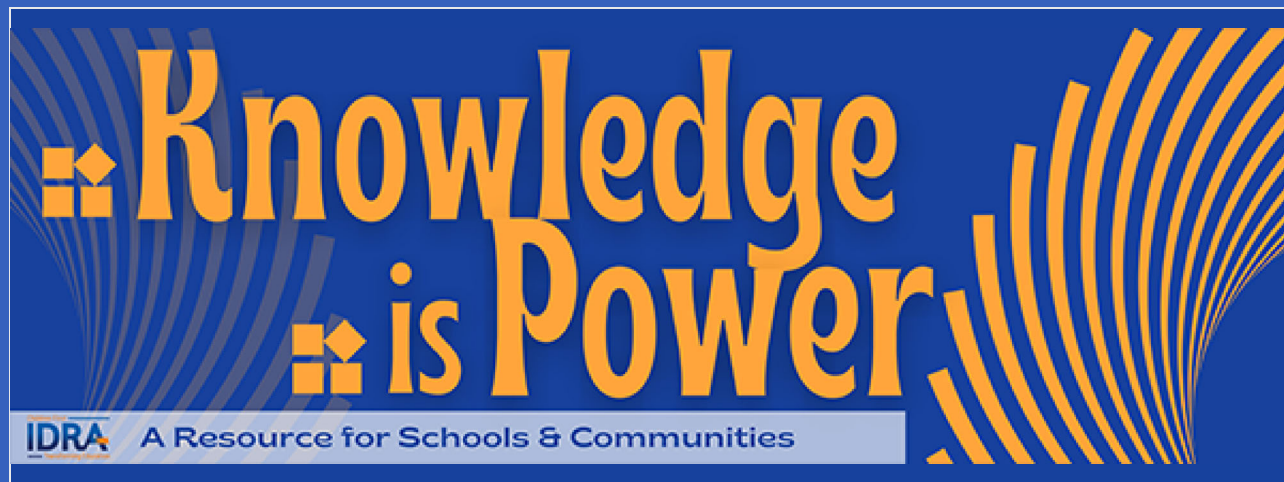


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November 18, 2021

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...

- Show Us Your... Books? The Latest Texas Efforts to Censor Classrooms
- Health Textbooks Should Acknowledge Importance of Gender Identity and Sexuality
- IDRA Extends Education Policy Fellow Program to Georgia
- Teacher Survey about Classroom Censorship

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



## Show Us Your... Books? The Latest Texas Efforts to Censor Classrooms

*By Dr. Chloe Latham Sikes*

The Texas censorship bills have been hot in the news even though the latest one does not technically go into effect until December 2. With still no state guidance on how school districts and teachers should implement HB 3979 or the latest SB 3, state lawmakers continue to try to censor classrooms through mandated book inquiries and calls for criminal investigations into so-called pornographic material in schools. Some school districts have instituted book bans on specific titles in this fervor to censor material that references race, gender or sexuality even in the slightest terms.

### Book Bans and Inquiries

Several Texas school districts have made news for instituting bans on specific titles on their campuses. Southlake's Carroll ISD may be most notable after administrators [mandated teacher training](#) on how to assess books for allegedly inappropriate content through a specific rubric issued by the district.

A few weeks later, Texas Rep. Matt Krause, chairman of the General Investigations Committee, indirectly [requested that select school districts and the Texas Education Agency report](#) on the presence and cost of almost 850 books on their campuses. Media outlets that analyzed the list reported on it largely targeting LGBTQ authors and texts, as well as books on race and racism ([Richmand & Smith](#), 2021; [Ellis](#), 2021; [Waller](#), 2021).

IDRA's analysis of 150 sample titles from the list found that over 75% feature some topic of gender identity, expression, or sex and sexuality. Twenty-three percent relate to race as well, either exclusively or intersectionally with gender and sexuality. And some titles deal largely with other themes, such as mental illness and relationships.

The books listed vary from renowned social research books like Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, to award-winning young adult books like *When Aiden Became a Brother* by Kyle Lukoff (2020 Stonewall Book Award), to historical accounts such as Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *And Still I Rise* and *The Indian Removal Act and the Trail of Tears* by Susan Hamen.

