



# **Book Bans and Curriculum Gag Orders: National Trends**

## **Staff Report**

Committee on Oversight and Accountability  
U.S. House of Representatives

October 5, 2023

[oversightdemocrats.house.gov](https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov)

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lawmakers and activist groups across the country are pursuing an agenda to ban books in classrooms and libraries and to censor teachers on subjects related to the history of white supremacy, gender in society, sexuality, and social and emotional learning. The number of proposed educational gag orders in states increased 250% between 2021 and 2022. Since January 2021, more than 300 bills that would curtail teaching about the history of race and gender in public schools have been introduced in states across the country. PEN America recently released a report documenting at least 3,362 episodes of book banning during the 2022–2023 school year.<sup>1</sup> Activist groups have challenged hundreds of books across the country, predominantly asserting that popular children’s books are actually vehicles of liberal indoctrination.

The escalation of ideological efforts to delegitimize teaching, ban books, and prohibit teaching certain subjects in the classroom contributes more stress to teachers already reeling from the pandemic and related safety measures.<sup>2</sup> At the same time that teachers and schools are contending with the shock of COVID-19 and the increased politicization of the classroom, school districts are facing significant teacher shortages related to these crises. As of February 1, 2022, there were approximately 600,000 fewer teachers in the United States than there were prior to the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> In May 2023, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported nearly twice as many job openings than new hires for state and local education.<sup>4</sup> A survey conducted by the National Education Association revealed that 55% of educators said that they are more likely to leave education sooner than they planned because of the pandemic and that 90% of educators cited “burnout” as a very serious or somewhat serious issue.<sup>5</sup> If right-wing culture wars on public education are not calculated to drive teachers out of the profession, they are certainly having that effect.

### I. THREATS TO PUBLIC EDUCATION

As students return to school, curriculum gag orders and challenges to books—both modern and classic—continue to undermine teachers’ ability to share knowledge and to deny students the ability to learn and grow. Proponents of classroom censorship assert that issues that have been taught for decades in history, social studies, and literature relating to white supremacy

---

<sup>1</sup> PEN America, *Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor* (online at <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>) (accessed Sept. 21, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> *Teachers Who Mention Sexuality Are “Grooming” Kids, Conservatives Say*, Washington Post (Apr. 5, 2022) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/)).

<sup>3</sup> National Education Association, *Survey: Alarming Number of Educators May Soon Leave the Profession* (Feb. 1, 2022) (online at [www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession](http://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession)).

<sup>4</sup> The job openings to hire rate was seasonally adjusted. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey News Release* (July 6, 2023) (online at [www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.htm)).

<sup>5</sup> National Education Association, *Press Release: Poll Results: Stress and Burnout Pose Threat of Educator Shortages* (Jan. 31, 2022) (online at [www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/NEA%20Member%20COVID-19%20Survey%20Summary.pdf](http://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/NEA%20Member%20COVID-19%20Survey%20Summary.pdf)).

and racism, and more recently related to LGBTQI+ equality, are efforts to indoctrinate students with extreme political views or even groom them for abuse by pedophiles.<sup>6</sup>

These myths are being promoted by groups like Moms for Liberty and No Left Turn in Education that claim to be standing up for “parents’ rights” while simultaneously calling for a “mass exodus from the public school system.”<sup>7</sup> The goal of this movement is to undermine confidence in public education and to elevate publicly funded private and religious education.<sup>8</sup> Nearly 50 million students, or 90% of American children, attend public schools.<sup>9</sup> Christopher Rufo, a “conservative culture warrior,” is open about the movement’s intent, stating: “To get to universal school choice, you really need to operate from a premise of universal public school distrust.”<sup>10</sup>

In the last two years, bans have targeted children’s books focused on the Civil Rights Era, books with protagonists of color, and books whose themes include sexual orientation, identity, and gender, such as *Ruby Bridges Goes to School: My True Story*, *Martin Luther King and the March on Washington*, *Fry Bread: A Native American Story*, and *Hair Love*, a story about a Black father doing his daughter’s hair to surprise her mother, that was adapted into an Oscar-winning short film. Other challenged children’s books include titles like *All Are Welcome* and *The Great Big Book of Families*, which recognize the humanity and dignity in everyone.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Office of Governor Ron DeSantis, *Press Release: Governor DeSantis Announces Legislative Proposal to Stop W.O.K.E. Activism and Critical Race Theory in Schools and Corporations* (Dec. 15, 2022) (online at [www.flgov.com/2021/12/15/governor-desantis-announces-legislative-proposal-to-stop-w-o-k-e-activism-and-critical-race-theory-in-schools-and-corporations/](http://www.flgov.com/2021/12/15/governor-desantis-announces-legislative-proposal-to-stop-w-o-k-e-activism-and-critical-race-theory-in-schools-and-corporations/)); *Teachers Who Mention Sexuality Are “Grooming” Kids, Conservatives Say*, *Washington Post* (Apr. 5, 2022) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/)).

