

**COUNTERING THE PARENTS'
RIGHTS NARRATIVE:**

**EFFECTIVE
MESSAGING
TO INSPIRE
ACTION**

BACKGROUND

Most Americans have not yet heard much about the topic known as “parents’ rights.” That means there’s still space for extremists to make their case — and lots of room for progressives to get there first with compassion and facts.

Research Conducted by PerryUndem and the Center for Advancing Innovative Policy, for [Advocates for Youth](#) and [Red Wine and Blue](#).

TOPLINE NARRATIVE

- Since 2020, there have been over **1,700 book bans in the country**. Hundreds of new laws are censoring what teachers can talk about, banning sex ed, stopping teachers from teaching things like empathy, requiring period tracking and bodily inspection of all girls, and putting LGBTQ+ kids in danger.
- **Kids are losing basic rights**, like safety and access to knowledge about themselves, their bodies, their history, and the world.
- **The folks pushing this agenda call it “parents’ rights.”** It is a political strategy funded by far-right activists at the national level to gain power, divide, and control people.
- It is a hard and scary time to be a parent. Society and technology are changing fast. We want to keep our kids safe and protect them. **The answer is not bans, censorship, and things that create an unsafe environment for everyone.**
- Teaching empathy is one way our schools are working to reduce bullying. **Let’s make sure kids get the information they need to understand the world, the people in it, and be successful in life.**
- It can be uncomfortable to learn about dark aspects of our past, but **kids must learn accurate history so they don’t repeat it.**
- **Let’s provide students with accurate, age-appropriate sex education**, while continuing to allow parents to opt their kids out, if they choose.
- **A child’s hormonal makeup or health care is not our business.** This is between parents, their child, and their doctor. All young people, including transgender and non-binary students, deserve a safe environment where they can be themselves in peace.
- **Schools should be a place where kids are safe**, inspired, supported, and treated with dignity.
- Let’s reject politicians who are riling people up and turning us against each other just for their own political power. **Let’s get informed and support each other and our kids.**

LET'S TALK ABOUT BANS

It's important to actually spell out what's happening — the overwhelming number and type of bans really drives the point home. **A collective set of policies fills awareness gaps and evokes strong emotions that can spark a desire to act.**

- Bans on lessons that teach empathy
- Banning schools from protecting LGBTQ+ kids from bullying
- Requiring bodily inspection and period tracking for all girls
- Bans on sex ed
- Banning books that deal with race, sex, or LGBTQ+ issues, including books about Anne Frank, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and LGBTQ+ kids who are struggling
- Bans and censorship on how teachers talk about racism and US history

FOCUS ON YOUTH IMPACT

On frames, our audiences are more centered on young people (their own kids, children in their lives, young people writ large) than themselves as parents. **People are most worried about children's well-being and safety (bullying is #1 issue for parents) and getting a well-rounded education.** They are less likely to view the policies through a parents' lens - that is our opposition's frame.

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- Teaching empathy is one way our schools are working to reduce bullying. Let's make sure kids get the information they need to understand the world, the people in it, and be successful in life.
- It can be uncomfortable to learn about dark aspects of our past, but kids must learn accurate history so they don't repeat it.
- Schools should be a place where kids are safe, inspired, supported, and treated with dignity.

MOST CONCERNING IMPACTS ON YOUTH

Focus on the freedoms and opportunities kids lose out on when far-right politicians pass bans. **Lead with the most concerning impacts.**

- Loss of knowledge of history
- Loss of access to a high quality, well-rounded education
- Loss of sense of safety and protection at school
- Loss of access to books
- Loss of freedom to learn about the world and all who are in it
- Loss of access to different perspectives and views
- Becoming narrow minded
- Facing more bullying in schools and mental health issue

TALKING ABOUT TRANS ISSUES

There is still a large education gap. Themes of collective bans, power and control, and youth-focus are throughlines to issues that specifically impact trans youth. The emphasis on a safe environment and concern over bullying continues to resonate when applied to trans youth.

Two main questions that our audiences have about trans youth:

HOW AND WHEN DID THEY KNOW?

HOW CAN WE SUPPORT THEM?

