BOOK REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky

Committee Report

To: The Readington Board of Education
From: The Book Review Committee
Date: October 9, 2026
RE: Book Challenge: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky

Library material being challenged: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky

Location of material: Readington Middle School Library, available to 8th grade students

Committee Membership: Per regulation 2535, the committee consisted of the superintendent, the principal of the school where the material is located, the school library media specialist, a representative selected by the Board (a Board member), at least one grade-appropriate teacher familiar with the material, a parent of a student enrolled in the school district, and an additional member deemed necessary (supervisor). A student was not selected as this option is limited to students in grades 9-12. The committee was formed on June 18, 2026.

Meeting: The meeting was held on October 2, 2026.

Committee Norms, Guidelines, and Procedures:
The challenged material was purchased and provided to all committee members no later than June 19, 2026. All committee members were informed that they had the summer to read the text and the superintendent would contact members with a suggested meeting date in early September. In order to ensure the committee complied with timelines in regulation 2535, the committee selected October 2, 2026 as their preferred date to meet to discuss the book.

The committee convened on October 2, 2026. Agenda and materials were provided in advance on September 29, 2026. The materials consisted of evaluation materials including the committee norms, policy and regulation 2535, the formal complaint, circulation and other relevant data, and an evaluation rubric. Committee norms operationalized how the committee members engaged with one another during the meeting to ensure all voices and perspectives were heard. Notably, the committee decision-making was driven by a consensus norm, defined as the general agreement among the group.

In conformity with policy and regulation 2535, the committee reviewed definitions, identified standards for library curation, and discussed the timeline and processes associated with a library material challenge, including steps taken before the meeting and steps to be taken after. All members of the committee read the text in its entirety. Lastly, the text *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky remained in the school library as a text for self-selection by 8th grade students during the time it was challenged.

Consistent with district procedure a letter was sent via Genesis to all RMS families on September 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30 informing parents that texts with mature topics appear in the curriculum and in the library. The letter allowed parents an option identifying texts their child(ren) did not have permission to read. In addition, attached to the letter was a representative cross-section of texts rated for 9-12. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* appeared on that list.

Recommendation:
The committee recommends that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* remain in the Readington Middle School library as a text for self-selection and continues to be identified as a 'teen' selection for 8th grade students. The committee also recommends that the administration review the opt-out letter sent to parents and corresponding processes sent each September, as part of routine district practice.

Supporting Evidence:
The following rubric was developed based on N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4. Each member of the committee reviewed each selection standard within the statute and identified the text's alignment with the selection standards. Using a 3-point scale, committee members provided the following average ratings regarding how well the book met the selection criteria.

Book Challenge Rubric

N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4 details the minimum standards for the curation of library material. The following rubric was developed in conformity with the statutory language regarding library material curation.

Title of the material currently being challenged: *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

The above named material is aligned to the following standards (please rate on the scale below):
3 points: **Strongly Aligned**
2 points: **Somewhat Aligned**
1 point: **Minimally Aligned**
0 points: **Not Aligned**

Standard	Rating	Summary Notes
Provides for the interest, information, and enlightenment of all students and presents diverse points of view in the collection. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.1.	2.3	The text provides for the various needs, interests, reading levels, and maturity levels of students, but remains an 8th grade selection only. The term *all* was understood by the majority of the committee as providing for a diverse spectrum of students, and may not necessarily mean available, accessible or appropriate for all middle school students.
Recognizes voluntary inquiry and the dissemination of information and ideas. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.3.	2.7	Even though this standard typically aligns more directly with non-fiction material, the committee noted that the book allows students the personal choice to voluntarily explore complex literary themes.
Promotes free expression and free access to ideas by students. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.4.	2.6	The text grants students access to mature themes and concepts. It serves a variety of readers by introducing higher-level literary elements.
Provides students with access to the widest array of developmentally appropriate library material. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.5.	2.6	The text allows for students at various reading levels access to complex literary elements. The text reaches a wide variety of student levels.

Is relevant N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.6.	2.7	The book maintains its relevance by addressing real-world problems and serving as a "window or mirror" into contemporary adolescent experiences.
Is in good physical condition. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.6.	3	The text looks new, is in very good condition, and does not appear to have any damage.
Is available in multiple copies, but does not take up unnecessary shelf space. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.6.	2.9	There are two copies in circulation (one was lost by a student and is now missing). The text is thin and does not take up any unnecessary shelf space.
Cannot be replaced with more recent developmentally appropriate material. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.6.	2.1	This text is unique and unlike others in how it addresses advanced literacy themes written at a more accessible level.
Is in continued demand. N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4.b.6.	1.9	Circulation history identifies this text as being checked out seven times over seven years, or 32 times total. In the scope of all texts, it remains in demand with positive student reviews.

