

**BEST PRACTICES
TOOLKIT FOR HB1084:**

PROTECT STUDENTS FIRST ACT

PREPARED BY VERSA IMPACT GROUP







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DISCLAIMERS



This research was funded by The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Inc., and we thank them for their support. However, the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.



As a collective impact intermediary with insight into the state of education in metro Atlanta, Learn4Life convened consortium members and facilitated discussions to support the design of this report. However, the findings and conclusions presented are those of the author(s) alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Learn4Life.



The research and development of this toolkit was led and conducted by Versa Impact Group; however, the tools created do not protect LEA employees from violation of the Georgia House Bill 1084 law. Rather, the tools serve as a resource to guide district leaders, teachers, and principals in navigating teaching topics that may be considered divisive. We advise users of the toolkit to reference their district's local policy and the state policy governing teaching sensitive topics when making all district and school-level instructional decisions.



LETTER TO THE READER

As district leaders, administrators, and teachers across our state grapple with Georgia House Bill 1084, we are clearly navigating uncharted territory. Understandably, this law poses an unmitigated threat to that which educators are allowed to teach and communicate about race and other topics perceived to be controversial. Nonetheless, the Metro Atlanta Equity Consortium stands firm and resolute in providing a safe, supportive, welcoming, and affirming environment for all children and is committed to helping teachers navigate those tough conversations about race, racism, or other forms of bias in their classrooms.

Our job as educators is to create engaged citizens who uphold our nation's democratic and pluralistic ideals, who value and understand the strength of our diversity, and who believe in our principles of liberty and justice for all. Our diversity makes us unique, and our work as educators requires that we teach in ways that elevate our multicultural tapestry and reflect the rich history of our nation.

In order to create a more perfect union, we must also engage in critical conversations that shed light on the historical and current blind spots of our democracy. These discussions can be uncomfortable, difficult, and controversial. However, for the betterment of our nation, we must lean into the tension that these discussions create. We must also recognize that our children live in the same world that we do. No matter how hard we try, we cannot ignore their access, experience, and exposure to the complexities of the world around them. Understanding this, we have a responsibility to help our students constructively engage with difference, think objectively, and challenge personal biases as they navigate their place in the world. Our children must also understand that they will not always agree on everything. The key is to disagree respectfully and appreciate times when our interests converge. These skills are essential, and our students must have opportunities to engage in and practice civil discourse by interacting with peers who hold opposing views.

The ability to engage in civil discourse is the hallmark of democracy, and in the classroom, it should be done in a manner that allows students to formulate their own conclusions by building on and learning from the diverse perspectives of their peers.

As a Consortium, we are firmly committed to advancing equitable learning while maintaining compliance with the law. The Consortium chose this project to provide those who have been tasked with implementing equitable policies and procedures within their school district tools to achieve their goals with a universal guide. We are aware of the difficulties educators face and aim to help educators alleviate some of the barriers preventing them from successfully achieving their goals.

This toolkit, in turn, will help district leaders, school administrators, and teachers navigate the new legislation, ensuring that student learning is prioritized within the changing landscape. It aims to provide comprehensive guidelines and resources for adhering to the law, a common language for discussing and teaching the law, and best practices for communicating the law to relevant stakeholders while maintaining the goal of fostering a positive learning environment. This toolkit will explain divisive concepts, highlight parents' rights, and offer support for teachers to continue affirming all students in their teaching and curriculum.

We hope this framework will empower teachers, school administrators, and district leaders to navigate the complexities of teaching sensitive topics while keeping equity at the forefront and maintaining a welcoming and affirming environment for all students.

Sincerely,

Dr. Tauheedah Baker-Jones, Ed.L.D.

Former Chief Equity & Social Justice Officer, Atlanta Public Schools
On Behalf of the Metro Atlanta Equity Consortium



INTRODUCTION

In April 2022, House Bill 1084, the Protect Students First Act was passed into law. This law amended Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia, relating to education. This law seeks to prevent the use of curricula or training programs that promote or encourage concepts and ideas in education deemed divisive. There are several concepts that are considered divisive, but divisive concepts generally refer to notions that promote personal beliefs around race.

The law requires local boards of education and superintendents to prohibit discrimination based on race and mandates curricula and training programs to encourage the practice of tolerance and mutual respect. Still, these curricula and programs should not promote or encourage divisive concepts. The Professional Standards Commission is also empowered through this law to regulate the certification and classification of certificated professional personnel. Finally, the law establishes a complaint resolution policy for local school systems to address violations of the provisions, including the process for submitting and reviewing complaints and the right to appeal decisions.

Versa Impact Group has prepared the following resources to help district leaders, school administrators, and teachers navigate the law, ensuring student learning is prioritized within the changing landscape. Teachers, in particular, must navigate a new norm where the content they teach, what they say, and how they facilitate classroom discussions may be questioned and scrutinized not only by students but also by parents and may cause suspension and, ultimately, the loss of teaching credentials for teachers who are found in violation of the law.

This toolkit aims to provide comprehensive guidelines and resources for adhering to the law, a common language for discussing and teaching the law, and best practices for communicating the law to relevant stakeholders while maintaining the goal of fostering a positive learning environment. This toolkit will explain divisive concepts, highlight parents' rights, and offer support for teachers to continue affirming all students in their teaching and curriculum.

As the education landscape continues to evolve (nationally, statewide, and locally), Versa hopes these resources will provide a framework for consistent interpretation and implementation of the law's provisions across districts. This framework should empower teachers, school administrators, and district leaders to navigate the complexities of teaching sensitive topics while keeping students at the forefront to ensure a respectful educational environment for all.



**WE CAN STILL ADVANCE
LEARNING WHILE
MAINTAINING COMPLIANCE
WITH THE LAW.**



OVERVIEW: DIVISIVE CONCEPTS LAW

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE LAW?

[The Protect Students First Act](#)¹ seeks to create guidelines to ensure teacher training programs, instructions and materials, personal beliefs, and curriculum neither discriminate against students based on race nor promote divisive concepts.

WHAT ARE DIVISIVE CONCEPTS?

1. One race is inherently superior to another race.
2. The United States of America is fundamentally racist.
3. An individual, by virtue of his or her race, is inherently or consciously racist or oppressive toward individuals of other races.
4. An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race.
5. An individual's moral character is inherently determined by his or her race.
6. An individual, only because of his or her race, bears individual responsibility for actions committed in the past by other individuals of the same race.
7. An individual, only because of his or her race, should feel anguish, guilt, or any other form of psychological distress.
8. Individual achievements or character traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or were created by individuals of a particular race to oppress individuals of another race.
9. Any other form of race scapegoating or race stereotyping.

THIS LAW...

1. Prohibits employees from discriminating against students and other employees based on race.
2. Requires Boards of Education (BOE), Superintendents, and charter school boards to ensure curricula and training programs encourage employees and students to practice tolerance and mutual respect and to refrain from judging others based on race.
3. Requires the Professional Standards Commission (Commission) to establish rules for high-quality certification standards for all educators. Educators will not be required to participate in a training program that advocates for divisive concepts.
4. Requires the Commission to seek the advice of educators in the state when adopting regulations.
5. Permits the suspension of a local school system's (LSS) strategic waiver if the State Board of Education finds the LSS has not implemented a corrective action plan resulting from a complaint.
6. Requires the Department of Education to continue providing conflict management and resolution and cultural diversity training; such training cannot advocate for divisive concepts.
7. Creates an executive committee to oversee high school interscholastic sports events and requires athletic associations to comply with law.
8. Allows the athletic association to prohibit transgender students from participating in athletic events.

1. "Protect Students First Act" 2022



CONTINUED

THIS LAW DOES NOT...

1. Violate constitutional rights around freedom and free speech.
2. Infringe upon students, board employees, or local school systems commitment to learning.
3. Prohibit the promotion of concepts such as tolerance, mutual respect, cultural sensitivity, or cultural competency by boards of education or school systems.
4. Prohibit school personnel from responding objectively to questions regarding specific divisive concepts raised by students, community members, or training program participants.
5. Prohibit the objective discussion of divisive concepts as part of instruction.
6. Prohibit curricula that address topics of slavery, racial oppression, segregation, or discrimination.
7. Grant individuals the ability to take legal actions against a local board of education, school system, or departments.
8. Prohibit a state or federal court or agency from ordering training that discusses divisive concepts due to a finding of discrimination.

HOW DOES THE LAW IMPACT ME?

This law may prevent critical examination of ongoing systemic challenges facing the United States of America. Students specifically, as noted below, may not have the opportunity to interrogate these systemic challenges in a thoughtful manner or at all, thereby diluting some aspects of learning. Below are a few ways the law might impact school-based stakeholders.



District leaders/Administrators

- Increased administrative burden for reporting and responding to complaints.
- Increased accountability over teacher instructional materials and lesson plans.



Students

- Historically acknowledged challenges faced by specific subgroups may be unaddressed.
- May not be exposed to ideas that promote diversity in gender, ethnicity, or culture.



Teachers

- Increased accountability towards teaching in an objective way (not teaching divisive concepts) as defined in the law.
- May be faced with challenges in providing supplemental materials to support student learning due to increased liability.





A woman with curly hair, likely a teacher, is leaning over a student with long hair and glasses. They are in a classroom setting, with a window and other students visible in the background. The image has a green tint.

BEST PRACTICES I

TEACHING SENSITIVE TOPICS

TEACHING SENSITIVE TOPICS

1. KNOW THE LAW

The Protect Students First Act has implications for every school stakeholder; however, teachers in particular have an additional burden to ensure they know the basic tenets of the law ([See Overview: Divisive Concepts Law](#), pp. 8-9). Teachers face an added burden because a primary factor in violating this law is how teaching and/or instruction is perceived. Teachers should know that parents², guardians, and students can submit a complaint to the principal and the district office if they believe a violation of the law occurred. **Teachers should endeavor to align instruction and curriculum to the Georgia Standards of Excellence³ (GSE), refrain from discussing personal beliefs about content, and foster a safe learning environment for all students.** Teachers should also refrain from addressing concerns about any lessons during instruction. Both this toolkit and student complaint protocol (Tool 01: Addressing Student Concerns During Lesson, pp. 12-15) support teachers in navigating such conversations while demonstrating their firm understanding of the law and its mandates.

TOOL 01: ADDRESSING STUDENT CONCERNS DURING LESSON

Sample complaint protocol teachers can use to guide discussions when a student has a complaint concerning a lesson.

The best method for dealing with student complaints is with understanding and inquisition; the least appropriate manner is with offense and rejection. If and when a student complains about a teacher, directly to the teacher the response should foster resolution and trust. Teachers must handle complaints with empathy and professionalism and should endeavor, to the best extent possible, not to handle complaints during instruction. An example of how a teacher might redirect a student is below.

STUDENT: Ms. [insert teacher's name], I really don't like that you said people don't vote because it's dangerous. I think that's your personal opinion, and it's fear-mongering for you to talk about voting in that way. I really take issue with that narrative and don't understand how a teacher can spread such lies.

TEACHER: It's not my intention to share my opinion but to offer a broad perspective of the voting experience for all Americans. I hope that by the end of the lesson after we've reviewed all of the sources, you will receive clarification about why I said, 'People don't vote because it's dangerous.' Regardless of whether that statement is justified to you by the end of the lesson, I would love to talk to you a bit further about this. I want to make sure we complete the lesson and that everyone else gets an opportunity to contribute to the conversation, so I'm going to table this discussion so that I can offer you a complete response at a later time. I want you to know that I have heard you and understand where your concern might be coming from, and I want to discuss it further after the lesson.

² Throughout the toolkit the following words may be used collectively or independently but all signify the same meaning for the purposes of defining a person(s) who is the caregiver of a student and should be interpreted as interchangeable: parent, guardian, and/or families. This interpretation is not in accordance with any legal definition or understanding of said words.

³ Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) - Official GaDOE Site. n.d. <https://www.georgiastandards.org/>.

Teachers may use the following best practices protocol when addressing student concerns. This conversation should take place in a one-off setting, after the lesson, with the student, teacher, and school-based point of contact ([See Communication Guidance, p. 38](#)).

1. **Active Listening:** Allow your student to speak. Advise the student that you want to create a safe classroom environment and learning experience for all students, and this is their opportunity to share their concerns without interruption.
2. **Show Empathy:** Acknowledge your student's emotions and validate them. Your student may come to you in a heightened state or very relaxed. You should anticipate any and all emotions and be prepared not to internalize your student's emotions but allow them to express themselves. As long as the student isn't disrespectful, affirm their feelings.

(E.g., from dialogue: Regardless of whether that statement is justified to you by the end of the lesson, I would love to talk to you a bit further about this I have heard you and understand where your concern might be coming from.)

3. **Remain Calm and Respectful:** Composure is key. It is hard to receive negative (and possibly unwarranted) feedback due to a misunderstanding. Still, your response sets the tone for the conversation, and you want to appear open and not dismissive.
4. **Avoid Blame and Judgment:** Focus on finding a solution and seeking clarity on what the student misinterpreted. Refrain from blaming the student for their misunderstandings. Use 'I' language as frequently and often as possible.

(E.g., from dialogue: I have heard you and understand where your concern might be coming from, and I want to discuss it further after the lesson.)

5. **Review End of Lesson Exit Ticket:** Continuity is critical. While unfortunate, vengeful behavior can occur, and it is best to anticipate and create guardrails to identify it. Exit tickets help teachers ensure students have accurately understood the lesson. Therefore, the student's exit ticket and verbal complaint should demonstrate a misunderstanding. Before convening with the student, teachers should make sure they have reviewed the student's exit ticket to verify whether it also shows a misunderstanding has occurred. If this is not the case, it might be helpful for teachers to ask clarifying questions about how their exit ticket isn't aligned with their complaint. The student may have understood the objective and identified another point in the lesson that was cause for concern for them.
6. **Ask Student to Repeat Concern:** By the end of the lesson, the student might have come to the conclusion that they have misinterpreted something you said. Begin the conversation by asking the student to recall what they heard as insensitive.
7. **Ask Clarifying Questions:** Allow the student to openly and honestly share their viewpoint and ask questions to seek a resolution. Your questions should ensure you understand the issue accurately, not to "trap" the student or invalidate their feelings.

8. **Document the Complaint:** Make a written record of the complaint, including the date, time, and details of the conversation. This documentation can be essential if the issue needs to be escalated.
9. **Explain Your Side:** This is your opportunity to dispel any confusion. Provide a recap of the lesson and emphasize to the student the objective and how your statement was aligned with this objective, not with your personal beliefs.

