

“I don’t know how much longer I can do this”



**Teachers’ Experiences Amid Attacks on
Public Education**

September 2024

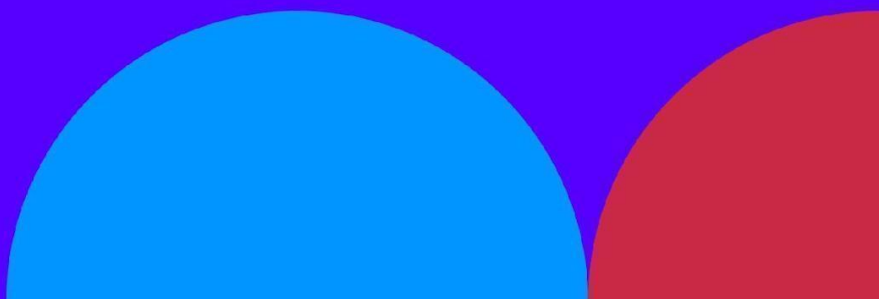




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Foreword

Teaching has never been an easy job. Our public school teachers are tasked with educating the next generation, supporting students' diverse learning styles and social-emotional needs while adapting to evolving curricula, and meeting the demands of parents and administrators. The vast majority of public school teachers are women¹—and like most women-dominated professions, our society undervalues and underpays teachers, especially relative to other occupations requiring similar levels of expertise.² Those serving the communities with the greatest need often are forced to work with the fewest resources.

But for many teachers, recent decades have brought new and mounting challenges that have accelerated since the pandemic. Conservative legislators have engaged in concerted—and often successful—efforts to weaken teachers' unions, undermining teachers' pay and benefits.³ Policies reflecting an increasing emphasis on standardized test performance have also reduced teachers' ability to make their own decisions about how to best meet their students' needs.⁴ Beginning in 2020, teachers found themselves on the front lines of the COVID-19 crisis—and in the years that have followed, teachers have had to deal with its fallout, from the impacts of lost learning time and social isolation to the political and social divisions the pandemic inflamed. Finally, in states across the country, far-right policymakers and extremists have targeted teachers, shifting from attacks on public health measures in schools during the pandemic to attacks on public education itself—working to restrict what teachers can teach, how they can teach it, which books children have access to in their classrooms and libraries, and even their ability to use respectful names and pronouns for their students.

¹ More than three-quarters (77%) of public elementary and secondary school teachers are women. National Center for Education Statistics, "Characteristics of Public School Teachers," *Condition of Education*, May 2023, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/clr/public-school-teachers>.

² On average, teachers made 26.6% less than other similarly educated professionals in 2023. Sylvia Allegretto, "Teacher Pay Rises in 2023—But Not Enough to Shrink Pay Gap With Other College Graduates," Economic Policy Institute, September 12, 2024, <https://www.epi.org/publication/teacher-pay-in-2023/>. See also Sarah Javaid, "A Window Into the Wage Gap: What's Behind It and How to Close It," National Women's Law Center, January 2024, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/2023-Wage-Gap-Factsheet.pdf>.

³ For example, the Economic Policy Institute finds that legislative measures restricting public-sector collective bargaining rights enacted in Idaho, Indiana, Michigan, Tennessee, and Wisconsin in 2011 and 2012 significantly reduced school districts' spending on teacher compensation. Emma Garcia & Eunice Han, "The Impact of Changes in Public Sector Bargaining Laws on Districts; Spending on Teacher Compensation," Economic Policy Institute, April 29, 2021, <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-impact-of-changes-in-public-sector-bargaining-laws-on-districts-spending-on-teacher-compensation/>. And these attacks continue. Most recently, in 2023, Florida adopted a law requiring most public sector unions to have at least 60% of members pay dues in order to stay active, while banning state and local governments from automatically deducting union dues from paychecks; at least eight county teachers' unions are at risk of decertification as a result. See, e.g., Daniel Rivero, "Tens of Thousands of Workers in Florida Have Just Lost Their Labor Unions. More Is Coming," *WLRN Public Media*, February 15, 2024, <https://www.wlrn.org/wlrn-investigations/2024-02-15/florida-labor-union-membership-teachers-public-sb-256>.

⁴ See, e.g., Tim Walker, "Teacher Autonomy Declined Over Past Decade, New Data Shows," *NEA Today*, January 11, 2016, <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/teacher-autonomy-declined-over-past-decade-new-data-shows>.



This moment is being driven by attempts to organize a small, nonrepresentative, extremist group of parents—exemplified by Moms for Liberty⁵—that has undermined trust and collaboration between teachers and parents more broadly and obscured their common interests. Across the country, most parents think teachers should be trusted to make decisions about their curriculum: Among parents of K-12 students, two-thirds oppose state lawmakers passing book bans, 62% oppose state lawmakers restricting what subjects teachers and students discuss in the classroom, and 81% support teaching about the history of slavery, segregation, and racism in public schools.⁶ But despite public opposition, extremist views have produced extremist policies in a number of states across the U.S.

Since 2021, at least 18 states have enacted laws restricting K-12 public school teachers' instruction on topics related to race, gender, sexuality, and other so-called “divisive concepts.”⁷ For example, in Florida, policies adopted since 2021:

- Bar public school teachers from providing classroom instruction related to sexual orientation and gender identity (the “Don’t Say Gay” law);⁸
- Require public elementary schools to publish online a searchable list of all library materials, allow parents to object to any such materials, and make any objected-to materials unavailable to students until the objection is resolved;
- Prohibit public K-12 teachers from suggesting in their instruction “that racism is embedded in American society;” and
- Require public schools to adopt policies declaring that “sex is an immutable biological trait and that it is false to ascribe to a person a pronoun that does not correspond to such person’s sex,” which means teachers can’t ask students their pronouns or be required to use students’ or other teachers’ affirmed pronouns if they don’t align with their sex assigned at birth, and also may not share pronouns they use for themselves with students if they do not correspond to the teacher’s sex assigned at birth.⁹

⁵ See generally “Moms for Liberty,” Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed September 17, 2024, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/moms-liberty>.

⁶ Chris Jackson, Mallory Newall & Charlie Rollason, “Americans Trust Teachers, But Some Still Want Parents to Be Primary Voices on What’s Taught,” Ipsos, June 2, 2023, <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/americans-trust-teachers-some-still-want-parents-be-primary-voices-whats-taught>. Parents’ sentiments are shared by the American public overall: Among all Americans, 69% oppose state lawmakers passing book bans, 67% oppose state lawmakers restricting what subjects teachers and students discuss in the classroom, and 79% support teaching about the history of slavery, segregation, and racism in public schools. Ibid.

