

Statement Regarding Library User Privacy Policy

by Stephen Spero, SCHS&FLA Board President

The Susquehanna County Library system is taking steps to ensure we comply with state law by updating our privacy policy, and that we administer that policy in ways that can give parents access to information about their children's reading selections.

There is no question that state law prohibits our disclosing of private information to anyone. Here's the crucial part of Section 9375 of Title 24, which is Pennsylvania's library code:

Records of the following institutions which relate to the circulation of library materials and contain the names or other personally identifying information of users of the materials shall be confidential and may not be made available to anyone except by a court order in a criminal proceeding:

- (1) The State Library.
- (2) A local library established or maintained under the provisions of this chapter.

There are other types of libraries listed, but (2) describes us. We are a local library. Incidentally, we are not a municipal library, which means we are not a government agency. We do receive state and county tax dollars, for which we are deeply appreciative and recognize that we must act as good stewards of the aid and have a responsibility to keep the public informed about what we do.

So, if all our circulation records are confidential, what is a parent to do if he or she wants to know what a child is reading:

First, don't give the child their own library card. Let them use yours. That way you have access to the information because it is yours. Incidentally, we think a child getting their own card is an important rite of passage on the road to adulthood. It promotes independence, responsibility, and helps instill a love of reading. Of course, that decision is entirely the parents' choice.

Second, the minor can tell us that he or she will allow someone else access to the information. If you're on the approved list, we will share that information with you.

If you agree that your child can have a card without waiving their confidentiality rights to a specific person, we will not be able to give you any information. If fines are levied regarding overdue, damaged, or lost materials, we will confirm the amount. But the minor will not be able to check out new material if the fines are greater than \$10.00.

The policies and procedures we are discussing align with the policies of other libraries throughout the state. As always, the library staff is here to help you navigate these procedures. If you have any questions, please ask.

In the past few months, we have received many comments about the proposed policy. We listened to each one. We have tried to address concerns while complying with state law in a way that allows parents to continue having oversight.