(E.g., from dialogue: It [was] not my intention to share my opinion, but to offer a broad perspective of the voting experience for all Americans.)

10. **Receive Confirmation of Understanding:** Before departing confirm that the student has received the clarity they were seeking and do not feel burdened by the concern. The teacher might ask: “Has our conversation helped you understand my intentions? Do you have further questions? Do you still have an issue with what I shared now or during class?”
11. **Involve Relevant Stakeholders:** After such conversations, it will be important for the teacher to inform administrators and school-based point of contact (POC) about the concern raised and the teacher’s response in writing. This is why documentation is important, and as a best practice, administrators and school-based POC should be looped in.
12. **Reflect and Learn:** Every complaint can be a chance to learn and grow as an educator. Use feedback constructively to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

2. UNDERSTAND TEACHING BEST PRACTICES STANDARDS

It is recommended that all public school teachers familiarize themselves with Georgia’s framework for good teaching. This framework identifies the knowledge, skills, dispositions, understandings, and other attributes of accomplished teaching. Organized into six domains, it provides a common language for teachers, with definitions, to engage in quality teaching. Adhering to this framework may greatly reduce the likelihood of teaching in a manner that violates the provisions of the law. [Appendix IV](#) (pp. 59-60) details key takeaways from the Georgia Extended Framework for Teaching that will be helpful for teachers as they strive to maintain compliance. Georgia’s framework exemplifies that the law does not prohibit the promotion of concepts such as tolerance, mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity. Therefore, teachers should promote cultural awareness and related concepts in classroom instruction and utilize Georgia’s teaching framework to substantiate this approach to teaching. This approach is a best practice indicator for effective teaching and can be a valuable tool for facilitating classroom discussions.

TOOL 02: CLASSROOM FACILITATION GUIDANCE**Sample guidance for effective classroom facilitation.****1. Set classroom agreements⁴ (guidelines on how students contribute and interact with one another) for discussions.**

- a. Suggested Agreements include: **(1)** listen to understand, **(2)** one person speaks at a time, **(3)** assume best intentions, **(4)** use I statements and objective truths, evidence, and reasoning as often as possible, and **(5)** be respectful.

2. Assign a facilitator.

- a. Can be a teacher or student.
- b. Calls on different students to ensure that everyone is engaging in the discussion.
- c. May stop the discussion at different time intervals to explain what they are witnessing and summarize what is being shared.
 - i. **Example:** It sounds like [Team A] is against 'X' viewpoint because they are expressing frustration with the decisions made by the author in the text. [Team A] Am I interpreting your viewpoint correctly?
- d. Uses discussion questions to guide the lesson.

3. Encourage active participation.

- a. Use strategies like think-pair-share and scaffolding supports, like writing down ideas before sharing them aloud, to engage all students in discussions. These strategies are especially helpful for shy or less verbally expressive students.
- b. Assign roles to students: observer (ensures norms are followed), timekeeper, multiple notetakers for accuracy, and a presenter.
- c. Ensure students are using academic language and referencing evidence from the text/lesson frequently and often.

4. Guide the discussion.

- a. Provide prompts for students to use vocabulary and language that is incorporated in the instructional materials.
 - i. Helpful guiding questions include: **(1)** What evidence are you utilizing to support your answer? **(2)** Have you considered an alternative perspective? **(3)** What are potential risks or challenges and benefits? and **(4)** What impacts might this have, and why?

5. Summarize the results of the discussion.

- a. What are the big ideas and critical information you want students to leave the discussion and lesson with? It is essential that this is made clear before the lesson concludes so that students' learning is solidified and well-prepped for future lessons.

Additional resources for classroom discussions include Socratic Seminars⁵, Fishbowls⁶, and Gallery Walks⁷. More information on these resources (Socratic Seminars, Fishbowls, and Gallery Walks) can be found in the web page links in the References [\[p. 69\]](#) section of the toolkit.

⁴. Developing Community Agreements — National Equity Project, n.d.

⁵. Socratic Seminar 2020

⁶. Fishbowl 2009

⁷. Gallery Walk 2009

3. BE WELL-VERSED IN CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND PEDAGOGY

In their pursuit to expose students to diverse viewpoints, teachers should be thoughtful and strategic in their approach to teaching and selecting supplemental instructional material. This should not deter teachers from teaching sensitive topics; however, as subject matter experts, it is crucial for teachers to thoroughly interrogate the material to ensure it does not violate the law. Proactively, **teachers should develop a syllabus that is reviewed by a grade/content-level chair or administrator prior to the start of the school year.** This may ensure, at a high level, instructional materials do not contain divisive concepts, even if subject matter includes sensitive topics. Teachers can use the [A Checklist for...Sensitive Lessons, p.16](#) and [Standard Operating Procedure for...Instructional Material, p.18](#) tools when deciding how to select supplemental material for instruction that may be deemed sensitive.

DIVISIVE CONCEPTS CHECKLIST

This checklist is designed to support teachers with determining the teachability of a potentially divisive lesson. This checklist will be most helpful for teachers who want to use supplemental instructional materials to enhance student learning around topics that may be sensitive. While these materials are likely not provided by the teacher's district or school, teachers should ensure ancillary materials have been evaluated by the appropriate school-based personnel (often content lead/chair) before instruction and even after employing this checklist.

While supplemental instructional materials can be valuable for fostering critical thinking, analysis, and examining diverse perspectives, they also require careful consideration and a thoughtful approach. **By utilizing this checklist, teachers may ensure that their sensitive lesson is neither divisive nor promotes divisive concepts as outlined in the Protect Students First Act.** In sum, teachers will need to use discretion when teaching sensitive topics. Sensitive topics can include curricula that address topics such as slavery, racial oppression, and segregation.

How To Use The Checklist:


The first two sections of the checklist should be viewed as mandatory items. Teachers should check 'yes' to the first 12 boxes to certify that their topics are not divisive. **The last two sections of the checklist** can be viewed as helpful suggestions. Teachers should endeavor to check 'yes' for most of the boxes to validate their use of sensitive supplementary instructional material.


By utilizing this checklist, teachers can better resolve if their sensitive lessons are inclusive and foster multi-cultural sensitivity and competency while not discriminating against students or promoting divisive concepts. Remember, the goal is not to completely shy away from sensitive subjects but rather to approach them with care and sensitivity, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute. Regardless, the material **cannot** promote or advocate for divisive concepts.

TOOL 03: A CHECKLIST FOR ASSESSING THE TEACHABILITY OF SENSITIVE LESSONS

If you can check 'yes' to a majority (12/18) of the boxes below, you can likely teach your lesson, albeit sensitive, in a fair and respectful way that does not promote divisive concepts in violation of the law.

The topic should meet all the items in the section below:			
Yes	No	N/A	Core Competencies
			Is the topic related to and meeting the objectives of the Georgia Standards of Excellence?
			Is the topic meeting the objectives outlined in the content's scope and sequence?
			Does the topic align with the curriculum and learning objectives?
			Is the topic directly relevant to the subject being taught?


 Did you answer "no" to ANY of the questions above? If so, refrain from teaching the lesson and refer to your [state's standards](#)⁸ [\[p. 12\]](#) to identify a lesson that is aligned to your content area standards.


 Did you answer "yes" to ALL of the questions above? If so, proceed to the next section. You are on the right track to teaching the lesson you've identified as potentially divisive.

⁸. "Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) - Official GaDOE Site." n.d.

The topic should meet all the items in the section below:

Yes	No	N/A	Complying with the Letter of the Law
			Will this topic promote critical thinking and respectful dialogue among students?
			Does your lesson or topic avoid promoting the idea that the United States of America is a racist nation?
			Does the topic avoid making students feel discriminated against based on the following: race, gender or ethnicity?
			Does the topic avoid promoting stereotypes or prejudice based on the following: race, gender or ethnicity?
			Will the discussion of the topic respect the diverse perspectives and experiences of all students?
			Is the topic based on objective facts and evidence?
			Will the topic address controversial issues in a balanced and unbiased manner?
			Will the discussion of the topic comply with school policies and guidelines on sensitive issues?


 Did you answer “no” to ANY of the questions above? If so, refrain from teaching the lesson. Proceeding with this lesson will likely cause you to be in violation of the law as your lesson promotes divisive concepts (See Overview: Divisive Concepts Law, [pp. 8-9](#)).

 Did you answer “yes” to ALL of the questions above? If so, proceed to the next section. You are on the right track to teaching the lesson you’ve identified as potentially divisive.

At minimum, the topic should take into consideration the items below:

Yes	No	N/A	Measuring Relevance
			Is the topic age appropriate and suitable for the maturity level of your students?
			Have I considered my students’ cultural and social backgrounds when selecting the topic?
			Have I considered the emotional impact the topic may have on students and have I prepared appropriate support or resources if needed?


 Did you answer “no” to ANY of the questions above? You may want to reconsider whether or not this lesson needs to be adapted or omitted, particularly if the subject matter is not age appropriate.

 Did you answer “yes” to ALL of the questions above? If so, proceed to the next section. You will be better positioned to provide rationale for teaching this lesson.

At minimum, the topic should take into consideration the items below:

Yes	No	N/A	Enhancing Student Learning
			Is the topic enhancing student learning in a unique manner?
			(Question to ask: How is this more helpful than the regular curriculum?)
			Does the topic encourage students to engage in research and inquiry to form their own opinions?
			Will this topic disempower any student/student group based on the following race, gender or ethnicity?

 Did you answer “no” to ANY of the questions above? You may want to reconsider whether or not this lesson needs to be adapted or omitted, particularly if the subject matter does not demonstrably enhance student learning.

 Did you answer “yes” to ALL of the questions above? If so, begin preparing your lesson, ensuring that you have still received approval from your [grade/content level chair](#) (p. 18). You will be better positioned to provide rationale for teaching this lesson.

Teachers are encouraged to use district-approved curriculum that is high-quality, research-backed, and aligned with the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) and Georgia's framework for teaching. The curriculum is tailored to each grade level and specific content, ensuring that teachers are well-versed and equipped to provide effective instruction to students. However, **supplemental instructional materials play a vital role in enhancing student learning experiences and must be tailored to standards** and aligned with the district's curriculum for the grade level and content area. This brief guide outlines a procedure for evaluating and operationalizing supplement materials.

TOOL 04: STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE FOR ASSESSING SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL

Sample guidance for assessing supplemental instructional material. This guide should be utilized after using the divisive concepts checklist above.

Step 1: Identify Educational Needs and Goals

- Collaborate with peer teachers and grade content lead/grade-level chair about lesson plans and identifying student educational needs and goals.
- Assess curriculum and instructional materials to determine gaps in student learning/comprehension that need reinforcement or enrichment.

Step 2: Conduct Research and Gather Materials

- Research and gather various supplemental instructional materials that align with the curriculum and standards.
- Confirm supplemental materials are from reputable sources and backed by research. Materials should also be age/grade-level appropriate.

Step 3: Evaluate Materials

- In conjunction with peer teachers, grade chairs/leads evaluate gathered material.
- Develop a rubric that considers alignment with learning objectives, student engagement, cultural relevance, and sensitivity to divisive concepts and enhances student learning in a distinct way.
- Ensure school administrators are able to review and vet supplemental material as a final round of approval.

Step 4: Select Materials

- Collaboratively decide on the most suitable supplemental materials that meet the needs and learning objectives.

Step 5: Implement, Monitor, and Assess

- Teachers should receive support from content leads/grade-level chairs with lesson planning and integrating supplemental materials into curriculum.
- Collect feedback from teacher(s) to assess the impact and effectiveness of materials.
- Continue to collaborate to make changes and adjustments as needed.

Following the use of Tool 04: Standard Operating Procedure For Assessing Supplemental Instructional Material (p. 18), teachers can begin planning their lesson. Below, teachers can find a sample lesson plan, scenarios with language guidance, and tips they can utilize in the classroom when teaching sensitive topics. While most lessons teachers create and teach will likely not be deemed "sensitive," when the occasion arises (especially when using supplemental material), the tools below may be helpful to tactfully navigate the law and teach effectively. **Teachers should be aware that this is only a guide and that they know their students best!** Therefore, teachers should use their discretion and guidance from school leaders to adapt the tools below to best fit their students' needs.

TOOL 05: SAMPLE LESSON PLAN AND GUIDANCE**Sample lesson plan and general guidance for teachers
when teaching sensitive topics.**

Teaching sensitive topics requires...sensitivity. As this toolkit will emphasize, teachers should be focused on the student learning experience. While teachers play the role of orchestrators of learning, students must be allowed to be “musicians” with autonomy. A focus on promoting understanding, empathy, tolerance, and respect will ensure that teachers maintain balanced instruction that advances learning and adheres to the law.

Before reviewing the succeeding lesson plan, think about the following when teaching sensitive topics:

1. Am I fostering an inclusive and respectful classroom environment?
2. Have I presented multiple viewpoints for students to consider?
3. Does my lesson include unbiased and reliable sources backed by research?
4. Does my lesson allow students to engage in critical thinking that is student-curated?
5. Are the various backgrounds of my students and people generally being presented in a respectful manner?
6. Have students been grounded in the historical context and related facts on this topic?
7. Have I anticipated potential challenges (from discussions or questions) that may arise from this topic?

What makes the lesson plan on voting rights (p. 20) a helpful resource for understanding divisive topics? At its face, voting rights is a historically objective subject matter. Not only is the subject matter objective but the topic is aligned with common core and Georgia state standards. When studied through its historical lens, it may not generally be viewed as sensitive.

However, when applying a modern lens to the subject matter that is both contextual and dependent on several factors, including political, ideological, and socio-economic issues, the topic can become divisive. This is true for many historical concepts that often require a critical analysis that considers identity, culture, ethnicity, and diversity, among other factors.

What makes this lesson plan effective is that even though it takes a contemporary perspective on a historical topic, it relies on evidence to substantiate the facts it presents. The emphasis on evidence-based teaching is crucial when dealing with topics that may appear divisive. Amongst the additional guidance provided in this toolkit, it is salient to ground instruction and teaching in facts, chiefly when handling potentially divisive topics.