⁷ Tim Walker, “Why Teachers Self-Censor,” *NEA Today*, March 1, 2024, <https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/why-teachers-self-censor>.

⁸ In March 2024, a group of Florida parents, students, and teachers who had challenged the “Don’t Say Gay” law, along with non-profit organizations Equality Florida and Family Equality, reached a settlement agreement with the Florida State Board of Education, Florida Department of Education, and school districts that mitigates some of the law’s most harmful potential effects. The agreement filed by the plaintiffs’ attorneys at Kaplan Hecker & Fink LLP and the National Center for Lesbian Rights with the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit makes clear that the law must be applied neutrally and is not a license to discriminate against LGBTQIA+ families. Nonetheless, the law remains in place and risks creating a chilling effect in classrooms across Florida. For more information, see “Family Equality Joins Equality Florida and NCLR on a Historic Settlement to Roll Back Key Discriminatory Provisions in ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Law,” Family Equality, March 11, 2024, <https://familyequality.org/press-releases/family-equality-joins-equality-florida-and-nclr-on-a-historic-settlement-to-roll-back-key-discriminatory-provisions-in-dont-say-gay-bill/>.

⁹ See, e.g., Ileana Najaro, “What’s With All the Education News Out of Florida? A Recap of Education Policy Decisions,” *Education Week*, August 16, 2023, <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/whats-with-all-the->



Policymakers in Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and a number of other states—particularly in the South and Midwest—have followed Florida’s lead. And nearly all states have seen the introduction, if not the enactment, of bills that PEN America describes as “educational gag orders” (which explicitly prohibit teachers from referring to certain materials and content in their classroom instruction)¹⁰ and “educational intimidation bills” (which establish inspection, monitoring, and complaint processes that create an environment of surveillance in K-12 classrooms).¹¹

Even where no statewide policies are in place, teachers may face censorship in the classroom: While Pennsylvania has no statewide law restricting teachers, for example, close to 200 books have been banned due to individual district policies and/or parental complaints.¹² And to date, the frequency of such bans is only increasing. PEN America reports that in just the first half of the 2023-24 school year, there were 4,349 instances of book bans—more than in the entire 2022-23 school year.¹³ These bans continue to focus on limiting students’ access to content addressing LGBTQIA+ topics (especially trans identities), sexual violence, and race and racism, rolling back efforts to ensure library collections are diverse and inclusive.¹⁴ In all but a handful of states, at least some schools and school districts have banned books.¹⁵

These extremist restrictions not only deprive students of a safe and inclusive school environment where they are free to learn—they deprive teachers of a safe and inclusive school environment where they are free to teach. They also create a chilling effect that reaches beyond their official scope: In the 2023 State of the American Teacher survey, two-thirds of K-12 public school teachers reported that they have decided on their own to limit instruction about political and social issues in the classroom—including more than half (55%) of teachers working in districts where no state or local law is in effect, because they fear upsetting parents and feel uncertain about whether their school or district leaders would support them if parents expressed concerns.¹⁶ In another 2023 survey, a large majority of teachers (82%) said the overall state of public K-12 education has gotten worse in the past five

[education-news-out-of-florida-a-recap-of-education-policy-decisions/2023/08](https://pen.org/education-news-out-of-florida-a-recap-of-education-policy-decisions/2023/08). See also “Index of Educational Gag Orders,” PEN America, April 4, 2024, <https://airtable.com/appg59iDuPhLLPPFp/shrtwubfBUo2tuHyO/tbl9Z5eGPNQmNgxXd/viwCwqVetJibJU2gO?blocks=hide>; “Index of Educational Intimidation Bills,” PEN America, August 17, 2023, <https://airtable.com/appeDA4ppZ4h3C4oc/shr3nNkKW2BDdCQfb7/tbl25DcG1mqp29aEY>.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Sachs, Jeremy C. Young & Jonathan Friedman, “For Educational Gag Orders, the Vagueness Is the Point,” PEN America, April 28, 2022, <https://pen.org/for-educational-gag-orders-the-vagueness-is-the-point/>; “Index of Educational Gag Orders,” PEN America.

¹¹ “Index of Educational Intimidation Bills,” PEN America.


¹² As of the 2022-2023 school year, PEN America had recorded 186 cases of banned books in Pennsylvania. Kasey Meehan et al., “Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor,” PEN America, September 1, 2023, <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>.

¹³ Kasey Meehan et al., “Banned in the USA: Narrating the Crisis,” PEN America, April 16, 2024, <https://pen.org/report/narrating-the-crisis/>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Over the last two and half academic years, PEN America has recorded banning activity in 42 states. Meehan et al., “Banned in the USA: Narrating the Crisis.”

¹⁶ Ashley Woo, Melissa Kay Diliberti & Elizabeth D. Steiner, “Policies Restricting Teaching About Race and Gender Spill Over Into Other States and Localities: Findings from the 2023 State of the American Teacher Survey,” RAND, February 15, 2024, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-10.html.



years, and most of these teachers (60%) name the current political climate as a major reason why.¹⁷ More than three-quarters of teachers (77%) said they frequently find their jobs stressful, and about three in ten (29%) said it's at least somewhat likely they'll look for a new job¹⁸—potentially exacerbating the teacher shortages that are already afflicting virtually every state.¹⁹ And in a 2024 survey, teachers who are women reported significantly higher rates of job-related stress and burnout than their male peers, along with lower pay.²⁰

These statistics tell us some of what we need to know about the impact of extremist attacks on public education. But they do not tell the whole story. The National Women's Law Center wanted to hear directly from teachers working in states where restrictive legislation and/or extremist organizations have affected their jobs, their relationships with their students, and their lives. We wanted to hear from them about what is threatening to push them out of teaching—and what could make them stay and thrive.

We are grateful to the Topos team for leading the conversations with teachers that are captured in the report that follows. We are inspired by the teachers' dedication to children and to honest, inclusive education. And we are committed to working with them—alongside parents and community members—to combat the racist, sexist, anti-LGBTQIA+ policies that are attempting to silence our teachers and distort and impoverish our children's education. Together, we can build schools where every child is free to read and learn, and every teacher is free to tell the truth; schools where both students and teachers feel safe, valued, and welcome to share their experiences and their identities—without fear.

