



MEETING THE MOMENT:

A Guide to Defending Civil Rights in Our Schools

About FedSDC

The Federal School Discipline & Climate Coalition (FedSDC) is a diverse group of local community organizers, national and local organizations, and directly impacted students, youth, and families committed to advocating for federal legislative action to protect the interests and educational rights of Black and Brown students and youth through racial and educational equity lenses. Establishing police-free schools and alternatives to school discipline through effective, non-punitive, and culturally-sustaining practices is a core value of our coalition.

We are pro-Black, advance disability justice, uphold equality, unequivocally support the LGBTQI+ community, and promote pro-immigration policies. These stances inform how we advocate for federal policy and administrative action and support strategic litigation. We strive to seize every opportunity to challenge the status quo, particularly when it involves the federal government's complicity in the discriminatory treatment of Black and Brown students, youth, and children in our nation's schools. Through this work, we aim to create a clear path for grassroots organizations and communities to influence education policy, while holding federal agencies and even larger nonprofit organizations accountable to all student voices.

Check out the [FedSDC's website](#) to learn more about the coalition's work.



Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The right to attend school free from discrimination is under attack.

In 2020, right-wing think tanks and funders started a radical campaign across the country, intended to undo the progress of the Black Lives Matter Movement. This coordinated effort has targeted the U.S. education system, inaccurately redefining terms like critical race theory, diversity, equity, and inclusion to create fear about racial and social justice. Right-wing policymakers have proposed over 600 policies at all levels of government—local, state, and federal—to silence both K-12 and higher education discussions of historical and current racial discrimination in the U.S. These policies are not only aimed at marginalized racial groups, but also gender and sexual diversity, often targeting LGBTQI+ youth.

This vocal minority is not a grassroots campaign. In fact, most parents in the U.S. (82%) believe teachers should be able to talk about race, gender, and sexual orientation at school.

Rather, this campaign is a coordinated and well-funded attempt to reverse civil rights gains for Black and Brown communities and other marginalized groups, weaken public education, and ultimately unravel the foundations of democracy. Right-wing radicals have even formalized this agenda into a playbook they call “Project 2025.”

FedSDC offers this guide to outline the goals, actions, and harmful effects of the anti-civil rights campaign. It highlights successful strategies and key resources for local advocates seeking to resist these attacks and preserve civil rights and education in our country.

WHAT IS THE ANTI-CIVIL RIGHTS CAMPAIGN?

FedSDC uses the phrase “anti-civil rights campaign” to describe how radical conservatives promote the narrative that racial justice is no longer a legitimate social goal and that efforts aimed at getting rid of racial discrimination are actually anti-white measures that lead to inequality.

Source: <https://ejl.org/news/history-racial-injustice-anti-civil-rights-movement/>

This guide aims to address the campaign as an intersectional attack on civil rights, highlighting its impact not only on racial justice, but also on gender justice.

Beginnings of the Anti-Civil Rights Campaign

Over fifteen million people took to the streets in peaceful protests of the murder of George Floyd in summer 2020 to show support for the notion that the lives of Black people matter. Professional associations, educators, and corporations began issuing statements promising to end racism and adopt “anti-racism.”

Conservative think tanks and political operatives designed the anti-civil rights campaign to undermine this movement against racism and maintain the status quo. In September 2020, a Fox News Report called on President Trump to eliminate “critical race theory” (“CRT”) from the federal government and to “abolish” diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”) trainings from businesses and the federal government. Within weeks, the Trump administration issued an executive order prohibiting workplace diversity training in federally-funded contracts and programs.¹ This executive order became a right-wing “playbook” used by conservative special interest groups in state legislatures across the country. The measures promoted by the executive order have created a toxic ecosystem of mis- and dis-information in the national conversation about education.

Attacks on culturally responsive pedagogy, CRT, and DEI are part of longstanding efforts to maintain white dominance and suppress civil rights progress through educational censorship.² Policies enacted under the anti-civil rights campaign continue to whitewash and suppress history by erasing the experiences of diverse communities from textbooks and classroom instruction. In its promotion of classroom censorship, the campaign encourages the teaching of lies about American history—for instance, that those who were enslaved benefited from slavery—and hinders teachers’ ability to develop students’ critical thinking skills that would enable them to identify and avoid the mistakes of the past and build a brighter future.

¹ This executive order was revoked by President Biden in 2021.