Social Studies

Date: Month XX, 202X

Week-at-A-Glance				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
The True History Of Voting Rights	-	-	-	Unit Quiz

Lesson Objective(s):	<p>At the end of the lesson, SWBAT (Students will be able to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that the expansion of voting rights in the United States has not been a smooth path nor has it been a history of continuous progress. Connect the history of voter suppression in the U.S. to the present. Register to vote, if eligible
Alignment to CCSS: (Command Core State Standard)	<p><u>English Language Art Standards History/Social Studies Grade 6&8</u></p> <p>CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.6.8.1 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.6.8.2</p> <p><u>English Language Art Standards History/Social Studies Grade 9&10</u></p> <p>CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.1 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.2 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.7</p> <p><u>English Language Art Standards History/Social Studies Grade 9&10</u></p> <p>CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.1 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.2 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.7</p>
Alignment to GSE	<p>SSGC16 Analyze the difference between involuntary and voluntary participation in civic life.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how and why citizens are required by law to pay tax, serve on jury, and register for military duty. Describe how citizens voluntarily and responsibly participate in the political process by voting. Performing public service, being informed about current issues, and respecting differing opinions. Explain the meaning and history of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Essential Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is voting a right or a privilege? What is the "Story of voting rights" we tell about the United States? What is the actual "story of voting rights" in the United States?

Introduction to new raw material	
<p><u>Vocabulary:</u></p> <p>Franchise [fran-chize] (noun): a right or privilege that a government guarantees its people. This usually refers to the right to vote. The verb "enfranchise" means to grant the right to vote to a person or group of people. The verb "disenfranchise" means to take the right to vote away from a person or group of people.</p> <p>Voter Suppression [voh-ter suh-press-shun] (noun): an effort or activity designed to prevent people from voting by making voting impossible, dangerous or just very difficult. Voter suppression can be legal and organized (for example, literacy tests or laws limiting the number of polling places), illegal and organized (for example, mailers or robocalls telling people to vote on the wrong day), or illegal and unorganized (for example, an individual showing up to a polling place to intimidate others into not voting).</p>	<p><u>Materials:</u></p> <p><u>Handout: Voting Rights Cards</u> (Printed and cut or Cropped, with one card distributed to each student)</p> <p><u>Handout: Voting Rights Timeline</u></p>

Lesson Procedure

1. Start with a warm-up to get students thinking about the history of voting and voting rights in the United States. **Ask them to write down one fact they already know about the topic** and have two or three students share out. This is a good time to introduce the idea that there's a "story of voting rights" most of us are familiar with, and that many believe that in the United States, the fight for voting rights ended in the 1960s.
2. Distribute the Voting Rights Cards, and have the five students With "Constitutional Amendment" cards line up in chronological order.
3. **Ask all students to take two minutes and write a sentence or two that tells "the story of voting rights" we get when we only consider the Constitutional Amendments.** Have one or two students share these stories. After they do, you might point out that that the common story of voting in the United States is one of continuous expansion: The right to vote is extended and extended and extended again until all Americans are included. But we know that's not the whole story.
4. Have students divide into two teams, according to their cards: 1776–1964 and 1965–present. Ask each team to work on one side of the room to create a "human timeline," lining up in chronological order as quickly as possible.
5. Once students have formed their "human timeline," have them share aloud in chronological order, reading their date and its corresponding event. **As they share, define any unfamiliar vocabulary (e.g., poll tax, ratified) and check for understanding. After the timeline's been read aloud, share a copy of the complete Voting Rights Timeline with students, so they have all of the dates in one place.**
6. Divide students into groups of three. Ask each group to read through the timeline and write a more accurate two-to three-sentences "Story of voting rights"
7. Come back together as a class and have each group share their story. When necessary, summarize these more complicated "stories of voting rights" and **supplement them with evidence from the timeline when possible.**
8. Explain to students that, even though the fight for voting rights often talked about like it's in the past, it's still unfolding today. Share a few key statistics about voting:
 - 2 out of 5 Americans don't vote in Presidential elections.
 - 3 of 5 Americans don't vote in midterm elections.
 - 1 of 5 Americans isn't registered to vote.

Ask students to take two minutes to list as many reasons as they can think of that explain why voters turnout it so low in the United States.
9. Give students a minute to share aloud. **You can explain that most of the reasons people don't register and vote fit into one of the three category:**
 - People don't vote because they don't have the right to vote.
 - People don't vote because voting is too difficult or dangerous.
 - People don't vote because they don't think their vote makes a difference.

It may be useful to list these categories on the board so students will be able to refer back.
10. Using these categories as your starting point, list the lesson's vocabulary terms—franchise (including "disenfranchise") and voter suppression—on the board. Invite students to share additional examples of voter suppression or disenfranchisement they may have heard about, referring back to the first two reasons people often don't vote. **Ask clarifying questions to ensure students understand the difference between the two.**

It's critical to adhere to the law by centering lesson to facts. To encourage learning, students should have the opportunity to share what they already know/think they know about any topic, but by the culmination of a lesson, students should walk away with absolute truths.

Exposing students to new vocabulary to substantiate their learning is useful for building critical thinking skills and understanding about the complexities of sensitive topics.

When teaching sensitive topics, it can't be overstated that evidence-based research must be emphasized.

Teachers should use caution on matters that may teeter between subjective and objective points of view. With this type of lessons, teachers must maintain neutrality and use evidence to substantiate any claims made, ensuring personal beliefs aren't shared.

Checking for understanding (CFU) is a helpful framework for teachers to use during and after lessons (exit tickets). Teachers should leverage this method to verify students do not misconstrue key takeaways and meet the objectives' goals.

11. Ask students to look back through the timeline and consider the question, “How have disenfranchisement and voter suppression shaped the history of voting rights in the United States?” Allow them time to respond.
12. Explain that we might think of voter disengagement as a lighter form of voter suppression: That’s the third reason some people choose not to register or vote—People don’t register or vote because they think their vote doesn’t make a difference. Remind students that this is a message we hear a lot: the system is rigged, or one vote won’t matter, or politics doesn’t really affect my life. When these messages are targeted to certain communities, they become a form of voter suppression.
13. If the time permits, give students two minutes to free write some arguments they might make to encourage people to vote. Have them answer aloud.

Students Accommodation

XX: guided notes, graphic organizers, preferential seating, verbatim reading
 XX: guided notes, graphic organizers, preferential seating, lightened workload
 XX: guided notes, graphic organizers, extra time

Closing: Recap Lesson, Exit Ticket

Extension Activities:

- [Take 10 minutes to Register Future Voters Today](#)
- [Do Something: My Voice, My voter’s Guide](#)
- [Voting in your own town](#)

As [Tool 1](#): Addressing Students Concerns During Lesson, pp. 12-14 illustrated, teachers might anticipate critique from students because of information shared when teaching sensitive topics. **Tool 06: Teacher Responses to Students Regarding Sensitive Topics serves as an example of how a teacher might respond to a student who might unintentionally cause a teacher to violate the law**, regardless of the subject matter. As exemplified below, a teacher’s familiarity with the law and content knowledge can allow for a thoughtful response that does not violate the law regarding espousing personal beliefs.

TOOL 06: TEACHER RESPONSES TO STUDENTS REGARDING SENSITIVE TOPICS

Sample responses for teachers when students ask questions that may potentially cause teachers to espouse personal beliefs and violate the law.

STUDENT: I know we’ve been learning about systems of government, and the United States is a democracy with a two-party system. Which party do you believe upholds the most democratic principles?

TEACHER: Thank you for such a thoughtful question. Both parties have their own ideological beliefs, which make them strong and valuably contribute to our democratic system, which is representative. Third parties are equally as unique in upholding beliefs that are true to and for them. Because of this, all parties advance the political process and allow our democratic system of government to thrive.

TIPS: What makes this teacher’s response strong?

- No use of ‘I’ statements
- The response begins by affirming the student’s question
- The teacher’s response relies on objective truths about the subject matter
- The response is neutral, and neither affirms nor negates a position

⁹. Checking for understanding: A check for understanding (CFU) is any method used to inform the teacher about the student’s current level of knowledge and understanding. An effective teacher does not just check for understanding at the conclusion of a lesson or unit of instruction.

4. KNOW YOUR STUDENTS AND COMMUNITY

One fundamental way to curtail the likelihood of complaints when teaching sensitive topics is through relationship building. Relationship building, however, must occur inside and outside of the classroom. Teachers should make every effort to get to know their students and families, understand their interests and strengths, and show genuine care and empathy toward their well-being. Additionally, knowing students and communities means taking into consideration and familiarizing oneself with the cultural diversity of students.

Teachers should affirm students' cultural and social identities and engage in teaching strategies that reflect students' identities and experiences. Finally, and most importantly, teachers should be aware of students' unique learning and developmental needs and tailor instruction and assessment in a differentiated manner that considers various student levels.

5. CREATE A SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

When teaching sensitive topics, it is important for the learning environment to be designed in a manner that allows all students to feel supported. Teachers play a crucial role in creating a safe learning environment and can achieve this by establishing clear expectations for classroom behavior, fostering strong relationships, and displaying care and respect for students. Students should also be reflected in the classroom. **Teachers should ensure the classroom is student-centered by displaying student work in and around the classroom, creating opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration, amplifying student voice—where appropriate (allowing students to share how they learn best), and engaging students in quarterly reflections via climate satisfaction surveys.**

TOOL 07: CLIMATE SURVEY QUESTIONS

Sample classroom climate survey developed by the US Department of Education.¹⁰

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about our classroom?

Students can select the following options: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

1. All students are treated equally in this classroom.
2. My teacher provides instructional materials (e.g., textbooks and handouts) that reflect my cultural background, ethnicity, and identity.
3. Students of different cultural backgrounds, races, or ethnicities get along well in this classroom.
4. My teacher is available when I need to talk with them.
5. My teacher cares about me.
6. I have many chances to participate in classroom discussions or activities.
7. I am happy to be in this classroom.

6. COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Language and word choice are crucial for lesson planning and can play a role in mitigating alleged violations. **What you say is just as important as how you say something.** Teachers should refrain from using 'I' statements during instruction and engage in constructive dialogue, providing objective information. Similarly, teachers should engage in frequent "checks for understanding" during sensitive lessons to verify what they have communicated is not misconstrued or misinterpreted. In lessons, especially those containing sensitive topics, **teachers can incorporate activities like "exit tickets"¹¹ and "optimistic closure questions"¹² at the end of lessons to verify that students have clearly understood the information presented and to engage in reflective activities that excite them about returning to the classroom.** These activities should be mindful of word choice to avoid violating the law.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.

¹¹ Exit Ticket - The Teacher Toolkit, n.d.

¹² CASEL [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning] 2017





BEST PRACTICES II

ADMINISTRATION OF EQUITY IN
TEACHING SENSITIVE TOPICS

ADMINISTRATION OF EQUITY IN TEACHING SENSITIVE TOPICS

1. NAVIGATING THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

As imperative as it is for teachers to know their students, families, and school community, it is equally crucial for school-based administrators and district leaders¹³ to know these same stakeholders. Similarly, school-system leaders need to be conversant in the political landscape of their school communities to aid in predicting how the Protect Students First Act might be applied in their community. Understanding the needs of students and families may allow school system leaders to proactively address concerns before they require formal procedural action as mandated by the law ([See Complaint Process Overview, pp. 35](#)).

School system leaders should know who their elected officials are and, more vitally, the educational issues that hold significance to them. In addition, to help school system leaders navigate the political landscape, they should:

- 1) *Familiarize themselves with their elected officials' political leanings.* It is important to know how elected officials in system leaders' respective communities vote and the bills or agenda items they tend to support. For instance, excluding legislators who did not vote and/or excused themselves from voting, roughly 59% of Georgia state legislators (House and Senate) voted in favor of HB 1084, the Protect Students First Act. In this way, system leaders may anticipate how elected official(s) might monitor their school's (or district's) compliance with the law, including the school's complaint process.
- 2) *Maintain even a loose understanding of the political landscape.* System leaders need to know what additional compliance measures may come in the future and whether or not the leaders representing their legislative district will support these measures. To illustrate this point, during the 2021-2022 Georgia legislative session, when HB 1084 was introduced and ultimately passed, two additional bills were introduced encompassing a comparable framework: HB 888 and HB 1158. The aforementioned bills ultimately did not pass; however, they provide insight into the potential legislative directions of some elected officials. For instance, HB 888 would have required every public elementary and secondary school to maintain a detailed list of primary instructional materials on its website. Meanwhile, HB 1158 would have mandated school and school system governing bodies to adopt policies promoting parental involvement in public schools.
- 3) *Invite elected officials to visit their school and intentionally include them as part of the broader school community.* Elected officials can be better advocates for their communities when they can readily pinpoint the needs of their constituents. Extending an invite to one's school community is a valuable avenue for achieving this.

Important Reminder:

Schools are nonpartisan entities.

School system leaders should not permit their political ideologies and beliefs to influence their decision-making or partnerships with elected officials.

- 4) *Refrain from attempting to identify the political leanings of its school community.* Instead, through surveys and intentional community engagement events, school system leaders can authentically cultivate relationships with students and families and identify topics in education that are salient to them in efforts to preemptively mitigate discussion of topics that might further polarize the school community. In a [recent article](#),¹⁴ The Brookings Institution highlighted that about "25-50% of principals don't know what the parents in their schools think about various politicized issues." The Pew Research Center designed a [survey](#)¹⁵ that school system leaders can adapt and utilize to "identify potential points of contention—or even misconceptions—held by parents." It is advised that such surveys should be brief, factual, and objective.
- 5) *Make a concerted effort for continued family engagement.* Building trusting relationships in the school community is critical for maintaining safe and inclusive learning environments and positive academic and developmental student outcomes. The National Association of Secondary School Principals identified [six strategies for increasing parent engagement](#),¹⁶ which include continuous communication via the Remind app to keep families abreast of school happenings, emergencies, and reminders.

¹³ For the purposes of this section and this section only, school-based administrators and district leaders will be referred to as school system leaders/system leaders.

¹⁴ Partnerships with Parents Are Key to Solving Heightened Political Polarization in Schools | Brookings 2023

¹⁵ Pew Research Center 2022

¹⁶ Strategies for Increasing Parent Engagement 2019

2. DEVELOPING A SYSTEM-WIDE EQUITY POLICY

Equity and objectivity should be at the forefront of district leaders' pursuit of successfully administrating and complying with the law. This toolkit is resourced with tools to support classroom-based personnel, school administrators, and district leaders in adhering to the law while fostering a safe and academically rigorous school environment.

Key Consideration:

District leaders should consider developing an equity policy that will reinforce the mandate of objectivity when teaching sensitive topics.

