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### **Protecting Students? Rhetoric vs. Reality and Recommendations for Peace Educators in the United States**

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Republican legislators have for years said they are enacting measures to protect kids in schools. But upon reviewing the nature of these efforts, one must wonder what is really meant by protection. Laws have been passed around the country to limit the types of books young people have access to in schools, the curricula that they are taught, who can access school-based sporting opportunities, and even where students can use restrooms. Although attacks on educators and the public school system are not new, these recent moves are allegedly necessary to counter the supposed “wokeness” of public schools and universities today.

In reality, much of the Republican party is actively opposing measures that actually protect kids. For example, many Republican politicians have opposed universal school lunch, an important measure to help feed poor kids. Republican leaders’ support for expanding Medicaid expansions to over poor children is weak, at best. Most Republican politicians actively oppose measures to restrict guns, even those specifically designed to keep guns out of the hands of children. This is despite polls that show a majority of Republic voters join Democrat voters in supporting sensible gun control.

This paper begins with a discussion of several of the supposed “protection” measures Republican politicians have pushed in recent years. It then discusses efforts that might actually protect students but that Republican politicians have

opposed. Next, the paper provides a brief review of the political and interests and motivations behind the Republican moves to “protect kids.” The paper concludes with how these measures violate basic civil and human rights as well as widely accepted principles and values of justice. implications and recommendations for peace educators.

**Don’t Say Gay and Other Restrictions Related to Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation.** Florida started a wave of legislation aimed at preventing educators from teaching about, and in some cases, even acknowledging, LGBTQ+ individuals. Colloquially referred to as “Don’t Say Gay,” Florida legislation was enacted in 2022 and severely restricts what can be taught about LGBTQ+ issues in K-12 schools. Seven states have similar laws, and all but one are led by Republicans. Florida’s law prohibits classroom instruction about sexual orientation and gender identity in grades Kindergarten through Three and requires that instruction in later grades be “developmentally appropriate,” although that term was not defined. Further, the law required that educators seek parental permission to refer to a student by a pronoun or nickname that does not correspond with their sex at birth. Additionally, the law expanded on other legislation related to banning books, in this case requiring districts to prepare easy to use objection forms to contest a specific book and allowing parents and community members to object to “pornographic” materials, materials that “[d]epict[] or describe[] sexual conduct,” materials that are “not suited to student needs and their ability to comprehend the material presented,” or materials that are “inappropriate for the 4 grade level and age group for which the material is used” (National Educational Association, 2023). A court decision in March 2024 addressed some of the concerns about the law but kept the bulk of it in place (McMillan, Demillo, & Mulvihill, 2024).

In contrast to Republican efforts, seven states, all but one led by a Democrat, have responded by passing legislation that mandates the teaching about LGBTQ+ history (Lavietes, 2024).

Four states—Florida, Kentucky, Montana, and North Dakota—have passed legislation protecting educators who refuse to address students by their selected pronouns (Mulvihill, 2024). In April 2024, a federal judge blocked Florida’s ban in a case involving a high school math teacher who refused to comply but left the statewide ban intact. U.S. District Judge Mark Walker determined that the law violated transgender plaintiff Katie Woods’ free speech right to express her personal identity (Wiessner, 2024).

Seven states have laws or policies that require schools to notify parents if their child is transgender. This is untouched by the federal policy passed by the Biden administration (Mulvihill, 2024).

Florida “effectively banned” AP Psychology because of the way that it covers gender identity and sexual orientation, according to the College Board. Florida officials informed the College Board that the curriculum violates the state’s Parental Rights in Education Act. The College Board criticized the decision, which deprives Florida students of valuable information and can earn them college credit. Further, the College Board noted that the material on sexual orientation and gender identity has been included in the course since it was created more than 30 years ago. State officials contend that the course is still listed as an option for Florida students and that it was working with the College Board to address its concerns (Laviertes, 2023).