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¹⁷ Luona Lin, Kim Parker & Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "What's It Like to Be a Teacher in America Today?," Pew Research Center, April 4, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/04/04/whats-it-like-to-be-a-teacher-in-america-today>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Tiffany S. Tan, Ivett Arellano & Susan Kemper Patrick, "State Teacher Shortages 2024 Update," Learning Policy Institute, July 31, 2024, <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/state-teacher-shortages-vacancy-resource-tool-2024>.

²⁰ Sy Doan, Elizabeth D. Steiner & Rakesh Pandey, "Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave in 2024: Findings from the 2024 State of the American Teacher Survey," RAND, June 18, 2024, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1108-12.html. See also Doug Irving, "Teachers Are Still Stressed and Underpaid Post-COVID," RAND, August 22, 2024, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/articles/2024/teachers-are-still-stressed-and-underpaid-post-covid.html>.



I. Summary


NWLC enlisted Topos Partnership to listen to teachers' stories. From April to May 2024, trained researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 25 teachers across 10 states in which conservative legislators, extremist groups, or both have been working to restrict teachers' instruction and materials on any topics deemed “divisive”—especially with regard to race, gender, and LGBTQIA+ inclusion—and to restrict both teachers' and students' freedom to express themselves in the classroom.¹

The one-on-one interviews focused on teachers' interactions with students, their ability to teach effectively, their feelings about their jobs, and more. The semi-structured format was designed to allow teachers to share their own experiences and perceptions about the ways recent right-wing attacks have shown up in and affected their schools, classrooms, jobs, and lives. Each teacher's interview tells a powerful story. Together, they reveal the following themes:

- An environment of fear provides a backdrop for many of the stories. Teachers describe parents and administrators acting out of fear. And teachers relay their own fears of losing their ability to provide a safe learning environment for their students. Moreover, teachers fear retaliation, termination, and, in some cases, losing their teaching license if they run afoul of restrictive policies.
- Teachers explain how censorship and restrictions are removing what little flexibility they may have had to find ways to engage their students. They describe a loss of agency as their expertise is squeezed out by “canned curricula” and “scripts,” their voices being drowned out by a small group of vocal conservative parents and policymakers.
- Teachers describe an environment of surveillance, with some teachers self-censoring to avoid pushback.
- Teachers express their concern and unease with how curricula addressing systemic inequality and the role of racism are distorted and the impact on all students, but especially students of color, whose communities are being excluded in the retelling of history.

¹ Ten of the teachers interviewed were from Florida; between one and three teachers were interviewed from each of the following states: Arizona (1), Georgia (1), Michigan (1), Nevada (1), North Carolina (3), Pennsylvania (2), South Carolina (1), Virginia (2), and Wisconsin (3). These states were identified by NWLC as states in which restrictive legislation has been passed and/or conservative extremist groups have been active.

Participants were mostly women (22/25). They were white (17/25) or Black (8/25) and represented teaching at the K-5th (8/25), 6th-8th (7/25), and high school (9/25) grade levels. Three self-identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ community. Participants were recruited through organizational and personal connections, and through referrals by teachers participating in the project. A co-created screening process identified final interviewees. Criteria included: 3+ years teaching experience; either currently teaching in a K-12 public school (or public charter school) or have left public school teaching within the past three years; and an acknowledgement that their job had been somehow negatively affected by the current political climate.

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- Teachers describe a desire to support LGBTQIA+ students, but feel their ability to do so is curbed by restrictions and a fear of discipline.
 - Many are raising the alarm that restricting curricula, books, and conversations are keeping them from building meaningful connections with students. And they describe a decline in the development of critical thinking skills, with long-term implications for the next generation.
 - Teachers—especially teachers in Florida—are witnessing how many in their profession are leaving. Those we spoke with, though many are tired and weary, resist by staying, continuing to educate and advocate for students as best they can.

“ I would wish they would understand that we as teachers, **we love what we do**. That we are not trying to brainwash. We're not trying to...make kids think a certain way. We're not trying to do any of that. We are trying to educate children.”²

- Reading interventionist for an urban elementary school, Florida; 54-year-old Black woman, teaching for 28 years

“ **We love the kids and things are really, really rough now**. We stay in it because we love the kids and we still wanna make a difference, but it's getting increasingly difficult to do that.”

- Third grade teacher for an urban elementary school, Pennsylvania; 53-year-old white woman, teaching for 20 years

² Quotes are direct transcriptions, though some are edited lightly for clarity (e.g., by removing repeated or “filler” words). Unless otherwise specified, all quoted teachers currently work at a public school.



II. Themes Across Stories

Twenty-five educators across 10 states (Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Virginia, and Wisconsin) shared their experiences, insights, and stories about what it's like to teach their students amidst a growing wave of censorship and restrictions. Despite differences in backgrounds, demographics, school types, and districts, common themes emerged across the interviews. This report delves into these themes, amplifying the voices and experiences of the teachers themselves.

A. Climate of fear

In conversations with teachers, an environment of fear provides the backdrop for many of their stories. Some parents, teachers note, have a fear of differing ideas and opinions; they fear what their children may be learning. School administrators have grown more cautious and concerned about getting caught between parents and teachers, and want to avoid the headaches that come from anything that might elicit pushback.

For themselves, teachers describe their fear of losing the ability to provide a safe environment for their students on top of their fear of facing public verbal attacks, retaliation, and—for some—losing their jobs or even their teaching licenses. While a few teachers describe finding support in their unions, others fear the support from their union could be taken away. One Florida teacher emphasized that *“they are fighting right now to kill our union,”* explaining that these efforts are *“going to affect how we teach, our benefits, what we're able to do, what we're not able to do, possibly our salaries.”*

Teachers: In their own words

“ I think **frightened people are easily led** and I think that in times of uncertainty, whether it's economic uncertainty, social change, people want to feel safe and secure. And if you've got an entity that says, 'We can make you feel safe and secure by demonizing something else. . . ,' they're more likely to fall into that. . . . schools are not immune to being singled out as something you need to be angry about as a method for a political party to control their masses.”

- Teacher providing small-group support in 8th grade English and science for an urban middle school (recently retired from teaching middle and high school sciences), North Carolina; 56-year-old white woman, teaching for 30 years



“ I have teachers that took their whole classroom library and donated it because **they just are terrified of getting fired** and having their content, you know, put on the school board agenda.”

- Librarian for three suburban middle schools, Michigan (formerly high school government/politics teacher); 44-year-old white woman, teaching for 20 years

“ There's always kind of an underlying fear of like, **you never know when that shoe is gonna drop**, when . . . the wrong parent is gonna get upset about something.”