To facilitate the creation of an effective equity policy, district leaders may draw inspiration from the [equity messaging guidance provided by the National Equity Project](#).¹⁷ The National Equity Project's guidance is geared toward assisting districts in establishing their own policies and communication efforts concerning equity, diversity, and inclusion. **District leaders may contemplate the following questions when designing their equity policy:**

- 1) **Is Critical Race Theory (CRT) In Our District? Does Our Curriculum Promote/Include/Aligned to Divisive Concepts?**
- 2) **Why Does Our District Need to Focus on Equity/Anti-Racism/Inclusion? Isn't Such Focus Divisive or Controversial?**
- 3) **Does this Work Cause Harm for Any Student? Will this Policy Victimize Our Students and Families??**
***TIP:** Consider the racial demographics of all students when considering this question.*
- 4) **What Does Brain Research and the Science of Learning Say About Our Need to Ensure Culturally Inclusive, Anti-Racist Environments?**

As district leaders begin establishing and/or building on their equity policies, they can garner insights from the work undertaken by states around the nation. Maryland, for example, has compiled a comprehensive [guide to educational equity](#).¹⁸ Maryland's guidebook defines equity and underlines specific focus areas it will address in order to meet its overarching goal of educational equity for all students. District leaders should leverage the guiding questions from the National Equity Project and established policies from states like Maryland for explicit elements to include when developing an equity policy. Additional questions district leaders may consider, and tips to support generating a robust equity policy are below.

- 1) **Why Does [insert District Name] Focus on Equity in Education?**
***TIP:** Align this response to relevant state standards.*
- 2) **How Will a Focus on Equity Advance the Academic Achievement of Every Student?**
***TIP:** Analyze local school systems' data and make changes required to eliminate achievement gaps, striving to address all disparities until they are eradicated.*
- 3) **How Does [insert District Name]'s Recruitment Efforts and Attrition Data Reinforce the Importance of Equity?**
***TIP:** Use [research](#) ¹⁹ to reveal the relationship between teachers of color and increased academic achievement for all students.²⁰*
- 4) **What Key Terms are Vital for [insert District Name] to Positively Inform Our Equity Policy?**
***TIP:** Below, you will find a Glossary of Key Terms (Appendix, pp. 51-53) that can significantly enhance the clarity and effectiveness of your equity policy.*

¹⁷ Equity Messaging Guidance for School Districts — National Equity Project 2021

¹⁸ EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE: A Guide to Educational Equity in Maryland 2017

¹⁹ Blazar 2021

²⁰ Teachers of color have large and lasting effects on the social-emotional, academic, and behavioral outcomes of their students...and the effects of teachers of color on self-efficacy extend not just to students of color but also to their white peers, relative to white students working with a white teacher.

3. DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR TEACHERS

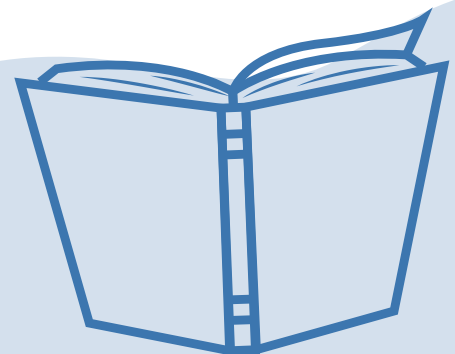
Teachers must navigate a new norm where the content they teach, what they say, and how they facilitate classroom discussions may be questioned and scrutinized not only by students but also by parents and may cause suspension and, ultimately, the loss of teaching credentials for teachers who are found in violation of the law. Consequently, because of the law, teachers may experience an increased level of paranoia and stress, as well as fear of being fired. School system leaders are encouraged to think strategically about ways to support their staff to ensure they have the support and resources needed to navigate the potential stress. Because the law is relatively new and vague, with unclear guidelines on what topics are permissible as aligned to the standards, there are no established 'best practices'; however, there are practices that system leaders across the country have found helpful:

- **Brief staff on the law, provide space to ask questions, share concerns, and develop a plan of action.** Gather staff to discuss collectively, as a school community, how the team can and should work together to ensure compliance with the law and to help develop the parent complaint process. Given the nuanced nature of the law, it is imperative for staff to work together under a shared understanding of what the law is and what it isn't and how best to address the law given the school's community context. Leveraging the tools offered in this toolkit can serve as a starting point to develop a tailored plan to continue advancing learning while remaining compliant with the law.
- **Facilitate professional development to build staff capacity.** Offer training and professional development for teachers to help them understand how to navigate the restrictions the law imposes while still promoting critical thinking and open discussions in the classroom. This may include workshops on inclusive teaching, culturally responsive education, and how to approach controversial topics.
- **Offer mental health support to help staff address emotional needs given the law:** Recognize these changes may be emotionally challenging for some teachers. Provide access to mental health resources, counseling services, or employee assistance programs to help teachers cope with stress, anxiety, or emotional challenges, noting the district's understanding of the stress navigating teaching sensitive topics may cause.
- **Develop district-curated resources to help staff navigate the law:** Develop and share resources that comply with the new laws while still promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. This may include curated reading lists, lesson plans, and teaching materials that align with the curriculum and the Georgia Standards of Excellence. Consider adapting the resources provided in this toolkit to meet your schools' specific needs.
- **Establish district-wide employee support or resource groups to create a safe space for staff to support each other.** Create safe spaces within the school and/or district-wide networks where teachers can openly discuss their concerns, share experiences, and seek support from colleagues and administrators. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) typically concentrate on fostering connections, networking, and sharing knowledge or experiences related to their common interest. Their activities may include organizing events, workshops, or activities related to their shared passion. The groups, selected based on how staff self-identify, should encourage open dialogue and the exchange of ideas. This group could provide an avenue for educators to discuss challenges they're navigating with teaching sensitive topics given the divisive concepts law or just communal support in general.

(See Tool 08: Employee Resource Group Development, pp. 29-30)

Oakland Unified School District leverages [affinity groups](#)²¹ to create spaces of belonging and voice for marginalized groups (BIPOC, LGBTQIA++, women, etc.), and to generate space for reflection, action, and change by all stakeholders in our school and district communities.

²¹. "Oakland Unified School District," n.d.



TOOL 08: EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Establishing an **Employee Resource Group (ERG)** involves several steps to ensure that the group is organized, inclusive, and aligned with the goals and values of your district. Facilitating ERGs is typically housed in Human Resources; however, establishing a cross-departmental committee to include Human Resources, School Leadership and Teaching, and Learning/Academics may yield a more strategic effort to collectively provide support for teachers and staff who must navigate teaching sensitive topics and need to connect and build community with others as an outlet and support.

Step 1. Identify Purpose and Goals of ERGs: Clearly define the purpose and objectives of the ERG as aligned to the district's broader talent management strategy and strategic plan. Determine what issues or interests the ERG will focus on (e.g., diversity, gender equality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, mental health, etc.). Consider leveraging the district's culture and climate survey to gauge staff interest in participating in an ERG and topics of interest and use the data collected to determine the purpose and goals.

TIP: Research Comparable Districts with ERGs

Research best practices and benchmark with other organizations that have successful ERGs. Learn from their experiences and gather ideas for your ERG's structure and activities.

Step 2. Gain Support from Senior Leaders: Given Employee Resources Groups impact all employees, there's a significant risk at stake; consequently, seeking support from senior leaders within the Cabinet is critical. Executive sponsorship can lend credibility to establishing the ERG and help secure necessary resources. Be sure to include the following information in the proposal to senior leaders:

- Problem the ERG hopes to address;
- Purpose and goals of the ERGs and how the ERG aligns with district-wide goals, priorities, and broader strategic plan;
- Anticipated impact of the ERGs, both short and long term; and
- Resources needed to implement the ERGs

Step 3. Create an Employee Resource Group Handbook. Develop a handbook that outlines the ERG's purpose, goals, membership criteria, leadership structure, and operating procedures. The handbook should provide guidance for ERG members and district staff facilitations to have a shared understanding of how the ERG will operate. In addition to operations, the handbook should include established communication channels for the ERG, such as email lists, social media groups, or collaboration platforms, to facilitate discussions and share information. (See [Palm Beach County School District's Pilot Handbook, pp. 61](#)).

Step 4. Promote the ERG as a resource and support for employees: Promote the ERG and recruit members across the district by using various communication channels, such as company emails, intranet, and social media, to raise awareness and attract interested individuals. Consider promoting the ERGs during professional development or discussions about teaching sensitive topics as an avenue resource and support for teachers and other school-based personnel.

Step 5. Interview and select prospective leaders or facilitators and officers, such as a Chairperson for the ERG. Using a selection process with clear criteria, recruit and select leaders for the ERG and consider offering a stipend to compensate them for their time and leadership. The opportunities to serve should be advertised using various communication channels, such as company emails, intranet, and social media.

TIP: Develop Clear Roles and Responsibilities for ERG Leaders

Thoughtfully consider the roles and responsibilities of its leaders, the decision-making power of the ERG, and the delineation of the ERG's position to speak on behalf of the district.

Step 6. Launch the First ERG Meeting and Plan Events: Once leaders are in place and members recruited, begin planning and executing activities and events that align with the ERG's goals. These can include workshops, awareness campaigns, networking events, and community outreach.

As part of the planning and development process, be sure to identify and track the measures of success of the ERGs. Use the data to establish the value of ERGs to advance the district's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Throughout the year, collect feedback from members and stakeholders to assess the ERG's progress and effectiveness and be open to making adjustments to better meet the group's objectives.

A few metrics to consider measuring are:

- **Membership Growth:** Track the number of ERG members over time.
- **Retention Rates:** Assess the retention rates of ERG members compared to non-members. A higher retention rate among ERG participants may suggest that the group contributes to employee engagement and satisfaction.
- **Participation in ERG Activities:** Measure the attendance and participation in ERG-sponsored events, workshops, and meetings. Higher participation rates can indicate the level of engagement and interest among employees.
- **Promotion and Advancement Rates:** Analyze promotion and advancement rates for ERG members compared to non-members to determine if ERG participation has an impact on career progression.
- **Employee Engagement Scores:** Examine employee engagement survey results to identify whether ERG participation correlates with higher engagement scores, indicating a positive impact on employee morale and job satisfaction.

Regularly report on the ERG's progress and achievements to senior leadership and the broader district and highlight how the ERG contributes to the company's overall goals

TOOL 09: SOCIAL STUDIES DISCLAIMER

Teaching history and social studies is part of the educational experience of all students; however, given HB 1084 and the political climate more broadly, districts should take a proactive approach to ensure all stakeholders understand the district's stance on teaching history. Taking a proactive approach to communicate to all stakeholders the district's stance on teaching history and its commitments to the content and curriculum in service of student learning may help mitigate questions and concerns parents and other stakeholders have about the district's approach to history education, given HB 1084.

What is a Social Studies Disclaimer?

The social studies disclaimer describes a district's stance on controversial topics as well as the skills they want our students to develop as a result of their educational experience [\[See Example of Social Studies Disclaimer, Clayton County Appendix, pp. 57-58\].](#)

[District Letterhead]

Dear **[School District Stakeholder Group]**,

[District] creates a learning environment for all students to graduate ready for college, career, and life **[or include the District's mission]**. As part of students' readiness, we aim to help students understand the past and present history of the United States and across the world and to be prepared to engage with others who hold different perspectives, cultures, histories, and identities in a productive way. To accomplish this, our instruction across all subject areas and grade levels aligns with the Georgia Standards of Excellence, including **[District]'s** approach to social studies and history instruction.

Our vision for all students is to **[District vision for social studies and history instruction]**. Our vision is grounded in the National Center for History in Schools **[or a credible national source]** and the Georgia Department of Education's Standards of Excellence for social studies, geography, American and world history, and government instruction.

We recognize that social studies and history instruction may include topics and historical events, such as slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, women's suffrage, the Holocaust, and other events that teach the impact of those events on a single racial group may be sensitive and triggering for students. Our goal is to provide our students with a safe learning environment and a learning experience that encourages them to understand multiple perspectives to foster critical thinking about the historical events and experiences of people across cultures, race, gender, socioeconomic factors, and other social identifiers.

[School District] acknowledges parents' rights and choice to determine if they want their children excluded from certain lessons. Our teachers and principals, in collaboration with parents, may provide appropriate alternative assignments aligned with State standards. It is also important to note that all students will be accountable for the content in social studies and history aligned to the Georgia Standards of Excellence, as the standards will be assessed on Georgia Milestones, Georgia's required standardized tests for all students.

To learn more about **[District]'s** approach to teaching history and topics that may be considered sensitive, please refer to the following resources:

- **[links resources, curriculum, local policy, etc.]**

We look forward to partnering with our families this school year to ensure that our students engage in history and social studies instruction in a way that aligns with the Georgia Standards of Excellence and that values the lived experiences of all of our students.

In Partnership,

[Name of Superintendent]

[Title]

[Name of Social Studies Department Leader or Chief Academic Officer]

[Title]

TIPS

- Send the disclaimer district-wide to stakeholders and post the disclaimer on external communication channels, such as the district website
 - Orient the district staff on the talking points outlined in the letter and provide clear steps on how principals and teachers should handle parent concerns
 - Leverage the district's social studies department to create the language and protocols to support the communications efforts
 - Focus the disclaimer on teaching standards-aligned social studies and history instead of equity or Critical Race Theory
-

Theory of Change for Teaching Sensitive Topics

Developing a well-defined theory of change can provide invaluable support for school system leaders seeking to advance equity. The Protect Students First Act is a first-of-its kind law and its statute may pose a challenge for school leaders to promote diversity, equity and inclusion and discourage teaching sensitive topics. School systems should be equipped with thoughtful methodology to guide administration and school stakeholders to advance equity and create a learning environment that encourages critical thinking and discourse around topics that may be considered sensitive.

