



## District Censorship Requirements Threaten Students' Educational Opportunities

**IDRA Testimony against SB 12, Submitted by Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., to the Texas Senate Committee on Education K-16, February 27, 2025**

Dear Chair Creighton 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 Senate Bill 12 because it creates vague requirements for school districts to censor all district activities, programming, hiring, training and other in-school academic and student supports with respect to race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality. These restrictions threaten how well educators can educate and support students and how well students can access safe and welcoming learning environments.

All students should be welcomed and supported to learn and thrive in school. Research shows that students who have teachers who are well trained to understand and support their backgrounds are better able to learn (IDRA, 2025). And school leaders who support those teachers are critical to creating a strong school district (Feingold & Weishart, 2023).

This bill contains several provisions that threaten school leaders' ability to create safe and supportive schools. In particular, Sections 2, 20 and 23 establish vague and discriminatory requirements for school districts that potentially undermine how schools and educators can actually educate and support students.

Most Texas public school students are Latino, Black, other students of color and students who are from low-income households. One in four are students who speak a language other than English at home. Fourteen percent receive special education services (TEA, 2024). People tasked with what SB 12 outlines in Section 2 as "diversity, equity and inclusion duties" support all of these students and their families in navigating school services, academics and educational programs. Without them and with restrictions on how educators can support students (e.g., Section 20), these students can be pushed out, face discrimination without support to report or address it (TEACH Coalition, 2021) and experience fewer educational opportunities.

IDRA has worked with students, parents and teachers across Texas following the 2021 censorship laws (HB 3979 of 87R, SB 3 of 87, 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Session). Many reported fear, exclusion, diminished support from district leadership to engage students in learning or to redress bullying

or harassment based on students' backgrounds. Teachers reported hostile environments that pushed them out of the classroom. (Latham Sikes, 2022)

Section 23 of SB 12 is vague and confusing in requiring superintendents and school boards to certify their compliance with the proposed ban on diversity, equity and inclusion duties and prior classroom censorship law around race, gender and history in schools. It could likely exacerbate the existing chilling effect on teaching, learning and student supports (Feingold & Weishart, 2023; GAO, 2021).

## Recommendations

IDRA urges this committee to not advance SB 12, and instead to focus on legislation that supports school districts to create safe and supportive learning environments that recognize the backgrounds and needs of each child, thereby serving all children.

IDRA is available for any questions or further resources that we can provide. Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please contact Chloe Latham Sikes, Ph.D., IDRA deputy director of policy, at [chloe.sikes@idra.org](mailto:chloe.sikes@idra.org).

## Resources

Feingold, J., & Weishart, J. (November 2023). How Discriminatory Censorship Laws Imperil Public Education.

National Education Policy Center. <http://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/censorship>

GAO. (November 2021). K-12 Education: Students' Experiences with Bullying, Hate Speech, Hate Crimes, and Victimization in Schools. Report to the Chairman, Committee on Education and Labor, House of

Representatives. U.S. Government Accountability Office. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-104341.pdf>

IDRA. (2025). Texas Must Have Culturally-Sustaining Schools that Support All Students – IDRA 2025 Policy Digest for Texas. <https://idra.news/TxSchoolCultureDigest>

Latham Sikes, C. (July 26, 2022). Recent State Policy on Curriculum Leads to Classroom Censorship in Schools – Testimony on Texas 87<sup>th</sup> Legislature Interim Charges. IDRA. <https://idra.news/TestimonyInterimSB3>

TEA. (January 2024). 2023-24 Pocket Edition. Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and-multimedia/2024-pocket-edition.pdf>

TEACH Coalition. (September 14, 2021). Letter to Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, Re: Request for Opinion No. RQ-0421-KP: Anti-Racism and Critical Race Theory Teachings. IDRA. [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)

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