

HB 327 aims to prevent the discussion of “divisive concepts” in Ohio schools. The definition of divisive concepts appears to attempt to protect students from hearing that one group of people is inherently worse or better than another group, which is a laudable goal. However, this is already covered by non-discrimination and non-harassment rules that most school districts have in place. Expanding the law to cover “divisive concepts” is an overreach by the state government. Teachers have been trained in their particular fields to teach information that is deemed important for students to know. This may include discussion of topics that make people uncomfortable. However, that is a valuable part of life. Students should, in their time in K-12 education, be preparing to live life as adults, which means being able to encounter, process, analyze, and respond to the issues of the day, whether they are divisive or not. If an individual teacher is causing problems, that is a topic best raised within the school and handled by the principal or school board.

As a teacher at Ohio State, I already have to catch students up on basic information, such as how the country of Israel was formed or the history of Japanese-American incarceration in the United States, because their teachers in K-12 thought it was too sensitive a topic to discuss. I do not tell my students what to think about these topics, but they should know that they exist, in order to make considered, informed decisions about how to participate in American civic life. The bill's writers may have intended to only ban conversations which were genuinely harmful, but the language is so vague and the punishments so extreme that teachers will, out of an excess of caution, be forced to avoid talking about anything anyone could take an exception to--which includes necessary, important, and objective information.

Restricting Ohio students' access to information because other people think it is "divisive" harms everyone. The students are unprepared for the real world, which is full of divisive information. The teachers are unable to tell the truth about the world, which is likewise full of divisive information. Ohio as a civic society will suffer from uneducated voters who are unequipped to discuss, weigh, and make decisions about these important issues. Please do not pass this bill.