**Trans Female Athlete Bans.** As of April 16, 2024, 24 states ban transgender females from participating in K-12 extracurricular sports. Idaho was the first state to do so in 2020 (Savage, 2021). In seventeen states the ban applies to college athletic participation (Movement Advancement Project, 2024). In April 2024, the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), which represents 241 mostly small colleges, all but banned trans females from intercollegiate competition. This move made it the first sporting organization to enact such a ban. In March 2024, Republicans on the House Committee on the Judiciary voted in support of a broader ban on transgender athletes. A similar but less expansive bill was passed through the committee the year prior. Called the “Protection of Women in Olympic and Amateur Sports Act,” it would require national governing bodies like those that oversee the Olympics, Paralympics, and pretty much any competitive sport, to ban trans women and girls from competing in sports designated for women and girls. Rep. Rebecca Ballant, a member of the House committee and Co-Chair of the Congressional Equality Caucus, responded that it was a hate bill. She said,

Time and time again, Republicans hide behind promoting women and girls in sports. But these continued attacks have real consequences. The countless anti LGBTQIA+ attacks from Republicans only stand to incite violence and ultimately remove trans people from public life. But I want trans girls and women to know: you deserve to participate and thrive in the sports you love (Congressional Equality Caucus, 2024).

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, a member of the committee and Co-Chair of the Equality Caucus’ Transgender Equality Task Force, explained

Republicans don’t actually care about protecting women’s and girls’ sports – if they did, they would focus on the lack of financial resources and prominent wage gaps. But instead, they’re coopting language from the women’s rights movement to go after gender inclusivity and trans

Americans. Countless sport's governing bodies and organizations have rejected categorical bans on trans athletes, and so should we. I will continue to fight for the right of trans individuals to participate in all aspects of society and live full lives full of dignity, respect, and equality (Congressional Equality Caucus, 2024).

The argument is that trans females have an unfair advantage in sports because they are biologically men. This is supposedly because of the higher levels of testosterone that men generally have. Experts state, however, that testosterone levels vary in any individual and that the amount of testosterone one has is only a small factor that contributes to athletic success. Further, such policies seem quite unnecessary, given that transgender individuals make up an estimated 1.8 percent of the high school population in the United States and the number of transgender athletes is significantly lower than that. Human Rights Campaign surveyed high school youth and found that less than fifteen percent of transgender students played sports (Associated Press, 2024). Trans athletes have not consistently outperformed other female athletes (Savage, 2021).

Sport participation is beneficial to youth, both physically and mentally. The President's Council on Sports, Fitness, & Nutrition Science has compiled research to show that effect of participation in athletics on mental, emotional, and social health. Sport participation lowers stress, anxiety, and depression; reduces the risk of suicide, substance abuse, and risky behavior; increases self-esteem, cognitive performance, and creativity; and improves life satisfaction. Physically, participating in sport can improve bone health, weight status, cardiovascular fitness, and overall quality of life. It can also reduce the risk of cancer and diabetes and for girls, reduce body fat (PCFSN Science Board, 2020).

**Where can people urinate?** In several states, Republicans have pushed legislation that would require that students, faculty, and staff only use the school bathrooms of their sex at birth. Ostensibly young people will feel uncomfortable if a trans female is using a female restroom or a trans male is using a male restroom. Further, some Republicans have whipped up the nothing-burger that young men will fake their gender identity so as to prey upon girls. Eleven states have some type of legislation related to bathroom use and gender identity. In Florida and Utah, it is a criminal offense in certain cases for transgender individuals to use a bathroom that matches their gender identity (Movement Advancement Project, N.D.). Oklahoma enacted such a bathroom ban with disastrous results. Nex Benedict, who identified as nonbinary and transgender, had suffered bullying since the start of the 2023 school year. Benedict was attacked by a group of girls in the school bathroom on February 7, 2024. Another transgender student was also attacked. The school did not call an ambulance or the police, despite Benedict's bruises, wounds to the

face and eyes, and scratches on the back of the head. To make matters worse, the school told Benedict that they would be suspended for two weeks. The next day, they died (Houghtaling, 2024).

In May 2024 Florida Governor Ron DeSantis signed into law a requirement that school staff and students from kindergarten to college use only the bathrooms and changing facilities that match their sex at birth. Colleges are required to investigate allegations of violations and report them to the Florida Department of Education. The law also applies to campus housing. Penalties begin with a verbal warning, followed by a written warning, then suspension without pay. A second violation results in termination. Even private schools must follow the law and can face revocation of their teaching certification if they are not compliant (Yurcaba, 2023).

