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May 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...

- Censorship Policies Undermine Excellent and Equitable Public Schools
- Texas State Board of Education Considers Social Studies Standards
- Advocacy Tools

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



Censorship Policies Undermine Excellent and Equitable Public Schools

by Paige Duggins-Clay, J.D.

U.S. House Hearing Examines Political Attacks on Free Speech and Classroom Censorship

Yesterday, the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform's subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held a [hearing](#) to examine political attacks on free speech and classroom censorship. The hearing built on the testimony and evidence [submitted earlier this year](#) on book bans and academic censorship, shining a light on the negative impact of these harmful policies on our youth.

As Chairman Jamie Raskin observed, the recent political efforts to censor expression in schools serve as a "nationwide assault on the rights of teachers and students to engage in free speech and historical accuracy." Critically, Raskin demonstrated that censorship policies promote "sinister distrust" in public education and are part of the broader strategy to dismantle public education and push privatization policies.

The hearing further underscored the [danger](#) of limiting students' and educators' ability to engage freely in learning and dialogue about history and current events. "No student or educator should feel targeted because of any aspect of their identity, including their race, ethnicity, gender, religion, or gender identity," said IDRA President and CEO Celina Moreno, J.D. "Federal and state actors and schools must protect students, not create or implement policies that compromise their safety, attempt to erase or censor their experiences and perspectives, or make it difficult for them to learn and succeed in the classroom."

A panel of three high school students shared firsthand how the political attacks on students, educators and public schools detract from healthy school environments. "Education matters more than politics," said [Elle Caldon](#), a Texas high school student, who expressed concern that some state and school leaders were focusing on politicizing identities and backgrounds instead of working on critical issues such as widespread teacher shortages, addressing learning loss due to the pandemic, and the youth mental health crisis.

Other panelists spoke about the harmful impacts of censorship policies on their own students and children. "Safe public schools are a national security and moral necessity," [Kentucky teacher of the year William Carver](#) said, urging educators, parents and policymakers to continue fighting for "kids to feel human, feel safe, feel hope."

Historian Timothy Snyder warned that authoritarian efforts to limit free speech and demonize systemically-marginalized children and communities threaten our democracy. "Authoritarians know that to master the present and the future, they first have to master the past," Snyder said. "When we shrink the past with censorship, fear and intimidation, we also shrink the possibilities for discussions in the present... It's discussions about the past that let us understand and self-correct our mistakes. That's what democracy is all about."

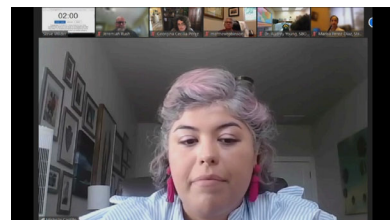
Frequently and misleadingly referred to as "parental rights" laws, censorship policies such as book bans and prohibitions on discussing or teaching so-called "divisive" concepts have no legitimate pedagogical objective and instead undermine effective inclusive instruction. Although the voices pushing these harmful policies and narratives do not represent the [views of the vast majority of parents](#), anti-public education politicians are [attempting to use parents](#) and children as political pawns to stoke fear and resentment to support anti-equity policies such as education savings accounts and vouchers. As censorship laws continue to be adopted and implemented across the nation (and particularly across the South), advocates, educators and community members [must continue to speak out](#) against their harmful and discriminatory impacts.

To learn more about IDRA's policy, advocacy, and community engagement work combatting censorship efforts, watch for upcoming issues of [Knowledge is Power](#). And encourage your friends to sign up for our national resource for educators and advocates working to promote equity and excellence in education.



Texas State Board of Education Considers Social Studies Standards

The Texas State Board of Education heard public testimony this week about the proposed [framework for kindergarten through eighth-grade social studies](#) standards (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, TEKS). The board expects to adopt revised social studies standards in November and will hold additional hearings with public testimony before then.



