



Parents Are Rolling Back Transgender Activism

Across the U.S. parents are fighting to protect their children from transgender and other LGBTQ activism. Through their school boards, parental rights organizations and public stances, parents are resisting efforts to impose transgender education and sex counseling within their schools. Many of these parents were made aware of the agenda to transform their children's schools by Manhattan Institute senior fellow Christopher Rufo, who has tirelessly produced documentary films, written op-eds and given speeches and podcasts warning parents about LGBTQ activism, in addition to working directly on educational reform in Florida and elsewhere.¹

Battles have broken out in California, New Mexico, New Jersey, North Carolina, Florida and other states against transgender indoctrination in schools. These fights have concerned required curriculum, school and library books, and the rights of parents to know if their children have reported to school authorities that they identify as transgender.

The struggle over parental rights versus state authorities backed by small but powerful transgender activists is just beginning and will intensify in the coming years. It will be fought through political mobilization and the courts. The woke left has placed a huge bet on backing transgender educational activism. Although it cost them the governorship in Virginia in 2022 when Glenn Youngkin, a former equity fund CEO, won election in a campaign defending parental rights, the woke left seems to have doubled down on the transgender issue.

In promoting transgender education, the left has cleverly employed language of "privacy rights" for children, "book banning" and "erasing" transgendered youth. This rhetoric has placed parental rights groups on the defensive. *Parental rights groups face determined resistance by state authorities who have pressured school boards to rescind parental protection of their children.*

A prime example of pressure by state authorities on school boards is found in California. This summer Governor Gavin Newsom and state education authorities went to war when two California school boards rejected state-imposed educational materials they found offensive. The battle was over the rejection by the Riverside County and Temecula Valley Unified School District boards of a new state-produced social studies book.

The textbook pointed specifically to the supplemental curriculum, which included a biography of gay rights leader Harvey Milk, the San Francisco city supervisor assassinated in 1979. The boards took issue with Milk's well-documented relationship with a 16-year-old boy when Milk was in his 30s. Conservative members of the boards believed that the curriculum was making Milk, whom they considered a pedophile, into a hero.

School Boards vs. States

Governor Newsom and other top California education officials accused the school boards of refusing to comply with a 2011 state law requiring school to teach students about the contributions of gay, bisexual and transgender Americans to the nation's history. When the Riverside County school board initially refused to comply, Newsom vowed to take the county to court and threatened a \$1.5 million fine. Under pressure, the board partially reversed course by approving the overall curriculum, while deciding to postpone one of its fourth-grade lessons on the gay rights movement.

The compromise did not mollify Newsom, who announced to the press in July, "Demagogues who whitewash history, censor books, and perpetuate prejudice must never succeed."² The Temecula school board backed down under pressure and fear of the costs of a legal battle with the state.

Meanwhile, the Chino Valley Unified School District passed a measure that requires schools in the district to notify parents if their child expresses a gender identity different from that child's biological sex. At a heated board meeting in July that lasted four hours, with more than 90 speakers, the board voted in support of informing parents about gender confusion of their children. School board president Sonja Shaw lauded the vote, telling the press, "As a parent, we were shut down. We tried to have conversations Stop assuming that parents are dangerous."³ Following the vote, she said that activists had threatened to kill and "dismember" her.⁴

In early August, the Murrieta Valley Unified School District passed a new policy allowing parents to be notified if their child identifies as transgender. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction sent an email to the board requesting that it reverse this policy. School district trustee Nick Pardue, who had proposed the new policy, responded on Fox News, saying, "The United States Constitution and constitutional rights of parents supersede state law. And I think we're on the right side of this."⁵

'Parental rights end' in school?

In the state of New Mexico, controversy arose when New Mexico School Boards Association "trainer" Andrew Sanchez was caught on tape in December 2022 declaring, "Parents do not have a fundamental right to tell you how public school teaches their child. Parental rights end when you decide to send your kids to public school."⁶ The tape was released by the parental rights group Freedom Families United.

New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy's administration sued three school districts in June for their policies to inform parents about their children reporting signs of confusion over their sexual identities. The suits were brought by Attorney General Matt Platkin against the Manalapan-Englishtown, Marlboro and Middletown school districts, whose boards had voted that parents have a right to know about their children reporting confusion of their sexual identities to teachers or counselors.

Attorney General Platkin argued that such policies violate state discrimination law. He maintained that "'Outing' these students against their will poses serious mental health risk; threatens physical harm to students, including increased suicides; decreases the likelihood students will seek support"⁷ A similar suit was previously filed against the Hanover Township Board of Education.

Attorneys representing the three school boards argue that the board policies are not discriminatory, and that keeping parents in the dark about important issues involving their children is counterintuitive and unconstitutional. These suits are still pending, with the policies blocked for now by a judge.

