GAE OPPOSES CLASSROOM CENSORSHIP BILLS HB1084 AND SB377

IMPAIRS A CHILD’S ABILITY TO LEARN AND THINK CRITICALLY
All students across Georgia deserve a *quality* education. That’s why our schools should be places where we invite children to be curious. We should not be stifling a child’s interest in understanding why things are happening in the world around them.

If a third grade class reads about the life and work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and a student inevitably asks why Dr. King was assassinated, would their teacher (and by extension, the school and school district) face punishment for responding that Dr. King’s killer did not believe in equality of the races, but rather, he believed that black people are inferior to white people? What if the student continues to ask probing questions, hoping to understand the role they can play in correcting the wrongs of the past? Should the teacher be punished for continuing the discussion? Or should the teacher tell the student to stop asking questions? What message are we sending our students when we say there are certain topics we can't talk about in our classrooms?

By limiting full discussions of history, race and racism in any classroom, politicians inhibit a child’s ability to learn, weigh the information for themselves, agree or disagree, and engage in intelligent debate that further develops their critical thinking skills.

ATTEMPTS TO BAN OR WHITEWASH IMPORTANT AND OFTEN PAINFUL AMERICAN HISTORY AND CURRENT EVENTS
Denying the reality that racism exists and is perpetuated in Georgia and, more broadly, in the United States of America invalidates the lived experience of marginalized students, thereby triggering the very anguish and psychological distress the bills’ sponsors claim they seek to prevent. To say we cannot talk about the current realities of systemic racism means educators cannot address disparities in health, wealth, employment, policing, housing, immigration, and more.
Political maneuvers like HB1084 and SB377 ultimately block our children from learning our complex history and confronting injustice perpetuated throughout American institutions. As long as politicians (in lieu of educational experts) are driving instructional decisions, a more perfect union will remain out of reach for our children.

**PRODUCES A CHILLING EFFECT ON EDUCATORS**
The bill parameters are so unclear and vague that educators feel they must avoid certain subjects altogether, forced to weigh their ethical and contractual obligation to teach the curriculum and affirm all children in their school against the risk of penalties to the school and district.

While HB1084 and SB377 lay out permissible discourse, it’s the risk of penalties ranging from professional sanctions to losing 10% of QBE funding that engenders an added layer of fear among educators. And while GAE stands opposed to waivers that allow, for example, class size maximums to be disregarded, ultimately one well-meaning social studies teacher should not be scapegoated for incurring penalties against the whole school or district.

**UNDERMINES TRUST IN EDUCATORS AND STOKES TENSION**
Educators are trained professionals, certified to teach by the state of Georgia. But HB1084 and SB377 send a message to teachers that the government may target them for allowing or perhaps indirectly fostering discussion of “divisive concepts” in their classrooms. The bills give parents, other teachers in the building, members of the House and Senate Education committees, and even the Attorney General the right to make complaints against teachers. Such complaint processes could be used as a tool for teacher harassment, particularly since they can be based on hearsay.

At a time when educators and parents should be encouraged to partner up and get our kids through an unprecedented pandemic, politicians are fomenting outrage over issues and ideas they personally find objectionable, using parents as a proxy to further undermine trust in public schools and educators. Rather than solve problems like [Georgia’s persistent shortage of teachers](#), substitute teachers, bus drivers, school nurses, and school counselors, these bills would only exacerbate them.

**CASTS AN ONEROUS BURDEN ON PUBLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION**
The complaint processes outlined in HB1084 and SB377 put pressure on the school principal to respond within three to five days of receiving a complaint. Given all the obligations and duties of a school principal, these bills provide a very low threshold for making complaints that could bog down the principal, and set too small a window to resolve the matter in the best interest of the children, educators, and local community. To add insult to injury, neither bill applies to private schools or private schools receiving state funding.
CREATES BUREAUCRACY AND DUPLICATES EXISTING LAW AND POLICY
Georgia already has laws, rules, and regulations at the state and federal level that address discrimination, academic standards, and requirements for professional personnel. For example, every certified teacher in Georgia signs a contract that outlines the process for adjudicating complaints, the Georgia Professional Standards Commission acting as final arbiter. HB1084 and SB377 don’t offer any new, innovative, efficient, or helpful ways to address the problem it purports to solve.

COMES FROM DUBIOUS ORIGINS
“Divisive concepts” language originated from the Trump administration’s Executive Order 13590, which attempted to curtail Diversity and Inclusion training programs required of federal workers.

A national movement among state legislatures to regulate what is taught in schools shortly followed. Since January 2021, state legislators across the country have introduced or pre-filed 137 bills restricting what can be taught in 35 states, according to PEN America. Over 87 of those bills emerged this year, and 10 states have already passed restrictive laws.

The Whole Truth:
Honesty in Education Resources

We Need to Teach the Truth About Systemic Racism, Say Educators - Brenda Álvarez, NEAToday

Racial Justice In Education Resource Guide - National Education Association

A Lesson on Critical Race Theory - Janel George, American Bar Association

Former Georgia Teacher of the Year: Debate over critical race theory is heartbreaking - Maureen Downey, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

White People’s Fear of Critical Race Theory is Based in Ignorance - Allison Gaines, Medium

Georgia Board Of Education Takes Aim At Critical Race Theory - Lily Oppenheimer, WABE

GOP Lawmakers Intensify Effort to Ban Critical Race Theory in Schools - Stephen Karse, Pew Charitable Trusts

1 The Georgia Professional Standards Commission sets and applies guidelines for the preparation, certification, and continued licensing of public educators.