- In the past 5 months alone, **82 laws have passed across states to ban and restrict transgender people and children**. There are **27 federal bans and restrictions under consideration now**. Some politicians and a few outspoken parents are focused on these bans.
- Just like other parents, the parents of transgender kids want their kids to learn and grow and play sports if they want to. **These politicians have no idea what parents of transgender children go through to understand, help, and support their children.**

POLITICIANS WANT TO:

- Ban schools from protecting transgender kids from bullying
- Ban transgender children from getting supportive health care
- Threaten doctors with crimes if they provide gender-affirming health care
- Ban transgender children from participating in school sports and activities
- Ban transgender adults from getting gender-affirming health care
- Ban transgender people of all ages from using bathrooms that match their identity
- Make it easier to discriminate against transgender people
- Mandate the forced outing of transyouth to their parents, even if it puts the child in danger at home

TRANS GIRLS AND SPORTS

- **Every child's body and athletic potential is different.** We've all known girls in school who are taller and stronger than many boys their age. We don't keep them from playing girls sports alongside shorter or less strong girls. Some boys are shorter and smaller than many girls, but we don't ban the stronger and bigger boys from sports to make it fairer for smaller boys.
- **There's no scientific evidence** that the average transgender girl athlete is any bigger, stronger, or faster than other girls.
- The point of school sports is to have opportunities to grow, learn, make friends, be healthy, and have fun. **Sports are a part of education, and no child should be banned from that.**

KEY TAKEAWAYS

FOCUS ON YOUTH

Most concerning impact of bans on youth:

- Loss of history; loss of access to high quality, well rounded education; loss of access to books and access to different perspectives and views
 - Facing more bullying and mental health issues in schools
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TALK ABOUT THE BANS

The volume of bans helps drive home that this is a political strategy about controlling people – don't be afraid to list them out or put them in a visual graphic.

- Since 2020, there have been over 1,700 book bans in the country and hundreds of new laws are censoring what teachers can talk about.
 - In the past 5 months alone, 82 laws have passed across states to ban and restrict transgender people and children.
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TALK ABOUT CONTROL AND POWER

Once our audiences understand the sheer number of bans, they begin to see the policies as disingenuous, questioning the political motivation behind them. Politicians are trying to pass these laws because they want to control people.

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 - They want to impose their religious beliefs on everyone
 - They want to divide people
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MEET PARENTS WHERE THEY'RE AT

Convey hope and empowerment in communications. This issue is very scary. Fear may spark a desire to take action – but fear can also be quickly paralyzing.

- It is a hard and scary time to be a parent. Society and technology are changing fast. We want to keep our kids safe and protect them. The answer is not bans, censorship, and things that create an unsafe environment for everyone.
- Let's provide students with accurate, age-appropriate sex education, while continuing to allow parents to opt their kids out, if they choose.
- Let's reject politicians who are riling people up and turning us against each other just for their own political power. Let's get informed and support each other and our kids.

LAWS AND POLICIES CURRENTLY PROMOTED BY “PARENTS’ RIGHTS” GROUPS

Countering Parents’ Rights Frames | March 2024

Since 2020, there have been over 1,700 book bans in the United States. Hundreds of new laws are censoring what teachers can talk about, banning sex ed, stopping teachers from teaching empathy, and putting LGBTQ+ youth in danger. Those pushing this agenda call it “parents’ rights.” But it is a strategy funded by far-right activists at the national level to gain political power.

BANS ON BOOKS IN SCHOOL in schools including books about Anne Frank, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and LGBTQ+ young people, with threats of fines and prison sentences for libraries.

BANS ON LESSONS THAT TEACH STUDENTS EMPATHY, how to get along with each other, manage stress and anxiety and make good decisions

BANS ON SCHOOLS PROTECTING LGBTQ+ YOUTH FROM BULLYING.

BANS ON TEENS ACCESSING ABORTION if a parent disagrees with abortion.

BANS AND CENSORSHIP ON WHAT TEACHERS CAN SAY RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

MANDATORY SHARING OF PRIVATE INFORMATION RELATED TO TRANS YOUTH AND THEIR PARENTS, without regard to the child’s safety at home.

BANS AND CENSORSHIP ON HOW TEACHERS CAN TALK ABOUT RACISM AND U.S. HISTORY, including penalties and fines and schools losing millions of state dollars.

BANS BLOCKING TRANSGENDER GIRLS FROM PARTICIPATING IN SPORTS, including threats of genital inspections and period tracking for all girls.

BANS ON SEX EDUCATION.

LAWS REQUIRING PARENTAL NOTIFICATION FOR TEENS TO OBTAIN BIRTH CONTROL.

BANS MAKING GENDER AFFIRMING HEALTH CARE AND COUNSELING ILLEGAL FOR TRANS YOUTH.

LAWS THAT TAKE MONEY FROM PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND GIVE IT TO RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS.