose voices are not as dominant—to be contributing members of the power relations in that district that make different decisions regarding censorship. Administrators could apply ideas from my study to the power relations in their schools and district, so administrators can more equally distribute the many roles present in power relations. One way to distribute power entails administrators discussing students’ rights with the students, incorporating them into class lessons, and creating forums to express their opinions about controversial materials. Once students know their rights and the channels available for advocacy, they can shift the flow of power.

My findings on the absence of flesh and blood students in administrator data have implications for educational research. It calls for more research into how students perceive and respond to school censorship. Do students view censorship as outside their realm of control? Are they aware of their First Amendment Rights? Do students want to be more involved with curricular decisions? Furthermore, how do administrators feel personally—not just

professionally—about how to intervene in power relations if they believe they are responsible for preventing censorship? How do those women/men resist? What does resistance look like to them? Where are the teachers? How do they work with teachers and library media specialists?

Implications for Practice

My study has several implications for practice in public schools that raise interesting questions. First, in terms of their role in managing and negotiating with parents, what do administrators need? Also, how can community members who do not represent the loudest voices help administrators manage their roles, given the power dynamics in the district? Since the community expects to be informed and involved with curriculum decisions, creating and implementing a digital filtering committee would benefit administrators and the community because the committee will allow opportunities to enact power relations.

A digital filtering committee would allow parents, teachers, students, and administrators to become more involved with online content filtering decisions. Administrators creating this committee will enable more pathways of dialogue as well as resistance for themselves, parents, teachers, and students to intervene in power relations. The committee would also reduce the time administrators spend fielding community concerns about content filtering. The last implication for practice involves consistently following and communicating to parents, students, and teachers the proper protocol for requesting material to be re-evaluated and up for possible removal. At the forefront of the literature is the recognition that administrators want to communicate with parents and engage them in school policies (Anderson, 2016; Johnson, 2005; Poore, 2019; Sternke, 2019). Administrators can achieve this by communicating with the community the proper procedure if they are concerned about classroom or library books. Administrators can reinforce and communicate that schools are part of a community; thus, they welcome and encourage

community members' opinions. This includes encouraging the community to reach out if they have concerns and when they have a clarifying question or suggestion. By encouraging open dialogue, more community members will have a space to feel heard. Creating avenues for communication will allow administrators to know the discourse of their community and be proactive when censorship topics occur (Sipe, 1999). One actionable step for schools found in research involved creating school-parent committees: "School-parent committees devoted to building mutual understanding and support" (Keller, 2008). This committee allows another outlet for parents, teachers, and administrators to hear and have an open dialogue.

Implications for Theory

Throughout the study, it became apparent that there were many roles at work in this and all school districts. The use of Foucault's frame helps expand and shift attention to power relations as discursive and contextual involving all community members. Power relations are multifaceted and depend upon the discourse of a community; censorship does not occur due to dynamics of only two roles. Every role is involved in the community discourse, so all roles are, in some way, part of the censorship processes that occur in the district. One example that could be useful is the importance of thinking discursively/systemically about censorship because no individual role in a school, or a district, a system, stands apart from other roles; they all work dynamically together. Censorship is not one person versus another, and it is never stagnant. This framing helps complicate how we think about and intervene in censorship.

In the current discursive environment in America, the topic of CRT and what constitutes "appropriate" for students is at the forefront of education. Since I undertook my study before the rise of book banning and CRT-related state bills being proposed and passing in many states, I

believe it is imperative to examine how power relations are at work with the new wave of CRT-related bills and how those bills impact teachers, administrators, and students. How do administrators and teachers navigate the new bills? How are teachers and educators coping with these new CRT censorship bills? How can they shift the power concerning the community gaze and pressure? My analysis of power relations and how they influence administrator perceptions and decisions is essential to research CRT bills to consider possible resistance mechanisms.

Future Research

Because I am particularly passionate about secondary education, I look to others to examine the censorship phenomenon in early childhood and elementary education. Such research would ideally include conducting studies that involve elementary school administrators in a study parallel to the one I have conducted. Since I want to enact change, I want to conduct an action research study where I collaboratively work with secondary administrators to understand the power relations at work better and create policies that would positively impact students' access to information. Positive impact means creating policies where students will have less censored novels, curriculum, and online materials and be able to master critical thinking skills.

