

TALKING ABOUT



Curriculum Censorship & Anti-LGBTQ School Bills



2024 EDITION

INTRODUCTION

This resource contains messaging to address two different far-right policies that can sometimes blur together—but which often have important distinctions:

- **Curriculum Censorship Bills.** Far-right politicians in many states have introduced and passed bills intended to censor teaching, curriculum, and books—in other words, educational content—discussing race, sexual orientation, and/or gender identity, among other topics. These bills typically lead with censoring teaching about, and banning books that discuss, race, though many of them also include bans on curriculum content regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. If a bill includes censorship of educational content discussing race, it's important to lead with that harm in your conversations.
- **Anti-LGBTQ Hostile School Climate Bills.** These bills—the most notable of which was passed in Florida and became known as the *Don't Say Gay* bill—focus more on what teachers and school personnel are and are not allowed to say to students when it comes to LGBTQ-related discussions. While these bills may ban LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum and lessons, their broader purpose is to ban school discussions—including in the context of student support—about sexual orientation, gender identity, and LGBTQ people and issues.

Some of these proposed bills may focus on one discriminatory agenda or the other, and some may focus on both. As a result, it's possible in some circumstances that your messaging may need to include content from both sets of talking points.

This resource also provides guidance for talking about the far right's growing cultural attacks on LGBTQ people and those who support them:

- **Anti-LGBTQ "Groomer" Attacks.** Amid their escalating assaults on schools, educators and LGBTQ students, the far right is increasingly using "groomer" as a slur to falsely smear those who oppose their efforts at curriculum censorship and their agenda to create a hostile school climate for LGBTQ students. While it may not always be helpful or necessary to engage with these smears, there are approaches for doing so that spotlight the falsehood of the attacks without playing into opponents' hands.

Note that this guidance is not intended to be used from start to finish. Few people will be able to use all these messages in a single discussion. Instead, draw from this guidance based on what feels appropriate in a particular conversation, bringing different elements together as needed.

Please consult with the Equality Federation for additional information about policy specifics and advocacy efforts in a particular state before speaking about them publicly.

TALKING ABOUT CURRICULUM CENSORSHIP

Censorship is at the core of these bills. After emphasizing shared values, show how the politicians behind these bills intend to *censor* curriculum, books, and teaching. Talking about how they intend to **ban** books and/or curriculum may also be helpful in explaining the far right's agenda.

1. *America is a country of freedom of speech and freedom of ideas. Those freedoms end when politicians start banning books and censoring curriculum simply because some people find them uncomfortable.*

What's next? Censoring teaching about slavery? Banning books about the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King? Skipping over the Holocaust because you can't teach it without acknowledging Nazism? Children deserve an honest and accurate education that enables them to learn from our past and help create a better future.

2. *When it comes to social studies and history, ask any two politicians what should be taught to students and you'll likely get two different answers. That's why we need to leave teaching to the schools.*

America's educators have the tough job of preparing children for the future and helping them build the critical thinking skills they need to succeed. Curriculum should be set by educators, not censored by partisan politicians with political agendas.

3. *A public-school education helps students prepare for their future by encouraging curiosity and critical thinking through math and science, art and music, history and literature. But now some politicians want to make it illegal to teach a whole range of social studies and history topics—and force schools to purge hundreds of books from their libraries. It sets a dangerous precedent when politicians simply start censoring school content and books they don't like.*

4. *Every parent hopes our laws will ensure our children's safety, protection, and freedom. But some politicians are rejecting those values and advancing legislation that would target LGBTQ kids for bullying and mistreatment just because of who they are.*

The politicians and groups behind these bills want to use our laws to control what students can and cannot read, what they can and cannot learn, and—most troublingly—who they can and cannot be. Our schools should protect all students—including LGBTQ students—so they can learn and thrive in a safe environment. This law would force schools to violate that most basic trust.

TALKING ABOUT ANTI-LGBTQ HOSTILE SCHOOL CLIMATE BILLS

Many recent state bills are intended to create a hostile school climate for LGBTQ students by banning discussions of LGBTQ people and families. When talking about these bills, start by emphasizing shared values around what every parent hopes and every student deserves, and then detail the harms that LGBTQ youth face when they are targeted for bullying and harassment by politicians who pass laws to erase LGBTQ youth and their families from our schools.

1. *Every parent hopes our laws will ensure our children's safety, protection, and freedom. But some politicians are rejecting those values and targeting LGBTQ kids for bullying and mistreatment, just because of who they are.*

Our schools should protect all students—including LGBTQ students—so they can learn and thrive in a safe environment. The politicians behind these attacks are trying to force schools to violate that most basic trust.

2. *LGBTQ students should have the same opportunities to learn and thrive as other students, but they often already struggle with bullying, harassment, and being told they don't belong. When politicians pass laws that say being LGBTQ is so shameful schools can't even discuss it, the emotional harm can be devastating. These attacks add to the isolation and fear that LGBTQ youth cope with as they struggle to accept and love who they are.*

3. *Our schools should protect all students—including LGBTQ students—so they can learn and thrive in a safe environment. The politicians behind these bills are trying to erase LGBTQ students, families, and history by banning any discussion about them in schools. This sends a message that LGBTQ kids, and kids with same-sex parents, are not welcome in classrooms and schools.*

TALKING ABOUT FALSE ANTI-LGBTQ 'GROOMER' ATTACKS

Politicians who push curriculum censorship and try to force schools to hurt LGBTQ students often say that anyone who opposes them is a “groomer.” **This is more of the same from far-right activists, who for decades have attacked LGBTQ people by falsely claiming they are a threat to children.**

If you need to address these false attacks, start by centering your conversation on the LGBTQ family, friends, co-workers,

and neighbors people already know. Then emphasize the importance of protecting every child and respecting every family—and why it's so harmful to threaten and try to silence people (including teachers) for supporting LGBTQ students.

NOTE: Never repeat opponents' false “groomer” claims. Saying or repeating the terms “groomer” or “grooming” gives free airtime to anti-LGBTQ opponents' smear. You can avoid taking the far right's bait by instead referring to their *attack*—for example, **“This attack...”** or **“The politicians behind these attacks...”** (see examples below).

1. *We all know LGBTQ people. They're our family, our friends, our co-workers, our neighbors. When we stop and think about the people in our lives, we know how baseless and offensive these anti-LGBTQ smears are—and how much they hurt people we know and care about.*

2. *This attack on LGBTQ people isn't new. For decades, the far right has tried to attack LGBTQ people by falsely claiming they are a threat to children—something we all know isn't true. So why are so many people standing silently by as their family and friends are smeared by far-right politicians—and as teachers are threatened, silenced or fired simply for being LGBTQ or for supporting LGBTQ students?*

3. *The well-being of children is important to all of us. Every child needs to be able to learn and thrive in a safe environment free from bullying and harassment. Which is why it's so harmful when far-right activists target LGBTQ students and the kids of LGBTQ parents for political gain—intimidating teachers into silence so that vulnerable kids will be left isolated, unsupported, and afraid.*

4. *We should all be able to agree on the importance of protecting every child and respecting every family. The politicians behind these attacks are trying to erase LGBTQ students and families from schools—and they're doing it by saying anyone who disagrees with them is a threat to kids. We need to stop these attacks and ensure that every child is able to learn free from prejudice and discrimination.*

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATION

Don't use name-calling (e.g., “bigot,” “hateful,” “ignorant”) or other inflammatory language. This kind of language can alienate the people we need to reach. Instead, use the relatable conversation approaches detailed in this guide to educate the public about these dangerous bills.