

**Belleville Area District Library Board**  
**Regular Meeting Agenda**  
**March 10, 2020 at 7:30 PM**

1. Pledge of Allegiance
2. Roll Call: Cichewicz, Dawson, Gates, Hughes-Grubbs, Juriga, Peters, Priest
3. Approve Agenda
4. Approve February 11, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes
5. Public Comments
6. Committee Reports
  - A. Building-Cichewicz  
New Building Occupation Update  
Bee Colony Placement Limitations
  - B. Bylaws-Juriga
  - C. Finance-Gates
  - D. Marketing-Hughes-Grubbs  
Mardi Gras FCF Farewell  
Book Brigade Soft Opening  
Upcoming Events
  - E. Personnel-Priest
  - F. Policy-Dawson
  - G. Art Committee-Peters or Montour
7. Approve Accounts Payable
8. Director's Report/Comments/Communications
9. Trustee Comments
10. Chair Comments
11. Adjournment

**Belleville Area District Library Board**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**February 11, 2020**

**1. Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Sharon Peters called the meeting to order at 7:32 pm.

**2. Roll Call**

Cichewicz conducted the roll call. The following persons were present: Joy Cichewicz, Mary Jane Dawson, Barbara Gates, John Juriga, and Sharon Peters. Also present: Library Director Mary Jo Suchy. Absent and excused: Linda Priest and Alma Hughes-Grubbs.

**3. Approve Agenda**

Motion by Juriga, seconded by Gates, to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

**4. Approve January 14, 2020 Regular Meeting Minutes**

Motion by Juriga, seconded by Dawson, to approve the January 14, 2020, Regular Meeting Minutes. The motion carried unanimously.

**5. Approve Cleaning Service**

Motion by Juriga, seconded by Dawson, to hire the low bid from A Production Building Solutions for cleaning services at \$2,550 a month. The motion carried unanimously.

**6. Public Comments**

Art Committee member Barbara Miller commented on how impressive the new building is and congratulated the board and architect. She also noted her conversation with the Director of the Ann Arbor District Library, who had good things to say about Dan Whisler and O'Neal Construction. Deb Green commented on how amazing the new library is.

**7. Committee Reports**

**A. Building** - Architect Dan Whisler reported that the circular rail will be onsite later this week and hopefully will be installed by February 21<sup>st</sup>. The stairs have been tiled and the carpet installation almost complete. There are delays from the library shelving supplier. All furniture is in the building except for some of the tables which are due this Thursday. The library is waiting for the computer tables so that the computers can be set up. The counter tops have been set on the reference and circulation desks. Terrace pavers are onsite, the sun shade is almost done, and the lighted terrace railing is expected the week of February 24<sup>th</sup>. The furniture vendor will be onsite Monday to set chairs in place. The second floor final cleaning will be done tomorrow and Thursday. The punch list still needs to be completed. A final building inspection is needed after the circular railing is installed in order to get a temporary certificate of occupancy. Trespa panels around the terrace will be installed after the railing is installed. The exterior library signage will be going up on the 19<sup>th</sup>. The Sumpter Branch is being well used by library patrons picking up their holds and using the computers. DTE has installed a street light for the parking area at the branch.

- B. Bylaws** - No report.
- C. Finance** - Motion by Juriga, seconded by Dawson, to accept the six-month budget report ending 12/31/2019. The motion carried unanimously.
- D. Marketing** - The committee will meet tomorrow at 1:00 pm to finalize details for the Mardi Gras and soft opening. The final farewell to the Fred C. Fischer Library will be February 21<sup>st</sup> at 6 pm. The Cross Town Horn Band will perform, and light refreshments will be served. The opening on the 24<sup>th</sup> is still subject to change due to delays.
- E. Personnel** - No report.
- F. Policy** - No report.
- G. Art Committee** - The committee met last week and had a tour of the new library. They identified places for possible permanent art work and places for temporary rotating art pieces. Barbara Miller talked to Hubert Massey, the fresco artist who painted the fresco at Cobo Hall, and asked if he would be willing to advise the library on permanent art. The library will host an exhibit in the fall about the suffragettes. The committee recommends putting the portrait of Fred C. Fischer in the Board Room. The committee needs to investigate a hanging system for the art wall.