² Early in the 20th Century, organizations encouraged by Confederate veterans were successful in replacing accurate descriptions of the Civil War and slavery in Southern textbooks with alternative accounts that downplayed the importance and even the existence of race-based slavery. This played out again in the 1960s, with coordinated massive resistance in response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision to racially integrate schools. This effort succeeded in delaying school desegregation throughout the South for 15 years.

Strategies of the Anti-Civil Rights Campaign

The strategies used in the anti-civil rights campaign have evolved and expanded since its initial attacks on critical race theory in 2020. Particular areas of focus for the campaign have included:

“Anti-CRT” measures

The anti-civil rights campaign has gained national attention spreading disinformation over the last few years by proposing laws that disguise their argument as opposing critical race theory or “divisive concepts.” In reality, these laws proposed in over 19 states aim to ensor discussion about race and racism. After the first year of the campaign, right-wing radicals expanded their focus, seeking to ban trainings and programs meant to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness, both in schools and businesses.

Book-banning

The American Library Association reported that attempts to ban books in states and school districts across the country come from a “well-organized, conservative political campaign” seeking to remove books about “race, history, gender identity, sexuality, and reproductive health from America’s public and school libraries that do not meet their approval.” PENAmerica reported 1,477 cases of book banning nationally between July and December 2022. In 2023, the American Library Association reported that 4,240 unique book titles were targeted for censoring, up 65% from 2022. The majority of banned books include books on segregation in the U.S., picture books with queer characters, and books about the Holocaust, including *The Diary of Anne Frank*. They also largely include books by authors of color or authors in the LGBTQI+ community.

Anti-LGBTQI+ measures

In Spring 2023, the anti-civil rights campaign began to focus its attacks on LGBTQI+ youth, especially trans students. In 2023, over 500 new laws targeted LGBTQI+ individuals. The disturbing trend has continued into 2024, with at least 527 anti-LGBTQ bills being tracked as of the publication of this guide. Most of the proposed laws ban classroom discussions about gender and sexuality. Some require teachers to forcibly out any student asking for a change in their name or pronouns to their parents.

Diversity and free speech in higher education

Attacks on higher education have increased dramatically in the last 3 years. In June 2023, the Supreme Court of the United States effectively ended the use of affirmative action in college admissions, posing additional barriers to higher education for diverse college applicants.

WHAT IS A “BILL”?

In the lawmaking process, a bill is a legislative proposal that is offered to a lawmaking body for debate and consideration before it is passed into law. Think of it almost as a “draft” of a law. However, not all bills are passed into law.

Source: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/bill>

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”) efforts in both higher education and K-12 have become the latest target of the anti-civil rights campaign during the 2024 legislative session.³ Copycat bills seeking to end diversity, equity, and inclusion training and services were pushed out in 28 states by hyper-conservative national think tanks, such as the Goldwater Institute and the Manhattan Institute. In addition to previously passed legislation in Florida and Texas, five other states, including Indiana, Utah, and Alabama,⁴ have passed bills ending tenure for and establishing systems of surveillance for students to report on faculty who violate those provisions.

As these attacks have grown more frequent, backlash and resistance have also increased. In response to the

University of Florida suddenly firing all of its DEI employees, the NAACP sent a letter to Black athletes, urging them to boycott predominantly white universities in Florida. An emerging coalition in Indiana issued a strong statement in the wake of the passage of Indiana’s anti-DEI bill, warning that a similar boycott could spread to the state and threaten its sports programs, as well as the entertainment and business communities.

³ Higher education has come under fire by right-wing radicals in a number of states for teaching what they refer to as “woke ideology.” At Governor Ron DeSantis’ urging, Florida has passed a suite of bills limiting academic freedom and banning spending on any instruction or programs involving DEI. When the faculty at the University of Texas at Austin passed a resolution supporting the teaching of social justice and critical race theory, the Lieutenant Governor threatened to end the tenure system in Texas Universities.

⁴ The most recent Alabama legislation has been described as “sweeping” and makes educators in both K-12 and higher education liable if they violate the restrictions.