- English teacher for an urban high school, Arizona; 30-year-old white woman, teaching for 5-9 years

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B. Loss of agency and the de-professionalization of teaching

Teachers often have little say in the standards and curriculum they are required to teach, and they explain how censorship and restrictions are removing what little flexibility they may have had to find ways to engage their students.

Teachers describe how the voices of those who spend their days in the classroom, who understand the nuances of student needs and the dynamics of effective teaching, are being drowned out and disregarded by policymakers (“*mostly like older white men who don't come within 50 yards of a child on any given day,*” notes one Wisconsin teacher), administrators, and most recently—a small contingent of powerful parents with a conservative agenda.

Teachers feel the lack of respect for their professional judgment and expertise as the classroom gets increasingly crowded with “*too many cooks in the kitchen trying to tell everyone else what to do,*” as a high school teacher in Virginia puts it.

The message teachers are receiving is that *anyone* can do their job. The type of teaching that is expected is not actually teaching, “*it's just robotic,*” says one North Carolina teacher. Another teacher wonders if “*one day they won't [even] need certified teachers.*”

Teachers: In their own words

“ We already are constrained to teach within the standards of the state and your district. But **now you're taking away my creativity. You're taking away things that light me up in the classroom.** . . . Students will give what they receive. . . . And if every time something that a teacher is excited about gets stripped away from her teacher toolkit and she can no longer use that to reach her students, what does she have? That's a piece of her teacher identity . . . that causes passion to be lost. And then at some point they'll just get fed up and find a new career.”

- Eighth grade science teacher for an urban middle school, Virginia; 35-year-old Black woman, teaching for 10 years

“ I feel like . . . teachers' hands are tied when it comes to curriculum. And being able to actually teach, **we are now dictated to what we'll teach and how we will teach it. I think before [we as] teachers, we had the flexibility.** We knew the curriculum and we knew the standards, and we were tasked with the lesson planning and finding the resources to meet the needs of our students.”

- Reading interventionist for an urban elementary school, Florida; 54-year-old Black woman, teaching for 28 years

“ I'll call it a **canned curriculum**, you know, so we're, as a school district, purchasing these curricula and having to follow it exactly as the teacher books tell us and there's no veering off of those instructions. . . . And so it's like **we can't engage our students in what they are interested in.** We have to really follow, this is the one book that the curriculum has for us to teach. We have to follow it even if the kids don't care about it at all. So it's harder to tap into student interest. . . .”

- Special education teacher for a rural middle school, Wisconsin; 49-year-old white woman, teaching for 15-19 years

The power of a small group of extremist parents

Teachers want parents to be their allies, and often they are. However, a small, vocal contingent of conservative parents is increasing the level at which teachers feel they are losing agency in their classrooms. Teachers feel it is too dangerous to discuss topics or introduce subjects that might upset even a single parent, even though this caution can undermine their students' education in ways that most parents do not actually support. In the current environment, teachers note, one parent's beliefs can dictate the experience of the entire classroom.

Teachers: In their own words

“... it is your right to discern what you want your child exposed to. I get it. **It is not your right to discern what the other 29 kids get, and you're trying to take it away from everybody.** If you don't want your child having it, I respect that, that is fine. But why are you trying to take it away from the other 29 who were fine[?] They're not your kids. So now you are pushing your beliefs. The very thing that you are accusing me of—or teachers or educators—that is what you're doing.”

- Honors English teacher for a suburban high school, Pennsylvania; 42-year-old Black woman, teaching for 16 years

“I love partnering with my parents. . . They are my allies. . . however the control they have versus the professionalism and control I have... I'm never gonna win. . . my professionalism is down here and what the squeaky wheel says is way up here. I think that's become very, very difficult to deal with because **the parent will go to extremes. And I mean. . . it can be career-ruining, you know?**”

- Reading coach for a suburban high school (also teaches one class), Florida; 52-year-old white woman, teaching for over 30 years

“I had a sticker on my door that, you know, it was like a . . . rainbow sticker that said, 'all are welcome.' And **I had a parent request their child not be in my classroom because I had [that] sticker on my door.**”

- K-3 teacher for a suburban elementary school, North Carolina; 39-year-old white woman, teaching for 15 years

“... At another middle school, we have an openly gay teacher who had a flag up in his room to show support to the students ...he was also the gay straight alliance coordinator. . . So he had that flag up to show that this is a safe space and that backfired with the parents. **And one particular parent was very vocal.** She would come to the school and cause problems, go to the district school board meetings. . .do all kinds of stuff to try to get him in trouble. **Terminated was her goal.**”

- Media studies teacher in an urban high school, Florida; 41-year-old Black man, teaching for 16 years



Melissa's Story: School “feels more like a battleground”

The light behind Melissa's* eyes dims as she recalls the daily micromanagement of her job by administrators, politicians—and most recently, a contingent of powerful parents with a conservative agenda.

“I used to go to school to teach. Now it feels more like a battleground,” she says, her voice edged with frustration. “I have to fight so hard for the rights of my students, the rights of my colleagues, you know, just materials, curriculum. . .”

She sighs, reflecting on the toll it has taken on her and her students. *“I know part of my purpose on this planet was to be a special education teacher. I love the kids. I love the work. It's all the surrounding bullshit that negatively impacts my health, my wellbeing, and the health and wellbeing of my students.”*

When asked if she's considered leaving the profession, she responds, *“Several thousand times.”*

- Third grade special education teacher for an urban elementary school, Wisconsin; white woman, teaching for 31 years

** In these descriptive vignettes, all names have been changed.*

C. Beyond censorship: Surveillance and self-censorship

Some teachers describe a feeling of constant threat of surveillance—from fellow teachers, administrators, and even students (who might be waiting for a “gotcha moment,” as one teacher explains). Teachers feel they are “under a microscope” and some teachers resort to self-censorship—preemptively removing books from their classroom libraries or avoiding answering questions that students have on a topic. All with an eye on “not poking the bear.”

The increased censorship comes as a shock to many teachers: “I can't believe they're actually making us teach this in this manner,” says a teacher from Florida, who has been teaching for 16 years. But while they don't agree with the changes, many also seem resigned to it.

The stakes are high: teachers fear being fired and forced out of teaching—and Florida teachers talked about their fear of losing their teaching license altogether.