**8. Approve Accounts Payable**

Motion by Dawson, seconded by Gates, to approve the Accounts Payable as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

**9. Director's Report** - Attached. Suchy praised Carol Johnson's great work on accounts payable.

**10. Trustee Comments**

Juriga - Thanked Peters for the treats.

Gates – No comment.

Cichewicz – Is excited every time she sees the new building.

Dawson – Everything is looking good. She can't wait to see everyone's faces when they walk into the new building. She also shared that \$35,000 was raised by the BYC at the Polar Plunge.

**11. Chair Comments**

Peters – Said she was sorry that she will not be here for the farewell event but will be thinking of us.

**12. Adjournment**

Motion by Juriga, seconded by Gates, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:48 pm.

Minutes submitted by: Joy Cichewicz

Belleville Area District Library  
 Operating Fund

Date: 03/04/2020

Time: 4:47 PM

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Check Date	Status	Vendor Number	Vendor Name	Check Description	Amount
02/06/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	2,020.13
02/06/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,138.58
02/06/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	614.69
02/06/2020	Printed	OFFICE DEP	OFFICE DEPOT	Office Supplies	140.60
02/06/2020	Printed	TLN	THE LIBRARY NETWORK	Bookbilling December	5,762.22
02/06/2020	Printed	WASTE MAN	WASTE MANAGEMENT OF MI, INC	Waste Disposal	246.42
02/10/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	3,284.47
02/10/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	2,128.65
02/10/2020	Printed	OFFICE DEP	OFFICE DEPOT	Office/Bldg Supplies	160.96
02/10/2020	Printed	WYANDOTTE	WYANDOTTE ALARM COMPANY	Commercial Fire Monitoring	417.00
02/14/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	860.02
02/14/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,811.54
02/14/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,083.75
02/14/2020	Printed	DANIELS AN	DANIELS AND ZERMACK LLC	Design Services	931.00
02/14/2020	Printed	FRIENDS	FRIENDS OF THE BELLEVILLE AREA	January Payout	684.25
02/14/2020	Printed	OFFICE DEP	OFFICE DEPOT	Office/Bldg Supplies	524.17
02/14/2020	Printed	UNIFIRST	UNIFIRST CORP	Bldg Maintenance	59.73
02/17/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	5,602.52
02/17/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,901.92
02/17/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	2,018.42
02/17/2020	Printed	BLUECROSS	BLUE CROSS BLUE SHIELD OF MICH	Group 007030330	563.79
02/17/2020	Printed	CLEARATE	CLEAR RATE COMMUNICATIONS	Fax Services	264.13
02/17/2020	Printed	GKELLY	GEORGE KELLY	Hardware/Software	229.92
02/17/2020	Printed	KONICA MIN	KONICA MINOLTA BUSINESS SOLUT.	Copier Service	277.00
02/17/2020	Printed	TLN	THE LIBRARY NETWORK	Envisionware and Installation	1,200.00
02/17/2020	Printed	UNIQUE MAN	UNIQUE MANAGEMENT SERVICES INC	January Placements	98.45
02/17/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,617.15
02/17/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,226.94
02/17/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,118.75
02/18/2020	Printed	ALERUS	ALERUS FINANCIAL	Retirement Employer Cont	2,473.54
02/18/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	4,164.19
02/18/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	2,368.57
02/18/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	2,431.54
02/18/2020	Printed	CDWG	CDW GOVERNMENT	Hardware/Software	6,558.00
02/18/2020	Printed	BELL	CITY OF BELLEVILLE	Water & Sewage	65.96
02/18/2020	Printed	OFFICE DEP	OFFICE DEPOT	Office/Bldg Supplies	188.87
02/18/2020	Printed	UNIFIRST	UNIFIRST CORP	Bldg Maintenance	98.91
02/18/2020	Printed	VANTAGEPT	VANTAGEPOINT TRANSFER AGENTS	Acct 306773	380.00
02/18/2020	Printed	WESTLND FIR	WESTLAND FIRE EXTINGUISHER INC	Bldg Maintenance	59.50
02/18/2020	Printed	WIESE	WIESE'S LAWN CARE INC.	Snow clearing/Salting	650.00
02/19/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	2,592.13
02/19/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,556.62
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02/19/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,454.65
02/20/2020	Printed	APPLIED IM	APPLIED IMAGING	Printers/Copiers	205.79
02/20/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,912.99
02/20/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,158.12
02/20/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	182.50
02/20/2020	Printed	DIPIETRO	DIPIETRO & DAY	Legal Services	25.00

