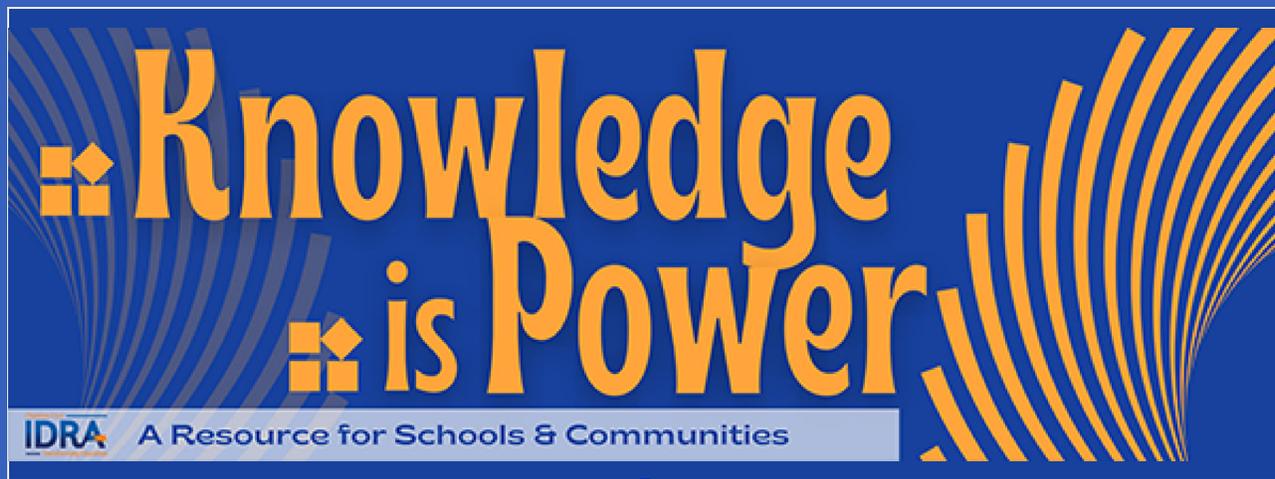


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September 2, 2021



Today, IDRA is launching 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.

The pandemic reaffirmed that schools help bind our democracy and feed our minds and bodies. Yet, the inequities in our schools remain and our students' educational and emotional well-being remains at risk.

IDRA works to ensure students have the educational opportunities to go to college and pursue lives of purpose. We are committed to the idea that all young people, regardless of the languages they speak, where they live, where they came from, regardless of the color of their skin, must receive an equitable and excellent education.

All students are valuable. None is expendable. All students are best served by culturally-sustaining schools that affirm their inherent value.



School Censorship Policies Sweep through the South

by Terrence Wilson, J.D.

Although students and families are facing a myriad of real challenges including natural disasters and a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic, many policymakers in the South have decided to focus their energy on a manufactured concern over what students learn about the world around

them. This article details several of the approaches that state and local policymakers in the South have taken to censor what educators can teach and limit what students can learn.

Whitewashing History

Several policymakers have pursued laws and regulations that would gloss over the full impact that systemic oppression has had in the history of the United States and the world. Many of these efforts have singled out The 1619 Project, which highlights the ongoing impact of slavery and the oppression of Black people.

Measures have been introduced at the federal level ([SB 2035/HR 3810](#)), introduced in state legislatures in Arkansas ([HB 1231](#)) and South Carolina ([HB 4343](#)), enacted in Texas ([HB 3979](#)), and enacted by the state school board in [Florida](#). Texas is considering a second measure this week ([SB3](#)).

Censoring Conversation about Systemic Oppression

Several of the measures seek to limit conversation about so-called “divisive concepts,” using nearly [verbatim](#) language from [model legislation](#) offered by conservative think tanks. These measures have been introduced under the guise of preventing critical race theory from being taught, but, in actuality, several such proposals neither mention the term nor reflect an understanding of it.

