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March 17, 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…

- Students Speak Out Against Classroom Censorship
- "Equity" is Not Racism
- IDRA Launches 'Southern Education Equity Network' to Support Family & Community Advocates
- Books Empower Us to Radically Hope
- Advocacy Tools

See previous editions of **Knowledge is Power** and related resources online.

Easy Form: How is classroom censorship affecting you?

Students Speak Out Against Classroom Censorship

by Terrence Wilson, J.D.

Over the last two years, policymakers across the South have rushed to limit the information that students can learn via classroom censorship bills. Students have met these proposals by showing up and speaking out to let these leaders know that more knowledge and access to diverse curricula is what they want. The Georgia Youth Justice Coalition, one of IDRA's SEEN partners, has been a leader of these efforts in Georgia and we would like to highlight some of their recent writings, quotes, and articles written about them below.

- **Georgia Student: Kemp, legislators seek to silence diverse voices**, by Aminah Muhammad, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 4, 2022
- **For Diversity in School Boards: Georgia Students Lead the Fight,** by Esther Schrader, Southern Poverty Law Center, February 25, 2022
- **Georgia Student: GOP bills tell me "You're just not American enough,"** by Adunni Noibi, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 9, 2022
- **Georgia students are affecting change at the state Capitol,** by Martha Dalton, WABE, March 10, 2022
- **Students Protest Book Bans Over Content on LGBTQ Issues, Race**, by Mary Retta, Teen Vogue, March 8, 2022

We encourage all advocates to connect with students and support their leadership in the effort to beat back classroom censorship.

Rally for Students' Rights & Black History

Wednesday, students led a march and rally at the Georgia Capitol to stand up for their rights and the teaching of accurate Black history. Students and partners from the Georgia Coalition Against Classroom Censorship attended to support the march. The demonstration was led by the Georgia Youth Justice Coalition, the People's Uprising, Atlanta Student Movement, and many others. Students and teachers spoke out against the latest classroom censorship laws, anti-trans legislation, and voting rights.

March for Education on the Texas Capitol

On Saturday, students working through Voters of Tomorrow held a rally about their concerns over book bans, censorship laws and learning our true history. Students also distributed free "banned" books. IDRA's Michelle Castillo, Ed.M., spoke at the rally on the capitol steps. See the **video and text of her speech online** or scroll below. **See one of the news stories about the march by Jamal Andress of Newsy.**

“Equity” is Not Racism

by Paula Johnson, Ph.D.

The current classroom censorship debate is taking place in the larger context that is resistant to seeing the existence of systemic racism. We have even seen the word equity on lists of so-called racist terms. The truth is precisely the opposite. Educational equity ensures equally high outcomes for all students, interrupts inequitable practices and supports all students in developing their full academic and social potential. To achieve educational equity, we must examine practices at the district, school and classroom levels to identify inequities that disproportionately impact particular student groups.

Truth: Equity is not exclusionary to certain groups

Targeted interventions are necessary to achieve educational equity. There is a smoke-and-mirrors initiative swelling in education. Politicians continue to introduce new legislation across the county in an effort to convince the masses that any focus on the needs of one student group leads to the exclusion of other groups and is therefore racist in nature. Those who rally against the goals of educational equity seek to weaponize the purpose of those who are fighting for educational justice. In order to fulfill the needs of all students, we must identify and meet the needs of student groups who are negatively impacted the most.

Truth: Race-based equity initiatives do not give Black and Latino students an unfair advantage over other their peers

Black and Latino students are more underrepresented than any other student groups in advanced placement, gifted and talented, and dual credit course enrollment. At the same time, they are disproportionately overrepresented in disciplinary actions, dropout rates and special education placement. Furthermore, emergent bilingual students of color may face far more academic challenges due to the lack of campus supports.