According to existing scholarship, the censorship phenomenon, especially concerning sexual and LGBTQ-specific topics, spans all public and common-school levels. I believe factors scholars have not considered lurk beneath personal beliefs about sexuality that affect censorship of LGBTQ-educational materials within public schools. Another step in researching the censorship phenomenon is to conduct studies that specifically address LGBTQ materials and why they are the most censored, secondary, public-school materials. I also intend to conduct qualitative studies addressing library media specialists' ethical, personal, and professional values that influence their censorship and self-censorship decisions.

A phenomenon occurred with one book in a particular part of the sophomore curriculum: *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini (2003). All administrators with current or past secondary administrative experience in the school district mentioned the controversy around *The Kite Runner*. Every high school site in the district had parents object to their children's studying the book. Administrators mentioned that parental objections revolved around a rape involving two boys in the novel, so the sexual assault in the book went against some parents' ethics and beliefs. Rape is illegal, so that is a public belief, but the objecting parents did not want rape to be part of a classroom-required novel.

Another book read at the sophomore level at some sites, *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls (2005), involves a young boy's attempted rape of a young girl. From personal experience as an educator, the few parents that objected when I taught the novel did not want their children to read a book with an abundance of profanity. Parents never objected to rape and other potentially sensitive subjects in the novel, such as mental disorders, child neglect, abuse, sexual assault, poverty, homelessness, and racism. I want to explore how protection is often saturated in fear in these censorship-provoking books and if censoring what students read hurts students' self-mastery and ability to decipher the information. Is the profanity so abundant in *The Glass Castle* that it overrides other potentially objectionable content? Do parents censor this book and others like it because of the presence of sex and sexuality? Or are administrators and parents keeping students from certain types of information, thus creating the opposite outcome of banning the book in the first place?

Also, based on my findings and discoveries, more research is needed to explore the focus on the role censorship plays in denying students to be active in their learning, which ultimately denies students their First Amendment Rights. This kind of practice can interfere with students'

development to be active members of a democratic society when denied or not allowed to exercise their rights. Court rulings have made it clear “That minors too have constitutional rights, even in school” (Ross, 2015, p.1). Administrators did not mention students’ rights, so it is a future research topic to pursue. Since public schools are part of the democratic system that seeks to honor all children and children’s family’s beliefs and backgrounds by “The intermingling in the school of youth of different races, different religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment” (Dewey, 1916, p.25), schools must respect and teach students how to enact their First Amendment Rights. By not mentioning students, the study might suggest that students may not even be aware of their constitutional rights. Students’ rights did not come up in the data, so their right is not something that administrators have to manage:

Schools have a unique opportunity and obligation to demonstrate the importance of fundamental constitutional values as an integral part of preparing students to participate in a robust, pluralist democracy. And the best way of transmitting values is by modeling them - showing how the principles that govern us work in action. (Ross, 2015, p.6)

Students are citizens, and students need to have access to unfiltered information and be able to research and explore in the safe environment schools purport to have.

Concluding Thoughts:

Censorship as a Threat to Democracy

Censorship is not about one book, website, or school district. Censorship can affect all information sources by interfering with the freedom of information, students’ exposure to diverse and contentious aspects of social life, and to become critical thinkers and learning to advocate for

themselves. When administrators and other community members censor what materials students can access, they tell students what to read or view and ultimately what to think. Knowledge building comes from the access to diverse information. By denying students access to information, schools are denying students knowledge and threatening the democratic principles upon which public schools are founded.