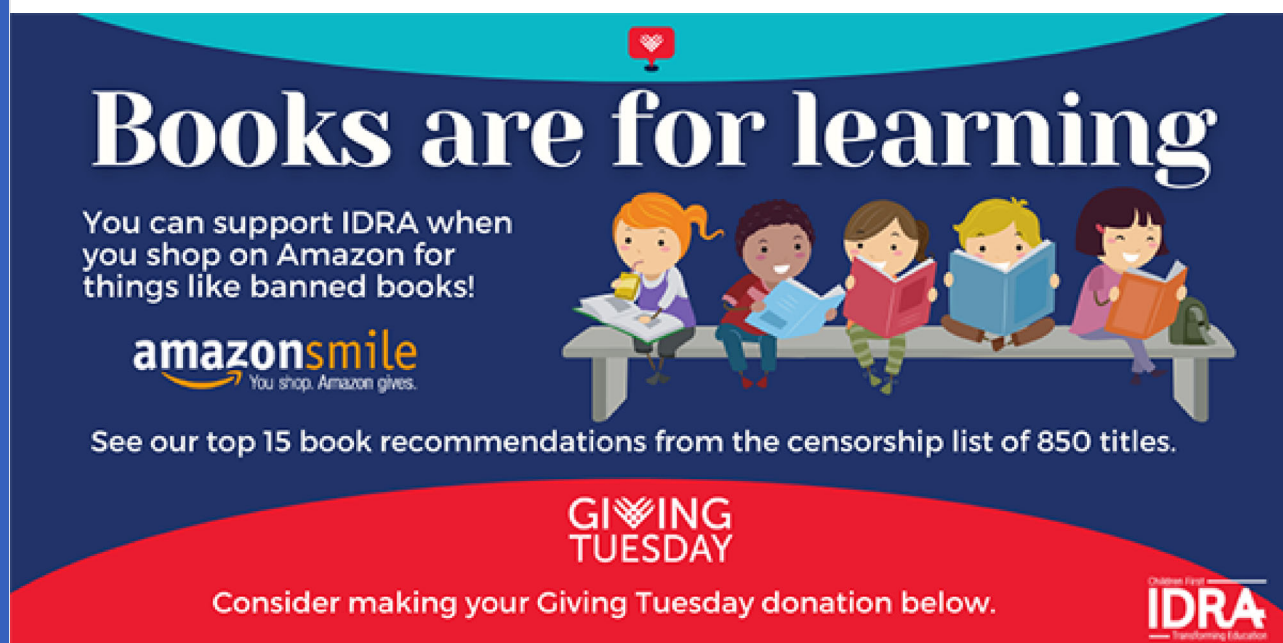
The list also includes some titles published in both English and Spanish, such as *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and its translated text, *Tres Con Tango*. The only thing the list does not discriminate by is genre as it includes fiction, non-fiction, poetry, historical and scientific texts alike.

## Calls to Investigate "Pornography" in Schools

Just last week, the Texas Governor [issued two letters](#) to state agencies to develop standards against and criminally investigate "pornography" in schools. [One letter](#) cites two books with [LGBTQ-related content](#), both memoirs, as purported evidence of pornography.

The letters demonstrate the urgency that state leaders feel to further censor classrooms by removing books that are highly relevant for LGBTQ students, Black students, Latino students and Indigenous students, and arguably for all students given the importance of race, gender and sexuality.

IDRA continues to monitor this legislation and any related state guidance or action and to advocate for teaching the truth in schools.



**Books are for learning**

You can support IDRA when you shop on Amazon for things like banned books!

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You shop. Amazon gives.

See our top 15 book recommendations from the censorship list of 850 titles.

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## Health Textbooks Should Acknowledge Importance of Gender Identity and Sexuality

This week, IDRA submitted testimony to the Texas State Board of Education urging the adoption of health curricula and textbooks that address the unique health needs of students who are gender non-binary, transgender and otherwise identify in the LGBTQ community.

Books and curricula about these students and their experiences are among the latest targets by the same policymakers who have pushed classroom censorship policies and encouraged a whitewashing of history and current events. They have labeled curricula that focus on students of color, LGBTQ students, and other systemically-marginalized students as "unpatriotic" and "pornographic."

This is a dangerous political tactic that threatens the wellbeing of students and compromises their access to culturally-sustaining schools. We reject efforts to demonize curricula that thoughtfully and appropriately reflect the experiences of all students and urge schools and education agencies to stock their shelves with materials that are true to the rich and diverse lives of our students.

[See IDRA's testimony to the Texas SBOE](#)



## IDRA Extends Education Policy Fellow Program to Georgia

IDRA launched its first [Education Policy Fellows Program](#) last year with four fellows who gained real-world advocacy experience and training during the 2021 Texas legislative session, because we know state policymakers can make stronger education policy decisions by working with advocates who are connected to impacted communities. The first cycle of the Texas fellowship ended in July.

Today, we are pleased to introduce our new fellow, Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed., who will focus on education policy in Georgia.

Students of color make up most of the Georgia public school population – about 63% – and Georgia grows more diverse each year. Yet, advocates of color often are rarely present in the rooms where decisions about the lives and opportunities for students of color are made.

IDRA's ground-breaking program seeks to change that picture during the next legislative session. Our Education Policy Fellow will work with coalitions, students and families to craft a community-centered education policy agenda and join a network of advocates and policy influencers focused on improving racial equity in education policymaking spaces.

The IDRA Education Policy Fellows Program is generously supported by the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation.



**Mikayla Arciaga, M.A.Ed.**  
IDRA Education Policy Fellow – Georgia Education Policy

Mikayla Arciaga, M.A. Ed., spent the last five years teaching high school math and coaching swimming at Title I schools in both Florida and Georgia. While still in the classroom, she worked with multiple school districts in a variety of roles focusing on community engagement, curriculum improvement, teacher development and policy analysis. During her summers, Mikayla collaborated with and led a team of policy fellows assisting school board members in metro Atlanta and across the country. She contributed to several projects including a line-item review of an \$800 million budget, an equity audit of almost 200 school board policies, and an analysis of both school and state-level per pupil expenditure data.

Throughout her work at the school district level, she recognized the need for high-quality accountability processes in the public school system, which motivated her to pursue a master’s degree in program evaluation in the educational environment from the University of Florida. Mikayla’s policy interests are centered around dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline, accessibility for students with disabilities and digital accessibility. Outside of education policy, her other great love has been to make swimming accessible to learners of all ages, backgrounds and abilities. As a swim coach, she has worked to create a space focusing on sportsmanship, community, and joy, bringing home the first city championship in school history.

## Teacher Survey about Classroom Censorship

Tell us how classroom censorship policies and proposals are affecting your school!

[Fill out our teacher survey](#)

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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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