



## **Families and Students Deserve Authentic Engagements as Partners Rather than Adversarial School Environments**

**IDRA Testimony against House Bill 1178, submitted by Mikayla Arciaga to the Georgia Senate Education and Youth Committee, March 23, 2022**

Chairman Payne & Members of the Committee, and Representative Bonner:

Thank you for giving us time to speak today. My name is Mikayla Arciaga, and I am the Georgia Education Policy Fellow for the Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA). We are 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. I am also a former high school math teacher.

We are opposed to House Bill 1178 as currently written because it does not prioritize engagement of historically-excluded families, it discourages true partnership between families and teachers, and it does not fully account for the rights of students in their own education.

Relying on over 40 years of authentic family engagement experience, we believe that parents should be treated with dignity and recognized for their value as resources, decision makers and leaders within their communities. We are glad that the bill encourages parent engagement, but it does not approach this process through an equity lens that requires school leaders to take additional steps to authentically engage with traditionally-excluded families.

Instead, this bill would promote antagonistic relationships between families and their schools because it encourages parents to bypass the individuals who are best positioned to address and resolve their concerns: the teachers. Furthermore, this bill provides explicit expectations for the process by which materials can be reviewed and removed but provides no avenue for parents to contribute or restore items to their local district curriculum. The processes proposed will likely lead to less diverse, culturally-sustaining curricula if historically marginalized families are not made an explicit priority.

Finally, this bill overlooks the most important stakeholders: our students. There is no mention of the role that students should play in these decision processes, but some of the most robust local governance models include student input at both the middle and high school levels. Students have the right to a free and truthful education – a right that is independent from those of their parents, and it must be protected.

This bill may allow the opinions of small groups of parents or families to infringe on the rights of students and obstruct access to diverse and truthful curriculum for all our children, not just their own. For these reasons, we oppose HB 1178 and ask the committee to invest more resources on processes that value the perspectives of diverse families and that lead to more inclusive, diverse curricula.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Terrence Wilson, J.D., IDRA Regional Policy and Community Engagement Director, at [terrence.wilson@idra.org](mailto:terrence.wilson@idra.org).

*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.*