Measures targeting the open discussion of systems of oppression have been introduced in state legislatures in Louisiana ([HB 564](#)), Mississippi ([SR 56](#)) and North Carolina ([HB 324](#)), enacted in Tennessee ([Public Act 493](#)), as well as enacted by state boards of education in [Alabama](#) and [Georgia](#).

Using Executive Power for Ideological Gain

Policymakers across the South also have turned to the executive branch of government to attempt to invalidate teachings and training that highlight diversity, equity and inclusion under the guise of an attack on critical race theory.

Twenty state attorneys general from Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas sent a [letter](#) to U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona that urges him to advocate for censorship of content and ideas. State legislatures in [Arkansas](#) and [Texas](#) have asked their respective attorneys general to rule on the legality of these efforts.

Instilling Fear

Taken together, these efforts illustrate a coordinated effort to use any and all levels of government to limit the concepts that can be taught around racism, sexism and other systems of oppression. These strategies rely on creating fear.

In [Tennessee](#), schools or districts may be defunded (up to 10% of state funds or \$5 million annually). If laws like those [proposed in Alabama](#) pass, teachers may be disciplined or fired.

Distracting from Key Policy Priorities

These efforts will undoubtedly hurt all students, leaving them ill prepared to understand the world, and they distract from pressing health, safety and education priorities.

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

Fill out our educator survey



Obscuring the Truth

The Evolving Efforts Against Critical Race Theory

by Haley Gray & Salih Cevik

Within the last six months, some politicians have proposed measures to “ban” critical race theory (CRT) from K-12 curricula. Critical race theory is not actually taught in K-12 schools. Nevertheless, [28 states](#) have already passed or are attempting to pass anti-CRT legislation.

What Critical Race Theory Really Is

Critical race theory is a [framework](#) through which racial oppression is analyzed. Widely introduced as a concept in post-undergraduate academia, it examines the way racism is maintained in society's policies, literature, laws and institutions through unjust systems. Due to its theoretical nature, CRT is not something that is explicitly taught; it is a way of thinking that informs how subjects like history, literature and civics are studied.

How this Debate Against CRT Arose in the First Place

In July 2020, [Christopher Rufo](#) proposed promoting the term “critical race theory” among conservative groups as a concept created to shame white Americans and promote segregation. It did not take long for this false definition to circulate. In fact, by September of 2020, President Trump signed an executive order to end racial sensitivity training within federal agencies that address white privilege or critical race theory. Mr. Trump claimed that these terms have infiltrated the education system and encouraged [“racist ideas” that “teach people to hate our country.”](#) This comment from Mr. Trump paired with Rufo’s endorsement of CRT as a divisive ideology caused many individuals to fear critical race theory and spurred the anti-CRT drive currently facing our nation’s schools.

Using the [Partisanship Out of Civics Act](#) as model legislation, along with anti-CRT guidebooks created by conservative [parent](#) and [political](#) groups, most anti-CRT legislation limits all classroom discussions of current events, race and racism. Additionally, anti-CRT legislation denies the existence of racial inequities that exist today and often condemns the use of helpful concepts, such as [racial consciousness, bias, equity, inclusion, etc.](#)

Anti-CRT bills promote a revisionist curriculum that de-emphasizes racial injustice and undermines the past and present experiences of individuals with marginalized identities. With these bills in place, students will not learn the content knowledge they need to critically analyze our society or learn how to act as empathetic leaders, advocates and allies. They will no longer learn key historical facts or patterns.

Due to these dire implications, teachers, parents, students and community members across the nation are speaking out to stop the anti-CRT drive. Students deserve to see themselves adequately represented within the curriculum and to critically think about and challenge the status quo. And above all, students deserve and can handle the truth.

We cannot allow anti-CRT legislation to silence and filter the thoughts of our youth. They must be given the opportunity to reckon with our past and confront our present so we can have the hope of building a better future.