<sup>7</sup> *Moms for Liberty Calls for “Mass Exodus” from Public School System*, *ABC News 4* (Oct. 14, 2021) (online at <https://abcnews4.com/news/nation-world/moms-for-liberty-calls-for-mass-exodus-from-public-school-system/>); *No Left Turn in Education, a Leading Anti-Critical Race Theory Group, Frequently Pushes Toxic Rhetoric in Media*, *Media Matters* (June 22, 2021) (online at [www.mediamatters.org/education/no-left-turn-education-leading-anti-critical-race-theory-group-frequently-pushes-toxic/](http://www.mediamatters.org/education/no-left-turn-education-leading-anti-critical-race-theory-group-frequently-pushes-toxic/)); *Moms for Liberty’s National Summit: 5 Takeaways for Educators*, *EducationWeek* (June 30, 2023) (online at [www.edweek.org/policy-politics/moms-for-libertys-national-summit-5-takeaways-for-educators/2023/06](http://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/moms-for-libertys-national-summit-5-takeaways-for-educators/2023/06)).

<sup>8</sup> *Conservatives Renew Call to End U.S. Education Department at Moms for Liberty Summit*, *Education Week* (July 5, 2023) (online at [www.edweek.org/policy-politics/conservatives-renew-call-to-end-u-s-education-department-at-moms-for-liberty-summit/2023/07](http://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/conservatives-renew-call-to-end-u-s-education-department-at-moms-for-liberty-summit/2023/07)); *Former Lobbyist Details How Privatizers Are Trying to End Public Education*, *Washington Post* (Apr. 16, 2021); Christopher F. Rufo, *Laying Siege to the Institutions*, *Imprimis*, Hillsdale College (May 2022) (online at <https://imprimis.hillsdale.edu/laying-siege-to-the-institutions/>).

<sup>9</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, *Fast Facts* (Fall 2021) (online at <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=372#PK12-enrollment>).

<sup>10</sup> Hillsdale College, *Chris Rufo: Laying Siege to the Institutions*, YouTube (Apr. 5, 2022) (online at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8Hh0GqoJcE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8Hh0GqoJcE)); *Extremists Are Using Lies to Undermine America’s Public Schools: We Need to Take a Stand*, *Time* (Apr. 29, 2022) (online at <https://time.com/6172216/public-schools-extremists/>); *Chris Rufo’s Dangerous Fictions*, *Vox* (Sept. 10, 2023) (online at [www.vox.com/23811277/christopher-rufo-culture-wars-ron-desantis-florida-critical-race-theory-anti-wokeness](http://www.vox.com/23811277/christopher-rufo-culture-wars-ron-desantis-florida-critical-race-theory-anti-wokeness)).

<sup>11</sup> PEN America, *Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools* (Apr. 20, 2023) (online at <https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa-state-laws-supercharge-book-suppression-in-schools/>); PEN America, *Index of School Book Bans 2021-2022* (online at <https://pen.org/banned-book-list-2021-2022/>); PEN America, *Index of School Book Bans Fall 2022* (online at <https://pen.org/index-of-school-book-bans-2022/>).

In August 2022, an Oklahoma high school English teacher was removed from her classroom on the first day of school and subsequently resigned after complaints that she placed butcher paper over her classroom library with the words “Books the state doesn’t want you to read” and gave students the QR code for the Brooklyn Public Library’s “Books Unbanned” project.<sup>12</sup> The Oklahoma Secretary of Education called for her teaching license to be revoked, writing, “There is no place for a teacher with a liberal political agenda in the classroom.”<sup>13</sup> Books banned in Oklahoma schools, or banned pending review, include *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *Brave New World*.<sup>14</sup>

On August 18, 2023, a Georgia teacher was fired “for reading a book to fifth-grade students that explores gender roles and identity through the eyes of a child who describes their shadow as purple[.]” The book, purchased at a school district-approved book fair, centers on a gender nonbinary theme in which a child describes the color of their shadow as different from their mother’s pink shadow and father’s blue shadow. The Cobb County Board of Education in Georgia voted along partisan lines to recommend the teacher’s termination for, among other things, “willful neglect of [her] duties.”<sup>15</sup>

In four counties in Texas, school boards were effectively taken over by candidates hand-picked by a political action committee coordinated by Patriot Mobile, “America’s only Christian conservative wireless provider,” in an effort to oppose any so-called “woke ideologies” in the schools.<sup>16</sup> Since then, school boards have cancelled book fairs and pulled dozens of books from shelves pending additional review. The books included a graphic novel adaptation of the *Diary of Anne Frank*, *Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass*, and *Restart*, an anti-bullying book.<sup>17</sup> One book, *Life Is So Good*, the true story of George Dawson, the grandson of a slave who learned to read at age 98, and for whom a middle school in the district is named, was identified for review

---

<sup>12</sup> *This Teacher Gave Students Access to “Banned” Books. She was Put on Leave and Resigned*, VICE (Aug. 24, 2022) (online at [www.vice.com/en/article/g5v55j/oklahoma-teacher-resigned-brooklyn-library-banned-books](http://www.vice.com/en/article/g5v55j/oklahoma-teacher-resigned-brooklyn-library-banned-books)).