Truth: “Equity” and “equality” are not the same thing

Educational equity means that all students’ needs are sought out and addressed to promote a positive and successful school experience inclusive of race, ethnicity, religion and gender. In

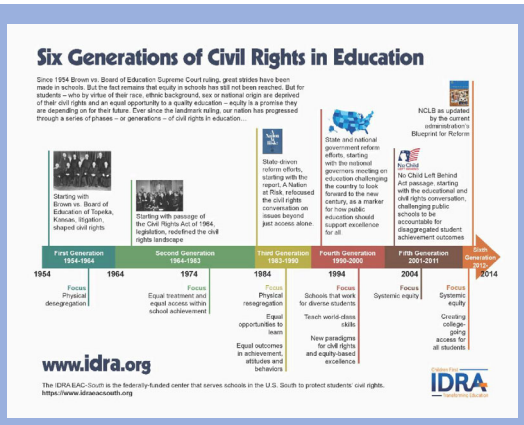
contrast, equality aims to provide everyone with the same support. Systemic equity, unlike equality, aims to promote social justice through sustainable resources, support, partnerships and community engagement where all people are able to achieve their full potential in school and in life.

Ultimate Truth

There are no excuses for racism. It isn't tied to one particular group of people. Racism can take many forms and happen anywhere, individually and collectively. Ibrahim X. Kendi provides this **definition**: "Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities."

Educational equity disrupts and eradicates all practices, policies and ideas that do not affirmatively and continually support all students and ensure inclusive and fair treatment for all.

See IDRA's Six Goals of Educational Equity



See our timeline: Sixth Generation of Civil Rights and Educational Equity

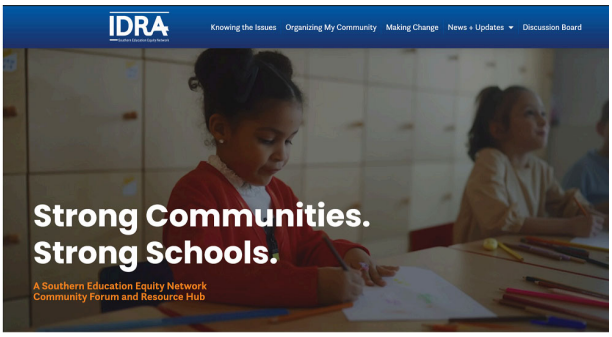
IDRA Launches 'Southern Education Equity Network' to Support Family & Community Advocates

by Paula Johnson, Ph.D.

SEEN's New Virtual Tool Will Help Students, Families and Educators Stand Up for Accurate and Inclusive Education

As small but loud factions attack public education, students and families across the U.S. South are pushing back. IDRA's new Southern Education Equity Network (SEEN) trains and assists communities in improving education policy and practice across the South and provides an **online and mobile space** for community members and coalitions to coordinate their advocacy.

"It is more important than ever that we stand united and help one another stand up for our students' futures," said Terrence Wilson, J.D, IDRA's regional policy and community engagement director based in Atlanta. "We are excited to elevate IDRA's community-centered advocacy across the South, ensuring that underserved students and families are seen and heard and have an opportunity to participate in the policymaking process that impacts them."



Community advocates are working together to expand culturally-sustaining teaching that accurately portrays the contributions of all communities. They oppose classroom censorship and book banning, want to eliminate discipline and policing practices that adversely impact students of color, and want to confront systemic racism in education policy. SEEN partners in Georgia and Texas include **Deep Center, Excellence & Advancement Foundation, Georgia Educators for Equity and Justice, Georgia Youth Justice Coalition,** and **South Fulton Arrow Youth Council.**

SEEN builds on the intergenerational community-building IDRA has led for years to secure education opportunities for all students. The network also supports the work of **IDRA's Education CAFEs** (Community Action Forums for Excellence) as they expand across the U.S. South. An Education CAFE is a family-led group, rooted in a community-based organization rather than on a single campus, focused on collaborating with schools to improve the success of students in the community.

The dynamic SEEN site features facts about key issues, news alerts and a forum to help communities stay connected and share lessons learned while organizing for excellent and equitable schools. It also provides tools for advocacy skill-building, such as learning how to testify before a legislative committee.

The Southern Education Equity Network is generously supported by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.

Visit the SEEN website and join a group!

Books Empower Us to Radically Hope

by Michelle Castillo, Ed.M.

