

6

**Advocacy  
lessons learned  
from fighting  
against  
classroom  
censorship  
policies**

+6 advocacy tools!

**#TeachTheTruth**

At IDRA we work to promote culturally-sustaining schools where all students and their communities are affirmed and valued. We organize with partners to fight harmful classroom censorship policies. Below are six lessons we've learned (so far) for combatting these policies and a few advocacy tools we hope can help others.

## 1

### Always center young people & families.

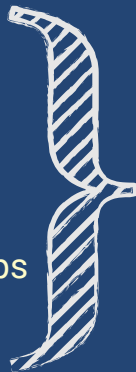
Communities of color, especially Black communities, are targeted by classroom censorship laws that deny the truth about history, racial injustice, and systems of discrimination. There are no better policy advocates on this issue than the young people impacted and their families. Their voices must be centered and amplified.

## 2

### Build & sustain cross-sector partnerships.

#### Everyone has an important role to play in protecting the truth!

- students
- teachers
- families
- schools
- businesses
- faith leaders
- civil rights groups
- historians
- researchers



Encourage everyone's advocacy with actionable information, including toolkits with policy explainers, talking points, letter and testimony templates, and advocacy tip sheets [see tools below]. Always make sure you can recommend a concrete action everyone can take, no matter their role, resources, or time commitment.

# 3

## Gather data, research & stories to clearly show impact.

Classroom censorship policies impact students and schools in many ways. Using data and research, and amplifying the expertise of students and families can help to show that impact from different angles.

This may appeal to broader range of policymakers and help to illustrate the large and lasting negative effects of the policies on school safety, culturally-sustaining classrooms, students' civil rights, teacher and administrator workloads, school funding, teacher diversity, curriculum and instructional best practices, the workforce, and many other areas.

# 4

## Make sure your message is clear & consistent.

Finding a messaging strategy that works for your group will help ensure you are effectively describing your positive vision for students and schools and explaining how classroom censorship policies stand in the way of that.

You may have to experiment with messaging as time goes on, but be sure that your message is clear, easy to share, and consistent. Going through the process of developing this message with your coalition or group can help you to control and drive the narrative around classroom censorship.

# 5

## Help everyone navigate & participate in the policy process.

Building a successful coalition means making sure everyone feels equipped to engage in the policymaking process. This doesn't mean you should simply tell people when to show up for a hearing or public rally.

Rather, it is important to share knowledge about the ins and outs of policymaking so anyone can join and lead meetings, understand the impact of their testimony, and engage directly with policymakers. See our advocacy tools below for more tips on supporting authentic engagement.

# 6

## Be bold. Be creative.

We must all support young people in the fight for educational justice, even when policymakers try to exclude us from the process. Your advocacy may take courage and creativity.

We urge you to demand meetings with policymakers, hold news conferences and people's hearings if you are denied access to meetings, and boldly share your vision of what excellent and equitable schools look like for all students.

(<https://www.idra.org/events/save-civics-virtual-town-hall-tleec/>)

## Advocacy Tool #1 – Use Clear Messages

Messaging is one of the most important pieces of the fight against classroom censorship policies. Claiming the narrative with a clear message early and often is important to ensure you convey your vision for a positive school climate for all students.

When you can: avoid too much jargon, center students, and be specific about your vision and values. The sample messages below provide help on how to effectively message against the attacks on an equitable education.

### Even though it's accurate, instead of saying... → Say...

- |  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| We need equitable schools (or equity in schools)             | → | Children of every race, background and zip code should have the freedom to learn and pursue their dreams.       |
| Teachers should have the freedom to teach                    | → | Children should have the freedom to learn with an education that prepares them for the future.                  |
| We need to create a sense of belonging for students of color | → | Create classrooms where students feel accepted, valued, regardless of race, gender, religion, or anything else. |

### Leave CRT to CRT experts . . .

Think carefully about using the terms "CRT" or "critical race theory" in your messaging. These terms have been twisted beyond recognition by supporters of the classroom censorship bills and are rarely described accurately by media and policymakers. Messaging research today shows that they are not effective ways of describing the censorship and racism that these policies are actually about.