<sup>13</sup> Secretary Ryan Walters (@sec\_walters), Twitter (Aug. 31, 2022) (online at [https://twitter.com/sec\\_walters/status/1565115199547482112](https://twitter.com/sec_walters/status/1565115199547482112)); *Walters Asks State Board to Revoke Former NPS Teacher’s Certificate*, The Norman Transcript (Aug. 8, 2022) (online at [www.normantranscript.com/news/walters-asks-state-board-to-revoke-former-nps-teachers-certificate/article\\_546ab96e-293d-11ed-a184-d3d4f8caeb8f.html](http://www.normantranscript.com/news/walters-asks-state-board-to-revoke-former-nps-teachers-certificate/article_546ab96e-293d-11ed-a184-d3d4f8caeb8f.html)).

<sup>14</sup> *What Are Some Notable Books that Have Been Banned in Some Oklahoma Schools*, Oklahoman (Sept. 6, 2022) (online at [www.oklahoman.com/story/opinion/2022/09/05/banned-books-whats-on-the-forbidden-list-in-some-oklahoma-schools/65468650007/](http://www.oklahoman.com/story/opinion/2022/09/05/banned-books-whats-on-the-forbidden-list-in-some-oklahoma-schools/65468650007/)).

<sup>15</sup> *Teacher Is Fired for Reading Book on Gender Identity in Class*, New York Times (Aug. 18, 2023) (online at [www.nytimes.com/2023/08/18/us/georgia-teacher-fired-gender-book.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/18/us/georgia-teacher-fired-gender-book.html)).

<sup>16</sup> *How A Far Right, Christian Cellphone Company “Took Over” Four Texas School Boards*, NBC News (Aug. 25, 2022) (online at [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/-christian-cell-company-patriot-mobile-took-four-texas-school-boards-rcna44583](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/-christian-cell-company-patriot-mobile-took-four-texas-school-boards-rcna44583)).

<sup>17</sup> *Keller School Officials Order 41 Books—including the Bible and an Anne Frank Adaptation—Off of Library Shelves*, Texas Tribune (Aug. 16, 2022) (online at [www.texastribune.org/2022/08/16/keller-isd-removes-books/](http://www.texastribune.org/2022/08/16/keller-isd-removes-books/)); see also Southlake Together (@Southlake4All), Twitter (Aug. 30, 2022) (online at <https://twitter.com/Southlake4All/status/1564649364810698752>); *Scholastic Book Fairs Canceled*, School Library Journal (Aug. 22, 2022) (online at [www.slj.com/story/Library-purchases-paused-by-florida-superintendent-to-keep-media-specialists-safe-censorship-roundup](http://www.slj.com/story/Library-purchases-paused-by-florida-superintendent-to-keep-media-specialists-safe-censorship-roundup)).

because teachers were concerned they would be reprimanded for teaching it in class.<sup>18</sup> In the same district, teachers were asked to sign non-disparagement agreements banning them from criticizing the school district.<sup>19</sup>

In Palm Beach County, Florida, the tenth largest school district in the nation, teachers must review all books in their classrooms and confirm that they do not “promote, compel, or encourage a student to believe” that “people are racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously” before lending books to students.<sup>20</sup> However, the county school board voted to exclude the Bible from any bans in the district.<sup>21</sup> Florida has also banned 41% of proposed math textbooks for purportedly containing indoctrinating and prohibited topics related to critical race theory and social and emotional learning despite key tenets of the latter actually being codified in Florida’s anti-critical race theory legislation, the “Stop WOKE Act,” passed in 2022.<sup>22</sup>

## II. BOOK BANS AND CURRICULUM GAG ORDER LAWS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The number of proposed educational gag orders in states increased 250% between 2021 and 2022. Since January 2021, more than 300 bills that would curtail teaching about race, history, and gender in public schools were introduced in states across the country.<sup>23</sup> The bills include harsher punishments, such as heavy fines or loss of funding for schools and districts and the potential for termination, loss of license, and criminal charges for teachers.<sup>24</sup>

Presently, 18 states have imposed bans and restrictions to curtail the teaching of critical race theory or limiting even discussion of racism and sexism in public schools. An additional 26 states have introduced related legislation or taken steps towards similar state-level action, such as

---

<sup>18</sup> *Parts of George Dawson’s Book Deemed Inappropriate for George Dawson Middle School Students*, Fox 10 Phoenix (Aug. 24, 2022) (online at [www.fox10phoenix.com/news/parts-of-life-is-so-good-by-george-dawson-deemed-inappropriate-for-george-dawson-middle-school-students](http://www.fox10phoenix.com/news/parts-of-life-is-so-good-by-george-dawson-deemed-inappropriate-for-george-dawson-middle-school-students)).