Furthermore, censorship practices in schools do not allow students the opportunity to become critical thinkers and master information literacy skills. This situation can lead to more extensive and possibly detrimental effects in a community's discourse of power relations. My research indicates that administrators are constantly navigating vocal parents and often giving them what they need, which allows the community to dictate the school curriculum. Students' First Amendment Rights are not part of this data set. If by being rendered silent and seeing that more vocal parents can censor the curriculum, students may model this behavior when they are adults and become the vocal parents someday—thus perpetuating the power relations cycle. By reading and being exposed to diverse literature and information, students become critical thinkers and information literate, but they also become empathetic. Students learn about world events and people's experiences through the school curriculum. They can then apply what they learn to their own lives. By denying students the chance to become critical thinkers, administrators and parents deny students the ability to think for themselves and empathize with other people's lives and experiences. When students become adults and parents someday, they will want their children to be taught and exposed to curriculum the same way they did, just like the data showcased when parents were upset about the new math curriculum. Is this a new form of indoctrination? The effects of censorship have a lasting impact not only on students but on the democracy and future of this country.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Student Demographics for the Suburban District under Study and Its Neighboring Urban School District

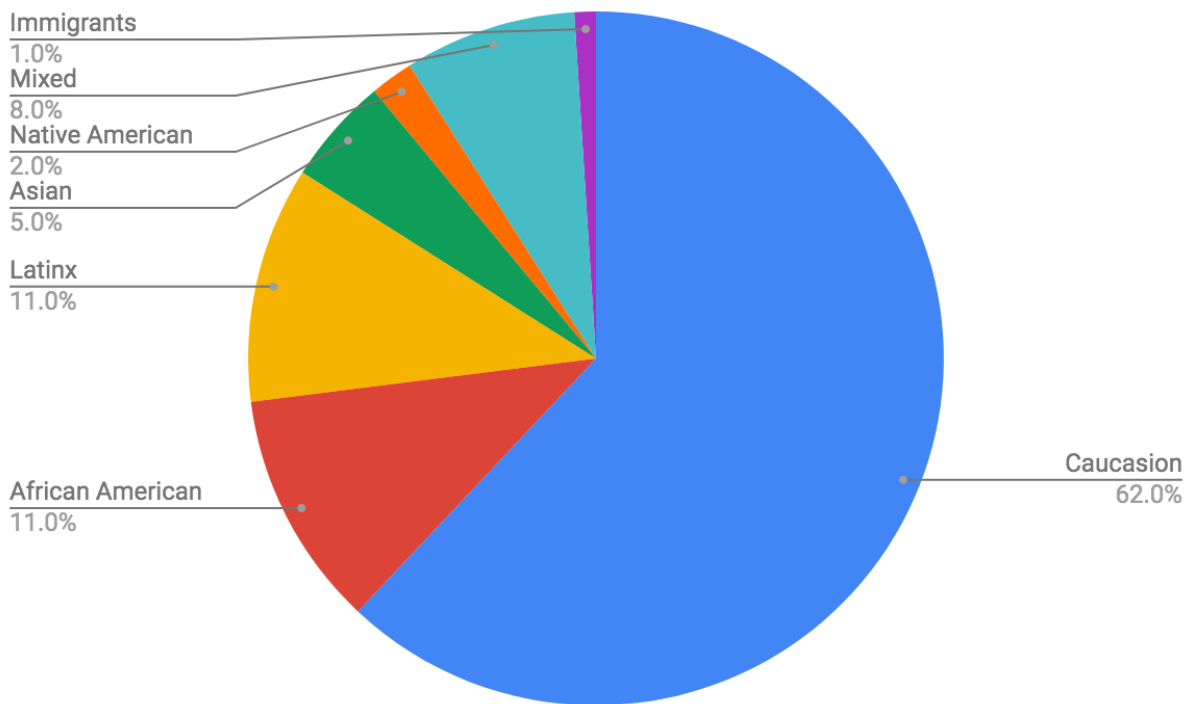


Figure 1. Student demographics for students attending the suburban school district.

APPENDIX II

Student demographics for students attending the neighboring urban school district.

