

Core Messages

OVERVIEW

Educational gag orders are being passed across the country and it will require a broad tent of coordinated, authentic voices to actively defend students, their future, and advocate for a more affirming and supportive education system that each student deserves.

Below you will find messaging guidance, informed by the latest research, on effectively advocating for honest and inclusive education.

The research tells us that working alongside parents and children, we must

- inoculate against the false narratives presented by those pushing these gag orders,
- clearly define the harm caused by these bills, and
- clearly define our positive vision for education.

Guiding Principles

As the conversation continues to evolve, so too does the messaging necessary to cut through the noise — review the latest research to learn more. When adapting the following guidance to your context, there are three key principles to remember:

- **Center families:** By centering what parents want and what children need/deserve, we address parents' fears and bring more people into the conversation. Parents of all stripes want truthful education, classrooms where students are valued and accepted, and curriculum that sets kids up to succeed — our messaging should align with parents' vision.
- **Humanize, don't politicize:** We lose ground when we focus on the politics; instead, we should focus on clear examples of the positive educational experience that is at stake (e.g., these bans prevent students from learning about heroes like MLK) as well as our values (e.g., we want education that helps our children understand how others feel).
- **Adapt to your context:** Messaging is not a one-size-fits all solution. You know your context better than anyone, so we encourage you to take what works for you from this guide but don't feel obligated to use what doesn't.

MESSAGING ARCHITECTURE

To address misinformation and shift the narrative, here are the four main elements to focus on. While the exact language for each directive might vary for your context, we explain why each of these steps will help your message:

	Why this works:
Align with shared values of parents:	Shared values start the conversation from a place of agreement, likely making them more interested, particularly if we align with families and invoke patriotism.
Define the impact:	Once you've established shared values - pivot to how the gag orders (or downstream impacts) undermine those same values. People need to know why this issue matters to them and real life examples help. Clearly outlining the consequences of these bans on our children, and nation, helps convey the urgency without exaggerating the problem.

Highlight benefits of honest and inclusive education:	Once the harm has been established, pivot to explain how honest and inclusive education DOES support those shared values. Explicitly state the value of education that reflects and affirms all kids by connecting to life skills, leadership, the future of our country - or other tangible benefits parents care about.
Call into action for a positive vision:	Finally, leave folks with a clear idea of what the future could look like, with specific calls to action that support honest and inclusive education. A positive vision helps the audience realize what's possible and recognize the role they play to spark change.

SAMPLE MESSAGING

Using the messaging architecture, here are examples of what this might look like.

Start with shared values: Parents want their children to feel accepted and valued, and to learn skills to prepare them for the future- and schools should work with families to achieve those goals.

- Parents and schools should work side-by-side to give children the tools, skills, and resources they need to be good citizens, members of their community, and leaders
- Parents of all stripes want truthful education, classrooms where students are valued and accepted, and curriculum that sets kids up to succeed
- Parents and schools should work together to ensure that every child gets a quality education — one that recognizes their unique needs and provides them the resources they need to reach their full potential, no matter their race or background.
- We all want to make sure our children learn the tools they need to succeed. Our families, communities, and futures depend on the next generation.
- Every child deserves an equal shot at success, no matter their race or background.

Define the impact: When we ban books about heroes like Martin Luther King, or prevent students from learning the true history of the US — good and bad — we are undermining the education we all want for our children.

If talking about the bans, start sentences with “when we prevent” or “when we limit” rather than “these bans”...

- Banning teaching on comprehensive history, racism, and civil rights, doesn't help our kids get the education we all know they deserve.
- These bans prevent our children from learning about important parts of U.S. history and only focus on select moments.
- When we ban learning about comprehensive history, racism, and civil rights, we undermine our children's education by...
 - limiting the free flow of ideas and speech which make our country great
 - limiting our children's ability to learn about different communities and cultures and their contributions to America's success and progress

→stifling our children's fundamental right to freedom of thought and expression.

→ limiting our children's ability to understand current events and learn the life skills necessary to navigate these complex situations.

→ making many students feel that they aren't valued or accepted.

→ limit understanding America as a work in progress, and that we all have a role to play in ensuring America's brighter future.

Highlight benefits: An honest and inclusive education benefits every student, not just by making them feel valued and accepted, but also by helping them build critical skills — like communicating across differences and understanding how others feel — that will prepare them for future success.

- By learning the true history of our nation — the good and the bad — our children can see how far we've come while also learning about how to build a better future for us all.
- Our country's strength comes from the free flow of ideas and speech. By learning the true history of our nation, we can teach children the skills to recognize racism, interact with people who are different from them, and lead a diverse country and world
- Our nation has so much to be proud of. Learning about the true history of our nation helps children see how far we've come and the work we still have to do.
- Our kids learn best in environments with low fear and high trust. Creating a safe environment to talk about tough issues, and helping kids of all backgrounds feel welcome, increases that trust and ensures that schools can be a ladder of opportunity for all students.
- Education that reflects and affirms all kids helps them pursue their dreams and reach their fullest potential.
- Education that reflects and affirms all kids helps students understand how others feel, especially those whose race, ethnicity, or background is different from their own
- Education that reflects and affirms all kids helps ensure that students of all races and backgrounds believe they can succeed.

Call into action for a positive vision: Children are America's future — and that future is at stake. Let's work together to give our kids what they need and deserve: a truthful learning environment that affirms all kids, so that they can learn freely and develop the important life skills they need to build toward a brighter future for all of us.

Let's work together to...

- Create learning environments where students feel accepted and valued, regardless of race, gender identity, religion, or anything else.
- Include more from every child's culture and experience in all aspects of education.
- Help our children understand the contributions and struggles of different groups of people and communities.
- Update instructional materials to feature a broad range of diverse peoples, places, and perspectives.

- Train teachers and administrators to ensure they encourage all kids to reach their full potential, regardless of race or background.
- Make sure these educational gag orders don't come into our community so children can reach their full potential.
- Protect our kids from educational gag orders so they can continue to gain the skills and confidence they need to succeed.

Keep in mind: Parents are on common ground.

When the hot button language is removed, and parents actually understand what their children learn in the classroom, parents are against educational gag orders.

Parents across the political spectrum and across all races and backgrounds agree that:

- It is good to acknowledge that our children come from different backgrounds, and we should help them learn in a manner that understands and embraces their life experience.
- Children of all races and backgrounds should believe they can succeed, which means that they all should feel valued and accepted in the classroom.
- Discrimination and racism happen in America today, and we should be able to talk about this in schools.
- We should highlight historical events and figures that may have been neglected in curriculum thus far, including things that are uncomfortable about our nation's history. We should instill our children with pride in our country, as well as the desire to continue improving it.
- Schools should do more to encourage curiosity and help students understand how others feel, especially those whose race, ethnicity, or background is different from their own.
- It's important to prepare our children to work, lead, and succeed in a diverse world.