These strategies are not an exhaustive list of how the anti-civil rights campaign has attempted to unravel public education. The anti-civil rights campaign has continued to grow in both size and scope, broadening its attacks to include disruption of school board meetings⁵; a rewriting of the history of slavery in the U.S.⁶; and a return to zero-tolerance school discipline policies.⁷ In early 2024, the extreme right-wing agenda was formalized into what is called the “Project 2025 Presidential Transition Project.” According to a recent guide by Democracy Forward,⁸ Project 2025 “is a well-funded (eight-figure) effort of the Heritage Foundation and more than 100 organizations to enable a future anti-democratic presidential administration to take swift, far-right action that would cut wages for working people, dismantle social safety net programs, reverse decades of progress for civil rights, redefine the way our society operates, and undermine our economy.” If implemented, Project 2025 would seek to defund the main agency for enforcing civil rights under the Department of Education, undo protections particularly for LGBTQI+ students, and allow political ideology to control school curricula—among several other strategies that would devastatingly dismantle public education in the U.S.

Harms Created by the Anti-Civil Rights Campaign

The anti-civil rights campaign has been deeply harmful, targeting Black and Brown communities across the country, forced to watch as their histories are erased from curricula. Bans on books from school libraries target books by Black or LGBTQI+ authors or about diverse subjects. Educational materials and curricula that perpetuate stereotypes and are not representative of students’ backgrounds can lead students to internalize stereotypes, develop a poor sense

⁵ In Summer 2021, individuals calling themselves “concerned parents” began engaging in hostile, verbally aggressive, and sometimes even personally threatening attacks on school boards, demanding an end to the teaching of CRT and trying to remove books they found unacceptable from school libraries. The attacks on school boards have been coordinated by national right-wing organizations, such as Moms for Liberty, and there is even some question about whether the “protesters” are, in fact, local parents.

⁶ In 2023, the Florida State Board of Education approved new African American history standards for public schools. The new standards include language stating that slaves developed skills that could be used to their personal benefit. Other language suggested Black people were perpetrators of violence during U.S. race massacres.

⁷ The same radicals attacking democracy and civil rights have also proposed legislation to return schools to zero-tolerance discipline. Despite evidence that suspension and expulsion are ineffective and cause racial disparities in a range of important life outcomes, laws have been introduced in a number of states to reverse disciplinary reforms and return to zero-tolerance style discipline.

⁸ See Appendix Section II for more information on The People’s Guide to Project 2025 by Democracy Forward.

of self, and feel stigmatized. State anti-DEI laws have led to massive resignations of higher education faculty,⁹ disproportionately faculty of color. Faculty of color are overrepresented among those teaching cultural diversity classes in teacher training programs. The loss of these instructors will cause the teaching force in anti-DEI states to be far less prepared in understanding and teaching about diversity.

LGBTQI+ students and educators also face efforts to invalidate and erase their experiences in school. Of 986 challenges to schoolbooks filed in the 2021-2022 school year, 43% of the challenges targeted books with LGBTQI+ characters or themes. Educators are punished for discussing LGBTQI+ issues in the classroom. These measures deny LGBTQI+ students affirming and welcoming school environments, which can negatively impact students' mental health and ability to succeed.

A poll by the Trevor Project revealed that over two-thirds of LGBTQ youth reported their mental health was negatively affected by debates over state laws targeting transgender students. Eighty-six percent of LGBTQ+ youth report being targets of bullying, harassment, or assault at school—all of which have been shown to contribute to high rates of absenteeism, not graduating, adverse health consequences, and academic underachievement.

The anti-civil rights campaign has created a chilling effect, where educators are actively modifying or deleting lessons out of the fear of jeopardizing their careers. This chilling effect leaves school officials feeling less empowered to protect the rights of students, teachers, and families. Educational censorship laws only contribute to stressors for educators, such as by threatening to take away licenses for teaching Black history or assigning books written by women. Superintendents and principals of color have been fired when they try to improve their schools' climate with research-backed trainings on diversity, bias, and culturally responsive education. Teachers are leaving the field in droves, and retention rates are dwindling, as a direct result of these harmful efforts. Reports following the 2020-2021 school year show that Black teachers, who were already underrepresented, are twice as likely to consider leaving teaching due to stressors in the profession.

These harms create school environments that are unwelcoming and, in some cases, openly hostile, making students feel less safe and less able to stay academically engaged. When particular students and educators experience these harms, the whole school community suffers.

⁹ Florida's anti-DEI campaign has led to almost a 30% loss in faculty in 2022.

Understanding the Extent of the Campaign

One of the goals of the anti-civil rights campaign is to dismantle evidence-based efforts that create inclusive schools, such as anti-bias teaching, culturally-sustaining education, diversity and inclusion programs, and even interventions to reduce exclusionary discipline.