Remarks at the March for Education on the Texas Capitol, Austin, March 12, 2022

My name is Michelle Castillo and I am the deputy director of advocacy for IDRA. We are a nonprofit organization that has for almost 50 years now advocated for an excellent public school system that values all children.

Together with the student organizers of today, we are in partnership with organizations leading the effort to protect public schools from school censorship. You can **follow us on Twitter at @IDRAedu** to receive action alerts on how to stay engaged.

I am here today not only as an organizer and advocate but also as a mother of a one-and-a-half-year-old, born into a world that feels like it's falling apart.

Born in a state that will target and terrify the parents of transchildren for simply loving and validating their babies for the blessing they are, instead of targeting poverty or the child abuse in our foster care system.

At a time when the children of our state, of our country, of our world face seemingly insurmountable challenges: the existential threat of climate change, unending racial and gender violence, and unnecessary world hunger; a book is not only a friend, but a lifeline.

It's why one of authoritarian government's first moves is to ban books – to make us feel small, isolated, and hopeless.

A book is a reminder that though we may be living through bleak times, we are not alone.

A book is a liberation manual for how our ancestors overcame the existential threats of their times.

A book is both a keeper of the resilience of the human spirit and ignitor of the flame for radical hope.

I'll never forget the first book that challenged and transformed me. I was in the 4th grade and our take-home book was "Number the Stars" by Lois Lowry.

The book, set during World War II follows Annemarie, a ten-year-old girl, living in Nazi-occupied Denmark with her best friend, Ellen, who is Jewish. Even as a 10-year-old girl, Annemarie draws courage from her family to confront the evils of discrimination, oppression, and genocide.

Through Annemarie, 10-year-olds everywhere - but particularly young girls – understand that children have the power to create a world where "young and old can create an ideal of human decency, and not a narrow-minded and prejudiced one."

As a little Latina born and raised in our overpoliced border, this knowledge about children overcoming injustice was empowering. I could be like Annemarie and her family -- I could do something about injustice.

And that's why we're here today, because state leaders want to ban the books that empower *you* with the tools to do something about injustice.

State leaders want to ban books that affirm children – from the child asking questions about why racism exists to the child asking questions about gender or sexuality.

But we're not going to let them! You're already *not* letting them.

Young people, you are part of a long lineage of changemakers.

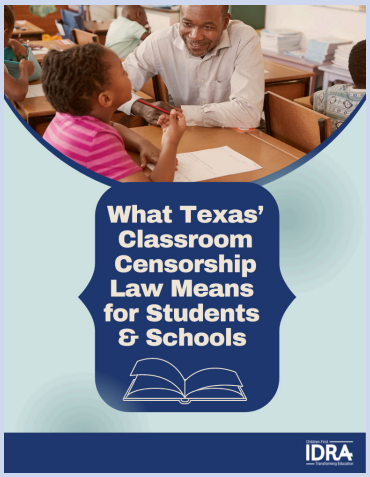
Young people across history have held up a mirror to our country to help reveal its flaws. But young people have also demanded, and done, the necessary work to see it live up to its founding ideals of equality and justice for all.

From the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s organizing freedom schools, to the East Los Angeles student walkouts that launched the Chicano movement, and the youth today who are part of Black Lives Matter, United We Dream, climate justice organizers, and the student gun-reform movement organizers, there is a powerful lineage of youth activism that has shaped our country for the better.

And that's why we're all here. Because we are with you in organizing for a country, for a state, where success is not determined by the zip code you grew up in, where ideas in classrooms are celebrated and not censored, where all children are valued, and where public education delivers on the promise of a more perfect Union.

Today is not the beginning, nor is it the end of our struggle. Young people – we are with you in your fight for the #FReadom to read.

Advocacy Tools



Guide to Texas Classroom Censorship Bill

IDRA's detailed guide of the Texas law (Senate Bill 3) contains analysis and our interpretation for how components of the law affect teachers and school personnel and what this means for continuing to teach the truth in schools. Educators should still consult with their district administration for local policies and procedures related to instruction, curriculum and school activities.

See Texas SB 3 School Guide

Lessons Learned from our Classroom Censorship Advocacy

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.

See Advocacy Guide (PDF)

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

Children First IDRA Transforming Education

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