



POLICY BRIEF

ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFIRMING AND ACCURATE LEARNING MATERIALS

THE PROBLEM

Over the last few years, conservative extremists have organized to limit the information that students access in classrooms and school and public libraries. Their efforts—known as censorship or book banning—seek to remove books from public schools and public libraries and limit what students learn, including books and curriculum that address LGBTQI+ identities, gender, race, reproductive rights, sexual health, [consent](#), and [sexual harassment, violence, and abuse](#). These efforts prevent students from accessing a [broad spectrum of information](#) that contributes to well-informed citizens with [strong critical thinking skills](#). Further, these efforts deny students the opportunity to learn more about their peers and see themselves reflected in their learning environment. Students need access to this information to ensure they can lead healthy adult lives, make informed choices, think critically, and have the brightest futures possible. As a nation, we are made stronger by our diversity. All students should feel affirmed in their learning environment, including their learning materials, and they should have access to information that reflects the diversity of our nation.

THE SOLUTION

In addition to organizing to prevent efforts by state legislatures, school boards, and school administrators to ban books and curricula, policymakers can take steps to ensure access to affirming and accurate learning materials in their schools by:

- **Passing legislation to prevent book and curriculum censorship that:**
 - **Protects public school learning materials and public library materials** from censorship based upon partisan, ideological, or religious disapproval;
 - **Ensures that professional librarians and licensed educators**, who have the necessary training and expertise, are included in decision-making about developmentally appropriate reading and curricula for students, not extremist groups or politicians promoting an agenda;
 - **When referencing materials that are appropriate for students to access, legislation should focus on a “developmentally appropriate” standard, instead of an “age appropriate” standard.** Advocates for censorship use “age appropriate” as a reason for removing learning materials that address topics such as gender identity, healthy relationships, or puberty. A “developmentally appropriate” standard refers to cognitive, social, and other skill-based standards and is a more reasonable and flexible standard to ensure youth can access the materials they are ready for.
 - **Aligns with the standard in the Supreme Court case *Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico*.** The First Amendment imposes some limitations on a school board’s discretion to remove books from school libraries—particularly when the decision to remove books is partisan, political, or is based upon a dislike of the ideas contained in a book.
- **Ensuring school administrations and school board members work with educators**, students, and school curriculum experts to develop affirming and accurate curriculum models for K-12 education.
 - **This curriculum should be racially, ethnically, and socially representative** of the school’s student body, which includes materials containing LGBTQI+ stories and information.
 - **Hold focus groups with students and staff** to gain insight on the everyday school environment, the role conservative and exclusionary curricula play in the retention of students, health and safety concerns, and policies that can be implemented or better enforced to achieve a safe and inclusive school environment for all students.
 - **Implement anti-bias trainings** to address how bias shows up in curriculum and classroom instruction.
- **Providing school districts with the resources** necessary to attract and retain a racially and culturally diverse teaching workforce which contributes to **positive outcomes** for all students, but especially for **students of color**.

TALKING POINTS ON THE SOLUTION

- **Students deserve access to learning materials** that are **reflective of their identity**, historically accurate, and free from external political or religious bias. This contributes to safe and inclusive learning environments for students who can see their own lives reflected in what they read and learn. It allows them to feel understood and safe in their identity while learning about their peers.
- **Book bans are not new to the United States.** However, this is the first time in U.S. history that we have seen efforts on this scale to remove books from and limit curriculum in schools. In the last half of 2023, there were **4,000 instances** of book bans across the country.
- **Our country is made stronger by the diversity of our population**, and the **2020 census** revealed that we are becoming even more racially diverse. Young people should feel affirmed in their learning materials and must have access to information that reflects the **diversity of their peers** and this nation.

- **Giving young people access to stories and lessons about people who are different** from them can lead to them developing empathy for their peers and for those outside of their own community.
- **LGBTQI+ students have significantly lower rates of absenteeism** when they have access to [inclusive curricula](#) and [supportive school staff](#).
- **Black students who have racial and cultural representation in their education** and at least one Black teacher between third and fifth grades are nearly 29% less likely to withdraw from school.
- **Access to developmentally appropriate information about sexual and reproductive health allows young people to keep themselves safe and healthy.** It empowers them to make their own decisions about their reproductive health care on their own terms and timelines. Depriving young people of knowledge surrounding topics such as pregnancy, abortion, birth control, menstruation, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) [inhibits their access to](#) and understanding of preventative measures and safe practices.
- **Comprehensive sexual education** also provides youth with necessary education surrounding consent and healthy sexual relationships, which decreases the likelihood of young people experiencing and perpetrating sexual harassment, sexual violence, and dating violence.

PUBLIC POPULARITY

- Efforts to censor curriculum and ban books are led by a vocal minority. A [survey](#) from the American Library Association found that 71% of voters oppose censorship efforts in their local public libraries and nine in 10 parents and voters held a favorable view of librarians, who are [fighting nationwide](#) to retain books in school classrooms and libraries.
- [Three-quarters of K-12](#) parents say they trust their child’s teacher to make decisions about classroom curricula. This majority sentiment is consistent among K-12 parents across party lines, including 84% of Democrats, 67% of Republicans, and 74% of independents.

STATES THAT HAVE PASSED THESE POLICIES

- A growing number of states have passed legislation to protect against censorship of books and curricula in public schools, public libraries, or both. As of June 2024:
- [Maryland](#) and [Minnesota](#) passed legislation to protect books in schools. For example, Minnesota prohibits the removal of books from public school libraries based upon the viewpoint, message, or ideas it conveys.
- [California](#), [Minnesota](#), and [Washington](#) passed legislation that protects school curricula. For example, Washington requires school districts to adopt inclusive curricula that incorporates the histories and contributions of racially and culturally diverse communities and the LGBTQI+ community.
- [Maryland](#) and [Colorado](#) passed legislation to implement a formal process for challenging books. For example, Maryland requires each local school system to establish policies to review objections to materials in a school library media program.
- [Maryland](#), [Minnesota](#), [Illinois](#) and [Colorado](#) prohibit the removal of books or other materials from public libraries based upon partisan disapproval or disagreement with the messages expressed in the material. For example, Illinois requires state public libraries to adopt the American Library Association’s Bill of Rights and prevents the removal of books based upon partisan or doctrinal disapproval.