

SHARE:

[Join Our Email List](#)



January 20, 2022

IDRA's Knowledge is Power is a national resource for educators and advocates to help you do your work for equity and excellence in education in the midst of classroom censorship policies.

In this edition...

- Organizing Against Classroom Censorship
- Families Must be Centered in Education Policymaking, Not Used as Puppets
- New Advocacy Guide: Lessons Learned from our Classroom Censorship Advocacy
- The Importance of Teaching All Truths (Lesson Plan Part 2)
- Building Supportive Schools from the Ground Up

See previous editions of [Knowledge is Power](#) and related resources online.



Organizing Against Classroom Censorship

By Michelle Castillo, Ed.M.

Schools have once again been reluctantly thrust into the political limelight by elected officials who chose to add fire to a burning building. Instead of supporting schools in keeping children and staff healthy and safe in the midst of the rise of COVID-19 or addressing the looming mental health crisis facing our students after two years of a pandemic, Texas elected leaders chose to score political points at the expense of Black, Brown, and LGBTIA+ students.

In Georgia, Texas and states across the country, we see a coordinated effort to censor teachers and young people and to ban books and instructional materials dealing with race, sexual orientation, and gender identity in schools and public libraries.

While we know that these efforts to censor the representation and lived experiences of our Black, Brown and LGBTIA+ students are not new, we stand ready to out-organize and out-

coordinate their efforts to undermine the quality of education for all of our children.

This is why I am excited to be joining the IDRA team as the new deputy director of advocacy. I will be leading efforts to envision a culturally-sustaining education that tells the truth, reckons with our historical wrongs, and centers and values the diverse experiences of all of our students.

Help us continue to engage in collective advocacy by sharing your experience!

IDRA is collecting information from educators on how school censorship legislation is affecting the classroom to inform our organizing strategy.



Survey questions include what guidance schools or educators have received in implementing legislation and what, if any materials or curriculum changes teachers and schools have had to make as a result of legislation.

If you or your classroom are experiencing particular harms from Texas' SB 3 or classroom censorship laws in other southern states and would like support or assistance in developing a response, please reach out directly to me **by email!**

Finally, make sure you're part of our community engagement and advocacy [listserv](#) to ensure you don't miss out on receiving all of IDRA's resources and materials. And tell your friends!

Fill out our educator survey



Families Must be Centered in Education Policymaking, Not Used as Puppets

IDRA Statement

All families must be part of building excellent and equitable schools regardless of their racial or ethnic background or socio-economic status. Unfortunately, many schools have not prioritized or invested in developing authentic relationships with families, particularly those of color, those with limited incomes, and immigrant families.

The expertise and experiences of these families is invaluable to building a strong and supportive school community, and it is critical for district and school leaders to ensure their voices are represented regardless of their access to financial means or political influence.

Some groups are now dividing and intentionally pitting families against schools and against each other with the goal of passing legislation that whitewashes and simplifies our history. These groups, who purport to represent values such as "equality" and "transparency" are feeding some families inaccurate information about their schools and encouraging them to make harmful demands and violent interventions in school policymaking to advance policies that actually widen inequalities and exclusion. They are pushing their economic, social, and political agendas under the name of "parent engagement."

This is dangerous.

For students to feel a connection and affinity for this country they must be taught to grapple with its painful history, see the beauty and value in the diversity of its people, and recognize all the work there is still left to do to make our democracy better. Students, their families, and their communities benefit from schools that provide truthful and culturally-sustaining curricula.

IDRA's principles for [family leadership in education](#) provide a roadmap for implementing a truly inclusive vision of family engagement in schools that centers traditionally marginalized families and focuses on building more just, culturally-sustaining schools for all students. We encourage schools and policymakers to use these principles in crafting responses to misinformation and to proactively develop opportunities for meaningful and productive engagement with all families.



New Advocacy Guide: Lessons Learned from our Classroom Censorship Advocacy

IDRA's research, training and policy advocacy work centers the principle that all students should be able to attend excellent, culturally-sustaining schools. When some policymakers began pushing so-called "anti-critical race theory" policies that promoted whitewashing history to deny the role racism and other forms of discrimination play in our society, we immediately recognized the threat to our efforts and to the work so many students, families and advocates have done.

We actively opposed classroom censorship policies, including leading a large coalition in Texas, participating in national strategy meetings, and working with partners to oppose bills filed in Georgia.

As our fellow advocacy organizations continue to fight against classroom censorship in their states and communities, our hope is that the lessons we learned and tools we used in our advocacy can help support others' inclusive, community-centered work.

Please check out our new [Advocacy Guide: Six Advocacy Lessons Learned from Fighting Against Classroom Censorship Policies](#).