Check Date	Status	Vendor Number	Vendor Name	Check Description	Amount
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02/20/2020	Printed	GKELLY	GEORGE KELLY	Computer Hardware	246.84
02/20/2020	Printed	SHARON DUC	SHARON DUCKWORTH, CPA	Accounting Services	950.00
02/20/2020	Printed	STANDARD	STANDARD INSURANCE COMPANY	00642946 0100	133.08
02/20/2020	Printed	UHC	UNITED HEALTHCARE	Insurance	7,755.41
02/20/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,606.07
02/20/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,052.00
02/20/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,116.91
02/24/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,346.26
02/24/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	960.34
02/24/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	698.83
02/24/2020	Printed	TARA MCCAN	TARA MCCAN	Library Supplies	104.98
02/25/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Mateials	462.34
02/25/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,537.70
02/25/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	891.76
02/25/2020	Printed	CDWG	CDW GOVERNMENT	Hardware/Software	660.25
02/25/2020	Printed	GKELLY	GEORGE KELLY	Hardware/Software	50.43
02/25/2020	Printed	OTIS ELEVA	OTIS ELEVATOR COMPANY	Elevator Maintenance	625.00
02/25/2020	Printed	PREFERRED	PREFERRED DATA SYSTEMS LLC	Hardware/Software Maintenance	6,468.60
02/25/2020	Printed	TLN	THE LIBRARY NETWORK	January Bookbilling	4,794.52
02/25/2020	Printed	TYLER TECH	TYLER TECHNOLOGIES	Annual Maintenance	617.44
02/25/2020	Printed	YP	YP	YP Listing	58.00
02/26/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	722.61
02/26/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,078.14
02/26/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,115.90
02/27/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,006.89
02/27/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,003.63
02/27/2020	Printed	BAKER & TA	BAKER & TAYLOR	Books & Materials	1,248.50
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		77		<b>Bank Total (excluding void checks):</b>	<b>108,567.81</b>

Belleville Area District Library  
 Capital Project Fund

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02/11/2020	Printed	DANIELS AN	DANIELS AND ZERMACK LLC	Design services	13,303.01
02/11/2020	Printed	KRUEGER IN	KRUEGER INTERNATIONAL INC.	Furniture Delivery	117.60
02/11/2020	Printed	WYANDOTTE	WYANDOTTE ALARM COMPANY	Fire Monitoring Equip/Install	13,019.00
02/19/2020	Printed	AWE	AWE DIGITAL LEARNING SOLUTIONS	Hardware/Software	11,116.00
02/19/2020	Printed	DIPIETRO	DIPIETRO & DAY	Legal Services	12.50
02/19/2020	Printed	TELSYSTEMS	TELSYSTEMS	Media Equipment	107,605.32
		6		<b>Checks Total (excluding void checks):</b>	<b>145,173.43</b>
		6		<b>Bank Total (excluding void checks):</b>	<b>145,173.43</b>
		83		<b>Grand Total (excluding void checks):</b>	<b>253,741.24</b>

**DIRECTOR'S REPORT  
MARCH 2020**



**NEW BUILDING:** The circular stair railing installers completed the entry railing on Thursday night, and the library received its temporary certificate of occupancy late Friday morning. The rest is history! The celebratory book brigade passed the last of the new fiction books from the old building to the new on a chilly but bright and sunshiny day, and then we were open for business. Overall reaction to the new library is very positive.