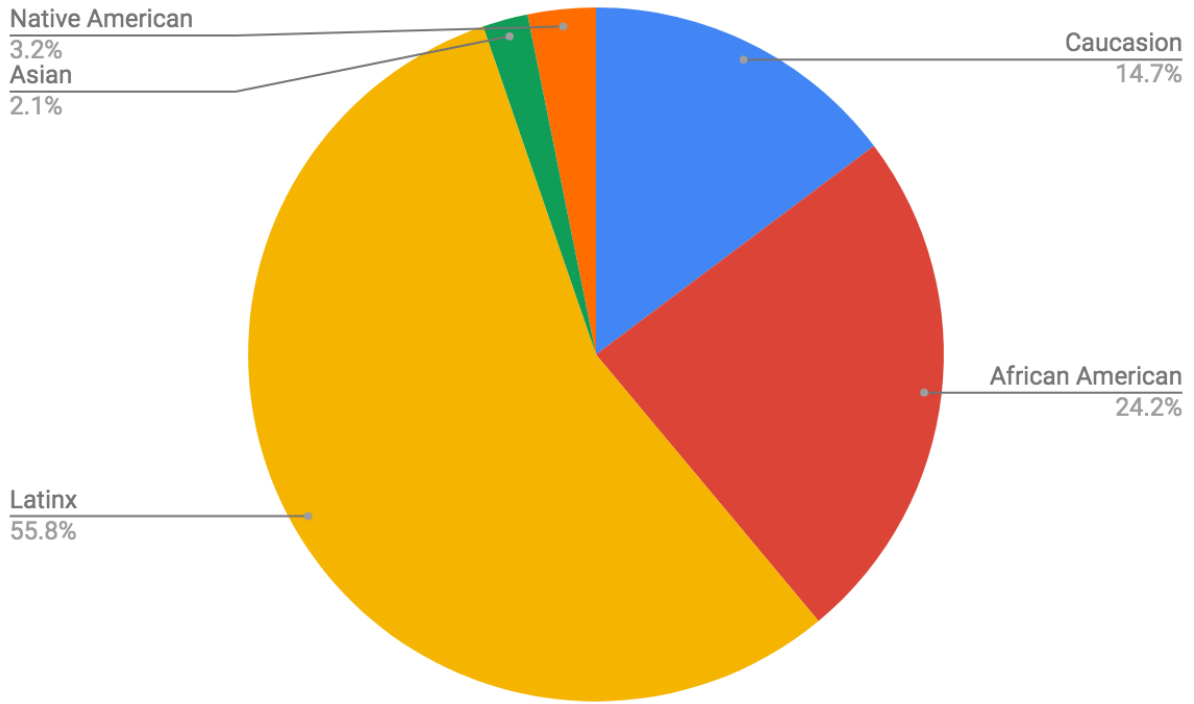


Figure 2. Student demographics for students attending the neighboring urban school district.

