



Columbus Board of Education
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Mission: Each student is highly educated, prepared for leadership and service, and empowered for success as a citizen in a global community.

State and Local Government Committee
House Bill 322 Opponent Testimony
September 22, 2021

Thank you Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chairwoman John, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the State and Local Government Committee for allowing me the opportunity to submit written testimony in opposition to House Bill 322. My name is Jennifer Adair, and I am the President of the Columbus Board of Education, representing Ohio's largest school district.

On June 7, 2021, Columbus City Schools, the Columbus Board of Education, and CCS labor partners issued a joint letter united in strong opposition to HB 322 and HB 327. The letter states, "It is difficult to view these bills as anything but an attempt to impede this process and fan the flames of dissension and polarization currently gripping our country. If passed into law, the outcome would constitute an extreme and unwarranted incursion into local control and undermine the free flow of information and ideas that serve as the foundation of our democracy."

As the weeks and months have passed, I have had the opportunity to participate in forums, panels, interviews, and dialogue about the impact of these bills. In the end, proponents have built a solution to a problem that simply does not exist, which is not based in truth or supported by evidence. They have turned our children's education and future into a political game.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is not taught in Ohio's K-12 education system. The Ohio Department of Education standards do not call for such teaching or assessment on this advanced legal theory. What *is* taught is U.S. History and the understanding of oneself as part of a community. Curriculum, adopted at the local level, creates lessons that help students reach the standards, always using age appropriate material.

It is a completely false narrative that our young scholars are being taught about racism or that white children should be blamed for slavery. What they are taught is how to identify with their community, view and appreciate differences, and have an understanding of self. Even as young learners, they observe and understand social differences and structures. Their curriculum teaches them to value others, even under perceived differences.

As children progress, they are taught history that supports truth and fact, again meeting the standards set by the state. Having students use a questioning lens, analyzing history, figuring out the "why" behind important events produces graduates who are critical thinkers and future leaders. Why wouldn't we want this? This is not divisive. This is truth.

The Columbus City School District does not discriminate based upon sex, race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, ancestry familial status or military status with regard to admission, access, treatment or employment. This policy is applicable in all district programs and activities.

The curriculum also allows for students to better connect and have greater understanding by using examples, narratives, and constructs that are more relevant to them as individuals. Why would we not continue these fundamental practices of giving each child what they need, acknowledging and valuing their culture, in order to create their best educational experience? This is not pitting one against the other. This is good education.

Proponents argue that children are made to feel bad about history because they are ethnically, racially, or culturally linked to those who perpetrated injustice on marginalized groups. Additionally, I have heard some argue that there was no need to change the curriculum of the past, as it was not divisive in its content or teaching. The curriculum of the past did not tell a full and accurate account of history, including perspectives from non-majority cultures. It varied based on where you lived and who you were. The curriculum of the past was divisive to marginalized groups.

There is also an assertion that students should not “feel” - specifically, that they should not have confusing, uncomfortable, or emotional thoughts about what they are learning. Feeling is what makes education real and evokes connection to content. What children need is a space that is psychologically safe to have and process feelings, and have support and structure that help them understand and work through them. Feelings are a perfect fit for K-12 education, where social-emotional learning has been a priority for almost a decade. An understanding of feelings helps students learn and embrace empathy, a skill that will help them better relate to and solve problems across differences. Why would we try to stop feelings? This is not inappropriate education. This creates emotionally stable and empathetic adults.

These bills amount to an unprecedented regulation of curriculum and instruction, as well as an unwarranted incursion into local control. They aim to suppress dialogue and perpetuate an inaccurate understanding of our history. Their goal is to put fear into teachers so they reconsider culturally responsive teaching or providing each child with what is in their best educational interest. This is political. Proponents offer these bills as a strategy to exacerbate the current national divide. This makes our children pawns, and this is not okay.

As a public school district, it is our responsibility to facilitate our nation’s healing through a truthful curriculum that provides a complete and honest rendering of our history in an open, supportive, culturally responsive, and psychologically safe environment for all students to learn. If there are school employees that create unsafe spaces for students, locally controlled employment actions and professional licensure standards are the solution to addressing poor performance, not sweeping, subjective, and broad legislation.

On behalf of Ohio’s children and their future, I ask that you do not support these dangerous bills that only seek to limit a foundational principle of democracy —education. Please stop playing politics with our children. I urge you to vote no on these pieces of legislation.

Once again, thank you Chairman Wiggam and the members of the State and Local Committee for the opportunity to submit written opposition testimony on House Bill 322.



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