Teachers: In their own words

“...it's very, very stressful for us as teachers. There's certain things I can say and some things I can't say to a kid. I have to be mindful of what I speak, how I speak, and what I say to all students. ...I know [they're] little, they're still in kindergarten, first grade. So it's different if maybe you're teaching older grades, **but these issues of gender and identity, even sex education or race and racism. Yeah. We, I try not to say anything.**”

- First grade teacher for a suburban elementary school, Florida; 66-year-old Black woman, teaching for 10-14 years

“Some teachers are still getting in trouble because the kids are going home and saying, 'Well, this is what this teacher said and this is what this teacher is doing.' And they're reporting it back to their parents and their parents are coming to the school district and teachers are getting reprimanded. So yes, **the kids are fully aware, and it gets to the point where they're so aware that they want that gotcha moment.** They want to find a flaw that the teacher is creating so that they can get the teacher in trouble.”

- Media studies teacher for an urban high school, Florida; 41-year-old Black man, teaching for 16 years

“So it's hard as a teacher, everything that I do I know is gonna be under a microscope and **all it takes is for one person to say one thing, right or wrong, true or false.** And you really can have a hard time at that point. ... I feel like the biggest issue I hear about is with literature, books and history, like social studies or world history. I wouldn't even say censoring things, but them just being reluctant to cover certain topics or things that can ...be ...a hot button issue.”

- Sixth grade English teacher for a rural middle school, South Carolina; 43-year-old white man, teaching for 20 years

“They also came to all the English classrooms to check our personal classroom libraries to make sure [a censored book] wasn't in there. And then they took it. Like they didn't just say, here, take this home. They took the book. ... And so the problem has become that most **teachers have removed their personal classroom libraries because they don't want them scrutinized** or ...they're worried it'll cause a problem.”

- Eleventh grade English/AP language teacher for a suburban high school, Virginia; 46-year-old white woman, teaching for 16 years



Rachel's Story: Avoiding some topics because it's "...not really worth poking that bear."

Rachel recounts a recent incident that illustrates the difficult choices she's had to make within a climate of fear and self-censorship. *"One kid did a really good news package on book bans and it was great, it was a great package," she says. "But I was afraid to put it in the little show that we send out every month because I don't know if someone's gonna take that the wrong way."*

The student's project, which presented the facts surrounding book bans, never saw the light of day. *"I know he was unbiased. He wasn't saying, 'in his opinion.' He was only stating facts,"* Rachel explains.

"I even ran it by my co-teacher and both of us were just like, not really worth it, not really worth poking that bear," she recalls. "So I felt bad that a kid who did a really good job wasn't able to go into something just in case it pushed that boundary."

- TV and film teacher for an urban high school magnet program, Florida; 41-year-old white woman, teaching for 3-4 years

D. Effects of silencing discussions of racism and systemic inequality

Teachers describe their concern and unease with how curricula addressing systemic inequality and the role of race and racism—especially in history, social science, and literature—are being distorted, “whitewashed,” and falsely sanitized. Some describe instruction in these subjects being altered in completely inaccurate and inappropriate ways, including framing the institution of slavery as a business model, avoiding discussions about gender and women’s rights, encouraging Holocaust denial, and erasing American Indigenous history.

Some educators describe being unsure how to go about teaching history without mentioning race and, especially those whose districts have institutionalized these changes, express exasperation with the misrepresentations and glaring omissions.

One teacher from Florida describes a brief era of hope and solidarity when teachers’ unions rallied during the past legislative session to try to prevent the “curriculum washing,” (*“there was a sense of, wow, maybe we can get this done”*), but after the legislation passed, the union was powerless to step in. *“And if it's backed by the governor and it's made official and you violate that, there's not much that the union can do for you,”* he notes.

Teachers: In their own words

“ *Participant: . . . when you start dealing, I would say with history, when you're dealing with the United States history as well as world history... that's when the controversy starts. . . .*”

Interviewer: “What comes up that. . . causes controversy?”

Participant: “In the fourth grade, I do remember [that the] Civil War . . . caused some confusion because you had teachers who were unsure of how to teach the part about slavery. And also when you have figures, when you have nationwide figures, who we usually have high regard to, and we have background information that we could share with the students. Sometimes it's not wise to share it with them. . .

*In history class we have had some, some interesting conversations as far as topics such as slavery, talking about the Holocaust. . . And also, some of the controversial figures such as Hitler, Stalin, those have also caused a few incidences where **you had parents who came and complained and didn't want their students to know anything about those particular situations.**”*

- Third grade teacher for an urban elementary school, Georgia; 45-year-old Black woman, teaching for 16 years


“ *I know that there have been teachers that have potentially crossed the line on what they've talked about [after the recent book bans], especially in US history. Because, you know, **a lot of people don't want to hear real history because it's messy.** And you know, not everything was perfect.”*

- Tenth grade world history teacher for an urban high school, Florida; 55-year-old white woman, teaching for 20-29 years

“ *Like, wow, [by law] we are not allowed to teach slavery. We're not allowed to teach the Holocaust. We're not allowed to mention anything about how there were mistreatments of Black people or minority groups [or]... the Native Americans. Can't teach anything about that. We have to downplay that. **And all the protected classes just got pushed away to the side, the way side for their history. And that was what was most difficult to digest for educators.**”*

- Media studies teacher in an urban high school, Florida; 41-year-old Black man, teaching for 16 years

Most teachers feel they are doing a massive disservice to students by not teaching accurate (or complete) history and by not being able to address how ongoing inequities shape the current day. One North Carolina teacher explains her frustration with not being able to even talk about the fact “*that racism exists. That people have a right to speak up because racism is a problem.*” Teachers are concerned about their role in perpetuating misinformation and the inability to answer questions that can help students process the world around them.



Educators worry how this distortion of content affects all children, but especially Black, Latine, Asian American, and Indigenous students, whose communities are being excluded in the retelling of history. Some teachers explain that when students learn their own histories, they not only become interested in learning more about it but it gives them a sense of empowerment—a sense that is lost when that history is erased.

Teachers: In their own words

“... I watched that [eighth grade US history] teacher being very careful how he talks about civil rights issues or women's rights issues. And even if kids have questions about those things, **I watch him bring those conversations to a close so that he doesn't say something that he is not supposed to**, or get too deep into some of the issues that are a part of... our history.”