**Antiracist education and diversity, equity, and inclusivity (DEI) restrictions.** Across the country, the Republican Party has pushed for legislation to keep White kids from feeling guilt, responsibility, concern, or really any emotion when it comes to America's racist past and how racism is embedded in US culture. One such effort involves banning the teaching of Critical Race Theory, an approach to antiracism education that emphasizes the institutionalization of racial bias. Despite the fact that it is designed for use in college courses and with no evidence CRT was actually being used in K-12 schools, Republicans like North Carolina state representative Dan Bishop, who introduced an anti-CRT bill, claim, "Critical race theory is a divisive ideology that threatens to poison the American psyche. For the sake of our children's future, we must stop this effort to cancel the truth of our founding and our country" (Bouie, 2023). Marcotte (2022) explained that "Republicans love to go on and on about fictional curricula in imaginary classrooms where dreamed-up white kids are being told that they're personally responsible for systemic racism." Florida's Stop W.O.K.E Act bans critical race theory as well as the New York Times 1619 Project, which is a collection of literary works that showcase African American's history and contributions to the United States (Pendharkar, 2023). Every state except Delaware has at least considered some type of anti-CRT legislation.

Reality is, the hysteria is little more than a hoax being used to dismantle public education, an agenda Republicans have pursued since the 1980s. Finley and Esposito (2022, p. 137) explained,

Yet even if educators are not explicitly teaching from a CRT framework, these kinds of laws have a chilling effect on the teaching of racial issues in general. Further, many of the anti-CRT laws are extremely broad, and thus

have been interpreted to prohibit an array of issues. These include teaching the story of Johnny Appleseed and objections to a book about Ruby Bridges, as the latter does not offer the perspective of redemption for racists who screamed at her for trying to attend school.

As of February 2023, at least eighteen states had laws or policies prohibiting antiracism education in some way. While these laws vary in their specifics, they all prohibit teaching that the United States is inherently racist, about conscious and unconscious bias, privilege, discrimination, and oppression. Further, these state laws apply to teachings about gender as well (Alfonseca, 2023).

Once again, Florida has also “lead,” albeit in a negative way. It was the first state to reject the pilot curriculum for Advanced Placement African American History in 2023. State officials alleged that the course was in violation of state law because it lacked “educational value and historical accuracy.” In response, the College Board, which develops AP courses, responded that the course had undergone “a rigorous, multi-year pilot phase, collecting feedback from teachers, students, scholars and policymakers.” Education experts as well as the White House immediately denounced Florida’s decision. Vice President Kamala Harris explained, “Every student in our nation should be able to learn about the culture, contributions, and experiences of all Americans—including Black Americans—who shaped our history. Unfortunately, in Florida, extremist so-called leaders ban books, block history classes, and prevent teachers from freely discussing who they are and who they love” (Pendharkar, 2023).

Florida, Texas, Utah, and several other states have or are considering legislation banning DEI programs in colleges and universities. In summer 2023 Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed a law requiring that all state-funded colleges and universities close their DEI offices. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis similarly banned public colleges from using state or federal funds on any DEI initiatives. Arizona State Senator Anthony Kern, in supporting a DEI ban in his state, pronounced that “there was ‘ample evidence’ of professors intimidating students by using state money for things beyond education or advocacy” (Adams & Chiwaya, 2024). In January 2024, Utah Governor Spencer Cox signed a bill into law that prohibits diversity training as well as hiring and other inclusion programs at universities and in the state government, referring to diversity hiring practices as “bordering on evil” (Goldberg, 2024).

**Social-emotional learning.** Social-Emotional Learning, or SEL, aims to teach young people five general life skills: self-awareness, social awareness, self-

management, the ability to get along in groups, and ethical and responsible decision making (Strozewski, 2022). Often referred to as “soft” skills or called character education, SEL is intended to help kids to be better people. SEL has been found to improve students’ academic skills as well as their mental health, peer relationships, and overall wellbeing (Durlak et al., 2011). It has also been found to help reduce the risk of suicide, substance abuse, anxiety, and feelings of hopelessness (Posamentier, et al., 2022), with these benefits persisting for many years help to increase the likelihood of graduating high school and attending college as well as reducing the risk of health problems and arrests (Taylor, et al., 2017). In at least eight states Republicans have proposed or passed bills limiting or even prohibiting it. Conservative media outlets fueled the attack on SEL, asserting that it “could be a “Trojan horse” for teaching children about critical race theory and gender diversity” (Abrams, 2023). To them, SEL is yet another example of indoctrination. Further, conservatives maintain that SEL is a distraction from academics. Research shows that most SEL curricula do not address race or gender at all (Ramirez et al., 2021).