We are still working through some tech issues related to the RFID system, print release system, and phone system. All of the issues were difficult to discover until we were live.

I would like to thank the many volunteers who helped us shift boxes during our move, and I am especially grateful to Rick Cichewicz, newly retired from Xerox, who helped George set up and deploy our computers.

We have also received an enormous amount of help from our library cooperative, The Library Network. I think we utilized the efforts, service, and expertise of virtually every employee of TLN during our project. They have been very professional and patient with us.

**STAFF:** The staff is getting used to their new environment and workflow. I think I can speak for all when I say that sometimes it takes me a few trips to find the paperclips, toilet paper, etc. The staff has been exceptionally flexible and positive in making this move, and we could not have done this without them.

Many of our staff members have suffered from colds and flu during the lead up and opening of the new building, and we are stretched thin right now while everyone recovers.

**BRANCH:** The hold shelving was finally delivered by the supplier, and the millworkers installed the end panels last week.

**STATISTICS:** I will resume reporting library statistics next month, once the dust settles!



## Legislation Amending Library Privacy Act Introduced in Senate

November 7, 2019

On October 29, State Senators Peter MacGregor (R-Rockford), Adam Hollier (D-Detroit) and Ruth Johnson (R-Holly) introduced Senate Bill 611. This bipartisan bill amends the Michigan Library Privacy Act, 1982 PA 455, enabling libraries, if they choose, to work with law enforcement when the library is a victim of a crime, or a crime occurs at the library. Currently, libraries cannot release library records to law enforcement without a court order. The bill has been referred to the Committee on Judiciary and Public Safety.

**While MLA has not taken a formal stance on this bill to date, we will notify the membership once a decision is made.** We want to make sure that all libraries who are impacted have had their voices heard. We are still gathering feedback on Senate Bill 611 from deans and directors from libraries across Michigan, but we want to make sure that the full membership and the entire library community also have the following information available to them. MLA's research continues and we have reached out to ALA to look at Library Privacy Acts across the country that achieve high standards. To the best of our ability, we want to fully understand the implications and not diminish privacy protections. We also want to make sure that any updates to the Library Privacy Act are fully vetted by those of you who are affected on a daily basis.

Before the bill was introduced, the MLA Legislative Committee reviewed a draft of the bill's proposed amendments and sent it to the MLA Board for consideration at the board meeting scheduled for Friday, December 13th. MLA has invited Lance Werner, Executive Director at Kent District Library and Anne Seuryneck, Attorney with Foster Swift Collins & Smith PC, to join us to discuss how the changes proposed in this bill will affect libraries across Michigan.

The Legislative Committee requested that we offer information on the support and the concerns for these important updates. Lance Werner and Julia Eisenstein, both members of our Legislative Committee offered the following viewpoints:

From Lance Werner, Executive Director, Kent District Library:

The amendment to the Library Privacy Act 1982 PA 455, MCL 397.601 et seq., enables libraries to pursue justice more quickly in cases of onsite criminal activity. In situations that involve child pornography, cybercrime, violent crime, and many other types of criminal activity, the speed of engaging law enforcement in an investigation can make or break any resolution, protecting or putting others at risk. Unlike other organizations, libraries must request that law enforcement obtain a court order, such as a search warrant, before sharing any identifying information about individuals. The process of obtaining a warrant delays the investigation by days or weeks. At times, law enforcement may choose to not seek a search warrant because they consider the instance to not be a priority, which means there will be no investigation. Justice is delayed or halted by onerous procedures that are required of libraries, but not by other organizations. Other instances where libraries have provided identifying information to law enforcement, in violation of the Library Privacy law would become legal with this amendment. This bill affords libraries the same rights and options to seek justice and

protect others. The amendment will enable libraries the discretion to determine how they want to engage with law enforcement when a crime has occurred at the library or the library is a victim of a crime. The amendment does not impact the original intent of the act, nor does it alter the portions of the act that pertain to computer usage.

