



Students Suffer Under Classroom Censorship

TLEEC Testimony against SB 2089, submitted to the Texas Senate Education Committee, March 29, 2023

Chairman Creighton and Members:

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of over 30 organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. We advocate at the local, state and national levels for high-quality teaching, curriculum and instructional practices and bilingual education for emergent bilingual students as well as fair funding and enhanced college access and success.

TLEEC opposes SB 2089 because it furthers classroom censorship through state-approved instructional materials. Students' education should include comprehensive and accurate accounts of history, current events, evidence-based research and diverse perspectives in texts.

However, SB 2089 imposes limits on the instructional materials that the state should adopt by requiring materials to reflect "positive aspects" of U.S. history (Section 1 (b)(1)(F)) and treating "all groups fairly" (Section 1 (b)(1)(H)) in historical accounts. Since the passage of last session's censorship legislation, HB 3979 (87R) and SB 3 (87, 2), school districts have debated what these vague terms mean. For instance, in Southlake's Carroll ISD, there was initial guidance from the district that the Holocaust be taught "from both sides" (Hixenbaugh & Hylton, 2021).

Under SB 2089, a Texas public school textbook could be rejected for saying: "There is no 'both sides' to the Civil War. The American South won because the Confederacy lost, and since then as the United States, we have grown more equal and inclusive through the hard-fought struggle of the long Civil Rights Movement." While there may not be a socially acceptable "contrasting view" to that statement, there are many people who reject the idea and would, if they could, reject its teaching in public schools. Texans, however, do not have that short of a memory. We know the Confederacy lost, and it only took 100 years to fully – well mostly – desegregate public schools.

Too solid to be unmarked and too conspicuous to be candid, the history of Texas will not be contained by statutory attempts to silence the past. Dictating what Texas public school students can or cannot learn about our past – ugliness and all -- from textbooks or instructional materials will not erase those events from our history. SB 2089, should it become law, will drive more educators from the schools and students they love because it further diminishes their autonomy as educators. Worse still, it will underprepare millions of young Texans for the complicated, often ugly world in which they live. Textbooks and instructional materials should meet the evolving educational needs of students by teaching ugly parts of our history and

the topics that make us uncomfortable, not evading them. Only then can we, as a state, outgrow the traumas of our shared history.

Recommendation

To avoid furthering classroom censorship, TLEEC recommends this body oppose SB 2089, and support measures that advance rigorous educational opportunities, such as ethnic studies, dual credit and Advanced Placement courses, and accurate and comprehensive instructional materials.

Resources

- Latham Sikes, C. (July 26, 2023). Recent State Policy on Curriculum Leads to Classroom Censorship in Schools, interim testimony presented to Texas House Public Education Committee. <https://idra.news/TestimonyInterimSB3>
- Hixenbaugh, M., & Hylton, A. (October 15, 2021). "Southlake school leader tells teachers to balance Holocaust books with 'opposing' views." NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/southlake-texas-holocaust-books-schools-rcna2965>
- Trouillot, M.R. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon.

For questions, please contact TLEEC either through Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes at IDRA (chloe.sikes@idra.org), or Jaime Puente at Every Texan (puente@everytexan.org).

The Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC) is a collaborative of organizations and individuals with the mission to improve the quality of public education for all children, with a focus on racial equity. The coalition convenes organizations and individuals who advocate in the interest of public school students at the local, state and national levels.

TLEEC Member Organizations

- | | |
|--|--|
| ARISE Adelante | National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS) |
| Austin Justice Coalition | – Tejas Foco |
| Breakthrough Central Texas | San Antonio Hispanic Chamber of Commerce |
| Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) | Texas American Federation of Teachers |
| Children at Risk | Texas Association for Bilingual Education (TABE) |
| Dr. Hector P. García G.I. Forum | Texas Association for Chicanos in Higher Education (TACHE) |
| Easterseals Central Texas | Texas Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (TADOHE) |
| Educators in Solidarity | Texas Association of Mexican American Chambers of Commerce (TAMACC) |
| Ethnic Studies Network of Texas (ESNTX) | Texas Center for Education Policy, University of Texas – Austin |
| Every Texan | Texas Hispanics Organized for Political Education (HOPE) |
| Houston Community Voices for Public Education | Texas League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) |
| IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) | Texas NAACP |
| Measure | The Arc of Texas |
| McNeil Educational Foundation for Ecumenical Leadership | The Education Trust in Texas |
| Mexican American Civil Rights Institute (MACRI) | UnidosUS (formerly known as NCLR) |
| Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) | |
| Mexican American School Boards Association (MASBA) | |