



# Censored Restrictions on Instructional Materials Lead to Classroom Censorship, Discrimination and Compromise Students' Education

IDRA Testimony against HB 1804, submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas House Public Education Committee, April 20, 2023

Dear Chair Buckley and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., and I am the deputy director of policy at IDRA, an independent, non-partisan 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.

IDRA opposes HB 1804 for several key reasons:

1. The bill contains vague language that **opens the door for additional harmful classroom censorship**;
2. The bill contains **discriminatory “don’t say gay” language** that restricts materials related to sexuality and gender identity, which would extend to LGBTQ+ themes, characters, historical figures and other content in the materials; and
3. The bill restricts how historical events can be conveyed in materials, which **compromises the accuracy and quality of these materials** for students.

## Vague Language Leads to More Censorship

Students should be encouraged, challenged and supported in their learning by high quality instructional materials that engage them. Yet, this bill contains confusing language that does not qualify what is “blatantly offensive,” what constitutes “bias” or “positive aspects” of the United States, and what would be considered “age-appropriate” in the sweeping ban against “sexual orientation, gender identity or sexual activity.”

## Discrimination Against Sex and Gender Hurts Students

One group of Texas students shared in their letter to the Texas Attorney General that censoring conversations about racial justice, gender inclusivity and discrimination makes them feel less safe in schools. Classroom censorship silenced important conversations and channels of communication regarding discrimination that occurred in schools. In a letter with over 100 student accounts of school discrimination, students reported feeling unable to report those incidents to school personnel or believed that nothing would be done to remedy discrimination if they did share their experiences (TEACH Coalition, 2021).

## **Censored Materials Compromise Students' Education**

HB 1804 bans materials that “condone civil unrest or willful disregard for law” except for nonviolent historical events. This is vague, as presenting truthful, accurate and comprehensive information could be misinterpreted as “condoning.” This could easily lead to the adoption of materials that avoid topics of civil unrest and disregard of law altogether, such as Turner’s slave rebellion, the Watts uprising of 1965, the LA Rebellion or Rodney King riots of 1992, the Capitol Insurrection on January 6, 2021, and many other examples for a range of social and political reasons that nevertheless, are part of both our long-past and tragically recent history.

A weakened curriculum hurts students’ quality education and ability to become engaged citizens. Past censorship policies have already contributed to canceling advanced-level courses, constitutional rights violations, and censored conversations in classrooms where students specifically ask to learn about what is happening in the world and in Texas. For Black, Latino and LGBTQ+ students, censored instructional materials also deprive students of the opportunity to access ideas, stories and histories that reflect their identities and of expressing their experiences with discrimination.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact [chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org).

## **Resources**

IDRA. (2022). Knowledge is Power, website. <https://www.idra.org/services/knowledge-is-power/>

IDRA. (April 7, 2022). Students Deserve Access to Books and Curricula that Reflect their Experiences – IDRA Statement on U.S. House Hearing “Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans & Academic Censorship.” *IDRA Knowledge is Power*. <https://idra.news/KnowledgeisPower14>

TEACH Coalition. (September 19, 2021). Letter to Attorney General Paxton Re: Request for Opinion No. RQ-0421-KP: Anti-Racism and Critical Race Theory Teachings. [https://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FINAL-AG-Letter\\_9\\_16.pdf](https://www.idra.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FINAL-AG-Letter_9_16.pdf)

*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 leading policy analyses and advocacy; dynamic teacher training and principal coaching; useful research, evaluation and frameworks for action; and innovative student, family and community engagement.*