

# **UNDER THE RALLYING CRY OF SO-CALLED “PARENTAL RIGHTS”, ANTI-EQUALITY LAWMAKERS INTRODUCED A FLURRY OF BILLS AIMED AT CENSORING SCHOOL CURRICULUMS.**

Whether they silenced discussions on Black history or pulled books with same-sex couples off of library shelves, the end consequence was the same. Fearful of having their teaching licenses revoked and of eliciting legal action against their school districts, many educators felt unable to provide inclusive and affirming spaces for their students. For LGBTQ+ students and students of color, this dramatic shift in classroom dynamics made school an unwelcome and unsafe place.

## **HISTORICAL PRECEDENT OF CENSORSHIP IN EDUCATION**

Today’s lawmakers are following an old playbook. The history of the United States is riddled with attempts by state governments to restrict the teaching of allegedly controversial topics. In the years following the Civil War, southern schools intentionally omitted key details about the brutality of slavery. A number of states would go on to ban the teaching of evolution in the 1920s. Several decades later, hordes of teachers across the country were dismissed from their posts for their alleged membership in the Communist party.

Anti-LGBTQ+ animus during the HIV/AIDS epidemic of the 1980s encouraged a proliferation of bills prohibiting positive mention of “homosexuality” in sexual education classes. Following this, the path to “Don’t Say LGBTQ+” bills was straightforward and quickly implemented across a handful of states.

## **“DON’T SAY LGBTQ+”**

Don’t Say LGBTQ+ bills contain provisions that seek, in some way, to restrict discussions and/or limit access to materials that concern sexual orientation and gender identity in educational environments. When implemented, these bills create a chilling effect in the classroom, stifling acknowledgement of LGBTQ+ people and issues. Further, these bills create an environment that leaves many LGBTQ+ students and teachers feeling ostracized from their peers.

Feelings of isolation and uncertainty became ubiquitous among Florida educators, whose school districts are still struggling to interpret the controversial language of Florida’s HB 1557, our nation’s first “Don’t Say LGBTQ+” bill in over two decades. They were joined by teachers from a dozen states that had quickly followed in Florida’s footsteps by introducing their own versions of the bill. The revival of curriculum censorship took state legislatures by storm, inspiring the introduction of a multitude of discriminatory education bills.

## **POLICING PRONOUNS, BANNING BOOKS, AND REWRITING HISTORY**

The singling out of sexual orientation and gender identity in the classroom disproportionately affects LGBTQ+ youth, who consistently report feeling isolated at home and in their communities. LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to face victimization, violence, and suicidality than their cisgender and heterosexual peers. These issues are especially pronounced for transgender and non-binary children. School can often be a safe place for students outside of an unsafe home, but where can students turn when both home and school no longer provide safety?

In just this past year, Tennessee legislators proposed legislation encouraging educators to misgender their students. In Oklahoma, lawmakers introduced a bill that would give parents broad authority to remove school library books that addressed sexual orientation and gender identity. Alabama passed the worst anti-transgender legislative package in history, and in doing so, created an untenable environment for LGBTQ+ youth in the community. The slate of bills contained a number of anti-LGBTQ+ measures, the worst of which criminalized parents for providing gender-affirming care for their transgender children, barred transgender children from using bathrooms and locker rooms that aligned with their gender identity, and censored classroom discussions on LGBTQ+ issues.

## **CONCLUSION**

It is clear that LGBTQ+ youth are under siege from anti-equality lawmakers, whose efforts to erase them from the classroom are on the rise. It is imperative that we continue to work together to make LGBTQ+ youth feel welcome and supported both inside the classroom and out. An inclusive curriculum is absolutely necessary to ensure that LGBTQ+ students feel safe and accepted in the classroom. And it is necessary that our educators and schools feel empowered to provide it