From Julia Eisenstein, Associate Librarian, University of Detroit Mercy and MLA President-elect:

The proposed changes to Library Privacy Act 1982 PA 455, will affect every library described in Section 2 (h), from public to academic to school and in some cases private libraries. Every library has a unique relationship with their police departments. While I have not made up my mind about the proposed amendments, I have heard from some of you already. Please consider with me the following as you review the proposed amendments. Will the proposed changes benefit libraries while working with law enforcement or will it hamper them? Will libraries actually lose their protection under the law? As it stands now, a subpoena, a warrant, or some court order (or consent of the patron) is required to turn over library records to law enforcement. The revision will give library officials a choice about releasing library records without a court order, which could cause conflict between library officials and law enforcement. If law enforcement knows libraries can turn over library records without a court order, they may expect it and that puts library personnel in a difficult position. The revision does not take away the library's right to refuse, but may make it harder. The proposed legislation does not distinguish between different kinds of crime, from ticketed offenses to felonies. Law enforcement and libraries may differ on what constitutes a serious enough crime to compromise patron privacy. ALA already provides guidance and advocacy in the handling of criminal activity: <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/privacy/lawenforcement>. As it stands, if a crime is committed and time is of the essence, libraries may preserve evidence until law enforcement officers can obtain the necessary court order.

This revision moves away from ALA's core value to protect privacy. The revision indicates a crime need only be "alleged," making it possible to turn over library records for a patron who may not be involved in a crime at all. The ALA's Rights to Privacy states, "Libraries should never enact policies or practices that abridge users' right to privacy regardless of their age, ability, housing status, immigration status, involvement with the criminal justice system, religious affiliation, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other forms of identity or status unless explicitly required by law. Even then, libraries should consult with legal counsel before abridging any user's right to privacy." <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/librarybill/interpretations/privacy>

No one can predict the effects these changes will have if enacted. The best we can do is consider our current situations as they relate to law enforcement and consider our core values. Is this a road we want to go down? Is this a road we have to go down? In a time where privacy seems to be a rare commodity, what do we stand for and what stand do we take? If these proposed revisions become law, we can't turn back.

MLA is interested in hearing from you about how this change to the Michigan Library Privacy Act may impact you and your library. Please feel free to contact Deborah E. Mikula, MLA Executive Director at [dmikula@milibraries.org](mailto:dmikula@milibraries.org) to voice your support or concerns. We have heard from many already, but hope to hear from more of you by December 12th so your comments can be shared at the MLA Board meeting.

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## MLA's Official Position on SB 611 – Michigan Library Privacy Act

February 6, 2020

On Friday, January 31, 2020, the MLA Board of Directors unanimously voted to support and approve a substitution bill for Senate Bill 611 (SB 611).

Last October, Senator MacGregor introduced SB 611 to amend the Michigan Library Privacy Act, 1982 PA 455. The intention of his bill was to enable libraries to work with law enforcement when the library is a victim of a crime. After hearing both concerns and support from the Michigan library community on Senator MacGregor's proposed amendments to the Privacy Act, MLA drafted a substitute bill that clarifies and updates SB 611.

The proposed substitution bill removes obstacles and legal barriers libraries sometimes face when a crime has been committed in the library while providing for continued protection to patron privacy.

At a meeting on February 5, Senator MacGregor agreed to move forward with the MLA-proposed changes to SB 611.

Below are highlights of the substitution bill content with updates to standardized language and confirming that Section 5 and Section 6 of the current Act remain in place without change.