APPENDIX III

Average Household Incomes

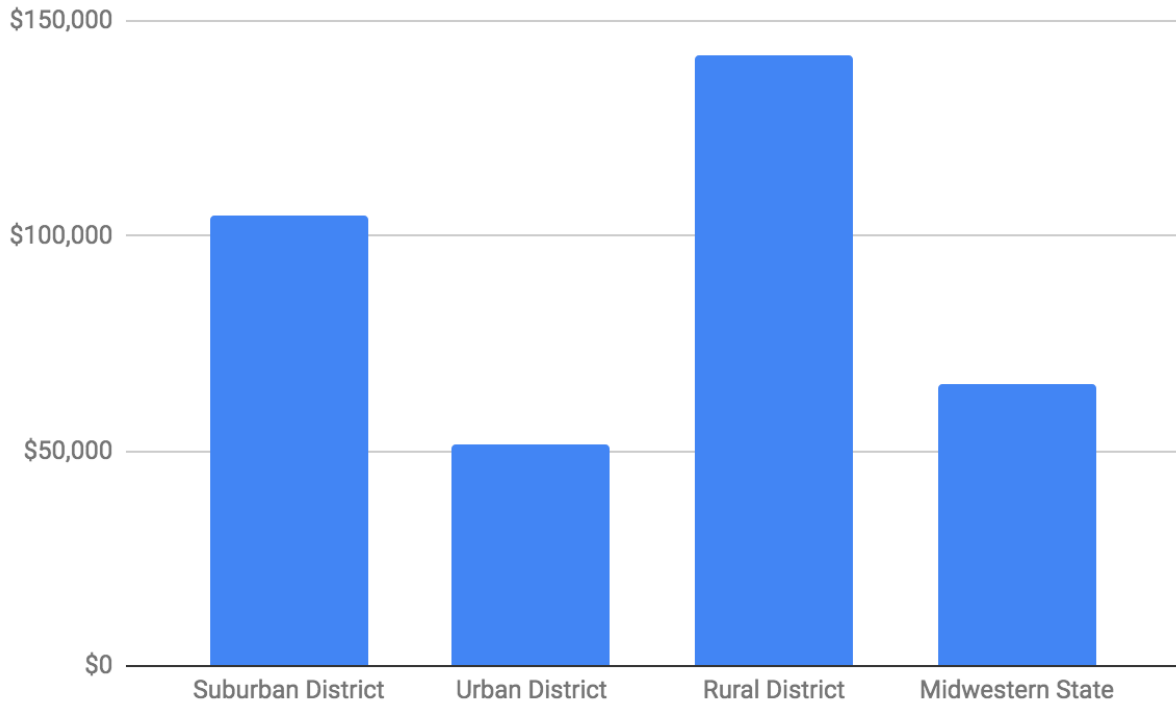


Figure 3. The average income for the Midwestern state in the study and the three districts referenced in the proposal.

APPENDIX IV

Recruitment Script, Censorship in Secondary Public Schools, 2019

Recruitment Script

Censorship in Secondary Public Schools 2019

The purpose of this study is to gain insight into administrators' experiences when making decisions about school-related events and print and digital materials for the school/district?

This study helps me meet the requirements for my dissertation at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

If you are willing to participate, you will be asked to participate in one 30–60 minute individual interview to discuss your experiences with decisions regarding school-related events and school curriculum, books, textbooks, and digital sources.

I am also seeking your permission to observe, record, and take fieldnotes on discussions in administrative meetings at the site and/or district level.

The interviews will be audio recorded then transcribed. No identifying such variables as name, school site, school district, community location, or state will be included on the final report.

There are no known risks associated with this research which would not already be encountered in daily life. You will be allowed to read over the transcripts and writings produced from the interviews to make sure there is no misrepresentation of your words and intentions.

**To sign up for the study contact
Alison Sterba at alison.sterba@okstate.edu**

The information obtained through this study will be kept confidential, and only the primary investigator and her dissertation advisor will have access to information.

Questions?

Contact Alison Sterba alison.sterba@okstate.edu
Oklahoma State University

APPENDIX V

Censorship in Secondary Schools Consent Form



School of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Sciences

CONSENT FORM

Censorship in Secondary Public Schools

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study about your experiences with censorship. You were selected as a possible participant because you are or were a district or site administrator in the school district being studied. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

This study is being conducted by: Alison Sterba, doctoral candidate in the School of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Sciences, Oklahoma State University, under the direction of Dr. Virginia Worley, School of Teaching, Learning, and Educational Sciences, Oklahoma State University.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Participate in an audio-recorded interview, complete a demographics survey, and be observed in the workplace at agreed upon times.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: No more than 2 hours.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study involves the following foreseeable risks: There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

The benefits to participation are: There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about how censorship happens, is perceived, and is experienced.

Compensation

There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

Because of the nature of the data collection, I cannot guarantee your data will be confidential and it may be possible that others will know what you have reported. The researchers will make every effort to ensure that information about you remains confidential but cannot guarantee total confidentiality. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. The state's, community's, school district's, school site's, and participants' names will not be revealed in publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study.

I will collect your information through audio recordings, field notes, and collection of materials that you provide me. This data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in a locked office at my residence. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, any code lists linking names to pseudonyms will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than May 2022. The audio recordings will be transcribed verbatim. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately 2 weeks after the completion of the interview. This informed consent form will be kept for 3 years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed. Your data collected as part of this research project may be used or distributed for future research studies.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. Those overseeing the research are also bound by rules of confidentiality. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is not to participate. You may skip any questions in the interview that make you uncomfortable.

Contacts and Questions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at 405-306-3706, alison.sterba@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a participant or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.
 Yes No

I give consent for my data to be used in future research studies.
 Yes No

I give consent to be contacted for follow-up in this study:
 Yes No

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX VI

Participant Inventory Sheet

Please answer the following questions prior to being interviewed. Please return this form to me, Alison Sterba, before our first interview takes place. Thank you for your participation.