- Special education teacher for a rural middle school, Wisconsin; 49-year-old white woman, teaching for 15-19 years


“... We cannot show anything related to slavery. We would not be able to show anything related to LGBT scenes and things like that, whereas in other states they would be allowed to. So our kids are sort of getting a one-sided view of things because we're not allowed to expand upon what they already are seeing in their environments. **We can't open their minds to things because we're not allowed to. . Kids are losing out. They're losing out on so much knowledge and so much truth in our history** that they are pretty much leaving with a skewed sense of what our country is built on. And I don't think that that's fair. . .I believe that children should be given all the facts. I believe people should be given all the facts.”

- Media studies teacher for an urban high school, Florida; 41-year-old Black man, teaching for 16 years

Interviewer: “And in your school district or in your state, what are some controversial topics that are most pressing right now that come into the classroom?”

“*Participant:* **That racism exists. That people have a right to speak up because racism is a problem.** When we do exercises explaining white privilege, it's always a big eye-opener for our white kids because they don't get it a lot of the time. So I think that that's a big one. The issue about the role of slavery in the Southern past, especially how it might've affected them and their families personally.”

- Teacher providing small-group support in 8th grade English and science for an urban middle school (recently retired from teaching middle and high school sciences), North Carolina; 56-year-old white woman, teaching for 30 years



“**And these kids are missing out on all these experiences, especially with history.** These kids, we don't even do. . . anything in February to honor. . . Martin Luther King. Nothing. It's not there. There is no Black history month lesson. It's gone. It's not there.”

- K-3 teacher for a suburban elementary school, North Carolina; 39-year-old white woman, teaching for 15 years

Olivia's Story: A Black teacher is singled out – “to some in this community, they would consider me pushing an agenda.”

The accusation that she was teaching “Critical Race Theory”³ came as a shock to Olivia. She had been teaching English literature to high schoolers in rural Pennsylvania for the last 16 years, and she said that seeing her name on the website of a far-right advocacy group caught her off guard.

She believes she was singled out as a young Black educator, her name standing alone on the list despite the fact that her colleagues in the English Department taught the same books by authors like Pat Mora and Brent Staples. *“None of my coworkers who were of different races [were accused],”* she recalls, *“It was me.”* Now she questions her every move in the classroom. *“That had me walking on eggshells.”*

I teach Othello, but I don't mention the fact that Othello is a Moor, or that he has dark skin,” she explains how she excludes race from her instruction of the Shakespearean tragedy. *“You can't. So when you talk about that play, which does address race and gender expectations, it's like, ‘Oh, am I spending too much time on this?’”*

Although her union supported her and her administration backed her against the accusations, the experience has led to self-censorship, such as removing Zora Neale Hurston's “Their Eyes Were Watching God” from the curriculum. *“It is clear that to some in this community, they would consider me pushing an agenda.”*

- Honors English teacher for a rural high school, Pennsylvania; 42-year-old Black woman, teaching for 16 years

³ Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an academic and legal framework that examines racism as a systemic phenomenon. It is not taught in K-12 schools. However, in many districts, like Olivia's, CRT has become a pejorative term that is inaccurately and broadly applied to any discussions that touch on ways racism has shaped history and policies. For more information, see Legal Defense Fund, “Critical Race Theory: Frequently Asked Questions,” <https://www.naacpldf.org/critical-race-theory-faq/>.



E. Barriers to supporting LGBTQIA+ students

The increasing restrictions on LGBTQIA+ content in classrooms and gender affirming policies in schools thwarts teachers' ability to provide the care and support they know their students need. Even when educators do not specifically include LGBTQIA+ issues in curricula, these topics naturally arise via students' lived experiences—their family configurations and their own identities. Some teachers are scared that any discussion of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues—or even using a student's affirmed name and pronouns—will lead to retaliation.

Some teachers also find it challenging to publicly identify themselves as LGBTQIA+ (they know of teachers who have been targeted because they were out) or even just to display a rainbow flag as a symbol of inclusion or the promise of a safe space. One teacher in Florida describes an incident at her school in which conservative parents were upset about a family picture on a teacher's desk. “. . . *And then the parents are upset and [say,] 'That's not right. And we don't believe in that.' . . . all because they have a picture of their spouse and it happens to be the same sex.*”

Most teachers express a deep desire to support students and their identities, but feel like their ability to do so is curbed by restrictions and the fear of discipline from administration. They are particularly concerned about their LGBTQIA+ students—that the current atmosphere marginalizes these students, which results in isolation and bullying and undermines students' safety.

Teachers: In their own words

“ People feel that teachers are indoctrinating their children, but in this case, the way I feel is that. . .we don't make your children gay, they come to us like that. So we just try to encourage them to let them know that it's okay. They may not have that same safety in their family environment, in their family nucleus, their family dynamic. They may not have that, but **at least they know that when they come to school they'll be in a safe place. . .**”

- Media studies teacher in an urban high school, Florida; 41-year-old Black man, teaching for 16 years



“ So even though they might be innocent topics, **they [teachers] just avoid anything like that. LBGTQ, you know, two dads, two moms, whatever the situation might be.** Anything like that, they would avoid if at all possible.”

- Reading interventionist for a suburban elementary school, Florida; 61-year-old white woman, teaching for 26 years

“ Well, I think gender and sexuality is a huge one at our school. How parents perceive any gender non-conforming kids that go to our school. I think there's . . . I'll say **a small group of the community, including parents that have wide misconceptions about gender non-conforming kids and live in fear of their own kids somehow interacting inappropriately with . . . a kid that's transgender or is gay, you know?** So there's a lot of that in our community.”

- Special education teacher for a rural middle school, Wisconsin; 49-year-old white woman, teaching for 15-19 years

“ I mean, yes, honestly...**our LGBTQ population has completely flipped on its head. . . like everybody is back in the closet. Kids are really scared.** I had a kid actually move out of the city the second he turned 18 because of all the stuff that happened and he moved overseas, 'cause he was like . . . 'people don't accept me here.' So yeah . . . it's definitely negatively impacting students, their grades, their learning, their mental health, everything.”

- Librarian for three suburban middle schools, Michigan (formerly high school government/politics teacher); 44-year-old white woman, teaching for 20 years

“ . . . one of the best ways to reach your students is to get connections. **If you can't even call them by the name, they wanna be called, you've already added distance to the potential relationship you're trying to form.** . . . it makes it harder for us because when...a child is in transition, they're probably going through things, but obviously we can't talk about it and be supportive. We had to take down our stickers for the Gay Straight Alliance saying that we were a safe space.”