Laws that seek to ban these efforts undermine core values of our education system, such as:

Teaching critical thinking skills

- We want students to grow up to be critically thinking adults (e.g., to problem solve, to not accept disinformation at face value, to be discerning consumers). However, these new laws are stifling educators from creating learning environments for students to learn and practice these skills.

Helping children understand history and themselves

- When we do not know our history, it is destined to repeat itself. Students should be able to grapple with difficult subjects, such as the consequences of imperialism, colonialism, and extreme nationalism in the U.S. and around the world, so they may grow up to be leaders that create a better future.
- Students must feel represented in their curricula. Classrooms that affirm the identities of those from historically underrepresented communities are using an evidenced-based strategy proven to improve academic engagement and achievement.

Ensuring schools are safe, supportive, and inclusive spaces for all students

- Research shows that the safest schools are often where there are teachers devoted to building diverse, affirming school environments and programs that teach students effective conflict resolution. These schools also address the roots of racial disparities in school discipline.
- Anti-civil rights laws make it clear that only certain groups of students are welcome and protected in schools. This creates school environments ripe for bullying and harassment and fosters the potential for further violence—ultimately making schools unsafe for all.

Upholding democratic practices, values, and beliefs

- A well-rounded, honest education can prepare students to become informed and engaged citizens, both nationally and globally.¹⁰
- By censoring the truth in schools, the anti-civil rights campaign is carrying out a white supremacist agenda, stripping members of marginalized communities of their ability to be active citizens.

¹⁰ A 2022 report by the National Education Association and the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance urges states to embrace “culturally inclusive education,” which “facilitates many of the core goals of public education: promoting democracy by preparing children for citizenship and voting, teaching cultural literacy, developing citizens’ capacities for critical thinking and self-directed learning, and cultivating a workforce that can compete in the global marketplace.”

Putting Resistance into Action

Whether you live in a state or community that has passed an anti-civil rights education law, or one where you are actively trying to stop such a policy, your voice is needed to protect the rights of all students. Here are some strategies for protecting civil rights and public education in your communities and states.

The strategies below are broken down by “blue” states (states that are more progressive) and “red” states (states that are more conservative). But note that many of these strategies, such as media work and building coalitions, are important to consider in both “blue” and “red” states.

BLUE STATES

“I LIVE IN A ‘BLUER’ STATE, WHERE POLICIES ATTACKING CIVIL RIGHTS MAY HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED, BUT HAVE NOT YET PASSED.”

STRATEGY 1: Build Support for the Cause and Define the Coalition

- Find other community members, groups, organizations, and businesses that oppose education censorship and create a coalition of these different stakeholders.
- Show support for all groups that the anti-civil rights campaign targets (e.g., educators of color, LGBTQI+ students, librarians).
- Ask for the public support of your state leaders, like the governor or attorney general:

- For example, in June 2023, the California Governor, Attorney General, and Department of Education released a joint letter outlining key considerations school leaders should keep in mind when addressing requests to ban curricula and certain books from libraries. This is the sort of action you can ask your state leaders to take.
- If your state leaders are helping the anti-civil rights campaign, look for the support of local leaders who can influence state leaders (e.g., district superintendents, business executives, community councils, religious leaders).

STRATEGY 2: Meet with Lawmakers and Demand Accountability

- If an anti-civil rights bill is proposed in your state, meet with the lawmakers who introduced it to discuss the harms of education censorship and the importance of protecting students' civil rights. Ask them to retract their sponsorship of the bill.
- Identify the leaders of the education committee in your local or state lawmaking body and encourage them to stop any bills that censor education from coming to the floor for discussion.
- Find a “champion” in your state legislature who can introduce and support bills that prohibit book banning and other versions of education censorship, particularly those that discriminate against LGBTQI+ students and students of color.

STRATEGY 3: Talk to the Press and Seize the Momentum

- Write an op-ed or a Letter to the Editor.¹¹
- Connect with a local journalist to pitch stories that shed light on your perspective. Maintain a good working relationship with your local and state journalists (such as thanking them for a good story or providing minor corrections if they write something that is inaccurate).
- Reach out to journalists who use inflammatory, inaccurate, or the other side's language in their reporting of education anti-civil rights issues and try to educate them on the realities of certain bills and their consequences (such as describing the issue not as "culture wars" but rather attacks on historically marginalized and vulnerable students).