<sup>19</sup> *Teachers in Southlake, Texas, Asked to Sign “Non-Disparagement” Agreements*, NBC News (Apr. 28, 2022) (online at [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/southlake-texas-teachers-non-disparagement-agreements-rcna26480](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/southlake-texas-teachers-non-disparagement-agreements-rcna26480)).

<sup>20</sup> Palm Beach County School District, *Classroom Library Checklist* (May 26, 2022) (online at [www.muckrock.com/foi/west-palm-beach-10292/palm-beach-county-school-district-books-and-hb1467-hb7-hb1557-hb241-129897/#file-1024919](http://www.muckrock.com/foi/west-palm-beach-10292/palm-beach-county-school-district-books-and-hb1467-hb7-hb1557-hb241-129897/#file-1024919)).

<sup>21</sup> *Bible Won’t Be Banned in Palm Beach County Public Schools*, WPTV (July 19, 2023) (online at [www.wptv.com/news/education/bible-wont-be-banned-in-palm-beach-county-public-schools](http://www.wptv.com/news/education/bible-wont-be-banned-in-palm-beach-county-public-schools)).

<sup>22</sup> *DeSantis Accused Textbooks of “Indoctrination.” Here’s What He Meant*, Washington Post (May 9, 2022) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/05/09/florida-banned-textbooks-math-desantis/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/05/09/florida-banned-textbooks-math-desantis/)); Ch. 2022-72, Fla. Leg. (2022 Sess.) (online at <http://laws.flrules.org/2022/72>).

<sup>23</sup> *From Classroom Censorship to Curricular Control*, PEN America (May 1, 2023) (online at <https://pen.org/from-classroom-censorship-to-curricular-control/>).

<sup>24</sup> PEN America, *America’s Censored Classrooms* (Aug. 17, 2022) (online at <https://pen.org/report/americas-censored-classrooms>).

a resolution by the state board of education.<sup>25</sup> Another ten states have laws that prohibit classroom discussion about LGBTQI+ issues, and five states require parental notification of LGBTQI+-inclusive curricula.<sup>26</sup> The bans and restrictions are often rooted in a fallacious argument that teaching about race promotes critical race theory, a seldom-taught, graduate-level, history-based school of thought, and that teaching about LGBTQI+ topics constitutes “sexual grooming.”<sup>27</sup> Many of these laws are vaguely worded, causing educators to self-censor lest they be subject to severe professional or financial penalties for ill-defined conduct.<sup>28</sup>

PEN America recently released a report documenting at least 3,362 episodes of book banning during the 2022–2023 school year.<sup>29</sup> In 2021, a Texas legislator implemented a statewide review of school libraries and classrooms to remove 850 books—62% of which address LGBTQI+ issues and 8% address race or racism.<sup>30</sup> Groups like Moms for Liberty have challenged hundreds of books across the country, predominantly asserting that non-controversial children’s books are actually vehicles of liberal indoctrination.<sup>31</sup> Thousands of books have been targeted.

---

<sup>25</sup> Education Week, *Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack* (July 15, 2022) (online at [www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06](http://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06)).

<sup>26</sup> Movement Advancement Project, *LGBTQ Curricular Laws* (online at [www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular\\_laws](http://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular_laws)).

<sup>27</sup> *Teachers Who Mention Sexuality Are “Grooming” Kids, Conservatives Say*, Washington Post (Apr. 5, 2022) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/)).

