



“DON’T SAY GAY” LAWS ARE NOTHING NEW



The so-called “Don’t Say Gay Bills” making their ways through state legislatures and influencing curriculum adoptions are nothing new.

That’s according to NEPC Fellow [Elizabeth J. Meyer](#) of the University of Colorado Boulder.

Even before this current cluster of legislation and policy, multiple states (including Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, and Texas) had laws on their books limiting discussions of LGBTQI+ people in schools, Meyer writes in a [recent blog post](#) with *Psychology Today*. Other states (including Alabama, Arizona, South Carolina, and Utah) had similar laws on the books that they have repealed over the past decade. Often, these laws were paired with abstinence-only sex ed.

“What is new,” writes Meyer, “is the organized youth resistance to such harmful laws and the deep knowledge base we have about how they can harm students and negatively impact school cultures.”

Students [throughout Florida](#) joined peers in [other states](#) in protesting Florida’s so-called Parental Rights in Education bill.

Professor Meyer [notes](#) that recent research has shown that LGBTQI+ youth in schools that lack inclusive curricula experience higher rates of bullying and harassment, and are more likely to be absent because they feel unsafe at school. Their academic performance may also suffer.

Recent efforts to strip mentions of LGBTQI+ issues from the curriculum are also different from prior campaigns in that they use parental rights as a justification. For example, Flori-

da's law, which prevents instruction related to gender identity or sexual orientation in grades K-3 and vaguely bans later instruction that's not "age appropriate," permits parents to sue school districts for alleged violations.

Efforts to incorporate gender identity and sexual orientation into the curriculum are sometimes inaccurately portrayed as the exclusive provenance of sex education—or, in the case of "Don't Say Gay" law proponents, as "grooming"—a term that suggests predatory behavior. In reality, "inclusive curriculum . . . ensures diverse identities, families, and communities are part of the history and stories taught in schools," according to Meyer.

We talk about straight families and historical figures all the time without mentioning their sex lives . . . Schools are responsible for preparing our children to become engaged citizens responsible for our functioning democracy. By officially erasing a large segment of our population (10-12 percent by most estimates), we are reinforcing negative stereotypes and creating another generation of people who believe LGBTQ people's existence is "inappropriate." There are wonderful lessons, texts, and discussion guides that model how to incorporate these topics in K-5 classrooms.

Another resource, called *A Queer Endeavor*, partners with school communities and educators to create school cultures that are safe and affirming of gender and sexual diversity. Founded by NEPC Fellow *Bethy Leonardi* and Sara Staley, both of the University of Colorado Boulder, AQE is available for those interested in learning more about teaching children about LGBTQI+ issues and creating health learning environments for all students.

Meyer and Leonardi, along with Harper B. Keenan of the University of British Columbia, are co-authors of the recent NEPC *policy brief*, *Transgender Students and Policy in K-12 Public Schools: Acknowledging Historical Harms and Taking Steps Toward a Promising Future*.

NEPC Resources on LGBTQ Issues

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