Your first and last name:

Your current administrative position:

Do you live in the same district where you work?

Which teaching position(s) did you hold before becoming an administrator, and for how long?

What job/education role did you have before assuming your current administrative position?

How many years have you been an educational administrator?

How many years have you been an educational administrator in your current district?

How many years in total have you held the same administrative position in this and other districts?

How many years have you been a secondary school administrator?

Why did you become an administrator/school leader?

Are you a parent?

If so, how old are your children?

Do you think your administrative position(s) take(s) a toll on your family life? How/Why?

APPENDIX VII

Request for Permission to Conduct Research in Schools

Alison Sterba
Doctoral Student
Oklahoma State University
Stillwater, Oklahoma
Email: alison.sterba@okstate.edu
Phone: (405) 306-3706

Dear administrator,

My name is Alison Sterba, and I am a Doctoral student in Education, Professional Studies, Arts, and Humanities at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma. The research I will conduct for my Doctoral dissertation involves studying the internal and external pressures administrators face when dealing with censorship, their perceptions of censorship, and their censorship practices and policy-making. I will conduct my research study, and my Oklahoma State University doctoral advisor will supervise my research process.

I am hereby seeking consent to approach and potentially interview you and other administrators at your site. I am providing you with a copy of my participant script and consent form, which I will use to solicit and obtain permission to interview administrators.

If you require more information or have questions, please contact me at my email address or phone number. If you agree to consent, please sign below.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Alison Sterba

I give consent for you to approach me and other administrators at my school site for participation in your study.

Name (Print): _____

Signature: _____

Administrative Position: _____

Site Name: _____

APPENDIX VIII

Initial Participant Interview Questions

1. What is your experience when making decisions about print and digital materials for the school or district?

4. Was it different at elementary vs. secondary? Or site versus district admin positions?

2. Do you ever experience external pressures?

- If so, from whom?
- Could you tell me more about those situations?

3. Do you ever experience internal pressures?

- If so, from whom?
- Could you tell me more about those situations?

