



Banning Critical Conversations in the Classroom Hurts Texas Students

IDRA Testimony against SB 3 in 87(2) session, presented by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Senate State Affairs Committee, August 10, 2021

Chairman Hughes and Committee Members:

My name is Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes, and I am the Deputy Director of Policy at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan, education non-profit committed to achieving equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. We continue to oppose SB 3 and bills similar to HB 3979 from the 87(R) session.

My job is to be an advocate for public education, including for rigorous, comprehensive and thoughtful curriculum in our schools. Today, I'll share my reflections as a graduate of Texas public schools. I attended Plano ISD, kindergarten through 12th grade. Plano ISD has long been recognized as a high-quality district, with its schools ranking on national lists.

But I graduated with a huge deficit in my knowledge. I had made it through a top school district without ever learning about some of the major historical figures of color, their contributions and events that happened in our own state and country. It was not until graduate school that I learned details about the Chicano movement or the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee that guided so much of the Civil Rights Movement, or about many women who shaped our country.

I distinctly remember in eighth grade U.S. History writing on an exam that the cause of the Civil War was slavery and receiving a lower grade since the acceptable answer was "states' rights." I knew that was not the full story, but it was the only one we were allowed to discuss in the classroom.

Perhaps this is in part because in my entire K-12 career, I had one Black teacher, and two Latina teachers, both in Spanish courses. We know that students are more successful when they see themselves reflected in their curriculum, in their textbooks and in the classroom through teacher representation.

There is a lot of discussion presuming white students' anguish in learning the truthful racial history of our country. But what is embarrassing and psychologically disturbing is thinking you have had a great education only to realize the adults in charge never thought you could handle the truth and instead trained you to be ignorant.

This bill deprives Texas students and teachers of the skills, the knowledge and the confidence to have critical conversations in the classroom. This hurts all students' ability to understand themselves and their shared place in our democracy, especially for students of color who are the majority of our student population. I urge you to vote against this bill.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA Deputy Director of Policy, at chloe.sikes@idra.org.

Resources

Dee, T., & Penner, E. (January 2016). The Causal Effects of Cultural Relevance: Evidence from an Ethnic Studies Curriculum. National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w21865>

IDRA. (October 2019). IDRA EAC-South Assists Virginia Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth. IDRA eNews. <https://idra.news/VAcmsn19>

IDRA. (May 2021). Culturally Sustaining Schools. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/nlMay21cc>

IDRA. (January 2020). Teaching Quality. IDRA Newsletter. <https://idra.news/nlJ20cc>

Rodriguez, J. (July 1, 2021). Diversity in the Classroom: Why Representation Matters. Diverse: Issues in Higher Education. <https://diverseeducation.com/article/219366/>

IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization led by Celina Moreno, J.D. Our mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity for every child through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college. IDRA strengthens and transforms public education by providing dynamic training; useful research, evaluation, and frameworks for action; timely policy analyses; and innovative materials and programs.