

## NASP Opposes Censorship in Public Education

Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) joins other K–12, higher education, and parent and family organizations expressing deep concern over efforts to misuse parents’ rights as a smokescreen to hobble our public K–12 schools’ and universities’ ability to provide a comprehensive, factual, and inclusive education to all students.

NASP firmly believes that families and educators want the best for children and work tirelessly toward that goal. We are committed to fostering effective family engagement where educators, parents, families, and caregivers work together as equal partners who share responsibility for the learning and success of all students in our public schools. In effective family–school partnerships, family diversity is celebrated, and family culture is embedded throughout school policies and practice. True family engagement must include consideration of the views of all families in the school community in decision making. We support increased opportunity for authentic family engagement as well as the right of families to voice opposition to or concern with specific actions. Parents and families have this right, as well as the right to review curricula and opt their child out of specific lessons or participation in specific activities, if they choose.

Unfortunately, this right is being grossly misinterpreted to mean that any parent or group of parents has the ‘right’ to eliminate any book, discussion, curriculum, or classroom decoration with which they personally disagree, even when the vast majority of parents in a school community demand that a diversity of content be available to their children at school. By their very nature, public schools have the responsibility to reflect and represent the diversity of the public they serve. Efforts to censor learning about or proactively reject, or even erase, subsets of student and family populations threaten this essential, irreplaceable public purpose. Additionally, we know from long global history that censorship is a dangerous force when wielded by the government and never results in positive progress or the improved well-being of society or its citizens.

We remain alarmed at continued efforts, falsely characterized as protecting ‘parents rights’, to: restrict access to a well-rounded, uncensored public education curriculum; sanction discrimination and further the marginalization of LGBTQ+ and other minoritized youth; limit schools’ ability to properly engage in critical early identification and early intervention efforts to support students’ well-being and social–emotional development; and prevent students from accessing school psychologists and other school mental health professionals when they need support. These policies, which prioritize the voices of a minority of school community members at the expense of the broader school community, are being considered and enacted by local school boards, state governors and legislatures, and Congress. Schools and districts must be empowered to make decisions based on empirical evidence and the needs of the school community, including the unique needs of specific groups of students, without fear of reprisal.

NASP firmly believes that censorship has no place in our education system. NASP strongly supports the inclusion of developmentally appropriate discussion and formal curricula on critical topics including: systemic racism, equity, cultural responsiveness, diversity, social–emotional learning, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Critical thinking and respectful dialogue about important and often complex topics are necessary to

equip students with the information and ability to understand and thoughtfully examine the facts that shape an increasingly diverse society. As such, we are highly concerned about efforts to restrict discussion of these same concepts, especially within our higher education system.

The free and open exchange of ideas is the foundation of the First Amendment and the bedrock of democracy. Current efforts, led by government entities, to restrict coursework, critical examination, or mere discussion of issues related to diversity, the LGBTQ+ community, racism, equity, gender studies, etc. on college campuses are failing our country and, ultimately, the young people who will eventually lead us. These efforts are antithetical to the U.S. Constitution, they misrepresent history, and they replace educators' expertise with government control and overreach. How can we expect people to be successful in an increasingly diverse and global workplace if they are not allowed to discuss these issues at the college level? How are we preparing doctors, teachers, mental health professionals, and others to work with diverse populations and engage in culturally responsive practices if they are prohibited from coursework that addresses these topics? Indoctrinating students to believe a false history that erases the experiences of large segments of our society benefits no one. It robs students of the opportunity to develop the critical thinking skills essential to solving the pressing problems of our time. Diversity is an undeniable part of the human experience and cannot be erased from our institutions of education or greater society.

These critically necessary topics have become far too politicized and are being weaponized in states and local school districts across the country. Even the consideration of policies to censor ideas or deny individual civil rights creates a climate of surveillance and punishment for educators. It has a chilling effect on evidence-based classroom instruction when educators fear potential repercussions, and this is severely limiting intellectual rigor on many college campuses. We currently face workforce shortages across education and mental health arenas. Passing laws that restrict the ability of these professionals to work with youth effectively will only exacerbate these shortages and worsen the youth mental health crisis.

NASP is unequivocally committed to ensuring the ability of students and educators to engage in critical dialogue necessary to dismantle systemic racism, combat prejudice and discrimination, and advance equity. Strengthening the capacity for critical thinking and positive engagement is foundational to our democracy and good for all of us.

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [Resolution Affirming NASP Commitment to High Quality Public Education for All Children and Youth](#)
- [NASP Supports Access to an Affirming School Environment and Uncensored Public Education](#)
- [Testimony for the Hearing of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on American Education in Crisis on February 8, 2023](#)

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