### SUBSTITUTION CONTENT:

1. **DEFINITIONS:** We have included a definition of “crime” as defined by section 5 of 1931 PA 328, MCL 750.5; a definition of “law enforcement officer” as defined as an individual licensed under the Michigan commission on law enforcement standards act, 1965 PA 203, MCL 28.601 to 28.614; and a definition of who is considered an “agent,” which also includes third party vendors.
2. **SURVEILLANCE VIDEO:** We have clarified that a library record does not include video surveillance and that video surveillance can be turned over to law enforcement without a court order if it shows no identifying library records or library activities.
3. **PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE:** We have clarified that personal knowledge may be shared with a law enforcement officer.
4. **EXIGENT CIRCUMSTANCES:** We have included a provision that in the event of exigent circumstances that make it impractical to secure a court order, a library may turn over records to law enforcement officers.
5. **LIABILITY:** While the library remains liable, we have removed an employee or agent as being liable unless an employee or agent knowingly violates this act.
6. **EQUITABLE RELIEF:** We have added that a court may grant equitable relief to a person.

Here is what is in store for us in the following weeks and months:

The next step is for Senator MacGregor's staff to work with the Legislative Service Bureau to get our changes turned into an official legislative document. Once this is complete, our MLA Lobbyist will meet with Senator Peter Lucido, the Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, to gauge his interest in the bill. Following that meeting, it is likely that a committee meeting will be scheduled to take testimony on the substitution bill. MLA will be asked to testify and explain our position on proposed changes to the Privacy Act. Senator Lucido will likely hold a second hearing on the bill to hear testimony from anyone that could not make it to the first hearing and to vote on the bill. If the bill is voted out of committee it then goes to the Senate Floor for consideration by the full Senate. If the Senate passes the bill it will be sent to a House Committee and the process starts over in the House.

We will keep you informed as the process moves forward. Be watching for future communications from MLA as we will be asking you to provide your support and perhaps provide testimony during the hearings.

We continue to be grateful for the time many of you have given to voice your concerns and support.

As always, please feel free to contact MLA Executive Director, Deborah E. Mikula at (517)394-2774 ext. 224 or by email at [dmikula@milibraries.org](mailto:dmikula@milibraries.org) with questions or comments.

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## Perspective | Don't be afraid to let children read graphic novels. They're real books.

By Karen MacPherson

“Remember: Pick a real book! *No comics!*”

The parent's sharp voice cut through the children's room at the public library where I work, and I watched as a young reader's eagerness to choose new library books turned to sullen acknowledgment of the parental edict.

Unfortunately, adult resistance to comics isn't unusual, despite the growing popularity of the literary format among young readers. In fact, dealing with parents and teachers who see comics (also commonly called graphic novels) as a low form of entertainment — instead of a valuable literacy tool — is a key topic of discussion among many children's librarians.

Before we go any further, though, here's another question at the heart of the matter: Should we call these books “comics” or “graphic novels”? Over the years, “comics” has become something of a pejorative, meaning a less-than-literary book played for laughs. “Graphic novel” sounds more highbrow, but it's not always correct, given that many of these books now are memoirs and other kinds of nonfiction. In addition, some people still get tripped up by the multiple meanings of the word “graphic.” Françoise Mouly, the publisher of TOON books suggests using the word “comics” as a broader term to describe books with sequential art and words, which need not be funny (but can be).

So, comics it is.

As librarians, we see how so many kids readily connect to comics and how this connection to books is helping to create lifelong readers. Dave Burbank, my library's comics expert, likes to reassure worried parents that many young readers are drawn to the genre because comics bear a resemblance to the screens so ubiquitous in our kids' lives, yet they are reading a book — not staring at a phone or tablet.

We know that comics are especially beneficial to struggling or reluctant readers, as well as English-language learners. These books also offer all readers a way to practice important reading skills such as building vocabulary, understanding a sequence of events, discerning the plot of a story and making inferences. And comics give young readers training in visual literacy — helping them read and interpret images — an essential skill in our highly visual world.