Based on the above. Select one (1) option below:

- ☐ Retain
- ☑ Retain with Limited Use (Rating by the majority of the committee members)
- ☐ Remove

Rationale:

By consensus the committee recommended that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* be maintained in the RMS library and continue to be available to 8th grade students. This determination was measured against the curation standards developed in Statute. Consensus is defined as general agreement, not unanimity, as set forth in the ratings in the rubric noted above.

The committee evaluated both quantitative circulation data and qualitative student feedback, noting that checkout records alone offer a limited perspective on a book's actual popularity and impact. Since entering the Readington Middle School library in December 2012, *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has been checked out 32 times. This figure is impacted by its restriction to 8th grade students only, compared to unrestricted titles available across grades 6–8. Despite checkout logs (including seven checkouts over the last seven years), direct feedback reveals the text is well-received and popular within the student body. Educator feedback informed the committee reports of 8th graders speaking passionately about the text's literary value and deep emotional resonance. Furthermore, with the exception of one very recent parental opt-out request, the text has not been listed by parents on the district opt-out form as a book a parent did not want their child to read, and has not been the subject of any previous complaint, challenge, or concern. The committee considered the parental notification process, with questions being raised about overall parental awareness of all books in the library. Thus the committee recommended a review of the parental communication process before next September.

In evaluating the developmental appropriateness of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, the committee considered published content advisories from Common Sense Media, Mackin, Booksource, and others, identifying the text as grades 9-12 (one as grades 10-12), against the broad range of maturity and reading abilities present in middle school. As English/Language Arts standards transition to higher-level literary analysis, access to complex themes becomes essential. Texts like *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, written at a 720 lexile, allow students across varying reading levels to engage with sophisticated literary concepts. While acknowledging that the novel addresses mature topics such as

sexual assault, substance abuse, and trauma the committee concluded that 8th grade students possess the developmental capacity to process these themes appropriately. Because middle school emotional and moral development progresses considerably from grade 6 to grade 8, maintaining the text as an 8th grade text was determined to be reasonable and appropriate. However, maturity level varies by individual child, thus the committee affirmed that parental guidance plays the primary role in directing student reading. Parental choice is supported by the district's opt-out letter rather than uniform restriction of library materials. The committee considered a viewpoint suggesting that materials not suitable for *all* middle school grades should be excluded entirely, as any student may be able to peruse the library at any time. However, the committee affirmed that fulfilling statutory curation requirements means offering a diverse collection tailored to varying maturity and reading levels, supported by parental opt-out provisions and staff supervision of the library, rather than outright restriction. This is not censorship as the definition found in policy 2535 allows for limitations on available texts.

The book challenge cited a specific section of *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* that describes sexual assault. Specifically, the complainant wrote, "it depicts rape, and the second aggressor (Dave) faces no consequences, while the victim receives no support. The book fails to address how to properly handle such a traumatic situation, which could mislead readers into thinking this lack of accountability and support is acceptable." The committee acknowledged that the depiction of rape is difficult for some students to read about while it may be something other middle schoolers may experience, offering a window or mirror. However, the committee determined that the scene functions as a critical structural and thematic element of the novel. Far from normalizing injustice, the depiction serves as a deliberate literary device that drives the protagonist's character development, plot progression, and eventual realization of the protagonist's own trauma. The overarching message of the narrative emphasizes personal recovery, awareness, and hope, directly supporting New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Language Arts that require students to analyze complex themes and character arcs in literary works.

In accordance with statutory mandates requiring the evaluation of challenged materials as a complete work, the committee considered the novel's themes and overall context. The committee noted that while *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* reflects a 1990s setting, its central themes clearly resonate with current 8th grade students. Although today's youth often encounter these interpersonal and social dynamics through digital communication and social media, the underlying issues remain fundamentally unchanged, reinforcing the text's continued relevance and value within a middle school collection.

Summary:
The Book Review Committee recommends that *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* be retained in the Readington Middle School library for 8th grade student self-selection based on the following key findings:

- *Statutory Alignment:* The text fulfills N.J.S.A. 18A:34A-4 requirements by offering developmentally appropriate, high-interest content that fosters voluntary inquiry and critical thinking.
- *Literary Value:* Evaluated as a complete work, the challenged scene functions as a deliberate literary device driving plot resolution, character growth, and themes of emotional healing.
- *Parental Choice:* Retaining the text maintains access for students with varied reading needs while honoring parental choice through existing district opt-out provisions.