STRATEGY 4: Take Control of the Narrative

- Continue to boldly advocate for the civil and human rights of students, families, and educators.
 - Stay aware of opposition tactics that slowly erode rights (like banning one book at a time).
 - Point out the truth about the anti-civil rights campaign (e.g., how it is funded by radical right-wing billionaires, often pushed forward by those who don't live in the state where these bills are being introduced).
- Know your school district's instances and patterns of past discrimination, and point them out.
- Advocate for your school or district to resist efforts to silence discussion on identity, race and racism, and true history (see Blue States Strategy 5).
- When discussing the anti-civil rights campaign with others, be wary of repeating the other side's talking points.

¹¹ See Appendix Section III for a few tips on writing op-eds and letters to the editor.

- For example, instead of saying, “Teachers are not indoctrinating kids,” (their talking point), say what is actually true: “Teachers talk about race and gender to ensure every student knows they belong in the classroom.”
 - We encourage advocates to use their best judgment in situations where they might need to repeat the other side’s arguments in order to make their broader point.
- Continue to use words and language that convey what you want to be true for students. Insist on using historically accurate definitions of CRT, DEI, equity, social emotional learning, and even “woke.”

STRATEGY 5: Do Not Allow Your Schools or Community to Be Chilled

- Proposed laws attacking students’ civil rights are *intended* to scare people away from using their free speech. This is called having a “chilling effect.”
 - For example, some of the anti-civil rights laws threaten to take away educators’ licenses or tenure if they are violated but are vague as to which subjects, if taught, might lead to these outcomes. Some educators may fear for their jobs and stay away from historically accurate or culturally responsive teaching, whether or not the law covers those subjects or has even been passed, to avoid any possibility of punishment.
- Help educators and other community leaders understand what is (and what is not) currently in state law.
- Keep expressing our rights of free speech, and encourage educators to continue to speak out and defend the rights of those who are marginalized.
- Be prepared to help those who may be punished for speaking out find appropriate legal assistance (see Red States Strategy 2).

STRATEGY 6: Get Familiar with Your School Board (or run for a seat yourself)

- Pay attention to school board elections, and vote for candidates supporting student-affirming educational practices.
- Encourage others in your community to vote in school board elections, and know what platforms candidates are running on.
- Attend school board meetings (and encourage others to do the same). Testify against bad policies, and advocate for the implementation of good policies.
- If you are unsatisfied with your school board's position or policies, run for election to your local school board!

STRATEGY 7: Promote Student-Affirming Model Policies

- A big part of protecting the civil and human rights of youth in our schools is advocating for policies that affirmatively protect students. Remember that you don't have to recreate the wheel. Many state and national organizations have created sample policies and laws that you can adopt and promote in your state.¹²

WHY SHOULD I FOCUS ON MY SCHOOL BOARD?

Many education censorship policies are enacted at the local level through school boards. This is especially true in states that do not have a statewide anti-civil rights law. School boards are powerful entities that have a significant impact on curricula, school culture, and students' experiences within a district.

¹² See Appendix Section II for a few examples.

STRATEGY 8: Create a Proactive Long-Term Plan

- Stay aware of when local and state votes will take place, such as for your local school board or state legislature.
 - Identify members of your community who would be a good fit to run for these offices, and determine how your coalition can support their campaigns. Work with your allies in the legislature to write and propose laws that resist censorship proactively.
- Don't wait for education anti-civil rights laws to be proposed in your state to take action!

Proactive Protections: A Closer Look at Illinois

In June 2023, Illinois became the first state to pass a law prohibiting its public schools and libraries from banning books based on partisan disapproval or one set of views ([HB2789](#)). The law took effect in 2024.

What was at stake?

- In 2022, there were at least [43 attempts](#) to ban books in Illinois.
- Over 69 different books were included in those bans, many of which were written by or about LGBTQI+ people, Black people, Indigenous people, and other people of color.

What does the new law do?

- The new law outlines how the State Librarian and the Illinois State Library should make and enforce regulations to ensure that all Illinois citizens have access to library facilities and materials.
- It also instructs Illinois public libraries to write or adopt a library bill of rights, like the one promoted by the [American Library Association](#).
- The library bill of rights adopted would show each library's commitment to challenging censorship and promoting free expression and access to ideas. Libraries that do not comply with the law risk losing state funding.

What was the impact of the efforts in Illinois?