## Advocacy Tool #2 – Partner with Students & Families

All students and families must be part of building excellent and equitable schools. Unfortunately, many schools have not prioritized or invested in developing authentic relationships with students and families, particularly those of color, those with limited incomes, and those from immigrant communities.

Similarly, these students and families are often ignored by policymakers, even though they bear the brunt of harmful education policy decisions. We must make sure we do not perpetuate this exclusion by leaving systemically-marginalized students and families out of the fight against classroom censorship policies.

The collage features several key IDRA documents:

- 6 IDRA Principles for Family Leadership in Education:** A bilingual infographic with six numbered points:
  - Families can be their children's strongest advocates.
  - Families of different races, ethnicities, languages and cultures are equally valuable.
  - Families care about their children's education and are to be treated with respect, dignity and value.
  - Within families, many individuals play a role in the children's education.
  - Family leadership is most powerful at improving education for all children when collective efforts create solutions for the common good.
  - Families, schools, and communities, when drawn together, become a strong, sustainable voice to protect the rights of all children.
- IDRA Parent Leadership in Education Model:** A circular diagram with 'IDRA Model of Parent Leadership' at the center, surrounded by five roles: Parents as Teachers, Parents as Resources, Parents as Decision Makers, and Parents as Leaders and Trainers.
- IDRA Education CAFE model:** A flyer titled 'Learn about IDRA's Education CAFE model' with the URL <http://budurl.com/IDRAandCAFE>.

IDRA's **model** and **principles** for family leadership in education provide a roadmap for implementing a truly inclusive vision of family engagement that centers traditionally marginalized families and focuses on building more just, culturally-sustaining schools for all students.

(<https://idra.news/FamLeadModel> & <https://idra.news/6PrinciplesFamLeadership>)

These **recommendations** from a student activist can help shape your work with young people in your coalition. (<https://idra.news/nlAug19a>)

Additionally, we recommend you:

- Seek out student- and family-led organizations that are already active in your state and community and build partnerships with them
- Do not make assignments to students and families, but ask for their advocacy vision and provide them with tools, resources, and technical support
- Be responsive to students' and families' communication styles, availability, and schedules so they can participate meaningful in meetings and work sessions.

## Advocacy Tool #3 – Build Cross-Sector Partnerships

There is something for everyone to hate about the classroom censorship bills. You can strengthen your campaign by building cross-sector partnerships and ensuring your partners share their concerns with policymakers about every problematic aspect of the policy. Not every partner may be a close coalition member or align with you on every other issue. But, it is helpful to stay in touch with others who are working against classroom censorship to determine if there are opportunities to collaborate.

For example, in our work in Texas, we tried to reach out to every organization that had a stake in the outcome of the bills to urge them to advocate against the proposed policies, including those representing the groups below. (<https://idra.news/WeOpposeHB3979>)

- |                                  |   |                                     |   |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Students</b>                  | want to be able to learn the truth about the world and feel safe and supported in their schools.                                      | <b>Businesses</b>                   | want to be able to attract and retain well-prepared employees.  |
| <b>Teachers</b>                  | want to teach accurate and truthful materials without fearing for their jobs or safety.   | <b>Faith leaders</b>                | believe in centering truth and love as a way to challenge injustice and avoid repeating atrocities of the past.   |
| <b>Families</b>                  | want high-quality schools where their children can safely learn the truth and be prepared for college and careers.                    | <b>Civil rights groups</b>          | oppose policies that deny the existence of systemic inequities and compromise the safety and civil rights of students.  |
| <b>School administrators</b>     | don't want interference in curriculum, instruction and training decisions or threats to their funding and authority over their staff. | <b>LGBTQ+ rights advocates</b>      | see the dangers of silencing diverse perspectives and oppose targeting books and curricula about the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community.   |
| <b>Rural school groups</b>       | oppose the onerous curriculum reporting requirements imposed by some policies.  | <b>Voting rights groups</b>         | see an inadequate education as a hurdle to students' full participation in our democracy.   |
| <b>Education advocacy groups</b> | want safe and culturally-sustaining schools where all students are able to thrive.  | <b>Historians</b>                   | see the educational and social value in a <u>truthful and complete telling</u> of this country's past.<br>( <a href="https://idra.news/HistoriansLtr">https://idra.news/HistoriansLtr</a> ) |
| <b>Colleges</b>                  | want applicants who are thoughtful and prepared to engage with challenging material and concepts.                                     | <b>Researchers &amp; professors</b> | want students who are well-prepared for the rigors of higher education and oppose policies that threaten their academic freedom.  |

