

Texas county may ban books

Montgomery County residents protest sexual education books in public library

In Montgomery County, north of Houston, a battle is brewing over which books children should have access to in a public library. After some complaints about it being "immoral," a popular children's book was pulled and sent to a review panel, which will recommend whether the book should stay on the shelves or be banned.



JENELLE WILSON

Not only does banning books assail the First Amendment, the practice goes against the nature of democracy. Individuals must be able to decide what books are good or bad for themselves and their own families. No one else has the right to make that decision.

At the center of this controversy are four copies of a popular children's book by Robie H. Harris entitled "It's Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex and Sexual Health." According to the *Houston Chronicle*, this book has translations in 17 languages and worldwide sales topping 650,000 copies. *Publishers Weekly's* review said the book "frankly explains the physical, psychological, emotional and social changes that occur during puberty" and called it "intelligent, amiable and carefully researched."

Critics of the book include County Judge Alan B. Sadler, who has vowed to change the process by which books are selected for the library. These critics have called the book obscene and claim it promotes homosexuality. Some have even gone as far as demanding that library director Jerilynn Williams and the person who approved the purchase of the books be fired. They also want the county to withdraw from the American Library Association, which speaks out against banning books.

The *Houston Chronicle* reports the critics are attacking another book by Harris, "It's So Amazing: A Book about Eggs, Sperm, Birth, Babies and Families," because of the same "pro-homosexual stance." This book, which is directed toward younger children, addresses issues such as conception, birth, love, sexuality, family, adoption, sexual abuse and HIV and AIDS in what *Scientific American* calls a "gentle and respectful manner."

Both books are highly praised and recommended. They offer simple, clear explanations to children about what is or will be happening to their bodies and should be available to any parents who wish to use them.

According to the ALA's Office of Intellectual Freedom, approximately 450 book challenges are reported every year, and it is estimated that three or four times that many go unreported. The ALA uses the reported cases to create a list of the most often challenged books. "It's Perfectly Normal"

ranked 15th from 1990-2000; "It's So Amazing" did not make the list.

Other books on the list include: "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" by Maya Angelou, "Of Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck, "To Kill a Mockingbird" by Harper Lee, "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker, and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" by Mark Twain. The "Harry Potter" series by J.K. Rowling topped the most-challenged list of 2001 list because of its use of wizardry and magic.

Book banning and challenges

have become so prevalent that the last week in September has been designated Banned Books Week. During the week, which is sponsored by the ALA and various booksellers, publishers and authors associations, people are encouraged to read a book from the most challenged lists as an act of defiance against censorship.

The ALA rightly believes a library should protect access to books and that individual families should decide which books are appropriate. The First Amendment protects an individual's right to decide what they want to read, and censors have no right to deny an individual that fundamental choice.

Public libraries serve all members of a community and provide materials representing all points of view, not just the opinions of a limited number of critics. Materials, such as the highly-acclaimed Harris books, should not be excluded simply because some don't agree with the topic.

Parents have every right to prevent their children from reading what they believe to be inappropriate; if they don't want their children reading Robie Harris' books, they don't have to allow it. They do not, however, have any right to limit what someone else's children can access. Parents have authority over themselves and their children — not over other people.

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JEFF SMITH • THE BATTALION

Wireless technology can create security hazard

Investigation finds wireless network security lacking at California businesses

An April Los Angeles Times article described a good way for hackers



CHRIS JACKSON

to find vulnerable computer networks to gain illegal access into: simply go for a drive around town. A laptop computer with a makeshift Pringles can antenna — apparently the equipment of choice for hackers on a budget — is all someone needs to gain access to an insecure wireless network, making once private information very public.

The article says there are many insecure wireless networks in use, public and private, and there are plenty of people who would take advantage of this. Keeping this information in mind, students who wish to install wireless networking in their house or apartment should strongly consider the security implications it may bring about. Some wireless networking flaws turn a simple, convenient solution into an access point for anyone who wants to see what is on your computer.

