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September 16, 2021

This month, IDRA launched Knowledge is Power, a national resource for educators and advocates to help you do your work for equity and excellence in education in the midst of classroom censorship policies.

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See the Sept 2 edition of Knowledge is Power in [English](#) and [Español](#).



Equity is a True American Ideal

by Hector Bojorquez

The current controversies in state houses across the country concerning certain pedagogies about race must not take aim at our nation's decades-long work to ensure educational equity for all students. Educators, researchers and policymakers have worked diligently to improve opportunities and supports for students who have faced historical inequities based on race, language, gender and religion.

They have done so under the guidance provided by federal law, court cases and regulations all based on distinctively American notions enshrined in the U.S. Constitution. Attempts to censor classrooms do not mean equity is no longer a priority.

Equity in education for the four federally-protected classes (race, national origin, gender and religion) has enabled educators and the communities they serve to identify incontrovertible problems and address them. Federal regulations for equity in education are the reason we take steps to pinpoint achievement disparities. It is why we can speak to communities in disadvantaged parts of our country and say, "We can solve these issues together," and then roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Equity in education has created opportunities for seven decades to better the lives of students by focusing efforts on where they are most needed. We have made many strides together as a nation, such as improving graduation rates and literacy, because of national support and federal laws protecting students' rights. U.S. education is *not* an abject failure; it is constantly improving. And it does so because of equity and education civil rights policies and actions.

Across the political spectrum, many people have worked together for student opportunities, in different ways and sometimes through spirited discussions, because we understand that, with an excellent, equitable system, our students will have the opportunity for a better life, our economic systems will thrive and our democracy will flourish.

We stand by equity in education because we instinctively understand it to be part of our American identity. That is why, while we may not be able to cite case law, we know what these protections mean in our children's lives. And we dedicate ourselves to visions of equity because it speaks to a basic national character that does not stand idly by when students in a predominantly Black or Latino neighborhood do not have access to the good education that is provided to other students across town.

Our dedication to educational equity speaks to our country's sense of fairness and dignity that is outraged when we see students persecuted because they are LGBTQ. It is why we shake our heads in disgust when we see that, in some other countries, girls are not able to go to school. And we protest when students of color are treated like criminals in classrooms.

While these examples may seem to represent the most basic protections that we take for granted, we must take this time to affirm that equity in education *is* the law. It is how we move forward. It is the lens through which each generation rededicates itself to our national character.

Ultimately, we must remember that equity is based on honorable laws, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that affirm the hopes and dreams of generations of Americans. It is our task to hold ourselves accountable to those hopes and dreams. Censorship in classrooms and attempts to whitewash history lessons do not supersede federal laws that protect students' civil rights.

[Learn more about protecting student civil rights from the IDRA EAC-South, the equity assistance center serving schools in the U.S. South.](#)

Educators! Tell us how classroom censorship policies and proposals are affecting your school!

Fill out our educator survey



Expansive Classroom Censorship Bill Filed in Florida

by Morgan Craven, J.D.

Florida legislators filed [House Bill 57](#), an expansive censorship bill that contains much of the same language as other policies across the country prohibiting the discussion of certain "divisive concepts" related to race, racism and other forms of discrimination.

This dangerous bill prohibits discussions of these concepts in public schools and colleges, state agencies, counties and municipalities. It also requires agencies to report expenditures on "diversity and inclusion training" and prohibits hired contractors from discussing the so-called divisive concepts, even allowing for them to be reported to the state and disciplined should they violate the law.



Tennessee Censorship Policy Serves as Warning to Other States

by Terrence Wilson, J.D.

On August 2, 2021, the Tennessee Department of Education released [guidelines](#) on how schools should implement the state's new [classroom censorship law](#) that prohibits certain concepts about race, racism and other forms of discrimination from being discussed in schools. This law and the corresponding regulations serve as a warning to other states of the damaging impact that these censorship efforts can have on students, teachers and schools.

IDRA [submitted a public comment](#) to this regulation highlighting that the law and regulations limit students' critical thinking skills, their ability to understand how racism, sexism and socioeconomic discrimination marginalize people in today's society. Our public comment focused on the following deficiencies in the regulation.

- The guidance given to schools is vague and subjective, which will undoubtedly lead to governmental overreach and confusion among educators. Specifically, the regulation does not specify what kind of conduct will lead to a determination that a "prohibited concept" was included or promoted in a school district's course of instruction, curriculum, instructional program or through a supplemental instructional material.
- The guidance limits students' ability to understand how power, race, oppression and resistance played out in the past and impact their current experience. The exceptions outlined in the guidance do not exempt courses aimed at understanding these topics – particularly ethnic studies courses – or current instances and experiences of racial, socioeconomic and gender-based oppression that continue to influence society. Without these additions to the enumerated exceptions, students' ability to draw connections between historical and current events and issues will continue to be compromised, further diminishing their critical thinking and analytical skills.
- Finally, the rule outlines that the state will withhold funds scheduled to be disbursed to school districts or public charters for violations of the rule. Students should not suffer financial consequences because of curricular complaints. This type of punishment would disproportionately impact historically-underfunded schools, leaving them with even fewer resources for instructional materials, staff and programming. No financial penalty should be included in curricular rules.

Tennessee's rule presents a stark example of the negative impacts that classroom censorship laws will have on students, educators and local school districts. Students will be left with sub-par curricula and fewer economic resources, and they will be under constant surveillance from the state.

Instead of these harmful approaches, states should promote guidance for [culturally-sustaining curricula and pedagogical approaches](#) that help all students develop the critical thinking and analytical skills they need to be thoughtful and engaged people who are able to meet modern-day challenges.



Texas SB 3 Makes New Changes to Social Studies Learning Standards

by Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes

A new classroom censorship law is on the books in Texas. It replaced HB 3979 just one day after it took effect. Senate Bill 3, the more recent bill, was passed on the final day of the second special legislative session. It echoes several provisions in HB 3979 and makes some new changes, notably to the social studies learning standards, or the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

The two main changes to learning standards are: (1) removal of the list of key diverse historical figures and events, and 2) "addition" of civics education language, much of which already existed in standards. [Our analysis](#) outlines where changes to learning standards in the bill are missing or already exist.

HB 3979 added a long list of historical figures and events significant to this country's racial history. In contrast, SB 3 removed these specific names, events and movements but included a clause that the removal does not prohibit the State Board of Education from adopting those names into the TEKS or teachers from teaching those names and events.

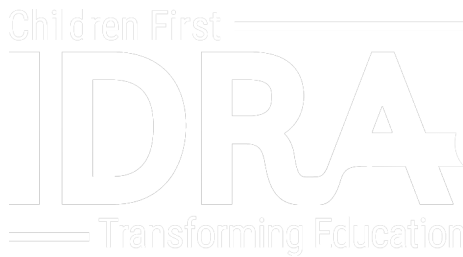
SB 3 purported to enhance civics education, though changes to the standards that promote U.S. founding documents, free speech and understanding civic responsibility already exist in many social studies TEKS. IDRA's analysis includes which social studies courses already contained these civics concepts and where they will be new additions.

See IDRA's analysis of Texas SB 3

See IDRA's web hub on the Texas law

Educators: Tell us how this bill has impacted your classroom or school

See our video gallery of student testimony



IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

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