## Advocacy Tool #4 – Collective Policy Analyses

Policy analyses are useful ways to keep track of bills, school board policies, and other classroom censorship efforts. When built with partners, these analyses can help to harness the diverse expertise of your coalition.

During our advocacy, the proposed classroom censorship policies were amended constantly, but we were able to keep up because we worked together. Using a shared document system, our coalition partners worked together to create thorough and thoughtful policy analyses.

Coordinated by a dedicated point person, our collective policy analysis approach allowed coalition members to use their different expertise and experiences to make sure every aspect and consequence of the policy was identified and understood. We used our internal analyses to craft our external messaging, draft statements and explainers for the public, and keep our coalition updated and organized.

We hope this type of collective policy analysis will become a standard part of equitable policymaking.

For examples of collective analyses that were published and shared widely, check out:

- this [analysis of a proposed bill](#) from diverse members of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC),
- this [chart, compiled by teachers, historians, and curriculum experts to help Texans understand how censoring classroom discussions would conflict with state learning standards.](#)

You can find a simple analysis template that may be useful to your coalition here: <https://idra.news/BillAnalysis>

**Bill # \_\_\_\_ Analysis - Sample**

[Here you should provide a description of which version of the bill is analyzed below, including a bill number, link to bill language, filing date, and any other helpful information about the process or substance of the bill.]

<b>Bill Language:</b>	<b>Analysis from Coalition: What this will mean for students, teachers, and schools:</b>
<small>[In this column, provide a few words to identify each bill section, then copy and paste or provide a detailed description of each provision of the bill. It helps to give each bill section its own row in the chart. Be sure to indicate the section number and, if possible, a page and line number where the language can easily be found.]</small>	<small>[In this column, write the impact of each provision in plain language. Encourage coalition members to provide analyses and share research about the impact of the corresponding bill provision and useful talking points. This section may need to be coordinated, moderated, cleaned up, or edited by point persons from the coalition.]</small>
Policy Provision Section	Coalition Analysis and Talking Points



## Advocacy Tool #5 – State Your Position

Public statements and talking points let policymakers, the media, and the general public know where you and your partners stand on the classroom censorship issue and help you set the narrative. They can also be an important organizing tool by helping you demonstrate the strength of your coalition and build relationships with reporters, legislators, and the public.

Your public statements can be released early and often and should be shared widely across any platforms you use and with targeted audiences like media and policymakers. Your talking points should match the messaging in your statements and be written so that your coalition members can speak confidently about your position and demands.

Public statements and talking points should be brief, clear, and can include:

- A description of who is in your coalition and why you oppose the classroom censorship policy.
- Your vision of what safe and welcoming schools and truthful curricula should look like for all students.
- Specific examples of the ways the proposed policies will harm students, teachers, and your community.
- Data you have gathered showing impact.
- A call to action for the public and policymakers to oppose the policy.

