

Library director to seek limits on kids

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LANSING — The director of the Lansing Public Library said she wants to institute a minimum age requirement in an effort to keep latch-key children, who come to the library alone after school, from disturbing other patrons.

Library Director Jan Bojda said Friday that she will recommend the policy at a meeting with her staff Thursday and, if she receives a favorable response, may recommend the policy to the library board in April.

Dave Tanis, president of the library board, said Friday that it

was the first time he had heard of the proposal, but said, "There is no need for an age restriction (at the library)."

The remaining members of the library board could not be reached for comment Friday.

Bojda said about a dozen so-called latch-key kids spend several hours at the library after school. The kids apparently have no place to go after school, she said, because their parents work and they come to the library rather than go home alone.

"Sometimes the kids are noisy, and sometimes they are not, but there is simply no way that you can get a kid to sit still like that

for several hours. And the kids have all this pent-up energy after school," Bojda said.

Although the kids generally are well behaved, Bojda said they occasionally are "rambunctious" and bother other library patrons "and our staff has to intervene. They have to play the role of parents.

"I think we should have a policy on latch-key kids, and have a minimum age, before it becomes a bigger problem," she said.

Bojda said she thought about instituting an age policy recently after noticing a problem with some children.

Bojda said she will recommend setting a minimum age, perhaps

age 8, for children to be allowed in the library alone. Children under the minimum age would not be allowed to enter the library without an adult.

She also said there are some concerns that if the library becomes an after-school program of sorts, it may be held liable if a child becomes injured.

"If a child chokes on a sucker or something, do we become liable?" Bojda asked. "Also, there is a problem because if a paramedic was called, we often cannot identify these kids, and we don't have their medical records."

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"We're not a social service agency," Bojda said, noting that parents should make other arrangements for their children through the schools and park districts, if the children are going to be alone after school.

Tanis, who will retire from the library board next month, said that "it is the normal spring thing" for children to become somewhat disruptive in the library. He said there is no need to restrict children.

"There is no need for an age restriction. We (the library board) rescinded the age restrictions that the former librarian had imposed," Tanis said. He could not recall when those restrictions were instituted or rescinded.

"This is news to us (the library board), and that decision is going

to be up to the new board, but I don't think it will happen," he said of Bojda's proposal.

This is the second time in as many months that a south suburban library has come up with a plan for restricting children's access to libraries.

In February, Calumet Park Librarian Melody Coleman instituted a temporary policy that allows only students with passes to enter the library alone. The policy was instituted in an effort to restore peace and quiet to the library, officials said.

The passes must be signed by a parent or teacher, confirming that the student has legitimate work to do at the library.

The policy was controversial and criticized by some residents. The National Library Association also criticized that policy, saying it would discourage youngsters from coming to the library.

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