- This law in Illinois is paving the way for other states to push back against educational censorship.
- Advocates continue to fight for a similar law to pass in [New Jersey](#), where it was introduced in May 2023.
- In September 2023, [California](#) passed its own "ban on book bans."
- As of March 2024, [several other states](#) have introduced and passed similar laws.



RED STATES

**“I LIVE IN A ‘REDDER’ STATE THAT HAS ALREADY PASSED LAWS
ATTACKING CIVIL RIGHTS OR IS LIKELY TO DO SO.”**

While many of the strategies identified above are actions that can be taken in all states, there are some specific strategies that may be necessary if you live in a state more likely to pass or that has already passed anti-civil rights legislation.

STRATEGY 1: Know Your Rights

- Research resources and rely on organizations dedicated to educating the public about their rights under Federal, state, and local laws.¹³
- Reach out to organizations such as your state American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) or PENAmerica to identify what options remain in your state, even after the passage of such anti-civil rights laws.
- You can also connect with legal advocates, *pro bono* services, or lawyers in your state who may be able to help you determine your rights.

STRATEGY 2: Consider Legal Action

- Consider whether your school or district has demonstrated a pattern of discriminatory harm or hostility caused or made worse by an anti-civil rights law.¹⁴

¹³ See Appendix Section II for additional resources.

¹⁴ For example, a pattern of racial hostility can potentially be demonstrated by disparate discipline practices or consistent incidents of Black students and other students of color being treated differently or singled out in school policies or practices. This may look like, but is not limited to: hair discrimination, single-race assemblies, or unaddressed incidents of racial harassment or bullying. If you believe this applies to your school district, reach out to a legal representative to determine if legal action could be appropriate. This guide provides these examples but is not meant to be used as legal advice.

- Reach out to lawyers and other legal advocates who may be able to help you determine whether you have available legal claims.
- Educators who have faced discipline as a result of an anti-civil rights policy should reach out to their local union to determine their protections and assess potential legal action.
- Reach out to national and state organizations, and ask if any would be willing to support a lawsuit against the new legislation.
- Consider filing a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR).
 - Filing a complaint with OCR does not require a lawyer, but you can always seek the help of a lawyer to file your OCR complaint.

STRATEGY 3: Develop Coalitions of Key Constituencies and Meet Regularly

- Reach out to organizations, both large and small, whose interests are affected by anti-civil rights legislation (even if you have to help them understand how they are affected).
- Meet on a regular basis when the state legislature is not in session.
- Meet on at least a weekly basis when the state legislature is in session to share information on the status of legislation and to coordinate possible actions.

STRATEGY 4: Stand Firm in Saying No

- While it's a good general rule to work with legislators who are open to compromise, understand that many of the proponents of anti-civil rights laws may have little or no interest in working with others. Compromising in such a situation may allow them to split your coalition (i.e., be wary of any “divide and conquer” strategy).

STRATEGY 5: Develop Your “Inside/Outside” Strategy

- On the “inside,” or behind the scenes, make it clear to all legislators that you are willing to work with them to help craft laws that address their concerns without punishing children or limiting the rights of other people.
- On the “outside,” or publicly, use all platforms within your communities and across the state, including both traditional and social media, to raise awareness of the bill you oppose, openly reject it, and ask for support in resisting these attacks.
 - An Inside Higher Education report describes some examples of civil rights groups’ “outside” strategies through statewide resistance campaigns in Indiana, Alabama, and nationally.

STRATEGY 6: Call Out Bigotry and Hatred

- As part of the “outside” work, do not be afraid to publicly and strongly call out any bill that discriminates against groups and individuals. Even policymakers who regularly support discriminatory policies or statements typically wish to avoid being publicly called out for promoting racist or discriminatory policies or thinking.
- But even if those most actively promoting the anti-civil rights agenda seem not to care about or are openly hostile to the civil rights of students, there are many people in your community and state who do. Try your best to activate and mobilize a base of resistance with those people to create a lever that can help slow or defeat such legislation.

STRATEGY 7: Stay Aware of the Status of Legislation

- Don’t wait for bills to be officially introduced. Keep track of potential bills that legislators are talking about or that are gaining media attention in the fall (October-December). These bills may emerge in the next state legislative session early the following year.

- Lobbyists or those who work with lobbyists in your coalition can monitor which bills are likely to be heard by the legislature and when.¹⁵
- Encourage those most in tune with current legislation to consistently report updates in your weekly meetings.