Below are a few examples of public statements:

- [IDRA's statement on the passage of the Texas classroom censorship law.](https://idra.news/SB3Statement-09/03/21)  
(<https://idra.news/SB3Statement-09/03/21>)
- [Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition's \(TLEEC\) statement on the impact of the classroom censorship law](https://idra.news/TxPolicyUpdate11)  
(<https://idra.news/TxPolicyUpdate11>)
- [A statement from the TEACH Coalition about their letter to the Texas Attorney General, highlighting students' stories of discrimination in school.](https://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TEACH-Coalition-press-release-September-29-2021.pdf)  
(<https://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/TEACH-Coalition-press-release-September-29-2021.pdf>)

## Advocacy Tool #6 – Demystifying the Process

Understanding the policymaking process can be challenging, especially for new advocates. Making sure your coalition partners understand those processes is important work in your campaign against classroom censorship policies and in efforts to remove systemic barriers to civic participation.

Understanding how policies are enacted can help you and your partners to:

- speak directly with legislative offices to share your concerns
- attend hearings and provide testimony
- use procedural tools to stop or slow down bills
- mobilize your coalition at the most effective times

Provide your partners with simple legislative process explainers, regular hearing updates, advocacy training sessions, and other types of support where you can.

(<https://idra.news/HowToTestify>)

(<https://idra.news/SB3HearingNotice>)

(<https://idra.news/Mondays>)

### TIP

Fighting these highly politicized policies is an uphill battle, so using procedural moves to slow or stop a bill can help. Friendly legislative staffers, long-time advocates, or current advocacy partners may be able to help, so don't be shy about asking them to share their knowledge!

(<https://www.texastribune.org/2021/05/28/texas-critical-race-theory-greg-abbott/>)

**How to Meet with Your Elected Official**

Meeting with your elected officials gives you the opportunity to share information, data and policy ideas about the issues that impact your community. Here are some tips to help you prepare.

Due to COVID-19, many in-person meetings have moved to virtual platforms, where people, regardless of their location, use an audio, video, or texting platform to connect online.

**1 Request a Meeting**

Begin by reaching out to the official's office and requesting a meeting. While it is usual to meet with the elected officials themselves, they may be unavailable. But you can ask to meet with the staff person in the office who handles the subject area you wish to meet about, like education or criminal justice.

Be clear about what you want to meet about and request specific dates and times to meet. If the meeting must happen virtually, determine the virtual platform you will use (e.g., Zoom, Microsoft Teams) and who will plan to host and share the link to the meeting.

Try to keep your number of participants in the meeting small so that everyone has enough time to participate.

**2 Get Ready**

**Do some research.** See what the elected official has done or said that is related to your issue.

**If you are attending the meeting in a group, assign roles to each person.**

- The **Leader** will develop an agenda and introduce everyone during the meeting. The leader will help guide the conversation, ensure everyone is given a chance to speak and communicate the requests to the elected official.
- The **Recorder** will work with the leader to keep the meeting on track and will take detailed notes on the meeting.
- The **Participant(s)** can help by sharing personal anecdotes that highlight the needs of the community and requests made of the elected official.
- The **Technology Facilitator** can assist with the virtual platform or needs of the group. This is largely a non-speaking role meant to assist with any technology needs.

**Prepare the information and key points you wish to share with the elected official and office staff.**

You may only have a few chances to meet with your elected official or their staff. It is important to use the time fully and effectively. Agree to the points you would like to make within your group to avoid any disagreements during the meeting. Disagreements during the meeting will undermine your credibility and hurt the overall outcome of the meeting.

Decide what you want to get from the meeting. It is crucial to determine what your requests are and who will make them. Be specific.

Decide who will share personal stories, key facts and data. Be prepared to show how the issue is systemic, requiring policy change, rather than an isolated or individual problem.

Plan and role-play the meeting. This is crucial to making sure you hit your key points and make any requests during the meeting. Role-playing is especially important for individuals who might be sharing a difficult story and providing information for the meeting. Build into your meeting a positive environment where people feel supported and never push anyone to share something that makes them uncomfortable.

List questions the policymaker may ask or objections that can arise. Prepare your responses.

Have all the individuals joining the meeting test the virtual platform beforehand. This will help ensure when the actual meeting takes place no one is delayed and keeps you on schedule.



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