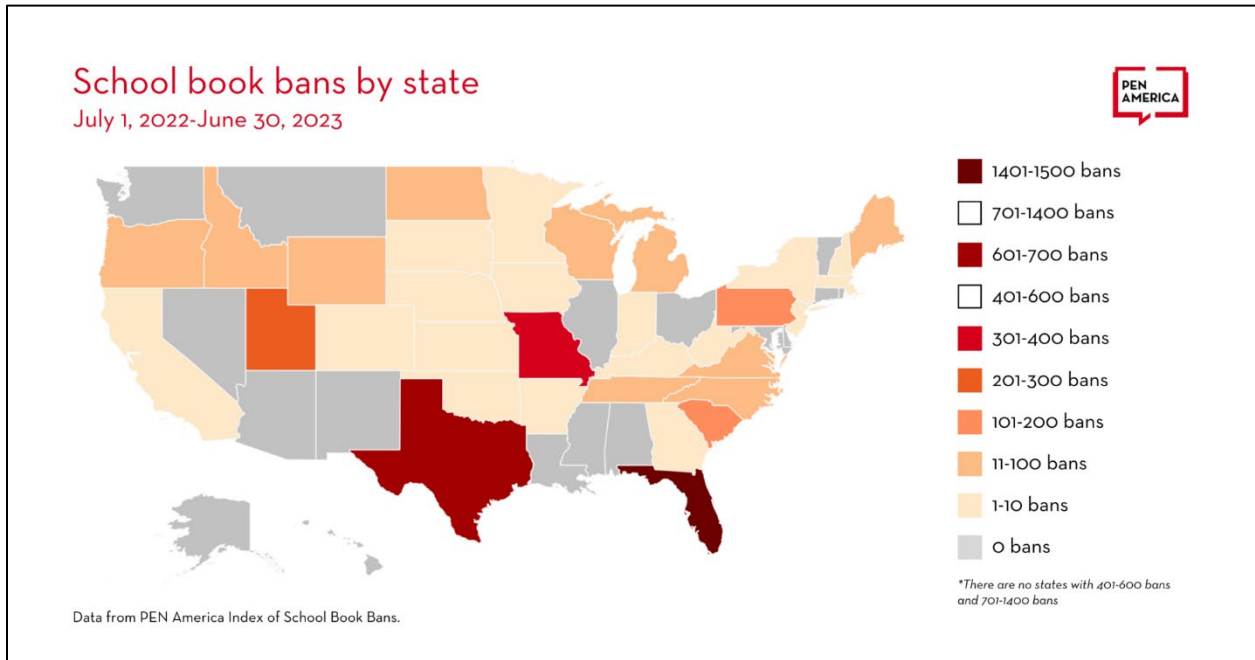
<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Education Week, *Map: Where Critical Race Theory Is Under Attack* (July 15, 2022) (online at [www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06](http://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06)).

<sup>29</sup> PEN America, *Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor* (online at <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>) (accessed Sept. 21, 2023).

<sup>30</sup> Letter from Chairman Matt Krause, Texas House of Representatives Committee on General Investigating, to the Texas Education Agency Deputy Commissioner on School Programs and Selected Superintendents (Oct. 25, 2021) (online at <https://static.texastribune.org/media/files/965725d7f01b8a25ca44b6fde2f5519b/krauseletter.pdf>); *All 850 Books Texas Lawmaker Matt Krause Wants to Ban: An Analysis*, Book Riot (Nov. 5, 2021) (online at <https://bookriot.com/texas-book-ban-list/>).

<sup>31</sup> *Parents Should Have a Voice in Their Kids’ Education But We’ve Gone Too Far*, Time (Sept. 20, 2022) (online at <https://time.com/6215119/parents-rights-education-gone-too-far/>).

**Graphic 1: Total Instances of Book Bans by State, July 2022–June 2023**



**Source:** PEN America, *Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor* (online at <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>) (accessed Sept. 21, 2023).

**Note:** See Appendix 1 for precise number of book bans by state.

Successes at the state and local levels have emboldened activists targeting teaching about race and acceptance, who are now targeting social and emotional learning.<sup>32</sup> Social emotional learning is often heralded as a gold standard in education. The objectives are to give students the ability to: 1) set and achieve positive goals; 2) feel and show empathy for others; 3) establish and maintain positive relationships; 4) make responsible decisions; and 5) understand and manage emotions. Conservative groups have unjustifiably derided this decades-old pedagogical technique for teaching students as the “latest child-indoctrination scheme” serving as a “vehicle for CRT, an effort to divide students from their parents, and emotional manipulation.”<sup>33</sup>

### III. THE POLITICIZATION OF THE CLASSROOM

The escalation of right-wing efforts to delegitimize effective teaching, ban controversial books, and prohibit teaching entire subjects and parts of American history in the classroom contributes to enormous stress on teachers.<sup>34</sup> The additional stress caused by classroom culture wars compounds the pressure teachers have faced due to the pandemic and related safety measures. A 2022 survey showed that 37% of teachers “reported being harassed because of their