STRATEGY 8: Engage in Multiple Actions

- Don't put all your eggs into one basket when it comes to resistance. Consider what you would do if your favorite strategy fails.
- Take as many different types of action (e.g., op-eds, protests, meeting with legislators, media coverage, local teach-ins) as possible.
- Although it's important to be strategic, consider all options. You never know what might work.

STRATEGY 9: Offer a Positive Agenda and Positive Options

- Avoid being viewed as the “naysayer” by developing a positive policy agenda. Consider what laws your coalition would like to see enacted.
- Determine what bills your coalition supports that improve education for all students, especially students who have been historically marginalized.
- Create a plan for how your coalition will affirmatively help those bills get introduced.

¹⁵ See Appendix Section I for examples of local, state, and federal legislation trackers you can follow.

STRATEGY 10: Remain United; Divide the Opposition

- When it comes to legislation, the side that remains united stands a better chance of winning. Try to build consensus among yourselves. Even if your coalition cannot agree on everything, ask “What are the principles that unite us?”
- Watch for divisions in the opposition. Often the most radical lawmakers are just one subset of the Republican Party, perhaps not even the majority. Seek out lawmakers who may come from more divided districts or those who may be less committed to anti-civil rights battles—and may even wish to avoid them altogether. Even a few moderate legislators can help divide more radical groups of lawmakers and thwart their anti-civil rights agenda.

Resistance Is Possible: Indiana’s Defeat of an Anti-CRT Bill

In January 2022, Republican state lawmakers in Indiana introduced an anti-CRT law that would have made it illegal for schools to present any information about race and racism in the classrooms that would cause discomfort. These lawmakers hoped the proposed law would limit or even prohibit discussion of racial injustice.



Shortly after the bill was introduced, representatives from a number of organizations created a coalition to create a strategy for fighting the proposed law together. Most, including coalition members themselves, believed their chance of stopping the bill was slim. But using strategies like those listed above, in the 2022 legislative session, Indiana became the first Republican-led state in the nation not to pass an anti-CRT bill. The coalition held together, and the Indiana supermajority failed to pass a similar bill in 2023.

The coalition, now known as the Indiana Educational Equity coalition, continues to work together to oppose anti-civil rights legislation. In Fall 2023, the coalition held its first annual statewide conference to share information and strategies in opposing such laws and to develop alternatives to support Indiana’s children and youth.

One Final Note: Consider the Risks

Each of the strategies presented in this guide may present some level of personal or professional risk. Remember that working in large numbers can help minimize some of the risks in this work. Also, each community may present different risks from another. Work with your coalition members to determine which risks are specific to your community and how best to avoid or minimize them. Finally, this guide is not legal advice. If some of your planned actions pose legal risks, be sure to talk to a legal professional before taking those actions.

Conclusion

In these times, resisting the anti-civil rights campaign is trying work. It will require skills that you may believe you do not have, creativity in trying out all legal means that increase the effectiveness of your resistance, and the firm dedication to doing the right thing for our nation's children and youth.

Remember that we *are the majority*—advocates dedicated to the protection and enforcement of the civil rights of all. Those engaged in the anti-civil rights campaign may be well-organized and well-funded, but they have always been and still are a minority seeking to impose values and beliefs that most people in the United States do not hold. When we stay alert, strong in our resistance, and united, we can win important victories.

It is time to get to work.

RESOURCES & STRATEGIES APPENDIX

I. Tracking the Anti-Civil Rights Campaign

There are a number of ways you and others in your community can push back against the anti-civil rights campaign. The below resources track states and localities that have proposed or passed laws and policies that censor education using the strategies discussed in this guide. These resources are linked and can be used to follow what is going on in your state or nationally.

A. **The CRT Forward Tracking Project**

- An interactive map that identifies, tracks, and analyzes local, state, and federal measures that attempt to restrict access to truthful information about CRT, race, and systemic racism.

B. **TruthBeTold | Legislative Tracker**

- A spreadsheet that lists state-level anti-CRT legislation with bill numbers.

C. **#TruthBeTold - Map of Legislative Attacks**

- A map showing which states have introduced or passed laws attacking racial and gender justice education.

D. **PEN America Index of Educational Gag Orders**

- An Excel spreadsheet with state policies (including state school board actions and executive orders) and legislation divided by K-12 and higher education.

E. **Mapping Challenges to the Freedom to Read**

- An interactive map and other data compiled by the American Library Association on 2022 book challenges from reports filed by library professionals in the field and from news stories published throughout the U.S.