Theory of Change:

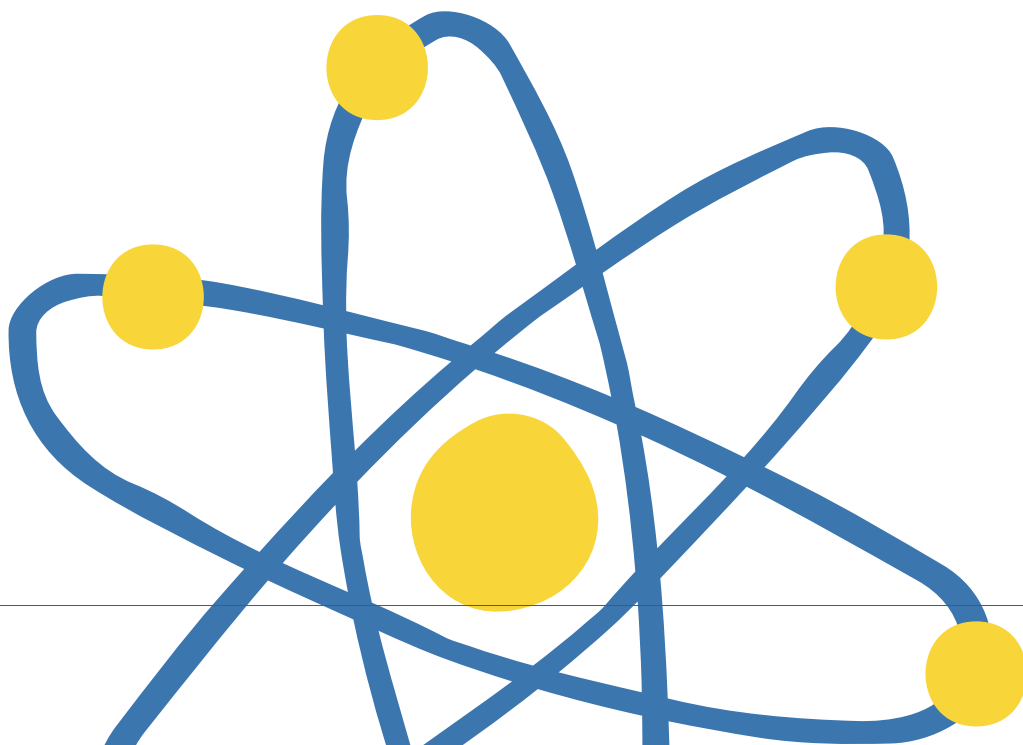
A theory of change describes the casual chain of events that leads from the implementation of a policy or intervention to the desired outcome. It's strategic tool that brings focus, clarity, and rigor to policy implementation.

Developing a theory of change for advancing equity requires a collaborative approach. The school board, district leadership, school-level and community stakeholders should work together to set the vision for equity in the school system. This does not, however, preclude school-level leaders from developing their own theory of change for their community stakeholders. Leaders at the school-level and the district at-large should proactively and cohesively approach the development and implementation tactfully and inclusive of stakeholders the divisive concepts law will impact. This law will likely lead to policy and procedural shifts at the district and school level, therefore creating a theory of change preempts what may come and takes a collaborative approach in doing so.

Important Note:

School leaders, too, must develop a theory of change for their school community aligned with the school vision. If issues arise due to teaching sensitive topics, the school's theory of change can provide a communication tool to explain why and how topics are being taught.

Mapping out the logical connections between planned activities, outputs, and desired outcomes encourages transparency, evidenced-based policy and procedure design, coherence, and alignment across district and school-level initiatives. It provides a roadmap that can be used to monitor progress and guide iterations as needed and ensures that stakeholders are set up for success.



TOOL 10: THEORY OF CHANGE FOR TEACHING SENSITIVE TOPICS

Developing a theory of change around equity-centered curriculum and instruction can help educators clarify the purpose and goals of teaching sensitive topics. The theory of change will ensure that teaching methods align with broader educational objectives like, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion, content mastery or fostering critical thinking. Communication with families is also critical when navigating an educational landscape with increased scrutiny when teaching sensitive topics. Developing a theory of change can serve as a communication tool to explain, big picture, why and how topics are being taught, potentially reducing resistance from stakeholders.

Though there are different graphic variations for theories of change, each theory of change typically includes the following elements:

- **Vision Statement:** the school system's hope for students reflecting its values and aspirations and will guide coherence
- **Inputs:** resources, assets, and activities needed to bring about the desired change
- **Outputs:** changes that occur relatively quickly after the implementation of activities or intervention
- **Outcome(s):** overarching goal(s) or change you want to achieve
- **Assumptions:** underlying beliefs or conditions that need to hold true for the theory of change to work
- **External Factors:** external factors are elements or conditions that exist outside of the school system and are beyond direct control but can significantly influence success or failure

Guiding Questions:

- How might our school district look, feel, be experienced, and sound when racial justice, respect and value for all students regardless of race, gender identity or socioeconomic status is an everyday reality?
- How might we know when diversity, equity and inclusion is embedded throughout everything that we do in our district?

Steps to Developing a Theory of Change

Working with a diverse group of stakeholders, use a variation of the following steps to develop a theory of change:

1. **Identify any relevant overarching models or implementation frameworks.** Before establishing your theory of change, consider any overarching models or implementation frameworks used in your district. These might include the [Leading for Equity Framework](#) or the [BELE Framework: A Guide to Building Equitable Learning Environments](#). Such frameworks are relevant to your theory of change in two ways. First, implementation frameworks often explicitly identify levers for change. Second, these frameworks may help illuminate key points of connection and gaps among various initiatives.
2. **Identify levers of change.** What circumstances, processes, practices, policies, or other elements will influence whether and how your district achieves its vision? For each lever of change, identify what it looks like when that lever is working in support of your vision. You'll more than likely have more than one idea.
3. **Identify stakeholders' roles in levers of change.** Develop a list of stakeholders and stakeholder groups that will aid in supporting the theory of change and determine their roles in pulling the levers you identified.

Key Considerations:

The Annie E. Casey Foundation developed a guide to assist organizations, groups, and system-level leaders, and with establishing robust theories of change.

Highlights from the Foundation's guide²² concerning key components of a theory of change include:

- **Identifying key audiences:** Who will use the theory of change and how will they use it?
- **Level of change:** What vantage point (30,000ft, 10,000ft, 1000ft) will best communicate your theory of change?

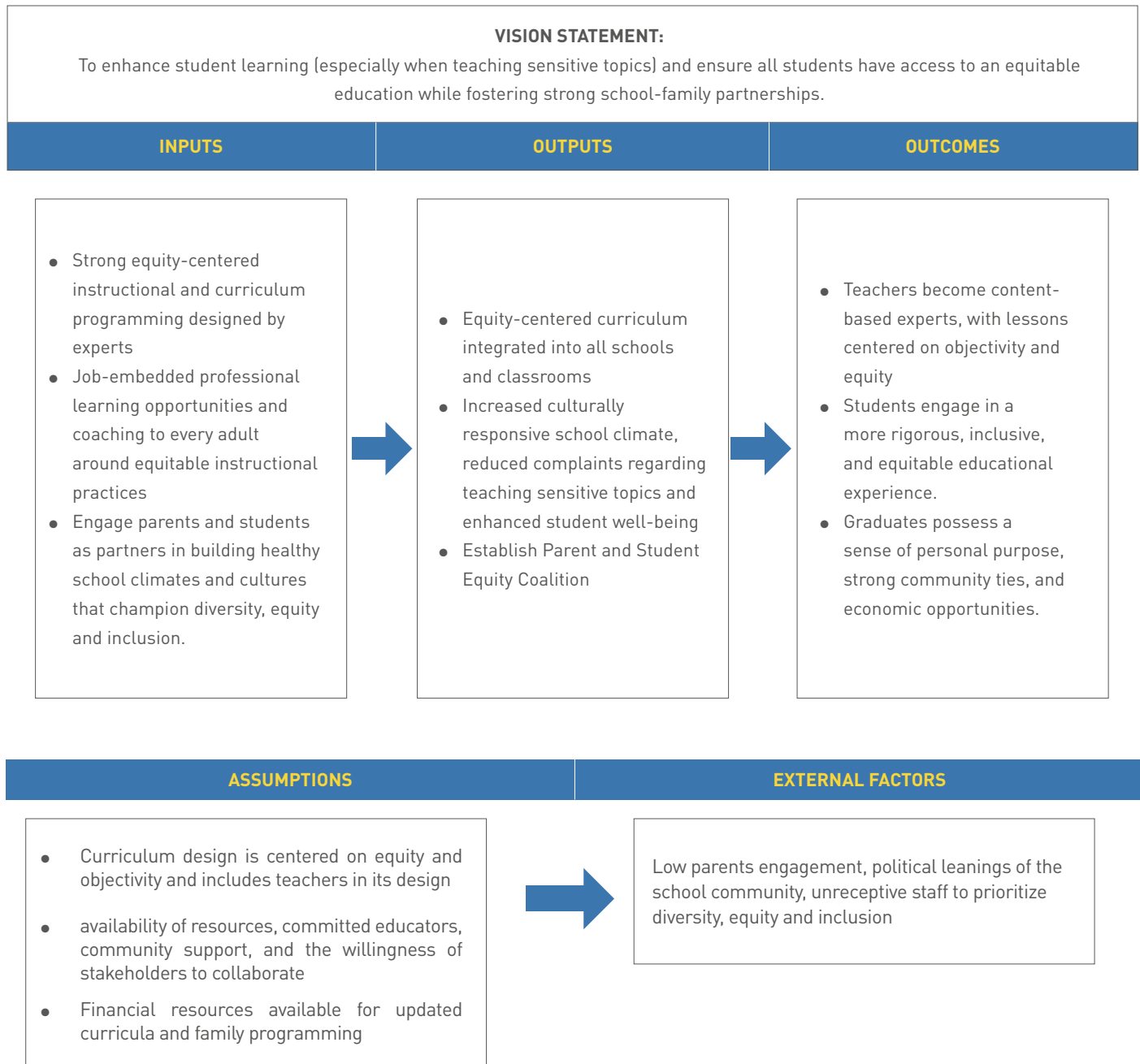
TIP: Starting at a midpoint (around 10,000 feet) makes it easier to zoom in or out later as needed.

- **Design for inclusion:** How will the process, strategies, activities, and overall outcomes of the theory of change prioritize voices that are often left out of the conversation about change?
- **Identify goals:** What is our goal? Who or what will change? What conditions will be present? What will be true if our work is completely successful?

²² "How to Develop a Theory of Change."

EXAMPLE THEORY OF CHANGE

The graphic is a high-level example of a theory change incorporating both curriculum and family engagement goals. When developing a theory of change, it's important to use quantitative and qualitative language in outputs as much as possible.



COMPLAINT PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Protect Students First Act establishes a **new complaint resolution policy designed to address complaints alleging violations of the statute. A local school system (LSS) is only required to respond to a complaint if it is made by a student, parent, or employee where the alleged violation occurred. As you review the Complaint Resolution Policy (p. 36), please keep the following in mind:**

- 1) Every school system has to create its own policy; however, most policies align directly with the law as written and
- 2) Response turnaround times are mandated as either school days or calendars. It is essential to note the difference between the two so that responses are provided within the parameters set by the law.

While the Department of Education was mandated by law to develop guidance for schools and local school systems when determining whether violations have occurred and revise such guidance from time to time, many school systems have already developed their own policy. The law also required LSS' to adopt a complaint resolution policy in August 2022. Hall County Public Schools has created a divisive concepts resolution process²³ that outlines the requirements of the law and may be used as a reference.

Key Consideration:

School administrators, teachers, and other relevant school personnel should ensure that they have access to their LSS' resolution process.

Use the policy chart below to better understand each stakeholder's responsibility as determined by the law.



²³. Board Policy Manual Hall County Schools 2022

COMPLAINT RESOLUTION POLICY

Student confidentiality or personnel information must not be violated during this process

District Leaders and Administrators	Parents/Guardians and Families	Local Board of Education (BOE)	District Leaders and Administrators
Principal or designee must review the complaint and take steps towards investigation within five school days .	Allowed to make a complaint if a student is enrolled in school (applicable to students 18 years old).	<i>Required to have adopted a complaint resolution policy by August 1, 2022.</i>	After hearing the complainant’s appeal, the SBOE must make written findings about whether any violations occurred.
Principal determines whether or not a violation occurred in whole or part within 10 school days . ²⁴ If a violation occurred, the principal must notify/confer with the complainant of remedial steps to be taken.	Must submit a complaint in writing to the principal , with a reasonably detailed description of the violation.	Must review the local superintendent’s decision and make a final determination on the complaint, if applicable.	If a violation occurred, the SBOE must direct the Department of Education to develop a corrective action plan for the LSS within 10 calendar days .
After conferring with the complainant, within 3 school days of a request by a complainant, the principal or designee must provide the complainant with a written summary of findings and a statement of remedial measures, if any.	Has the right to appeal the local Board of Education’s decision to the State Board of Education in a hearing.	Has 30 calendar days to implement a corrective action plan and can have waivers suspended if not done. ²⁵	If the SBOE determines the local BOE has not implemented a corrective action plan, the SBOE must order the immediate suspension of one or more of the LSS’ (Local BOE) waivers. Suspended waivers must be in effect for no less than 12 months.
Upon receiving a written request for review by the complainant, the local superintendent or designee must review the principal’s determination and remedial steps, if applicable, within 10 school days .	Has the right at any time to request, in writing, from the local superintendent or principal records for inspection and receive such no longer than 3 calendar days .	Must place denial of complainant record request appeal on next public agenda meeting.	If the LSS has not been granted a waiver, the SBOE must refer the matter to the state superintendent.
Following the review of the principal’s determination, the local superintendent’s decision must be reviewed by the local Board of Education.	Has the right to appeal the denial of records requested to the local Board of Education if not received within 30 calendar days .		<i>Required to have promoted a model policy to assist schools and LSS with establishing a complaint resolution policy by July 1, 2022.</i>
The superintendent or principal must produce a complainant record request within 3 calendar days .	<i>*Items that school systems should have already completed are italicized in red</i>		

²⁴ If another timeline is agreed upon by the complainant and the principal the ten school days mandate can be adjusted.

²⁵ Per Georgia Code Title 20. Education § 20-2-244, the State Board of Education is authorized to waive specifically identified state rules, regulations, policies, and procedures, or provisions. The goal for each waiver shall be improvement of student performance.



BEST PRACTICES III

COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE

WITH PARENTS AND/OR GUARDIANS

COMMUNICATION GUIDANCE WITH PARENTS AND/OR GUARDIANS

1. BE PROACTIVE

Proactive communication plays a vital role in addressing complaints and concerns in a **timely and effective manner**. When accusations arise, swift messaging not only becomes a game changer but also demonstrates the legitimacy of the issuer's concerns, as well as the school's commitment to addressing them through a structured system. It is crucial to prioritize accuracy by stating the facts and providing sufficient details without being accusatory or dismissive.

Clear and consistent messaging is also vital, and as such, it is recommended that schools designate a school-based point of contact (POC) who can issue a response and involve relevant individuals in the process. By engaging in proactive communication, schools can foster transparency, build trust, and effectively address concerns that may arise within the school community. The tool below is an example of immediate correspondence to be sent to a parent who has initiated a complaint regarding a violation of the law.

TOOL 11: RESPONSE TO PARENT COMPLAINT MADE BY PHONE

Sample messaging for school-based point of contact to send to a parent who makes a complaint via phone call.