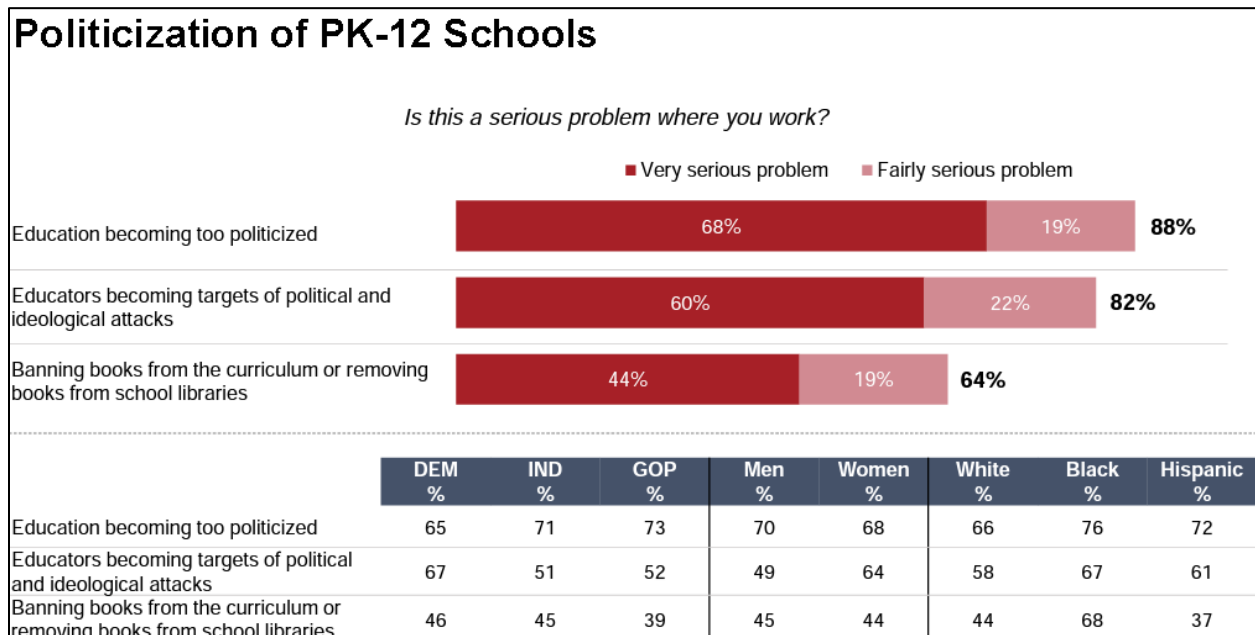
<sup>32</sup> In “Social Emotional Learning,” *Right Sees More Critical Race Theory*, Washington Post (Mar. 28, 2022) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/28/social-emotional-learning-critical-race-theory/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/03/28/social-emotional-learning-critical-race-theory/)).

<sup>33</sup> *Id.*

<sup>34</sup> *Teachers Who Mention Sexuality Are “Grooming” Kids, Conservatives Say*, Washington Post (Apr. 5, 2022) (online at [www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/04/05/teachers-groomers-pedophiles-dont-say-gay/)).

school’s policies on COVID-19 safety measures or for teaching about race, racism or bias.”<sup>35</sup> Recent surveys by the American Federation of Teachers indicate the overwhelming majority of educators view political and ideological attacks on teachers and book and curriculum bans as aggravating stressors to the general difficulties of educating young people amidst pandemics, emotional and mental health crises, and the anxieties of contemporary life, including climate change.

**Graphic 2: Politicization of PK–12 Schools**



**Source:** American Federation of Teachers, *Under Siege: The Outlook of AFT Members* (June 2022) (online at [www.aft.org/sites/default/files/de-14326\\_aft\\_member\\_survey.pdf](http://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/de-14326_aft_member_survey.pdf)).

At the same time that teachers and schools are contending with the effects of the pandemic and right-wing attacks in the classroom, school districts are facing significant teacher shortages. As of February 1, 2022, there were approximately 600,000 fewer teachers in the United States than there were prior to the pandemic, and 55% of educators said that they are more likely to leave education sooner than they planned because of the pandemic.<sup>36</sup> In May 2023, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported nearly twice as many job openings than new hires for state and local education.<sup>37</sup> A survey conducted by the National Education Association

<sup>35</sup> RAND Corporation, *Walking a Fine Line—Educators’ Views on Politicized Topics in Schooling* (2022) (online at [www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1108-5.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-5.html)).

<sup>36</sup> National Education Association, *Survey: Alarming Number of Educators May Soon Leave the Profession* (Feb. 1, 2022) (online at [www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession](http://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession)).

<sup>37</sup> The job openings to hire rate was seasonally adjusted. Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey News Release* (July 6, 2023) (online at [www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/jolts.htm)).



revealed that 90% of educators cited “burnout” as a very serious or somewhat serious issue.<sup>38</sup> A 2022 Texas State Teachers Association survey found that 70% of teachers were seriously considering leaving.<sup>39</sup>