For more information about IDRA's policy, advocacy, and community engagement work, please email [Morgan Craven, J.D.](#), and encourage your friends to [sign up for our advocacy network](#).



[See Advocacy Guide \(PDF\)](#)



The Importance of Teaching All Truths (Lesson Plan Part 2)

By Hector Bojorquez

In [a previous Knowledge is Power edition](#), I discussed the necessity of teaching all truths about the most important historical figures in our past. We explored truths behind one of our country's most seminal thinkers and defining leaders: Thomas Jefferson.

We examined the fact that Jefferson was adamant about the separation of church and state and that among his rationales that he believed in the powers of reason over superstitious religious ideas, like miracles. This truth can make many of our students and their families uncomfortable. After all, how could one of the founders of this country have such little respect for religion? How can this truth be discussed in our classroom?

Some classroom censorship laws indicate that teachers should use “primary documents with students when teaching about U.S. founding documents,” as Texas’ law states. Let’s explore a lesson plan or classroom activity using primary and secondary sources that can help us teach these issues. (I will use the Texas standards for this example for simplicity.)

Teaching with Primary and Secondary Sources

Teaching with primary and secondary sources is the 6-8 Social TEKS in Texas because it helps students establish the difference between an article or artifact around a historical event or issue and texts that were written to report on, summarize or interpret an event. It also helps students understand the difference between evidence, historical accuracy and historical interpretations and propaganda.

A sample lesson in this skill could be taught in the high school course, “United States Government.” The correlated TEKS are Chapter 13, Subchapter C, Rule §113.44 (a)(b)(1),(2) and (a)(c)(1)(B).

- **113.44 (a)(b)(1,2)** Support the teaching of the essential knowledge and skills, the use of a variety of rich primary and secondary source material such as the complete text of the U.S. Constitution, selected Federalist Papers, landmark cases of the U.S. Supreme Court (such as those studied in Grade 8 and U.S. History Since 1877), biographies, autobiographies, memoirs, speeches, letters, and periodicals that feature analyses of political issues and events is encouraged.
- **113.44 (a)(c)(1)(B)** Identify major intellectual, philosophical, political, and religious traditions that informed the American founding, including Judeo-Christian (especially biblical law), English common law and constitutionalism, Enlightenment, and republicanism, as they address issues of liberty, rights, and responsibilities of individuals.

Lesson Guiding Context

Thomas Jefferson was an intellectual man of his time who believed that all natural mysteries could be explained by ever-growing scientific discoveries. He did not believe in miracles or in supernatural explanations. However, he was a great believer in the moral lessons found in the New Testament of the Christian Bible. Because of this tension, he “edited” the New Testament and removed mentions of any supernatural events, such as resurrection and miracles.

Secondary Resource Activity

1. Have students find information about his religious opinions using the **secondary resources** on the [Monticello website](#). These can be articles, websites and documents. The Monticello website is the portal to online information about Thomas Jefferson’s 5,000-acre plantation and a resource concerning Jefferson’s life and times.

Students will:

- Use the search engine within the Monticello website, or
- Use a Google site search feature by typing the following into the search box: site: [Monticello website](#). “Jefferson Bible” (see [more information on this tip](#).)
- Write a brief summary of what they find.

2. Remind students that a primary resource refers to the actual texts, objects or artifacts themselves. This is where you can explain about the usefulness of the primary resources to present facts.

Primary Resource Activity

1. Ask students to find the “Jefferson Bible” in the [National Museum of American History’s website](#) and the [Smithsonian website](#). The National Museum of American History’s website contains digital versions of primary resources that students can view.

Students will

- Use the search engine within the American museum website.
- Use the search engine within the Smithsonian website.
- Write a brief summary of what they find.

Reflection

Ask students to answer these journal prompts over a three-day period

- Why is it important to know what Thomas Jefferson thought about religion?
- How did Thomas Jefferson’s views on religion influence the constitution?
- Why did people from his time think that religion and state (government, etc.) should be separated?

This activity helps students have confidence in understanding the truth and evidence behind issues that some may find uncomfortable. Any truth and all knowledge is simply unassailable when we find the primary resource, the proof itself behind our history.



Building Supportive Schools from the Ground Up

IDRA's report highlights how school districts can use federal funds to invest in strategies that ensure culturally-sustaining schools for all students. The strategies were identified during IDRA's community sessions with young people, families, advocates and other education experts.

[See Report PDF](#)



IDRA is an independent, non-profit organization whose mission is to achieve equal educational opportunity through strong public schools that prepare all students to access and succeed in college.

[Reach Out To Us](#)