SUBJECT: RESPONSE REGARDING ALLEGED VIOLATION OF STATE LAW

CC: [Teacher], [Principal]

Dear [Parent Name],

Thank you for reaching out via phone to [Principal Name] and expressing your concerns about [Teacher's Name] lesson on [Insert Lesson Plan Subject Title] which potentially violates the Protect Students First Act. We appreciate the vibrant community we've cultivated here at [School Name], and it is of utmost importance to us that our community's concerns are addressed swiftly to maintain a safe and respectful learning environment for our students.

We are committed to upholding the provisions of the law and are hopeful that we will be able to thoroughly and promptly address this issue. Per the statute, all complaints must be made in a written manner. To support this process, we have developed a [complaint form](#) that you can utilize.

Principal [insert name] will review your complaint and maintain appropriate confidentiality throughout the process. We appreciate your vigilance in bringing this matter to our attention.

We remain dedicated to fostering a positive educational experience for all students, and we are grateful for your partnership in achieving this goal.

Educationally,

[School-based POC Name] [Title] [School Name] [Contact Information]

The divisive concepts law centers around teaching topics that may be considered sensitive for students. To proactively inform parents that the upcoming unit or lessons includes sensitive topics, sending a notice in advance may empower parents to make an informed decision to have their child participate in the lesson. [Tool 14a: Proactive Email to Parents, pp 42](#) in this toolkit offers an email to send to parents at the beginning of the year to notify them of sensitive topics that will be covered during the year.

What is a Sensitive Topics Notice?

A Sensitive Topic Notice is a letter to send home to parents/guardians prior to teaching topics that may be considered sensitive or controversial. A sensitive topics notice is a cautionary printed statement that alerts students and parents to the sensitive nature of the lesson content about to be seen, read, or discussed in class.

The notices give stakeholders the forewarning necessary to possibly decrease the harmfulness of encountering triggering material. Content notices are not intended to permit students to skip class or censor the material; rather, to notify parents of the content in lessons that may be considered sensitive or controversial.

In addition to sending a notice at the beginning of the school year, a sensitive topics notice may be sent prior to the start of the unit to give parents at least two weeks' notice that the unit includes topics that may be considered sensitive.

TIPS:

- Develop a district-approved template for schools to standardize the Notice
- Refer to the district's social studies disclaimer in the Notice, if applicable
- Establish a procedure to guide teachers and principals to manage sending notices home and to address parent concerns

TOOL 12: SENSITIVE TOPICS NOTICE

[School Logo]

Sensitive Topics Notice

Dear Parents,

It's a priority for us to ensure that we teach the Georgia State Standards and provide a safe environment for our students to learn. This letter serves as a notice that the upcoming unit may include topics considered controversial and sensitive to students. Please see the details about the unit and let me know if you have any questions or concerns:

Topic: [Topic]

Georgia Standard of Excellence: [GA Standard aligned to the unit]

Objective(s): [Provide the goal of the unit and desired student learning outcomes.]

Dates of Lesson: [Date of lesson]

Supplemental Materials: [Resources]

Our school, with the support of district leadership, acknowledges parents' rights and choice to determine if they want their children excluded from certain lessons. We're more than happy to work with you to address any concerns and provide appropriate alternative assignments aligned with State standards.

If you have additional questions about the district's approach to social studies and history instruction, please refer to the district website: [website for the social studies disclaimer]

In Partnership,

[Teacher's Name]

2. ENSURE RELEVANT SCHOOL PERSONNEL UNDERSTAND THE LAW

By ensuring all school stakeholders thoroughly understand the Protect Students First Act, schools can promote a cohesive approach to implementing the law, maintaining compliance, and creating a supportive environment that benefits all students. All relevant school personnel (or as deemed appropriate, e.g., principal, assistant principal, dean of culture and climate, etc.) should be well-equipped to take the necessary steps to alleviate conflict and disputes or answer questions regarding the law should issues arise for parents. Similar to the guidance for teachers on effective communication when teaching, all school-based personnel should familiarize themselves with the Overview: Divisive Concepts Law (pp. 8-9), which provides an overview of the law.

3. DEVELOP A STANDARDIZED COMPLAINT PLAN OF ACTION

While the statute does not mandate schools to develop a complaint form, it may be beneficial for schools to have one on hand in the event that a complainant provides advance notice (not in writing) that they wish to submit a complaint. This communication strategy allows schools to effectively manage the complaint process and standardize the plan of action for all school personnel.

A standard complaint plan should consider the following:

1. The teacher or school personnel should remain calm and professional if approached by the complainant before a formal/written complaint is made.
2. The teacher or school personnel should immediately notify the school-based POC that a potential complainant has approached them. This should be done in writing and include where and when the incident occurred.
3. The school-based POC should provide a complaint form to the complainant via email and carbon copy the principal and accused teacher.
4. The school-based POC should utilize the response template [\[See Tool 11: Response to Parent Complaint Made by Phone, p.38\]](#) or one similar when issuing a response.
5. All stakeholders should be instructed to maintain confidentiality and privacy and refrain from discussing the incident with other staff members or students.

TOOL 13: PARENT COMPLAINT FORM

Sample complaint form to make available to complainants.

COMPLAINT FORM

[School Name] values your feedback and is committed to addressing concerns promptly. Concerns regarding the Protect Students First Act may be completed using this form and sent to [Principal Name]. Please note that complaints can be submitted via email to [Principal Name] in place of this form but should include as many details as possible. Please complete this form to initiate the complaint resolution process.

Complainant Information:

- Name:
- Relationship to Student:
- Contact Number:
- Email Address:
- Mailing Address:

Student Information:

- Student's Name:
- Grade Level:
- Mailing Address:

Complaint Details:

- Date of Incident:
- Name(s) of Individual(s) Involved:
- Description of Complaint (Please provide a detailed account of the incident, including any relevant dates, times, locations, and the specific violation(s) you believe have occurred):
- Have you previously discussed this issue with the teacher or school administrator? (Yes/No)
- If yes, please provide details of the previous discussions and any actions taken:

Desired Resolution:

- What outcome or resolution are you seeking as a result of filing this complaint?

Please submit this completed form and email it to [Principal Name] at your earliest convenience. The next steps will be taken in accordance with the requirements of the law.

[Principal Name] [Phone Number] [Email Address]

Thank you for your commitment to maintaining a positive and respectful educational environment for our students.

[School-based POC Name] [Title] [School Name] [Contact Information]

4. ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN CONSISTENT METHODS OF COMMUNICATION

Establishing and maintaining consistent methods of communication is essential for schools to engage with parents and guardians effectively. Regular communication and collaboration with families provide valuable insights into students' lives and support a solid home-school partnership. Schools can utilize various communication channels, such as email (templates for common messages), newsletters, classroom management software (e.g., Class Dojo, Google Classroom, etc.), and a well-maintained school website to share important information, updates, and announcements. Phone conversations and in-person school visits are also valuable for more personalized and direct communication.

Important Notice:

Teachers must exercise caution when handling complaints in-person or over the phone, ensuring that they involve a colleague or school leadership (preferably school-based POC) staff member to maintain a safe and professional environment and accountability for conversation.

Should an unanticipated in-person conversation occur, teachers should redirect complainants to schedule a formal meeting at a later date. It is crucial to document all interactions and follow up with complainants via email, advising again that complaints be made in a written format.

TOOL 14a: PROACTIVE EMAIL TO PARENTS**Sample beginning of the year (back to school) email to parents.**

SUBJECT: Welcome to [insert class name] [insert school year]

Dear [Parent Name],

I hope this email finds you well and rested after a wonderful summer break! As we head into the new school year, I am reaching out to all of our students' families and providing you with important information and resources to ensure you and your student(s) are set up for success this year.

Firstly, **attached** to this email, you will find our course syllabus for [insert class name]. The syllabus outlines our curriculum's course and sequence, grading scale, classroom policies, expectations, and parent/guardian survey. It helps students and families alike to be informed about what to expect this school year. Please review and return the completed parent survey and syllabus acknowledgment form.

The [insert class name] curriculum is comprehensive and covers a wide range of topics to deliver a well-rounded education for all students. As you review the syllabus, you might identify some topics that raise questions for you. [insert class name] values and respects all our parents' unique beliefs and preferences, with the ultimate goal of fostering fair access and opportunity for all learners.

Should you find specific concerns with any of the topics in the curriculum, I encourage you to reach out to me directly to discuss further. I hold dear to and respect open communication, and your thoughts and perspectives are important to me. I will endeavor to answer your questions to the best of my ability and maintain this level of communication throughout the school year.

As always, thank you for your ongoing support of our students and school community. Your commitment to your student's academic and social well-being is essential to their success. I hope my classroom will allow students to feel safe and ask thoughtful and engaging questions while cultivating a respectful atmosphere.

I am excited about the year ahead and look forward to your partnership and creating enriching learning experiences for all students this year!

Educationally,

[Teacher Name] [Title] [School Name] [Contact Information]

Social media can be a platform for sharing relevant information, but it is important to refrain from engaging in back-and-forth discussions on these platforms and instead redirect individuals to communicate through official channels, like email. Schools can foster effective partnerships with parents and ensure clear and efficient information is delivered by establishing and maintaining consistent communication methods. **That is, communication should occur consistently and frequently throughout the school year and not only when issues arise.**

TOOL 14b: HANDLING CONFLICT ON SOCIAL MEDIA**Sample social media conflict resolution on Twitter due to a tweet from an unhappy parent.**
(In most cases, the text content of a tweet can contain up to 280 characters)

@[school name]PS: Do you know how to engage in thoughtful debate? If not, ask the amazing 10th graders at *[insert school name]* who held a riveting class discussion on the importance of the Constitution.

@parent: The Constitution? Are those teachers even qualified to teach it correctly? I want to know what discussions were held in that classroom!

In a private message: @[school name]PS to @parent - Hello, we noticed you were interested in learning more about the awesome work happening at *[insert school name]*. If you have an enrolled student, feel free to reach out to *[Principal name]* for more details. We're always happy to highlight the incredible work of our students!

5. INTERNAL DEBRIEF

To enhance practices that support students and families and ensure a safe learning environment that neither infringes upon the rights of school stakeholders nor violates the law, continuous improvement is the goal. To accomplish this, principals, teachers, and other relevant school personnel should engage in debriefing processes that provide an opportunity to reflect on any complaints received concerning The Protect Students First Act. Internal debriefing after receiving a complaint from parent, student, and employees is crucial as it allows the school to review its protocol(s) and assess whether all necessary steps were taken to the best of its ability.

The internal briefing session may include the following:

- Assessing how internal personnel understood the order of operation for addressing the concern;
- Evaluating what went right and what went wrong in the process; and
- Determining if the complainant felt heard and understood.

The internal briefing session helps identify areas for improvement and guides decisions on what should be done differently for similar situations in the future. By engaging in internal debriefing, schools can enhance their responsiveness, ensure effective communication, and continuously improve their processes to better address parent concerns and maintain positive parent-school relationships.

TOOL 14c: INTERNAL DEBRIEF PROTOCOL**Sample debrief template²⁶ for use after dealing with a full cycle of the complaint resolution policy.****DEBRIEFING TEMPLATE****Review results vs. expectations**

1. What were the expectations about the process and results? What was your definition of success?
2. To what extent were those expectations met?
 - a. Consider using a Likert scale-based question for responses:
 - i. (1) significantly exceeded expectations
 - ii. (2) met expectations
 - iii. (3) did not meet expectations
3. How did our results contribute to the bigger picture of the school's mission—fostering a safe learning environment, advancing learning, and driving equity?

Evaluation and learning

1. What were the biggest factors that contributed to the results?
2. What went well? Why? What led to that success?

²⁶ This template was taken from The Management Center's Debriefing Template. Please ensure you accurately source this resource if used.

- a. What would it take to replicate or build on that success for next time?
3. What didn't go well? Why? What needs to improve next time?
- a. What would it take to prevent or mitigate the obstacles we ran into next time?
4. What else can we learn from this?
5. Were there any unintended consequences regarding equity and inclusion that we should note?
6. Did we adequately meet the needs of everyone we were hoping to serve? Were there any gaps or disparities in who was impacted or served?

Next steps and recommendations

1. What will you (we) try next time?
2. What questions do we need to answer before next time?
3. What kind of support will you (we) need next time?

Quick Debrief Agenda

If you're in a time crunch, remember these questions for a quick debrief:

What went well? What didn't? Why?

What should we do differently/similarly next time?

Additional Debrief Questions

- What recommendations do you have for the team handling the complaint resolution policy process based on our current procedure/these results?
- What was the best decision you (we) made during this process? What can we learn from that? How can we build on that next time?
- What worked about how we worked together on this? What didn't work well?
- What feedback do you have for me (*likely the principal*) about how I supported or managed you (*likely school-based POC*) in this process?

Responding to Parent Complaints about Sensitive Topics

Parents may have various concerns and complaints about divisive concepts and sensitive topics taught in schools. These concerns can arise from different perspectives and ideologies, how parents interpret the law, their personal beliefs and feelings, and the content taught in their child's classroom. **Here are examples of the types of complaints parents may have about teaching sensitive topics:**

- **Political Bias:** Parents may believe that teachers or curriculum materials promote a particular political ideology or bias, leading to concerns about impartiality in the classroom.
- **Inappropriate Content:** Complaint: Parents may express concerns about age-appropriateness and the inclusion of explicit or graphic content when teaching sensitive topics, such as sex education, gender, history, or current events.
- **Religious or Cultural Sensitivity:** Parents may feel sensitive topics, like discussions about religion, race, or gender identity, do not respect their cultural or religious values and may express concerns about indoctrination.
- **Fear of Bullying or Stigmatization:** Parents may fear their child will be subjected to bullying, stigmatization, or harassment due to their views or personal experiences related to sensitive topics.
- **Fear of Indoctrination:** Parents may worry their children are being indoctrinated with particular beliefs or ideologies rather than being encouraged to think critically and independently.
- **Curriculum Choice:** Parents may disagree with the choice of curriculum materials, textbooks, or resources used to teach sensitive topics, arguing for alternative materials.
- **Impact on Emotional Well-Being:** Parents may express concerns that discussions about sensitive topics taught and discussed in the classroom causing their children emotional distress or anxiety.