The Los Angeles Times article about network security included the story of a California-based security consulting firm, D-fensive Networks, Inc., that picked up stray signals from a hospital's wireless network while working with another business a short distance away. The hospital was operating as normal, but its patients most sensitive medical data was unwittingly being transmitted to anyone who would care to see it. To highlight other incidences of poor wireless network security, D-fensive ran a security audit in another parking lot, picking up 169 different signals from networks in the area. All but six of those networks were unguarded, leaving them open to anyone and everyone with prying eyes.

Texas A&M University has implemented a large-scale wireless network as well. However, the University is offering its students and faculty truly secure wireless network access, unlike 163 businesses in the Los Angeles area. The University has gone to great lengths to make sure these wireless network access points are secure for its users, but something you can rig up in your house or

apartment most likely won't be as secure.

There was an uproar in the wireless networking industry after the so-called Wired Equivalency Protocol (WEP) was shown to be easily breakable. The widely used WEP keys are 40- or 128-bit encryption keys which are supposed to keep data secure as it is transmitted from a computer to a wireless receiver, known as a router. However, a simple search for "WEP key" on any search engine will bring up links to numerous programs with the ability to crack such keys. Any 8-year-old with time on his hands could get these programs and learn how to use them. Other security measures such as service set identifications and media access control authentication are not as easily beaten, but are vulnerable nonetheless.

Willis Marti, associate director for Computing and Information Services, said the only way to go about making a wireless network completely secure is through an encryption process known as virtual private networking (VPN). "We configure our access point so you can only go through this router to the VPN server ... and you have to log in and be

encrypted," Marti said of the A&M network. That way, "by encrypting all the traffic, no one else can read (what you send)." VPN requires software be installed on the user's computer and an account be opened so the user's password can be identified.

Virtual private networking is the solution to secure wireless networking. But running a VPN requires more technical expertise than is available at the neighborhood Best Buy or Circuit City, though these stores sell wireless networking equipment. For a few hundred dollars, anyone can set up a nice, convenient wireless network for themselves. The only problem is, it could end up being a nice, convenient way for the neighbor living next door or upstairs to get ahold of free Internet access, not to mention credit card numbers, e-mail accounts and bank statements. In the end, wireless may be a good solution for some, but for those who don't have the equipment to keep their data secure, a Pringles can may be what turns private information into common

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Microsoft agreement does not benefit students

In response to Collins Ezeanyim's Sept. 23 column:

The two stated ways in which the Microsoft agreement benefits students are both questionable, hence the controversy. Sure the software is cheaper to all students, but in reality hardly any students don't have but still need these products, despite Microsoft's marketing. Many can't even run the software with their current systems. That all students are required to pay for a discount off of monopolistically inflated prices on software is no great deal for them, especially when the actual academic worth of the goods is questionable.

Second, just because the Department of Computing and Information Services (CIS) gets a discount under this deal doesn't

mean students benefit. All it means is that they get a larger operating budget. It's nice for them that they now get more money from students without the hassle of convincing students this budget increase is necessary.

Also, the vote last year was very lacking in details of the deal. Combine that with the normal low turnout and one has to wonder how so few students could provide the student body's consent for a deal they never really saw. Many complaints didn't arise until the deal was finalized.

With this deal, Microsoft and CIS definitely win. The student body, meanwhile, gets trampled.

Chris Carlin Class of 2003

The only one benefiting from the Microsoft agreement is Microsoft. At \$18.75 a semester, I will be paying at least \$150 over four years for the fee plus five

bucks per disk. The University tells us this is a great deal, but an educational version of Microsoft Office is widely available for \$154.95, the same price. For this you get a lovely boxed set complete with installation instructions and comprehensive tech support. Order it from the University and all you get is a CD. As for Windows, the vast majority of students buy computers with the operating system of their choice already loaded and has no reason to ever buy a separate copy of Windows. Visual Studio would be great — if it was not already available to students. Most computer science classes requiring it made it available free to students under the previous agreement.

Bill Gates, I salute you as a capitalist. Students, I encourage you to let the University and Microsoft know you prefer to make your own software choices.

Grant A. Halsey Class of 2004

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