Rather than take steps to remediate the issues driving teachers from the profession, some states are taking steps to further delegitimize teaching and public education. In 2022, Arizona passed a bill giving any parent who pulls their child from public schools \$7,000 to spend on education in any manner they choose, including private religious schools or homeschooling expenses, a policy which could potentially strip \$600 million in funding from public schools every year.<sup>40</sup> Chris Rufo touted this law, tweeting, “Every red state in the country should follow [Arizona’s] lead.”<sup>41</sup> Days later, Arizona passed a law to “address” the teacher shortage by revoking the requirement that teachers have a college degree, allowing anyone enrolled in college to teach in the classroom.<sup>42</sup> Arizona’s voucher program has surpassed its initial estimates and now may cost the state \$900 million over the next school year.<sup>43</sup> Florida is also addressing its teacher shortage by allowing individuals without degrees into the classroom, permitting veterans who have completed 60 college credit hours to receive a five-year teaching certificate so long as they pass a minimum subject matter test.<sup>44</sup>

#### IV. PRIOR CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS

During the 117th Congress, the Committee on Oversight and Reform Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties held hearings to address the threat to academic freedom at the elementary and secondary school levels posed by curriculum gag orders and book bans spreading across the country.<sup>45</sup> This new wave of censorship is enforced through intentionally vague laws targeting allegedly “controversial” topics related to race, history, and the LGBTQI+ community.

---

<sup>38</sup> National Education Association, *Press Release: Poll Results: Stress and Burnout Pose Threat of Educator Shortages* (Jan. 31, 2022) (online at [www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/NEA%20Member%20COVID-19%20Survey%20Summary.pdf](http://www.nea.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/NEA%20Member%20COVID-19%20Survey%20Summary.pdf)).

<sup>39</sup> Texas State Teachers Association, *TSTA News: TSTA Survey Indicates a Record 70 Percent of Teachers on the Verge of Quitting as Educator Morale Sinks; Political Attacks, Pandemic, Years of State Neglect to Blame* (Aug. 8, 2022) (online at <https://tsta.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/080822-Moonlight-survey-results-PR.pdf>).

<sup>40</sup> *Universal Vouchers Dramatically Defund and Divide*, Arizona Mirror (Sept. 7, 2022) (online at [www.azmirror.com/2022/09/07/universal-vouchers-dramatically-defund-and-divide](http://www.azmirror.com/2022/09/07/universal-vouchers-dramatically-defund-and-divide)).

<sup>41</sup> *School’s Out Forever: Arizona Moves “To Kill Public Education” with New Universal Voucher Law*, Salon (July 1, 2022) (online at [www.salon.com/2022/07/01/schools-out-forever-arizona-moves-to-public-education-with-new-universal-voucher-law/](http://www.salon.com/2022/07/01/schools-out-forever-arizona-moves-to-public-education-with-new-universal-voucher-law/)).

<sup>42</sup> *We Don’t Need No Education: Now Arizona Says Teachers Don’t Require College Degrees*, Salon (July 12, 2022) (online at [www.salon.com/2022/07/12/we-dont-need-no-education-now-arizona-says-teachers-dont-require-college-degrees/](http://www.salon.com/2022/07/12/we-dont-need-no-education-now-arizona-says-teachers-dont-require-college-degrees/)).

<sup>43</sup> *Arizona School Voucher Program Growth Explodes to \$900 Million for the Upcoming School Year*, Arizona Mirror (June 1, 2023) (online at [www.azmirror.com/2023/06/01/arizona-school-voucher-program-growth-explodes-to-900-million-for-the-upcoming-school-year/](http://www.azmirror.com/2023/06/01/arizona-school-voucher-program-growth-explodes-to-900-million-for-the-upcoming-school-year/)).

<sup>44</sup> Sec. 1012.59, Fla. Stat. (2022); *Florida Law Lets Veterans Teach Without Degrees, Not Their Spouses*, Associated Press (Aug. 18, 2022) (online at <https://apnews.com/article/fact-check-florida-law-education-veterans-military-degree-645106455513>).

<sup>45</sup> Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, *Hearing on Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans and Academic Censorship*, 117th Cong. (Apr. 7, 2022) (online at

The Subcommittee heard from concerned students, parents, teachers, administrators, and authors about the growing censorship campaigns in public schools and the effort to punish faculty who do not abide by vague mandates on what may be discussed in the classroom. At the Subcommittee’s April 7, 2022, hearing, Ruby Bridges—who as a child was the first person to integrate public schools in Louisiana and, as an adult, wrote a children’s book about her story that has been banned in public schools—put it this way: “Books celebrate our shared history and they should not be banned. The integrity of books and history and stories within their pages must be embraced and preserved by all, for all. History is sacred and should not be changed and altered in any way.”<sup>46</sup>

Several students spoke out at the hearings about the destructive effects of censorship. Shreya Mehta, a high school student from Washington state, testified, “By not acting strongly against censorship and outspokenly defending students’ intellectual freedom, we are proving that we haven’t learned from our country’s past mistakes when it came to moral panic, exclusion, and discrimination.”<sup>47</sup> Claire Mengel from Ohio testified, “Our teachers are scared. ...[T]hey fear repercussions. Something has gone very wrong when teachers think they will be fired for supporting the concept of diversity.”<sup>48</sup>