Going even further, in some communities, parents have begun to contend that mental health counselors and suicide prevention initiatives in schools are also “indoctrinating” students (Kingkade & Hixenbaugh, 2021).

**Creature’s butts, naughty goblins, and other non-issues in children’s books.** The conservative Republican group Moms for Liberty complained about several children’s books to the Indian River School District in Florida. Their concern was that these books included sexual content. Moms for Liberty member Jennifer Pippin submitted complaints about *Unicorns are the Worst*, a children’s book that won Florida’s state literature reward because it included an image of a goblin with a naked backside. Another book, *No! David* was challenged because it showed the naked backside of a little boy, as well as Maurice Sendak’s *In the Night Kitchen* because images of the main character naked. Eric Carle’s *Draw Me a Star* was also objectionable, Pippin claimed, because it showed an image in classic Carle style (cartoonish, abstract, bright colors) of a naked couple. Pippin agreed that some of the books could remain if the district colored in shorts or other clothing garments to cover the nudity (Otten, 2024).

Lake County, Florida school district removed the book *And Tango Makes Three* because it allegedly violated the “Don’t Say Gay” law. It has no sexual content in any way and actually tells the true story of two male penguins who built a nest together and raise a baby penguin after the zookeeper gave them an egg (Chait, 2023).



## Failure to Protect: Real Issues

**Adequate food and healthcare.** While they are busy so-called protecting kids, Republican politicians are equally transfixed on ignoring the needs of young people. Some have refused to support universal school lunch. Protection from hunger is not an agenda item, it seems. In Minnesota, Republican state senator Steve Drazkowsi even pronounced that, “I have yet to meet a person in Minnesota that says they don’t have access to enough food to eat” (Bouie, 2023). A federal program that took effect in January 2024 allows students who are eligible for free and reduce lunch to receive similar assistance during the summer months. Eligible families can receive \$40 per month, per child. The program would serve some 21 million students starting around June 2024, providing \$2.5 billion in relief across the country. Republican governors in fifteen states opted not to participate in the program, thereby denying up to ten million kids food assistance. Nebraska Governor Jim Pillen even said, “I don’t believe in Welfare” (Rampell, 2024). In at last ten states Republicans have refused the Medicaid expansion that was authorized in the Affordable Care Act, thus leaving millions of people without regular medical care. This includes many children (Bouie, 2023). These programs are widely supported by voters, including the majority of Republican voters. Those Republican leaders who oppose expansions or even in some cases continuations of school food programs have cited a Cato Institute report that alleges fraud.

The “fraudulence” the think tank is concerned about is not some shadowy cabals of teachers systematically stealing from the school lunch money pot: It’s students who are being fed, even if their parents technically make too much to benefit from the program. In other words, Republicans’ opposition to the program is based on the assumption that people being “wrongly” fed at school is tantamount to abusive waste (Thakker, 2024).

**Predatory loans and student debt relief.** College students have for some time been stuck with ridiculous debt, in part due to predatory loans. While President Biden has made several efforts, with some success, at relieving student loan debt, most Republican politicians do not support relief efforts. During the Republic presidential debates in January 2024, the five candidates that were still in the race—Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis, Nicki Haley, Vivek Ramaswamy, and Asa Hutchinson—all opposed student debt relief. As Nova (2024) wrote, “the average loan balance at graduation has tripled since the 1990s to \$30,000 from \$10,000. Additionally, about 7% of student loan borrowers are now more than \$100,000 in debt.” Further, the majority of Americans support some type of student loan forgiveness, with less than one-third opposing it. DeSantis probably had the most despicable comment about it. He said, “Why should a truck driver have to pay for



somebody that got a degree in zombie studies? It doesn't make sense" (Nova, 2024).

**Being safe in school.** Polls routinely show that Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to leave decisions about protections like masks and vaccines to parents, rather than focusing on what would be best for the common good (Khazan, 2022). Florida Governor Ron DeSantis supported the state's Department of Education in fall 2021, which withheld funds from two districts (Alachua and Broward County) that imposed mask mandates (Mervosh, 2021). Governors in Texas, Arizona, Oklahoma, Iowa, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah also imposed bans on school district mask mandates (Durkee, 2022).