TOOL 15: FRAMEWORK TO RESPOND TO PARENT COMPLAINTS

Given the sensitivity and the possible emotionally-charged nature of the conversation, it is important to have a framework to engage with parents empathetically and in a way that invites diverse perspectives, even if there's disagreement with the perspective shared. Consider using the following framework when engaging parents who have concerns about teaching sensitive topics in the classroom:



AFFIRM:

Affirmation involves expressing value in someone's contribution to the dialogue and also establishes a shared sense of humanity before diverse and potentially conflicting perspectives come into play. Affirmation is a critical step in the process, even in situations in which you do not agree. An affirmation is not an agreement but an opportunity to find authentic ways to connect with another person.

- **Acknowledge Concerns:** Validate the parent's feelings by acknowledging their concerns, even if you disagree.
- **Empathize:** Express empathy for any anxiety or worry the parent may be experiencing. Be genuine and truthful in your affirmation.
- **Paraphrase the Content of the Speaker's Words:** Putting what the speaker says into your own words demonstrates you have listened attentively and allows the speaker to correct or clarify any misunderstanding.
- **Connect What was Shared and What You Heard:** It could be a feeling, an experience, or a common principle shared with the other person.
- **Appreciate the Honesty and Authenticity Shared:** Even when you disagree, recognize the courage it might have taken the parent to share.

INQUIRE:

Inquiry is a powerful tool for engaging in challenging conversations with parents about the divisive concepts law. It helps create a more productive and respectful dialogue, fosters understanding, and can lead to mutually satisfactory resolutions. It is an essential skill for school administrators and educators dealing with sensitive topics.

Encourage parents to share their thoughts and feelings by asking open-ended questions, such as:

- Can you tell me more about your concerns regarding the lesson or topic?
- What concerns has your student expressed about the lesson?
- How do you think these concerns are affecting your child's education?
- What do you believe is the best solution to resolve your concerns?

RESPOND:

Avoid debate. Rather than looking for right and wrong, try to articulate areas of difference as well as places of agreement. Use "I" statements. Own your beliefs and experiences and share policies and procedures that relate to the issue. Based on what you learned and the answers to the questions you asked, respond.

- **Invite Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration and ongoing dialogue. Let parents know that their input is valuable and you are committed to addressing their concerns within the bounds of the law.
- **Include Relevant Stakeholders:** Parent complaints regarding the divisive concepts law or teaching sensitive topics should not be addressed in isolation. Include relevant stakeholders such as the grade level chair and the principal to promote transparency in the decision-making process. By including school leadership, parents can have confidence that their concerns are being taken seriously and that the school's leadership is aware of and engaged in the resolution process.
- **Offer Resources:** Provide parents with resources, such as district policies, websites, or documents, where they can find more information about the law and your district's approach.
- **Follow the Proper School Procedures to Address Parent Complaints:** The next steps should include any steps outlined in the school's procedures when addressing parents' complaints about teaching sensitive topics. For example, a school procedure may include documenting the complaint using a parent complaint form.
- **Document the Conversation:** After the conversation, document the key points discussed, any agreed-upon action items, and the date of the conversation for future reference.

TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION:

Addressing parents' concerns collaboratively can help prevent conflicts from escalating. Taking action early can help prevent escalation and serious consequences. The plan to resolve the complaint should prioritize fairness, transparency, and the best interests of students while ensuring legal compliance and accountability. Establish follow-up steps by determining whether further conversations or actions are necessary and establish a follow-up plan.

- **Invite Collaboration:** Encourage collaboration and ongoing dialogue. Let parents know that their input is valuable and you are committed to addressing their concerns within the bounds of the law.
- **Include relevant stakeholders:** Parent complaints regarding the divisive concepts law or teaching sensitive topics should not be addressed in isolation. Include relevant stakeholders such as the grade level chair and the principal to promote transparency in the decision-making process. Parents can have confidence that their concerns are being taken seriously and that the school's leadership is aware of and engaged in the resolution process.
- **Offer Resources:** Provide parents with resources, such as district policies, websites, or documents, where they can find more information about the law and your district's approach.
- **Follow the proper school procedures to address parent complaints:** The next steps should include any steps outlined in the school's procedures when addressing parents' complaints about teaching sensitive topics. For example, a school procedure may include documenting the complaint using a parent complaint form.
- **Document the Conversation:** After the conversation, document the key points discussed, any agreed-upon action items, and the date of the conversation for future reference.

Parent Complaint Scenarios

The section below contains scenario-based talking points that may be used if a parent calls or approaches a teacher to complain about sensitive topics taught. Though the talking points are written to be used verbally, the points can easily be translated into written form.

Important:

Remember, take the stance of listening to understand and not listening to defend.

SCENARIO 1

Parent/Guardian: "Janeen came home crying about how we, white people, treated Black people during slavery. She was uncontrollably upset. I send my child to school to learn and not to have her emotions wrecked because a teacher makes her feel bad for being white.
What are you going to do about this? This is unacceptable. I know the law, and talking about slavery is against the law."

AFFIRM

"Thank you for sharing your concerns with me. I can imagine, as a parent, it was unnerving seeing your child upset coming home from school.

I really appreciate you sharing your concerns. If I understand correctly, Janeen was upset because the lesson made her feel bad for being white and you believe teaching about slavery is against the law. Did I understand your concerns correctly?"

Remember: Listen to understand.

INQUIRE

"Can you tell me if Janeen shared with you specifically what upset her about the lesson?"

What are your concerns about the lesson?

Have you thought about how we can resolve your concerns and make sure that Janeen has an emotionally safe learning environment?"

Remember: Listen to understand.

RESPOND

"I understand. Please know I did not intend to upset any of my students because of a lesson I taught.

I know we both want to make sure that Janeen learns and has a positive experience in the classroom. She's such a great student and always engages in our class discussions.

As part of the Georgia Standards of Excellence, we're required to teach slavery to our students as part of American history. It's not against the law to talk about slavery, but the law does govern a list of 9 topics that we cannot discuss. I'll share an overview of the law to help clarify more.

As a district, we recognize the sensitive nature of some topics. It's our goal to provide our students with a safe learning environment and a learning experience that encourages them to understand multiple perspectives to foster critical thinking about the historical events and experiences of peoples across cultures, race, gender, socioeconomic factors, and other social identifiers.

Given the nature of the events that took place during slavery, it's understandable that the content might upset some of my students. It's a balance I have to navigate because I have to teach the standards and I understand the topics can be difficult to learn. I want to make sure we resolve your concerns."

TAKE ACTION

"I'd love to schedule a time for us to meet with Janeen to understand what was upsetting and to develop a plan to ensure she learns the content, given the topic of slavery is a Georgia State requirement.

I'll follow up with you via email and include Hope Jenkins, my grade-level chair, to meet and plan how we'll best support Janeen in a way where she feels comfortable and learns the information required by the state. I'll also send you an overview of the law.

I'll need you to complete the Parent Complaint form first so we can make sure we have a record of your concerns. I'll share the link with you as well."

TIP:

Be sure to follow up all in-person and telephone conversations in writing.

SCENARIO 2

Parent/Guardian: "I just found out that my son is reading "Beloved" by Toni Morrison. Isn't that a banned book? I do not want my son reading that book. I feel uncomfortable with the topics, and I have concerns about how you're presenting the topics in the context of classroom discussions. Isn't there another book that you should be teaching kids?"

How does having kids read a book about a woman who killed her daughter to spare her from slavery align with the standards? It doesn't promote inclusivity. I'm going to report this to the school board."

AFFIRM

"Thank you for sharing your concerns with me. I understand your concerns, and I want to make sure that you receive the clarity and answers you need to resolve your complaints.

I remember when my son was in middle school, and there was a book that I wasn't comfortable with him reading. I can relate to your concerns."

Remember: Listen to understand.

INQUIRE

"Can you tell me more about your concerns regarding the text?"

Would you be open to having your son read an alternate text with the same historical context as "Beloved"?

What would you like to see the district do to resolve your concerns?"

Remember: Listen to understand.

RESPOND

"Thank you for helping me to understand what you need to resolve your concerns.

We want to make sure that your son has a positive learning experience that honors his lived experiences and your expectations as a parent that will also ensure he learns the content aligned with standards.

I'm unsure if you're aware, but the author, Toni Morrison is a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and the book, "Beloved" won the Pulitzer Prize and has received international acclaim. The book has helped to facilitate thought-provoking dialogue among students and provided an avenue for students to think critically and consider the perspectives of Black people during that time period.

Though the book is on the approved reading list for the district, as a district, we recognize the sensitive nature of some topics, and it's our goal to provide our students with a safe learning environment and a learning experience that encourages them to understand multiple perspectives to foster critical thinking.

We have to balance teaching the standards in a way that respects the diversity of all of our students. I want to make sure that we resolve your concerns."

TAKE ACTION

"I'd love to schedule a time for us to meet with the principal and our Area Superintendent to resolve your concerns,

I'll follow up with you via email to schedule a time to meet and develop a plan on how we'll best support your son so that you both feel comfortable and that he learns the information required by the state. I'll need you to complete the Parent Complaint form first so we can make sure we have a record of your concerns."



APPENDIX

APPENDIX

I. EXAMPLES OF REPORTED PARENT COMPLAINTS REPORTED DUE TO DIVISIVE CONCEPTS LAW

The following complaints were gathered from local news outlets to denote the types of complaints that have been escalated to the school board and/or through legal proceedings.

Inappropriate Supplemental Material Cobb County Public Schools (August 2023)

Complaint: Parents in the Cobb County Public Schools complained that a read-aloud from “My Shadow is Purple” by the fifth-grade teacher, Ms. Katie Rinderlie, was inappropriate. Parents complained the book violated the divisive concepts law because it contained themes of gender identity and sexuality. The story is about a child whose shadow isn’t blue or pink. Rinderlie instructed her students to use they/them pronouns when referring to the main character in the book. Superintendent Chris Ragsdale stated that Rinderlie’s refusal to acknowledge that her conduct was inappropriate exacerbated the situation and led to formal disciplinary action against her. Complaints about texts read in Rinderlie’s class also predate the 2023 complaint. In 2022, parents complained that Rinderlie read a book by gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, alleging that reading a book by a current candidate for office was politically divisive.

Rinderlie is the first public school teacher in Georgia to face disciplinary action under the divisive concepts law. Though her lesson did not introduce concepts of race, the district is accusing Rinderlie of violating the Parent’s Bill of Rights, an accompanying piece of legislation passed alongside the divisive concepts law. The Parents Bill of Rights allows parents to “learn about the child’s courses of study and object to instructional materials which they feel are “divisive or harmful to minors” and withdraw their children from sex education at the school.” The board also accuses Rinderlie of introducing personal political beliefs, introducing sensitive topics that require the permission of parents or guardians, and violating the ethics code. The ethical violation is based on the fact that Rinderlie “failed to acknowledge” that the book introduced inappropriate themes around sex and sexuality during the investigation.

Resolution: Rinderlie was put on leave by the Cobb County district and faced a tribunal on August 10. Her lawyers argue that her termination is unjustified and that the book is about inclusivity rather than sexual identity and sexual education.

Link to Report: [5 Things to Know: Cobb County Teacher Faces Hearing Over Divisive Concepts Book](#)²⁷

Indoctrination in the Classroom Gwinnett County Schools, Georgia (August 2020)

Complaint: Two parents complained that McGaughey had a Black Lives Matter poster in her virtual classroom. The parents alleged that McGaughey was “indoctrinating their children and that they were concerned she would only focus on ‘Black stuff’.”

Resolution: Gwinnett County Public Schools spokeswoman Sloan Roach said that while McGaughey was not required to take down the poster, she was asked to consider how to avoid making the poster a distraction for her students. McGaughey said she was told by Human Resources that she didn’t have to remove the poster but that it “impacts her effectiveness as a teacher” and that there would be further consequences if other parents complained. McGaughey stated that she posted the poster in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd to demonstrate to her Black students that she was an ally and to send the message to all of her students: “You matter, and you are safe here.”

Link to Report: [Gwinnett Teacher Under Fire Over Black Lives Matter Poster](#)²⁸

Inappropriate Books Forsyth County Schools, Georgia (May 2023)

²⁷. Alexander 2023

²⁸. Walker 2020

Complaint: Citizens in Forsyth County, including parents and advocates, raised an objection to the school board regarding 100 books they deemed sexually explicit and inappropriate for students. Of these, Forsyth County schools removed eight books, including “The Bluest Eye” by Toni Morrison. One parent asked that books dealing with LGBTQ characters, themes, and issues be shelved separately from other books. Some advocacy groups argued that books were targeted to exclude the experiences of people of color and LGBTQ people from the school libraries.

Resolution: In May 2023, the US Department of Education found that while the challenge to books based on the inclusion of sexually explicit material was valid, the communications at board meetings about the removal of books may have created a “hostile environment for students” and that the district’s “responsive steps related to the library book screening process were not sufficient to ameliorate any resultant racially or sexually hostile environment.” The district agreed to issue a statement explaining the library book removal process and offer supports to students impacted by that process, to administer a climate survey of the student body to assess if additional steps need to be taken to encourage an inclusive environment, and to implement ongoing monitoring until the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights is confident that no federal civil rights laws are at issue.

Link to Report:

- [U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights Resolves Investigation of the Removal of Library Books in Forsyth County Schools in Georgia](#)²⁹
- [Forsyth County school library book removals may have created ‘hostile environment,’](#)³⁰

Indoctrination in the Classroom Burlington, Wisconsin (August 2020)

Complaint: Fourth-grade teacher Melissa Statz developed and taught a lesson about the Black Lives Matter Movement in the wake of local protests about the death of Jacob Blake. The students were discussing the protests, and Statz decided to use a children’s book, educational video, and worksheet to discuss the following questions with her students: “What is the Black Lives Matter Movement trying to do? How do we stop systemic racism?” A parent posted the worksheet Statz used with her students to social media, claiming that it was being used to “indoctrinate” students. Social media conflict escalated; parents showed up to the school board meeting to complain, racist graffiti was put on the school campus, and threatening messages were sent to Statz.

Resolution: Amid conflict on social media, over 200 community members attended a September 14 board meeting to discuss Statz’s lesson. Some defended Statz, saying she had made efforts to form a more inclusive environment for students of color in the majority-white district; others called for her job, saying she pushed a personal agenda on students. The district issued a statement in which they did not call Statz by name but said she would not be fired over a one-time use of curricular materials. Statz later said that she had a conversation with her principal but was not formally disciplined.