- Tenth grade world history teacher for an urban high school, Florida; 55-year-old white woman, teaching for 20-29 years

Hannah's Story: Noticing a decline in tolerance – "now. . . you'll see some kids genuinely being nasty to each other over [expressions of gender identity]."

Hannah has spent the last 14 years working with middle schoolers, first as an 8th grade language arts teacher and now as a school counselor. She talks about how she treasures watching the transformation of sixth graders, who often arrive as "babies," and eventually turn into more self-assured "cool" eighth graders.

When the conversation turns to increasing censorship of discussion around LGBTQIA+ identities and experiences, she explains her concern for her current students.

"Yes, we've had a lot of changes in our state as far as gender identity and trans rights in general. I've had students that two years ago, they were very open about who they were," she explains. "They felt really empowered because [as] . . . part of our school policy they could ask to . . . use their name and pronouns and that wasn't a problem. Now . . . everyone has to go through . . . paperwork. And even at that point we're still directed not to use anything other than the name and gender markers used in our school software."

"I've seen some kids just look like [new] versions of themselves," Hannah explains. "Some have become more militant, which is great, but you see a lot more of them clamping down. They just don't seem like the same kids they were years ago."

The impact of these changes extends beyond individual identity to the overall atmosphere of the school. Hannah has noticed a decline in the understanding, openness, and tolerance that once characterized students' interactions. *"It was [a supportive environment], now it's like a punchline for some of them," she laments. "You'll see some kids genuinely being nasty to each other over [expressions of gender identity]."*

Hannah herself is part of the LGBTQIA+ community and tries to be a source of support for her students. She wears a pride lanyard, a signal to students that she is a safe person to confide in. *"I get lots of comments about it, and that's usually their segue into talking about how they feel about themselves or what their family's like," she notes. This small gesture has also reassured parents, like the two moms who felt relieved to see her at the school.*

But in an era of heightened censorship and surveillance, Hannah says that she has learned that she has to be cautious. *"I'll answer any question honestly," she explains, "but I don't spend a whole lot of time talking about it because I know it can become an issue."*

- School counselor for a suburban middle school, Florida (formerly a middle school language arts teacher); 39-year-old white woman, teaching for 10-14 years



F. An erosion of critical thinking

Teachers are quietly raising the alarm that current policies and practices are discouraging the development of critical thinking, which hits home for teachers who describe going into the field because they felt inspired by *their* former teachers who had challenged them to think for themselves. One Pennsylvania teacher explains how “*that [experience of being encouraged to think critically] was something that always stuck with me and something that I want to do for others.*”

Within the confines of the current environment, teachers are struggling to engage students in thought-provoking discussions, and many note the difficulties of building meaningful connections and relationships with students because they have to “shut them down” on topics that are important to their students. Teachers know that the questions and problems don’t just “go away” because they are forbidden to discuss them in class.

Further, teachers note that some students are losing interest in learning—and even in school—because teachers are so restricted in what they teach and how they teach it. They describe being frustrated by not being able to adjust content to be culturally relevant or otherwise inspiring to students.

Some educators are open about their concern that there are long-term implications for students and for society. They note that they are struggling to prepare students for the real world or equip them with the basic skills to succeed later in life. And some view this trend of censorship as a calculated strategy to keep the next generation uninformed.

Teachers: In their own words

“ I think the way we've been doing things prior to now has helped kids create their own critical thinking. I think that's what every teacher's goal is, to get kids critically thinking on their own. And I think **that scares some parents because what if they start thinking for themselves and they don't agree with mom and dad?** I think that's become the problem.”

- Eleventh grade English/AP language teacher for a suburban high school, Virginia; 46-year-old white woman, teaching for 16 years

“ And in a sense **it's a dumbing down of learning.** We're gonna avoid things that are sensitive or scary or, you know, which may be exactly the things that some children in front of you may need to talk about.”

- Reading interventionist for a suburban elementary school, Florida; 61-year-old white woman, teaching for 26 years



“**You're taking away their critical thinking. You're taking away their imagination. You're taking away so many things from children.** And I don't think from the political climate that we're in that they see it that way. But. . . you keep the information away from them. . . [As a result] They only think literally. They don't think beyond their immediate environment. They don't see it from someone else's perspective. They only see it just one way.”

- Reading interventionist for an urban elementary school, Florida; 54-year-old Black woman, teaching for 28 years

“**It's de-education, right?** They want to de-educate minorities because minorities started voting and the outcome will be, you know, different from this point forward. . . You know, you take all the Black kid books out of the library now...and the Black kids don't wanna read again. That's what they want. You take the LGBTQ books out of the library, then gay people start going back in the closet because they don't feel safe. I mean they wanna roll it back. That's what the conservative party does.”

- Librarian for three suburban middle schools, Michigan (formerly high school government/politics teacher); 44-year-old white woman, teaching for 20 years

* * *

G. Many teachers are leaving. Some teachers resist. All teachers care.

Many teachers describe feeling extremely tired or burned out, and we heard this especially clearly in the interviews with Florida teachers. As one Florida teacher notes: *“The stress level that I have seen on the educators here is something that I've never seen in 32 years.”* Teachers talk about how they would think twice about entering the profession today. A Florida teacher explains: *“If I had to do it again, would I [have] chosen this profession? No. No. Would I recommend it to another young kid coming up? No.”*

Some teachers with decades of experience, who never before considered leaving the profession, are looking toward the door. And many witness their colleagues exiting the profession. As one Michigan teacher says, *“People are quitting left and right.”*

Teachers: In their own words

“ I guess if you had asked me [why people get into education] like 10 years ago, it would be a dramatically different answer. I loved every minute of being a teacher 10 years ago, I felt like I was making a difference. . . . Now it's completely different. . . . **I would not in good faith be able to tell someone that I cared [about] to go into education right now. It's a nightmare.**”

- K-3 teacher for a suburban elementary school, North Carolina; 39-year-old white woman, teaching for 15 years

“ We [teachers] have to support each other because **everyone's saying the same thing, 'I don't know how much longer I can do this. . . like this.'** ...we all love what we do, but in the current climate and the way that it's going. . . and the tying of teacher's hands, no one wants to be in a job where they feel like they have no freedom. No one wants to feel that way.”

- Reading interventionist for a urban elementary school, Florida; 54-year-old Black woman, teaching for 28 years

“ And that is why teachers are leaving because they're getting . . . so little at this point. It's not worth it. And don't even get me started on the pay because we are 50th in the nation in pay. . . . **I mean it's just stressful and it's not necessarily safe.**”

- Tenth grade world history teacher for an urban high school, Florida; 55-year-old white woman, teaching for 20-29 years

“ I see teachers leaving the profession because of what's going on. You've had **teachers that have taught for 10, 15 years and they're just deciding to leave now because of the curriculum, because of the politics** that are surrounding the schools. . . .”