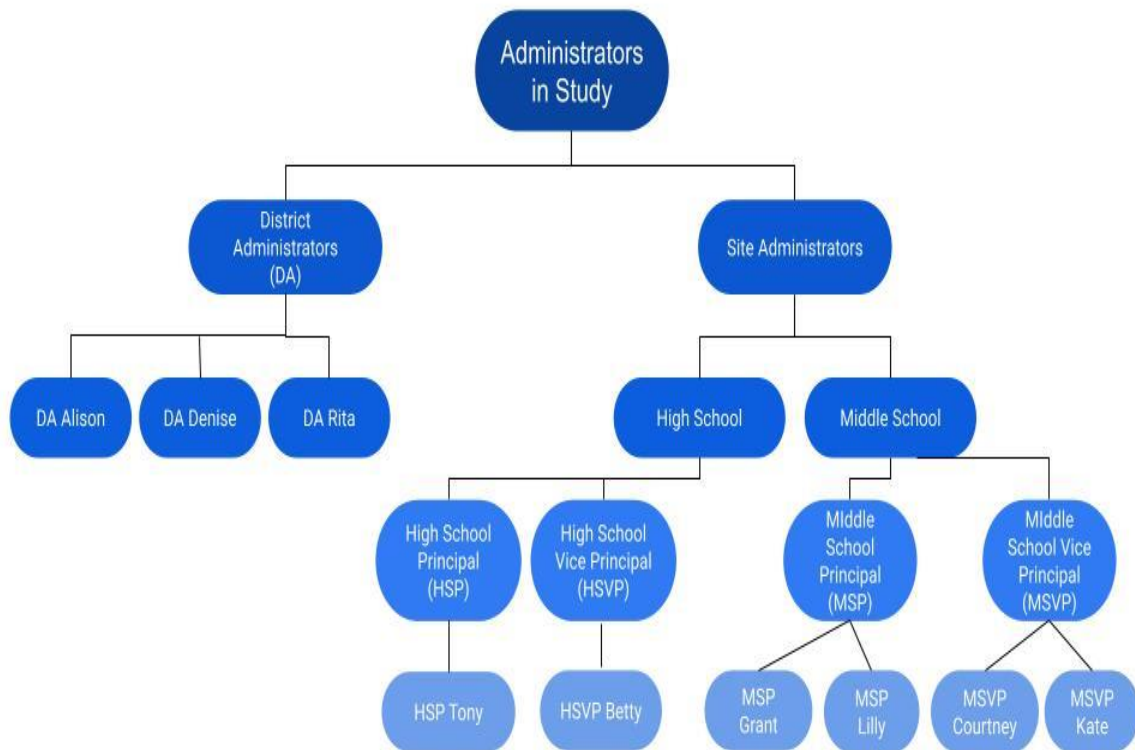
APPENDIX IX

Follow Up Interview Questions

1. Where do you think parental objections to novels come from? Do you think they came from religious, political, moral, or other values?
2. In the past, science classes, due in part to evolution and other sensitive topics covered, were an area where parents were concerned. Is the science curriculum still an area of concern for some parents and/or teachers? If so, why?
3. You have had experiences with parents objecting to novels and wanting their child not to access certain materials on their Chromebooks or the internet in general. Do you think these experiences affected your decision-making?
4. How do you believe these experiences are influencing or have influenced policy?
5. Have you noticed a difference between the concerns of print materials versus digital materials? Why do you feel like one area has more objections or concerns than the other area?
6. Should curriculum and decisions about how material is taught and what is taught in school should be left to educators? Why or why not?
7. Typically, a community has shared values that are imparted to the school district. What do you are the shared values of the X Public School community?

APPENDIX X

Administrators' Abbreviations Chart



APPENDIX XI

Justification Chart for the Use of Print Data

Print Data Name	Justification for Using the Print Data as Related to Censorship
Instructional Material Selection Policy	This district policy document outlines 14 guidelines library media specialists adhere to when selecting materials.
Citizen's Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Material	Parents access and complete this document when they object to any material in the school curriculum.
Request for Parent Permission to Use Supplemental Instructional Materials in Class	Although administrators have already approved the school materials, parents can request a detailed list of materials a teacher plans to use.
Social Media Student Use Policy	Students cannot access social media sites or interact with people outside the school district.

<p>Digital Conversion Handbook</p>	<p>Administrators use filtering software on school devices students are on school grounds and at students' homes.</p>
<p>Technology Responsible Use Agreement</p>	<p>In this document, administrators explain how and why students' have internet filters on school-issued devices. Administrators explain that students will lose internet if they break the rules of internet etiquette.</p>
<p>Network and Acceptable Use Agreement</p>	<p>This document clarifies that district administrators encourage and expect parents and educators to participate in school-related decision-making.</p>
<p>Dear ___P.S. Parents</p>	<p>Administrators outline district's use of internet filtering and other protective measures deployed on school-issued devices.</p>

APPENDIX XII

Institutional Review Board Approval



Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: 06/03/2019
Application Number: ED-19-73
Proposal Title: Secondary-School-Level Administrators' Perceptions of Censorship and Their Censorship and Policy-Making Practices

Principal Investigator: Alison Sterba
Co-Investigator(s):
Faculty Adviser: Virginia Worley
Project Coordinator:
Research Assistant(s):

Processed as: Expedited
Expedited Category:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved
Approval Date: 05/29/2019

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which continuing review is not required. As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent, and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a status report to the IRB when requested.
3. Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
4. Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the OSU IRB and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
5. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

VITA

Alison Nicole Sterba

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: ADMINISTRATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF CENSORSHIP AND POLICY-
MAKING PRACTICES IN ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Major Field: Education

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Teaching and Learning at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in July, 2022.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Instructional Media at the University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma, in 2010.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English Education at Southwestern Oklahoma State University, Weatherford, Oklahoma, in 2007.

Experience: High school English teacher, High School Librarian, and Secondary Instructional Technology Consultant

Professional Memberships: National Council of Teachers of English, Oklahoma Educational Association