Florida has struggled with an outbreak of measles that was heretofore unheard of for decades, with eleven cases in 2024 as of this writing. The reason relates directly back to Republican opposition to vaccines and other health mandate. The state continues to allow parents to send their children to school regardless of if they are fully vaccinated or even have been found to have contracted measles, thereby jeopardizing other people's kids. Florida Surgeon General Joseph Ladapo, an appointee of Republican Governor Ron DeSantis, has vocally and repeatedly repudiated science related to COVID, vaccines in general, and now to containing the spread of measles. Ladapo even told parents it was fine to send their unvaccinated kids to school amidst the measles outbreak, in direct contradiction of recommendations by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which calls for a quarantine of 21 days for anyone who has not been vaccinated or had a previous infection. Dr. Robert Speth, a professor of pharmaceutical sciences at Nova Southeastern University, explained "The surgeon general is Ron DeSantis's lapdog, and says whatever DeSantis wants him to say. His statements are more political than medical and that's a horrible disservice to the citizens of Florida. He's somebody whose job is to protect public health, and he's doing the exact opposite" (Luscombe, 2024).

Surely Republicans at least want to keep kids safe from violence, right? Maybe not. Most refuse to cooperate on bipartisan gun control efforts that might reduce gun violence, including school shootings. In 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that firearms were the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in the United States. Despite passing in 2022, with bipartisan support, the most comprehensive gun control package in decades, polls show Republican support for gun control has waned since. Republican support for gun control dropped from 49 percent in the summer of 2022 to 32 percent the following summer (Long & Sanders, 2023). Even still, polls show that most Republican voters agree with Democrats about a few gun control issues. For

instance, ninety percent of Democrats and eighty percent of Republican voters support universal background checks for firearm sales (Helmstetter, Plutzer, & Kalale, 2023). It is the politicians that seem to struggle, and their reasoning is clear: They do not want to alienate the NRA and its funding nor risk losing elections in more conservative districts. It is the GOP base that decides primary contests and is vehement in its opposition to gun control (Hulse, 2022). Demonstrating the disregard, Tennessee Representative Tim Burchett commented, “It’s a horrible, horrible situation. And we’re not gonna fix it. Criminals are gonna be criminals.” He actually represents a district in Nashville that had a school shooting (Bouie, 2023).

Research is clear that most school shooters are students or former students and are under the age of 18. Thus, they are generally ineligible to purchase firearms. As such, they often acquire the guns they use to perpetrate school shootings from their own families or the families of friends. Despite knowing this, the United States has weak Child Access Protection (CAP) laws for firearms (Cox et al., 2022). There is no federal CAP law, nor does federal law require that parents safely store their guns. Nineteen states have some type of CAP law, but many are weak and not enforced. Research is clear that CAP and safe storage laws prevent injuries and death, including school shootings (Child Access Prevention, ND). Yet Republican legislators in many states oppose safe storage laws. For instance, in 2021, Colorado Republicans spent ten hours opposing a bill that would require safe storage of firearms when not in use (Niebert, 2021).

In December 2023, Senate Democrats sought to advance a bill banning assault weapons. Predictably, Republican legislators moved to block it (Benen, 2023). Assault weapons are the firearm of choice among mass shooters. While banning them will not address all firearm violence, it may well reduce mass shootings, including those that take place in school settings.

### **In Summary: The Republican Political Agenda**

Rather than a chaotic and disorganized agenda, these efforts are organized and intentional. Jennifer Berkshire and Jack Schneider in their book *The Education Wars* explained that today’s disagreement on the nature of schooling and what should be taught is that it is designed to eliminate public schooling as we know it. Berkshire and Schneider maintain that these efforts are being funded by neoliberals who want the free market, not the government, to control education. They point to Moms for Liberty, one of the key proponents of “parents’ rights” and “protecting kids” and note that it is a project of the conservative Heritage Foundation and that it gets most of its funding from very wealthy donors. Many of the anti-CRT efforts, for example, emerged from “model” legislation that the Heritage Foundation,

Citizens for Renewing America, and the American Legislative Exchange Council developed and promoted (Finley & Esposito, 2022). Tim Chambers, whose work is focused on monitoring and countering disinformation on the internet, explained "The anti-CRT effort is textbook disinformation, manufactured and funded by right-wing think tanks and boosted by programmatically targeted ads to inflame users. It is from well-funded orgs working with suspect local groups on the ground, and with the ever-present background push from Fox News on broadcast and cable behind it all" (Graham, 2021).