- Media studies teacher in an urban high school, Florida; 41-year-old Black man, teaching for 16 years

Teachers hear the attacks against them—that they are “indoctrinating,” “brainwashing,” or even “grooming” children. These attacks are in direct opposition to their experience of their role, which is to empower and inform. As one teacher explains, the “*task [of teaching] is to suspend my beliefs and to present students with information so that they can form their own... informed belief, an informed position.*”

What teachers wished that everyone understood is that they truly *care* about children, their learning, and their experiences. And this is the reason—despite feeling burnt out, feeling that their expertise is disregarded, and feeling disrespected in their roles, that teachers say they are staying. As one Pennsylvania teacher says: “*We love the kids and things are really, really rough now. We stay in it because we love the kids and we still wanna make a difference, but it's getting increasingly difficult to do that.*”



Carla's Story: Frustrated by censorship "Because we don't indoctrinate. All we wanna do is teach."

Twice honored as her Florida region's Teacher of the Year, Carla's dedication to her students and her craft is reflected in her 23 years of experience. She takes pride in her work and in her tenure. Yet, when the topic shifts to the censorship of books and classroom materials, the frustration in her voice is palpable.

"Everything has to be vetted," she says, the weariness surfacing as she reflects on the changes over the past six years. "The fact that I have to think about what I can and cannot discuss. And the fact that I can't now...I have to refrain. I have to think, I cannot share."

Her words reveal a deep-seated frustration with the rationale behind increasing censorship policies and practices: *"This whole indoctrination—excuse me, I know I'm being recorded—is bullshit. Because we don't indoctrinate. All we wanna do is teach."*

- Special education teacher for a high school, Florida; 55-year-old white woman, teaching for 32 years


Teachers: In their own words

“ **People are saying that teachers are trying to indoctrinate students. Like I don't know when we would have time to indoctrinate anyone.** I'm just trying to teach 'em how to read and write and you know, get to the next grade level and in a certain amount of time and then . . .make sure they're listening to that teaching and not hurting each other.”

- Second grade teacher for a suburban elementary school, Florida; 53-year-old white woman, teaching for 31 years

“ I would wish they would understand that we as teachers, one, we love what we do. **That we are not trying to brainwash. We're not trying to . . . make kids think a certain way. We're not trying to do any of that. We are trying to educate children.** We are trying to educate them. We're trying to teach them one plus one. We're trying to teach them to read. We're trying to teach them to love reading. We're trying to get them interested in the sciences, in the arts. We are trying to broaden their horizons to get them to think beyond their local area. We're not trying to indoctrinate them to think a certain way. That's not what we're here for. We are here to develop a love of learning. That's what we're here for.”

- Reading interventionist for an urban elementary school, Florida; 54-year-old Black woman, teaching for 28 years



“ I have loved my career. I go out of my way to make these kids have these memories, and I have kids that are in high school now that still talk to me. And I still don't wanna be a martyr. I've never wanted to be a martyr. . . **I will be your child's teacher. I will be an advocate for them till the end of time. I will teach them to the best of my ability. . .**”

- K-3 teacher for a suburban elementary school, North Carolina; 39-year-old white woman, teaching for 15 years

“ We're not trying to indoctrinate your children. If I could indoctrinate your child, they'd bring a pencil to school, their Chromebook charged and turn in their work on time. **Trust me, we're not indoctrinating your children, we're just trying to teach them about our subject, about our state, about how to be a good citizen.**”

- Tenth grade world history teacher for an urban high school, Florida; 55-year-old white woman, teaching for 20-29 years

Allison's Story: Holding on to hope that “. . . all these things that are problematic, they can be changed if somebody in the upper administration says, 'This matters to us' . . .”

After discussing the litany of problems with teaching, Allison seized the direction of the conversation, expressing that she wanted to “flip it” to a more positive view. She launched into a story of how a Department of Equity Affairs in her county led to the transformation of AP courses from a “white kid class” to a more diverse group. “We started thinking about institutional racism in our school, [and] one of my students says, ‘Why is it that I'm the only Black kid in AP chem?’ And we're like, ‘Good question!’ And so we went back and looked.”

The journey Allison laid out involved a cooperative peeling away of racial issues layer by layer—tackling implicit bias in ways that didn't end in defensiveness, listening to kids' experiences, and enlisting the students themselves to contribute to changing the school's culture and its race-based assumptions. She shared the practice of students of color enrolled in high school AP classes visiting middle schools so the younger students could “see somebody who looked like them being successful in that environment.”

According to Allison, this effort transformed course enrollment to be more representative of the racial makeup of the student population. “So all these things that are problematic, they can be changed if somebody in the upper administration says, ‘This matters to us’, and then there's support for follow through. So there can be happy, happy stories.”

- Teacher providing small-group support in 8th grade English and science for an urban middle school (recently retired from teaching middle and high school sciences), North Carolina; 56-year-old white woman, teaching for 30 years

III. Conclusion

Recent right-wing attacks on education are creating an environment of fear in the classroom, with far-reaching consequences for teachers, their students, and the next generation. Interviews made clear that the consequences can even extend beyond the reach of the policies themselves, as teachers experience a new atmosphere of surveillance where it is safer to self-censor than to risk offending one parent or administrator.

Teachers are uncertain about how to teach accurately and effectively in an environment of censorship and they worry about the impact on students. And they explain how censorship and restrictions strip away some of their ability to engage with, inspire, and support their students—especially students of color and LGBTQIA+ students.

Notably, interviewees observed that the current climate is driving teachers out of the profession. While most of the teachers we interviewed are determined to stay and continue doing their best to educate and advocate for students' rights, they also point to the direct correlation between their working conditions and the quality of children's education and our collective future.

“ If [children's] teachers feel safe, their teachers feel valued, their teachers feel motivated, then that's gonna carry over into the classroom because they'll feel safer that they can teach what they want to teach, that they can teach how they wanna teach it, and that will provide a better quality education for their kids. . .

*I wish that [people] would just not see teachers and education as the enemy. . . We always go into this profession with the greater good on our mind. And we value education and we value children. **We believe that there is hope in the future.***”

- Media studies teacher in an urban high school, Florida; 41-year-old Black man, teaching for 16 years