At the Subcommittee’s second hearing on May 19, 2022, Professor Timothy Snyder, one of the country’s foremost experts on authoritarianism and the author of *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, summarized the hearings’ findings: “We cannot help but be struck by the fact that the banning of books and the attempt to limit classroom discussion ... is a hallmark of the early stages of the end of democracy.” He continued, “[T]here is nothing more undemocratic than to limit the possibility of discussion about the past.”<sup>49</sup>

In September 2022, then-Subcommittee Chair Jamie Raskin introduced a resolution recognizing “Banned Books Week” and the sweeping attacks on books in the United States.<sup>50</sup>

---

<https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/legislation/hearings/free-speech-under-attack-book-bans-and-academic-censorship>); Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, *Hearing on Free Speech Under Attack (Part II): Curriculum Sabotage and Classroom Censorship*, 117th Cong. (May 19, 2022) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/legislation/hearings/free-speech-under-attack-book-bans-and-academic-censorship>).

<sup>46</sup> Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Transcript, *Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans and Academic Censorship*, 117th Cong. (Apr. 7, 2022) (online at <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO02/20220407/114616/HHRG-117-GO02-Transcript-20220407.pdf>).

<sup>47</sup> Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Testimony of Shreya Mehta, *Free Speech Under Attack: Book Bans and Academic Censorship*, 117th Cong. (Apr. 7, 2022) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/sites/democrats.oversight.house.gov/files/Mehta%20Testimony.pdf>).

<sup>48</sup> Committee on Oversight and Reform, Subcommittee on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, Transcript, *Hearing on Free Speech Under Attack (Part II): Curriculum Sabotage and Classroom Censorship* (May 19, 2022) (online at <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO02/20220519/114793/HHRG-117-GO02-Transcript-20220519.pdf>).

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> H.Res. 1392, 117th Cong. (2022).

The resolution urged Congress to denounce the illegitimate processes being used to ban books in schools, prisons, and libraries. As Chairman Raskin described:

The efforts to remove books from schools and public libraries simply because they introduce ideas about diversity or challenge students to think beyond their own lived experience [are]...a hallmark of authoritarian regimes.

The Managing Director of PEN America Washington and Free Expression Programs, Nadine Farid Johnson, endorsed the resolution and stated:

Limiting access to literature stifles the free exchange of ideas essential to public education, and these encroachments on open inquiry too often exclude the voices of historically marginalized communities from the conversation, sending a chilling message to educators and students that certain ideas and perspectives are off limits. The rights to free expression enshrined in the First Amendment do not end at the schoolhouse gate.<sup>51</sup>

In the 118th Congress, House Republicans passed H.R. 5, the Parents Bill of Rights Act. In part, this bill would require schools to notify parents and guardians of their right to inspect the books and other reading materials in the library of their child's school in order to receive federal education funds.<sup>52</sup> In response, Rep. Suzanne Bonamici introduced an amendment to H.R. 5 that would, in part, prohibit the banning of books and certain curricular materials. All Republicans who voted on the amendment opposed it, and the amendment failed 203–223.<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Committee on Oversight and Reform, *Press Release: Chairman Raskin, Senator Schatz Introduce Bicameral Resolution Recognizing Banned Books Week* (Sept. 22, 2022) (online at <https://oversightdemocrats.house.gov/news/press-releases/chairman-raskin-senator-schatz-introduce-bicameral-resolution-recognizing-banned>).

<sup>52</sup> H.R. 5 (online at [www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/5](http://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/5)).

<sup>53</sup> H.Amdt. 115 to H.R. 5 (online at [www.congress.gov/amendment/118th-congress/house-amendment/115](http://www.congress.gov/amendment/118th-congress/house-amendment/115)).

**APPENDIX 1: NUMBER OF BOOK BANS PER STATE, JULY 2022–JUNE 2023<sup>54</sup>**

<i>State</i>	<i>Number of Cases</i>
Florida	1406
Texas	625
Missouri	333
Utah	281
Pennsylvania	186
South Carolina	127
Virginia	75
North Carolina	58
Wisconsin	43
Michigan	39
Oregon	38
North Dakota	27
Idaho	25
Wyoming	15
Maine	13
Tennessee	11

Colorado	8
Kansas	7
New York	6
Nebraska	6
Iowa	6
Georgia	4
Arkansas	4
Indiana	3
New Jersey	3
Kentucky	3
Oklahoma	2
South Dakota	2
West Virginia	2
New Hampshire	1
California	1
Minnesota	1
Massachusetts	1
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>3362</b>

---

<sup>54</sup> PEN America, *Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor* (online at <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>) (accessed Sept. 21, 2023).