As Bouie (2023) opined,

When you put all of this together, the picture is clear. The Republican Party will use the law and the state to shield as many children as possible from the knowledge, cultural influences and technologies deemed divisive or controversial or subversive by the voters, activists and apparatchiks that shape and guide its priorities. When Tucker Carlson, Christopher Rufo and Moms for Liberty say jump, their only question is: How high?

But when it comes to actual threats to the lives of American children — from poverty, from hunger, from sickness and from guns — then, well, the Republican Party wants us to slow down and consider the costs and consequences and even possible futility of taking any action to help.

Marcotte (2022) also summed it up very well:

Republicans only care about children that are imaginary. Real children have needs: Food, shelter, safety, emotional support, education, love. Imaginary children, however, want for nothing. The fictional threats to imaginary children are useful for political rhetoric and for bashing your opponents, with no real cost. Providing for real children cuts into resources Republicans would rather see spent on yacht improvements for their donor base. Keeping real children safe means embracing policies, like gun control, that offend the easily bruised egos of their voting base of child-men and their wives.

### **The Danger of Republican “Protection”: Real Harms to Civil and Human Rights**

Banning books has long been considered by many people to be a violation of the First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Legal challenges to many of the things described herein are indeed seeing them as violations of civil liberties. In

April 2024, a federal judge ruled that Florida’s pronoun law violated a teacher’s freedom of speech. The anti-LGBTQ+ laws enacted around the state have and will continue to make LGBTQ+ students feel less safe in schools. They are in stark contrast to the basic principle of providing a safe and healthy educational climate—a hallmark, supposedly, of U.S. public education.

From a human rights perspective, the United States is the only country that has never ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a glaring omission. The rest of the world recognizes that children have human rights just like adults. There are four general principles underpinning the UNCRC: 1) The right to life, survival, and development; 2) Non-discrimination; 3) The right to be heard; and 4) The best interests of the child. It is difficult to see how enacting bans on what kids can be taught about issues like racism and sexual orientation is consistent with these principles. Likewise, it is clear that involvement in sports and other extracurricular activities is beneficial for student development yet is being strictly curtailed in many states. Meanwhile providing food to young people would seemingly be a significant part of the right to life, survival, and development. In sum, these measures to “protect” are doing the opposite and jeopardizing the safety and wellbeing of young people.

### **Recommendations for Policymakers and Peace Educators**

Federal legislation could be one part of the remedy to these failures to adequately protect kids and to address those laws and policies that are instead doing harm. For example, Democrat President Joe Biden’s administration issued a federal rule in April 2024 that seeks to prohibit bathroom bans. It is based on the administration’s determination that the federal law Title IX, enacted in 1972 to prevent gender discrimination in schools and colleges that receive federal funding, also covers sexual orientation and gender identity as well (Mulvihill, 2024). Peace educators can continue to push for federal legislation that would not only provide uniformity on these issues but would also respect human rights and personal dignity.

Legal challenges are another route that peace educators can support. As was noted, legal challenges have already been brought about many of these laws and for the most part, they have been successful at blocking or overturning the legislation. More have been filed and will continue to be, as nonprofit organizations and others contest the constitutionality of these laws, most often on First Amendment grounds.

Nonviolent activism is another tool that has and will continue to be useful in promoting real protection for students. In Florida, activists have been very vocal

and organized in their opposition to “Don’t Say Gay.” Protests, petitions, creative art exhibits and other strategies have been utilized to raise awareness and garner support for opposition to restrictive legislation that does nothing to protect students.

As always, teaching young people about their rights is essential to promoting democracy and resisting oppression. While public school teachers face potentially career-ending consequences if they do too much to contest the damaging policies discussed herein, others have more flexibility. For instance, college educators are somewhat more protected, especially those working at private universities.

Leveraging the power of media and social media is important as well. In an era of so much misinformation, peace activists and educators can try to share a different perspective. Even more, the youth who are affected by these policies do not want to remain silent. They have and can continue to resist peacefully those efforts that do not protect them and advocate for those that will.

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