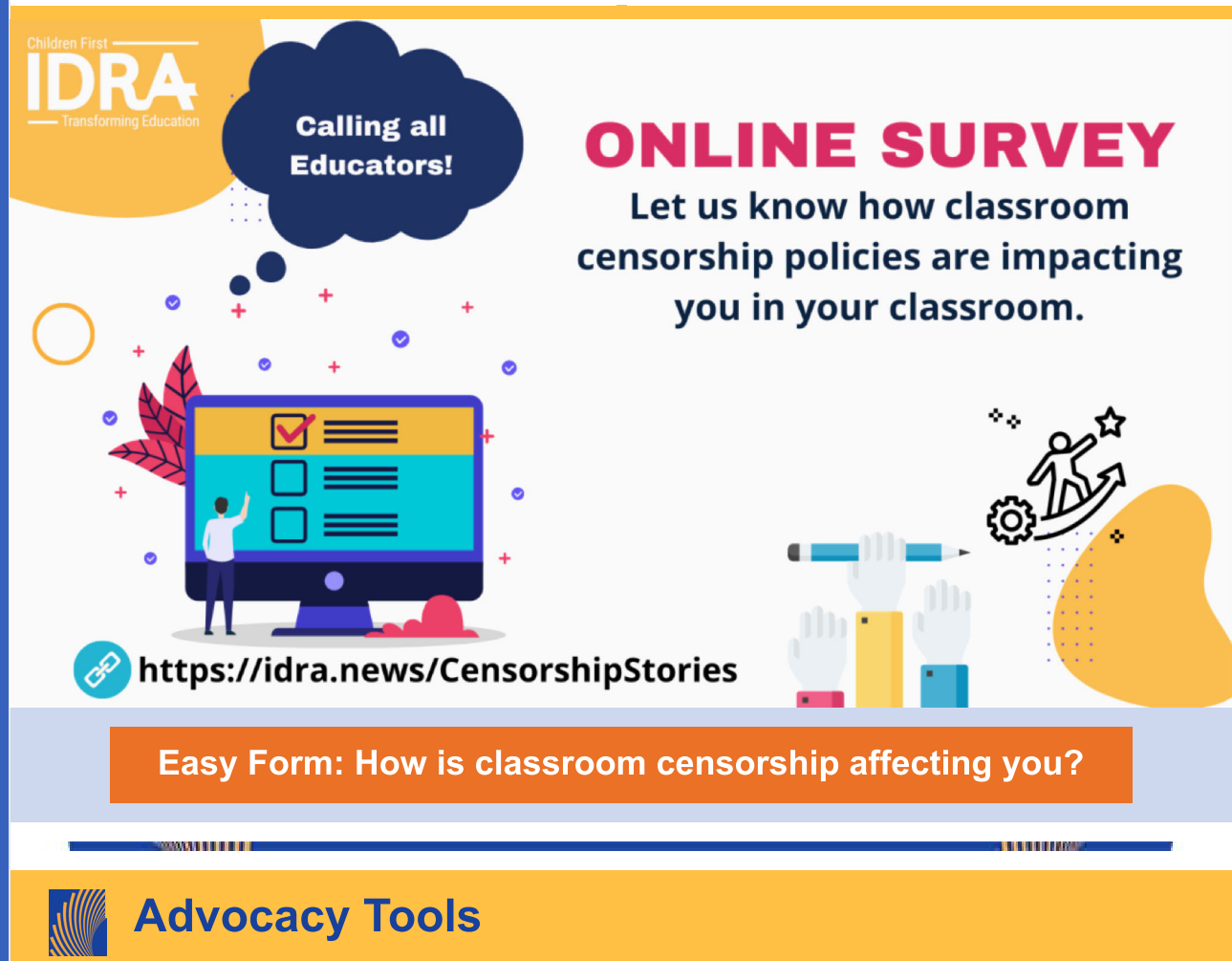
This is the first review of social studies curriculum standards following passage of classroom censorship legislation in Texas.

IDRA Deputy Director of Advocacy, Michelle Castillo, Ed.M., presented testimony urging the board to add historical figures who are Black, Latino, Indigenous and women to the revised TEKS, including those named in the stricken sections of House Bill 3979 when it was replaced by the current law, Senate Bill 3.

Castillo stated: "Earlier this year we surveyed educators. Teachers reported increased barriers to planning lessons that are meaningful to their students, and programs that offer student leadership and civic engagement opportunities to K-12 students have been canceled."

Read her testimony: [Texas Social Studies Curriculum Should Include Black, Latino, Indigenous and Women's History.](#)

See a [list of the historical figures included in HB 3979](#) that is no longer current law.



The graphic is a promotional poster for an online survey by IDRA. It features a yellow header with the IDRA logo (Children First, IDRA, Transforming Education) and a dark blue cloud containing the text "Calling all Educators!". The main text reads "ONLINE SURVEY" in large pink letters, followed by "Let us know how classroom censorship policies are impacting you in your classroom." in dark blue. Below this, there is an illustration of a person at a computer screen showing a survey form, surrounded by various icons like a pencil, a hand, a gear, and a star. The URL <https://idra.news/CensorshipStories> is displayed in a blue circle. At the bottom, an orange banner contains the text "Easy Form: How is classroom censorship affecting you?". The footer is a yellow bar with the text "Advocacy Tools" and a small IDRA logo.

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Calling all Educators!

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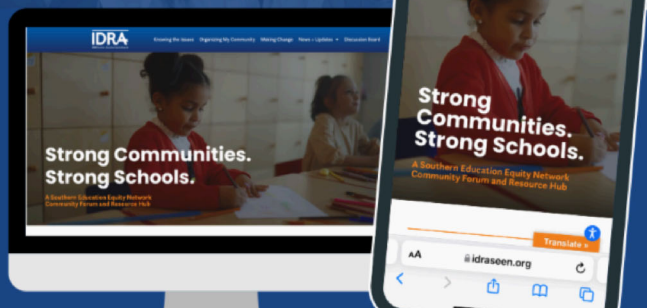
Advocacy Tools

IDRA Southern Education Equity Network

A community forum and resource hub for advocates of strong inclusive public education

- ✓ Get advocacy how-to tools
- ✓ Share policy & action updates
- ✓ Plan actions with your group

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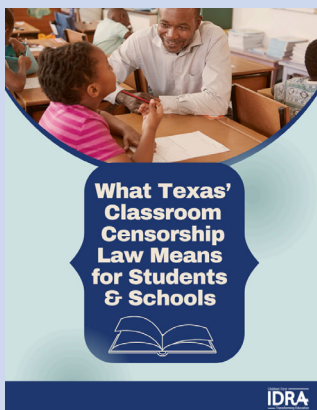


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Guide to Texas Classroom Censorship Bill

IDRA's detailed guide of the Texas law (Senate Bill 3) contains our analysis and 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](#)

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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.

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