Parents won a significant victory in North Carolina on August 16, when the Republican-led legislature overrode Democratic Governor Roy Cooper's veto of three bills affecting transgender children, including a ban on instruction on "gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality" through 4th grade, and a requirement that schools inform parents if their child asks to be called by a different name or pronoun.

Objections to School Library Books

While fights rage over school curriculum and parental rights, sparks are flying over what books should be available in school libraries.

Florida has become a focal point for this struggle. In the spring of 2023, Florida lawmakers approved a bill expanding prohibitions on LGBT content in the state's existing "Parental Rights in Education" law—dubbed the "Don't Say Gay" law by opponents—through high school. (A summary of the law is worth reading because of so much distortion of it by the mainstream media, politicians and activists.)⁸

The expanded law contains what opponents call a "book ban" provision, which permits any county resident to initiate a review process that could lead to removal of books he deems objectionable from school library shelves. The law was passed in a party-line vote. Passage of the law was urged by Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis. The Florida Board of Education, also at Governor DeSantis's recommendation, enacted a new rule governing "professional conduct" in the classroom by teachers. Instructors in K-12 were prohibited from "intentionally provid[ing] classroom instruction" on sexual orientation or gender identity.⁹ Teachers found in violation of the rule can face suspension or have their teaching licenses revoked.

With the passage of the law, the state of Florida and Governor DeSantis came under attack for wanting to ban books. Of course, Florida was not the only state where parents protested over books being placed in school libraries and the classroom.

Often left unexplained is the nature of the books that parents have complained about in public hearings. In part, this failure to discuss the content of the books reflects bias, but it also reflects respect for what can be decently discussed in public. A look at the content of some of these books shows why a discussion of content is avoided.

Books that have provoked parental complaints include Maia Kobabe's *Gender Queer*, George M. Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue*, Mike Curato's *Flamer*, John Green's *Looking for Alaska*, Jonathan Evison's *Lawn Boy* and Juno Dawson's *This Book Is Gay*.

Not Safe for Work

The American Library Association announced that Maia Kobabe's graphic memoir *Gender Queer* was the most "challenged" book of 2022, for the second consecutive year in a row. *Gender Queer* is a graphic book—comic book, if you will—that depicts young adolescent boys having oral sex, and a young girl who wonders if she is transgender after her first menstrual cycle. In subsequent frames she worries about breast cancer to an obsessive degree. She just does not like being in a girl's body.

George Johnson's *All Boys Aren't Blue* contains detailed descriptions about the author's homosexual encounters as a youth. The first depiction is of the author's molestation by a relative who was a few years older. The second describes in detail the first time the author engaged in consensual homosexual sex.

Flamer, a graphic novel drawn by the Filipino-American artist Mike Curato, tells of a young boy at a summer Boy Scout camp who experiences his first homosexual relationship (graphically told). In realizing he is gay, the boy rejects his Roman Catholic upbringing and church doctrine on homosexuality as "homophobic." *Flamer* has developed a near cult-like following.

Lawn Boy is a "coming of age" story of a Hispanic youth, who recounts his first homosexual encounters. Instruction about specific homosexual sex acts, among much else, is delivered in *This Book Is Gay* by Juno Dawson. Published in 2014, the latter book has become a standard in sex education courses across the country.¹⁰ Advocates and the book's author say it was written to help young people who are beginning to explore their sexuality, but critics call it a "hookup" sex manual. Young readers are given advice on how to secretly meet up with gay youth and adults, and what to do in first and subsequent sexual encounters.

Controversy over *This Book Is Gay* began last year when a parent filed a complaint because the book was available in the Pierce Middle School library in Tampa, Florida.¹¹ A committee at the school reviewed the book and decided it should stay. Their decision was appealed, and then a district committee reviewed the book and also voted that it could remain on library shelves. The dispute continues.

These books have received wide praise by reviewers. An internet search of any of these books finds review after review describing the book as moving, important, and essential reading for young people. Reviews avoid specific descriptions of explicit sexual material.

We have come a long way since J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), a novel heavily assigned to earlier generations of high school students, about a prep school boy coming of age sexually. The main character in the novel never actually has a sexual relationship.

Attacks on Parents

Parents taking offense at these sexually explicit novels assigned in class or available in school or public libraries have been attacked as "homophobic" fascists trying to "ban books," "erase transgender kids" and disrespect child privacy. The attacks on these parents have been vicious in public and online.