So why do some parents and teachers continue to regard comics in such a negative light? Part of it may have to do with the history of comics in the United States, Mouly said. In the 1950s, Mouly notes, congressional hearings were held on what lawmakers saw as a possible connection between juvenile delinquency

and comics. Worried that the federal government would try to regulate their industry, comics publishers established the [Comics Code Authority](#) as an alternative to government regulation. The Comics Code required that comic books show respect for established authority and banned nudity and explicit violence. While voluntary, the code was followed by many publishers, resulting in an industry focused largely on producing simple, laugh-inducing kids' comics like "Archie."

In the 1980s, there was a backlash as more publishers decided to create comics for adults, such as the classic "Batman: The Dark Knight Returns," published in 1986. The market became dominated by glossy, expensive superhero comics mostly aimed at an adult male audience. Suddenly, comics were really not for kids anymore.

Then, in 1992, "Maus: A Survivor's Tale," a graphic novel by author/artist Art Spiegelman (Mouly's husband), became the first comic to win a Pulitzer Prize, giving the format a new standing in American literature.

From there, comics have been on a slow, but mostly steady, march to acceptance as more literary graphic novels and comics were published, first for adults and now for children and teens. In the past decade, the increase in female comics creators, such as Raina Telgemeier, has expanded the range of books published for both adults and kids. Superhero stories have been joined on the comics shelves by realistic fiction and by memoirs and other nonfiction.

Mouly credits librarians with helping to shift the public's thinking about comics, as libraries, rather than comic book shops, have become the go-to place to find the genre. Yet, an implicit — and strong — bias remains in U.S. education against books with pictures. While picture books are seen as wonderful and important for young pre-readers, once kids learn to read, the prevailing wisdom is that it's time to take away the pictures. Even parents and teachers who condone comics often see them as a steppingstone toward the goal of reading text-only books.

Kids have fought back. Over a decade and a half, they have embraced comics and highly illustrated "hybrid" series such as Captain Underpants, Diary of a Wimpy Kid and Dork Diaries. At the same time, comics for kids have begun winning literary awards. In 2007, "American Born Chinese" by Gene Luen Yang became the first graphic novel to win the Michael Printz Award, given annually to the best book for teens. It was also a National Book Award finalist. In 2015, "El Deafo" was the first comic to win a Newbery Honor, an award for text, not pictures.

This year, the literary community went a step further, awarding "New Kid," a graphic novel written and illustrated by Jerry Craft, the 2020 Newbery Medal, considered the most prestigious U.S. children's book award. Although two previous graphic novels won Newbery Honors, this was the first time that a comic captured the top award.

Comics won an unprecedented eight awards this year when the American Library Association announced its selection of the best new books for kids and teens. Among the winners was "Hey, Kiddo," a graphic memoir written and

illustrated by Jarrett Krosoczka, which received the 2020 Odyssey Award for the best-produced audiobook for kids and teens, breaking another boundary for comics.

With such achievements and the soaring popularity of comics and hybrid books among young people, publishers have rushed to establish new imprints and sign new comics creators to fill the demand.

Among the new imprints are Random House Graphics; among its first books, to be published this spring, is “Stepping Stones,” the first for kids ages 8-12 by best-selling comics writer and illustrator Lucy Knisley. And Houghton Mifflin recently announced its new imprint, Etch, which this fall will publish its first books, including “Oh My Gods!,” by Stephanie Cooke and Insha Fitzpatrick, and “Dinomighty!,” by Greg Trine.

The kids are on board with comics, and so are many publishers, librarians, teachers and literary award givers. I'm hopeful that still-reluctant parents and educators are coming around. Whenever I encounter resistance, I think of what Robin Brenner, teens librarian at the Public Library of Brookline, Mass., and founder of the “No Flying No Tights” website, said: “Comics are not intended to replace prose. They are just one way to tell a story. But they can be as demanding, creative, intelligent, compelling, and full of story as any book.”

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