What the Texas Classroom Censorship Bill Means for Schools

by Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes

Texas is [one of 28 states](#) to consider policies that attempt to restrict or ban classroom conversations on race, racism and racial history. Texas lawmakers passed House Bill 3979 in the spring and are currently debating even more stringent measures to censor classroom discussions and whitewash school curriculum.

HB 3979 went into effect on September 1, 2021, but not all parts of the bill will hit classrooms this school year. It makes two major changes to how race can be discussed and taught in schools. And it makes additions to the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for required social studies courses.

This means that the Texas State Board of Education will be tasked with revising social studies learning standards to include broad concepts about this country's founding documents and civic engagement, as well as specific figures, names and events of racial significance. Many of the bill's changes will go into effect through the State Board of Education's review of learning standards. Students and advocates can [make their voices heard](#) through that review process by testifying how it restricts their knowledge of themselves and their history. Unlike similar legislation proposed during summer legislative sessions, the [list](#) notes key historical figures who are Black, Latino, Indigenous and women.

However, the law does prohibit requiring certain concepts in classroom discussions and teacher training. This law and similar proposed bills seek to censor school conversations that pertain to race and racism, as well as sexism, slavery, forms of oppression and current events. Even though supporters frame the law as about civics education, HB 3979 attempts to curtail truthful civics and history, and it prohibits students from gaining course credit for real-world civic engagement in their local, state and federal governments.

The prohibited concepts in classroom discussion and teacher training could dissuade teachers from discussing topics related to race, racism and historically significant events. Already, some school districts have reported [canceling civics education](#) that they fear would tread too closely to these prohibitions.

Texas learning standards [scarcely mention](#) key historical figures of color and women, and anti-CRT legislation diminishes their contributions to history even further.

[Educators: Tell us how this bill has impacted your classroom or school](#)

[See IDRA's web hub on the Texas law](#)



Student Testimony Excerpt: Let's Talk about Our Entire History

by Ric Galvan

Editor's Note: During its two special sessions, the Texas Legislature considered proposals House Bill 28 and Senate Bill 3 as companions to the classroom censorship (HB 3979) measure that was passed in the spring.

I am a student at the University of Texas at Austin, majoring in history. And I am the central Texas campus organizer of Texas Rising, but I am here representing myself in opposition to HB 28.

As a recent public school student in San Antonio, I graduated three years ago. I want to make clear, I never even heard of critical race theory once in school. And – I’m not knocking my teachers, they are fabulous teachers, especially my favorite social studies teachers – but, in all my life in public school here in Texas, I hardly ever heard any history that represented myself or people who look like me or like some of my other Black and Brown friends in my classes. I hardly heard of the Chicano Movement. I hardly heard of Juan Crow. Jim Crow was mentioned, and Reconstruction was barely discussed. All these are important to our history. And yet, I was taught a limited history.



And so, when I see bills like this, I get fired up, not just because I grew up with educators or because I care about education so much, but because I know what it’s like to not learn the full history of ourselves, of our state, of our community. And to make it even more restricted just doesn’t make sense to me. To hide things that are important, that shape not only our current society but also our political structures and economic structures, to me is abhorrent.

To see bills like this, and say, “Well, let’s just hide all the history that’s really important about how we’ve founded this country and how we founded these governing institutions,” I believe is wrong. I don’t think, of course, we should dictate what teachers say, but I think it’s important that we give some guidelines that say clearly, “Let’s talk about the entire history of how our government was created, including that slavery was etched into our Constitution, both federal and state, even the current one we still have that we use today here in Texas, was written by proudly self-proclaimed white supremacists called Redeemers.”

I think that’s just important for us, contextually, to understand how we navigate these spaces, *especially* for someone like me, who is visibly Brown and has to understand that these systems that we use weren’t built for me. And that if we’re going to progress forward, we need to understand that fully and see if we can truly adjust it beyond just simple civil rights bills that say this is enough.

We need true equity and justice bills to say: “Not only can you now enter, but you are *meant* to be in these institutions. You are meant to belong here, and your entire communities are to be propped up just like other communities were.”

[See our video gallery of student testimony](#)

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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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