The American Library Association (ALA) takes particular umbrage at parental protests over sexually explicit books in school and public libraries. The ALA website on its first page projects a national crusade by right wingers to ban books.¹² There is no mention of Shakespeare's *Othello* or Mark Twain's novel *Huckleberry Finn* being banned due to left-wing objections, or other authors from Agatha Christie to Roald Dahl being rewritten by publishers.¹³

The reason is that ALA is a left-wing activist organization, whose newly elected president Emily Drabinski is an avowed lesbian Marxist. In her "Vision for ALA," she states, "consequences of decades of unchecked climate change, class war, white supremacy, and imperialism have led us here," but there is hope through "collective power" and the use of "public goods like the library."¹⁴

The ALA reported more than 49,000 members as of 2021. With a staff of more than 300, it is quite influential.

Schools are simultaneously dumbing down and sexualizing our students. Average literacy and reading scores for 13-year-olds fell last year to the lowest level in a decade. Even

National Public Radio and the *New York Times* were shocked by this decline. The National Assessment of Educational Progress scores fell by 4 points in reading and a startling 9 points in math, compared with tests given in 2019-20. These declines were more pronounced for lower-income and minority kids, but scores dropped across all percentiles.

The Consequences We Face

The same national test revealed that basic knowledge of American history and civics among 8th-grade students showed an even more shocking decline.¹⁵ Scores for tests of 8th graders' understanding of history continued a decade of decline in 2022 and fell for the first time in civics. Only 13 percent of students showed proficiency in American history and only 22 percent scored proficient in civics. Forty percent of students fell below the basic level of knowledge of U.S. history, up from 34 percent in 2018.¹⁶

So while the woke left forces sexual miseducation in the classroom, our students and future citizens have become ignoramuses, confused and maybe even obsessed about their sexual identities, while uninformed about a nation founded on individual rights and freedoms.

This is not a healthy state for a democratic nation. Can it be reversed? The answer is an emphatic Yes! *Parents are fighting back by voting for elected officials for school boards, state legislators and governors who respect and understand that parents have a right and an obligation to raise their children in ways they see fit.* Drove of parents are deserting the public schools to enroll their children in private schools or homeschooling.

These parents are being joined by other Americans who fear for the nation. This is just the beginning of a backlash against woke education. As the left pushes the boundaries

of what is acceptable in the classroom, Americans are responding with a simple request: *Please educate our children to read, write and calculate.* It is for their future and the future of our great nation that we request this. If you refuse, we will take action. Call us what you want—fascists, homophobes, bigots—but we know who we are: responsible parents and citizens acting on behalf of our children, our families, our communities and our country.

¹ <https://rufo.substack.com/p/the-transgender-empire>. We note that the *Mindszenty Report* has previously addressed transgender ideology and policy on three occasions: in May and June 2018 and in March 2021.

Transgender ideology has numerous implications, including for medical care, girls' and women's sports, prisons and homeless shelters, restrooms, family court issues and employment, as well as educational content. This Report focuses on educational content in K-12 schools.

² https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2023/07/26/gov_newsoms_school_board_showdown_149577.htm.

³ <https://www.foxnews.com/media/california-school-district-stands-parental-rights-newsom-targets-conservative-school-boards>.

⁴ <https://www.dailysignal.com/2023/07/25/radicals-threaten-kill-dismember-school-board-president-adopting-parental-rights-policy/>.

⁵ <https://abc7.com/murrieta-valley-unified-school-district-transgender-students-controversial-policy/13632738/>;

<https://www.foxnews.com/media/california-school-board-member-parental-rights-policy-gender-identity-parents-voices-being-heard>.

⁶ <https://pinonpost.com/nm-school-board-trainer-on-hot-mic-parental-rights-end-in-public-school/>.

⁷ <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/06/22/murphy-new-jersey-school-districts-transgender-policy-00103127>.

⁸ <https://www.flgov.com/2022/03/28/governor-ron-desantis-signs-historic-bill-to-protect-parental-rights-in-education/>.

⁹ <https://www.metroweekly.com/2023/05/florida-legislature-expands-dont-say-gay-law-along-with-book-ban/>.

¹⁰ <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/this-book-is-gay-juno-dawson-banned-book-1234710076/>.

¹¹ <https://thehill.com/homenews/3923013-florida-board-bans-this-book-is-gay-from-middle-school-libraries/>.

¹² <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/top10>.

¹³ Rick Fuentes, "Why Ban Books if You Can Rewrite Them," *American Thinker*, August 11, 2023.

¹⁴ <https://www.dailysignal.com/2022/04/22/american-library-association-picks-self-proclaimed-marxist-as-president/>.

¹⁵ <https://edsources.org/2023/latest-test-results-underscore-declining-knowledge-of-u-s-history-and-civics/689766>.

¹⁶ <https://edsources.org/2023/latest-test-results-underscore-declining-knowledge-of-u-s-history-and-civics/689766>.

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