F. **ACLU Anti-LGBTQ Bills Tracker**

- An interactive map by the American Civil Liberties Union, tracking bills targeting LGBTQ rights across the U.S. in the 2023 legislative session.

G. **State Legislative Tracker 2024: Pro-LGBTQI+ Legislation Affecting Schools**

- A map by GLSEN that shows where proactive anti-LGBTQI+ legislation has been filed.

II. Organizations Providing Assistance or Information on Strategies & Model Policies

Below are a few linked resources that provide assistance and model policies you can use to advance protections for students.

- **Freedom to Learn Toolkit** – National Education Association
 - The resources in this NEA toolkit will help advocates protect the right to an honest and culturally inclusive education.
- **Model Laws & Policies** – GLSEN
 - GLSEN has created a toolkit of evidence-based model policies based on what's working across the country and what our expertise shows us will make schools safer for all students, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.
- **CRT Hotline** – Howard University Thurgood Marshall Civil Rights Center
 - Created in partnership with the African American Policy Forum, the CRT Hotline provides confidential assistance to parents, teachers, administrators, and community members who have been affected by the anti-critical race theory crusade that has made education about race and American history taboo.
- **Identity-Based Bullying Model Policy Package** – Intercultural Development Research Association
 - This model policy package cites incidences where the bullying taking place is based on or related to a student's identity, such as their race, ethnicity, national origin, sex, gender, religion or

disability status. The package includes a policy brief, model policy for state-level legislation, school board policy, and an advocacy guide.

- **The People’s Guide to Project 2025** – Democracy Forward
 - Democracy Forward released a report focused on “kitchen table” issues detailing the day-one devastating impacts of policies set forth in Project 2025.
 - In addition to the linked landing page above, you can use these links to access Democracy Forward’s [People’s Guide Report](#) and [Resource and Amplification Toolkit](#).

III. Tips on Writing Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

Here are some general tips for writing op-eds or letters to the editor. Length and formatting requirements may differ from outlet to outlet. For any specific media outlet, search online or ask its reporters for its guidelines and make sure your piece meets those conditions.

- ***Op-ed quick tips***
 - Identify the issue up front, in the first sentence or paragraph.
 - Make sure it’s timely and persuasive.
 - Make it personable, with a mix of facts and your own perspective.
 - Try to keep it to about 600-800 words.
 - Whenever possible, contact the editorial page editor in advance to pitch them your piece.
 - Sometimes (usually with more local outlets) it is possible to have a conversation about the timeline for publication or even whether this is a topic they might be interested in.
- ***Letter to the Editor (LTE) quick tips***
 - Reasons to send an LTE:
 - To directly respond to something published in a news outlet (be specific about the date and source of the publication!)
 - To proactively raise a point that you would like to see covered
 - To agree with something the outlet published and to thank them for sharing this perspective
 - To express how your view opposes that of the author of published piece

- Drafting suggestions:
 - Make it interesting, informative, and brief.
 - Due to limitations with space, outlets publish many more LTEs than op-eds, so LTEs are a better option if you have a brief point or question in response to a specific criticism.
 - Try to keep it to about 100-150 words.

IV. Keywords Used throughout the Guide

The following is a list of the keywords and phrases that were highlighted in this guide, as well as their descriptions that were provided in the set-off boxes throughout.

- **What is the anti-civil rights campaign?** (text box on page 2)
 - FedSDC uses the phrase “anti-civil rights campaign” to describe how radical conservatives promote the narrative that racial justice is no longer a legitimate social goal and that efforts aimed at getting rid of racial discrimination are actually anti-white measures that lead to inequality.
 - Source: <https://ejl.org/news/history-racial-injustice-anti-civil-rights-movement/>
 - This guide aims to address the campaign as an intersectional attack on civil rights, highlighting its impact not only on racial justice, but also on gender justice.
- **What is a bill?** (text box on page 5)
 - In the lawmaking process, a bill is a legislative proposal that is offered to a lawmaking body for debate and consideration before it is passed into law. Think of it almost as a “draft” of a law. However, not all bills are passed into law.
 - Source: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/bill>
- **Why should I focus on my school board?** (text box on page 14)
 - Many education censorship policies are enacted at the local level through school boards. This is especially true in states that do not have a statewide anti-civil rights law. School boards are powerful entities that have a significant impact on curricula, school culture, and students’ experiences within a district.