Link to Report: [How one teacher’s Black Lives Matter lesson divided a small Wisconsin town](#)³¹

²⁹ U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights Resolves Investigation of the Removal of Library Books in Forsyth County Schools in Georgia | U.S. Department of Education 2023

³⁰ Associated Press and Amy 2023

³¹ Kingkade 2020

II. GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS³²

Words have deep meaning. Having a shared understanding of common terms and concepts will help contextualize lived experiences and create a pathway to understanding. Having common language lays the groundwork for productive conversations and can help prevent assumptions or misaligned understandings. Work around sensitive topics becomes detoured because the same terms are used with one another but have a different meaning. The results can be confusion and misunderstanding – which, at its worst, causes dissension and distrust.

Important Note:

This is not an exhaustive list of terms but, instead, a place to start to define the terms for districts to refine and share with their stakeholders.

HB 1084: PROTECT STUDENTS FIRST ACT

The following terms are related to and directly included in the Protect Students First Act:

1. **HB 1084:** Known as the Protect Students First Act, was passed into law on April 28, 2022. The law stipulates that no local board of education, public elementary or secondary school administrator, teacher or other personnel can promote “divisive concepts” either in direct instruction, professional development, employee training, supplemental instructional materials, or classroom discussions.
2. **Divisive Concepts:** Nine topics outlined in the Protect Students First Act that may not be taught in direct instruction, professional development, employee training, supplemental instructional materials, or classroom discussions. The following topics are considered divisive, as outlined in HB 1084:
 - a. One race is inherently superior to another race
 - b. The United States of America is fundamentally racist
 - c. An individual, by virtue of his or her race, is inherently or consciously racist or oppressive toward individuals of other races
 - d. An individual should be discriminated against or receive adverse treatment solely or partly because of his or her race
 - e. An individual’s moral character is inherently determined by his or her race
 - f. An individual, only because of his or her race, bears individual responsibility for actions committed in the past by other individuals of the same race
 - g. An individual, only because of his or her race, should feel anguish, guilt, or any other form of psychological distress
 - h. Individual achievements or character traits such as a hard work ethic are racist or were created by individuals of a particular race to oppress individuals of another race
 - i. Any other form of race scapegoating or race stereotyping
3. **Dominance:** Power and influence over others.
4. **Psychological Distress:** Negative stress response, often involving negative affect and physiological reactivity; a type of stress that results from being overwhelmed by demands, losses, or perceived threats.
5. **Race:** Social construct used to describe individuals who hold similar and distinctive traits, most often the pigmentation of their skin. Human groups can be differentiated into particular subgroups based on physical characteristics and geographic origins.
6. **Sensitive Topics:** Topics that are likely to prompt a strong emotional response from students (such as distress or anger). The topics could impact students’ sense of identity, values, and beliefs and prompt reactions, causing psychological distress.
7. **Oppression:** Systemic use of institutional power and ideological and cultural dominance, resulting in one group benefiting at the expense of another; the use of power and the effects of domination.
8. **Scapegoating:** Social phenomenon whereby members of an aggrieved majority group retaliate against innocent third parties, usually members of vulnerable minority groups.³³

³² Many of the key terms in this section were taken from the National Association of School Psychologists’ (“Social Justice Definitions” 2021).

³³ Želinský et al. 2021

9. **Critical Race Theory:** Practice or theoretical framework of interrogating the role of race and racism in society that emerged in the legal academy and spread to other fields of scholarship.³⁴

RACE:

The following terms are related to race and systemic racism. Classroom discussions and lessons that include topics around race using some of the following terms may cause distress for some students.

1. **Discrimination:** Inappropriate treatment of people because of their actual or perceived group membership; may include both overt and covert behaviors, including microaggressions, or indirect or subtle behaviors (e.g., comments) that reflect negative attitudes or beliefs about a minoritized group.
2. **Historically Excluded:** Populations that have been, and may continue to be, denied rights, dignity, or access that are afforded others within a society.
3. **Racism:** System of oppression advancing white supremacy through a socially constructed racial hierarchy privileging white people based on perceived value based on assumptions of ancestry and phenotypic properties. This system of oppression unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and ultimately undermines the full potential of the whole society through the waste of human resources (Jones, 2000).
4. **Systemic (Institutional) Oppression:** “Systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person’s membership in the social identity group.”³⁵

GENDER:

The following terms³⁶ are related to gender identity. Class discussions and lessons that include topics around gender using some of the following terms may cause distress for some students.

1. **Gender identity:** Individual’s sense of their own gender (e.g., as a male, female, transgender, nonbinary).
2. **Gender expression:** Individual who presents their gender to others through physical appearance and behavior—this may include, but is not limited to, dress, voice, or movement.
3. **Gender diverse:** Addresses the spectrum of gender identities and expressions, including but not limited to: transgender, non-binary and cisgender.
4. **Transgender:** Person whose identity differs from the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.
5. **Non-binary:** Person who does not identify exclusively as a male and female. A non-binary person may identify as being both male and female, or not a part of either of these categories.
6. **Cisgender:** Person whose identity does not differ from the sex and gender assigned to them at birth.

OTHER TERMS:

The terms in this section have been found in reports and news articles around the conversation of divisive concepts. It is important to note these terms as they may cause dissension and sensitivity for key stakeholders.

1. **Disempower:** Cause (a person or a group of people) to be less likely than others to succeed or to prevent (a person or group) from having power, authority, or influence.
2. **Objective history:** Approach to teaching history that is factual and substantiated with research-based evidence. It implies an approach to teaching history free from personal bias and sentiments and devoid of a narrow, one-sided, personal, and partial interpretation of historical events.

³⁴. George 2021

³⁵. “Social Justice Definitions” 2021

³⁶. “Social Justice Definitions” 2021

3. **Indoctrination:** Process of teaching or re-educating someone in unquestionably and uncritically accepting certain beliefs or values.
4. **Social justice:** Equal distribution of resources and treatment to all students, regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or any other difference.
5. **Social emotional learning:** Process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.
6. **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** Culturally responsive teaching recognizes the importance of including all students' cultural references and backgrounds into the curriculum and learning experience. (Ladson Billings, 1994). It is a strengths-based approach that views students' cultural differences as skills to build upon rather than deficits to be fixed.

It is strongly recommended that districts define these terms in a way that is responsive to its community context, developed and shared across departments and that grounds conversations around sensitive topics.

III. Sample Lesson Plan on Sensitive Topic: Voting Rights

Social Studies

Date: Month XX 2xx

Week-at-A-Glance				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
The True History Of Voting Rights	-	-	-	Unit Quiz
Lesson Objective(s):	<p>At the end of the lesson, SWBAT (Students will be able to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize that the expansion of voting rights in the United States has not been a smooth path nor has it been a history of continuous progress. Connect the history of voter suppression in the U.S. to the present. Register to vote, if eligible 			
Alignment to CCSS: (Command Core State Standard)	<p><u>English Language Art Standards History/Social Studies Grade 6&8</u> CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.6.8.1 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.6.8.2</p> <p><u>English Language Art Standards History/Social Studies Grade 9&10</u> CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.1 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.2 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.7</p> <p><u>English Language Art Standards History/Social Studies Grade 9&10</u> CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.1 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.2 CCSS ELA-LITERACY RH.9.10.7</p>			
Alignment to GSE	<p>SSGC16 Analyze the difference between involuntary and voluntary participation in civic life.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how and why citizens are required by law to pay tax, serve on jury, and register for military duty. Describe how citizens voluntarily and responsibly participate in the political process by voting. Performing public service, being informed about current issues, and respecting differing opinions. Explain the meaning and history of the Pledge of Allegiance. 			

Essential Questions

- Is voting a right or a privilege?
- What is the “Story of voting rights” we tell about the United States?
- What is the actual “story of voting rights” in the United States?

Introduction to new raw material**Vocabulary:**

Franchise [fran-chize] (noun): a right or privilege that a government guarantees its people. This usually refers to the right to vote. The verb “**enfranchise**” means to grant the right to vote to a person or group of people. The verb “**disenfranchise**” means to take the right to vote away from a person or group of people.

Voter Suppression [voh-ter suh-press-shun] (noun): an effort or activity designed to prevent people from voting by making voting impossible, dangerous or just very difficult. Voter suppression can be legal and organized (for example, literacy tests or laws limiting the number of polling places), illegal and organized (for example, mailers or robocalls telling people to vote on the wrong day), or illegal and unorganized (for example, an individual showing up to a polling place to intimidate others into not voting).

Materials:

Handout: Voting Rights Cards (Printed and cut or Cropped, with one card distributed to each student)

Handout: Voting Rights Timeline

Lesson Procedure

1. Start with a warm-up to get students thinking about the history of voting and voting rights in the United States. Ask them to write down one fact they already know about the topic and have two or three students share out. This is a good time to introduce the idea that there’s a “story of voting rights” most of us are familiar with, and that many believe that in the United States, the fight for voting rights ended in the 1960s.
2. Distribute the Voting Rights Cards, and have the five students With “Constitutional Amendment” cards line up in chronological order.
3. Ask all students to take two minutes and write a sentence or two that tells “the story of voting rights” we get when we only consider the Constitutional Amendments. Have one or two students share these stories. After they do, you might point out that that the common story of voting in the United States is one of continuous expansion: The right to vote is extended and extended and extended again until all Americans are included. But we know that’s not the whole story.
4. Have students divide into two teams, according to their cards: 1776–1964 and 1965–present. Ask each team to work on one side of the room to create a “human timeline,” lining up in chronological order as quickly as possible.
5. Once students have formed their “human timeline,” have them share aloud in chronological order, reading their date and its corresponding event. As they share, define any unfamiliar vocabulary (e.g., poll tax, ratified) and check for understanding. After the timeline’s been read aloud, share a copy of the complete Voting Rights Timeline with students, so they have all of the dates in one place.
6. Divide students into groups of three. Ask each group to read through the timeline and write a more accurate two-to three-sentences “Story of voting rights”
7. Come back together as a class and have each group share their story. When necessary, summarize these more complicated “stories of voting rights” and supplement them with evidence from the timeline when possible.
8. Explain to students that, even though the fight for voting rights often talked about like it’s in the past, it’s still unfolding today. Share a few key statistics about voting:

- 2 out of 5 Americans don't vote in Presidential elections.
- 3 of 5 Americans don't vote in midterm elections.
- 1 of 5 Americans isn't registered to vote.

Ask students to take two minutes to list as many reasons as they can think of that explain why voters turnout it so low in the United States.

9. Give students a minute to share aloud. You can explain that most of the reasons people don't register and vote fit into one of the three category:
 - People don't vote because they don't have the right to vote.
 - People don't vote because voting is too difficult or dangerous.
 - People don't vote because they don't think their vote makes a difference.

It may be useful to list these categories on the board so students will be able to refer back.

10. Using these categories as your starting point, list the lesson's vocabulary terms—franchise (including "disenfranchise") and voter suppression—on the board. Invite students to share additional examples of voter suppression or disenfranchisement they may have heard about, referring back to the first two reasons people often don't vote. Ask clarifying questions to ensure students understand the difference between the two.
11. Ask students to look back through the timeline and consider the question, "How have disenfranchisement and voter suppression shaped the history of voting rights in the United States?" Allow them time to respond.
12. Explain that we might think of voter disengagement as a lighter form of voter suppression: That's the third reason some people choose not to register or vote—People don't register or vote because they think their vote doesn't make a difference. Remind students that this is a message we hear a lot: the system is rigged, or one vote won't matter, or politics doesn't really affect my life. When these messages are targeted to certain communities, they become a form of voter suppression.
13. If the time permits, give students two minutes to free write some arguments they might make to encourage people to vote. Have them answer aloud.

Students Accommodation

XX: guided notes, graphic organizers, preferential seating, verbatim reading
 XX: guided notes, graphic organizers, preferential seating, lightened workload
 XX: guided notes, graphic organizers, extra time

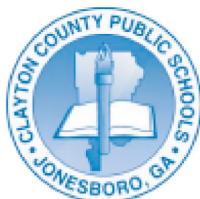
Closing: Recap Lesson, Exit Ticket

Extension Activities:

- [Take 10 minutes to Register Future Voters Today](#)
- [Do Something: My Voice, My voter's Guide](#)
- [Voting in your own town](#)

³⁷. Learning for Justice, n.d.

III. Example of Social Studies Disclaimer, Clayton County



Clayton County Public Schools Office of the Superintendent

1058 Fifth Avenue • Jonesboro, Georgia 30236 • (770) 473-2712

DR. MORCEASE J. BEASLEY
Superintendent/CEO of Schools

REGINA WALLACE
Coordinator, K-12 Social Studies

September 1, 2022

Dear Clayton County Public Schools,

The Clayton County Public Schools (CCPS) Department of Social Studies ensures that both teachers and students have access to a well-rounded, academically challenging curriculum that supports the teaching of the Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE). The core and supplemental resources, such as Document Based Questions or Unit Preview Day materials, are provided to support standard mastery. It is important to note that while resources are vetted and selected based on quality, relevance, and standards alignment, Clayton County Public Schools is not responsible for the views expressed in such documents.

The GSE standards reflect the minimum requirement to be taught. The GSE for Social Studies are primarily organized into four domains; geography, history, government, and economics and cover a variety of topics, including but not limited to, the founding philosophy and principles of the United States of America, the structure of our government, slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, women's suffrage, and the history of minority groups such as American Indians. CCPS Department of Social Studies trains our teachers to teach the GSE and to use instructional materials as written and provided by the GaDOE and those approved by our local board of education. For further guidance, teachers are directed to the Teacher Notes and Teacher Content Tutorial Videos from the GaDOE. Clayton County Public Schools is not responsible for the views expressed in documents, videos, and images that are not created by the District.

According to the historical thinking skills developed by the National Center for History in the Schools, students must understand multiple perspectives, which means learning about historical events and people that have diverse views. In order to teach students how to "think like a historian," we must expose our students to historical documents with varied viewpoints. The teacher must provide a historical context that allows students to think critically about multiple perspectives and

Clayton County Public Schools
www.clayton.k12.ga.us

help them understand the historical setting of each document. The Social Studies Georgia Milestones assesses all of the aforementioned skills. Therefore, we must do our due diligence to prepare students to be successful by exposing them to a variety of educational experiences.

America's history, as well as the world's history, is full of events that will continue to show up in our state standards. Also, our curriculum would not be complete without making connections between the past and the present, discussing current events, and making it relevant for our students now. When doing so, it is our job as social studies educators, among other things, to 1) provide students the opportunity to learn about history and current events using the content standards, 2) afford students the opportunity to learn about varied perspectives, 3) teach students to critically think about how historical trends manifest into current events and systems, and 4) support students in the learning process as they determine the beliefs and ideals they will adhere to for their lives.

Clayton County Public Schools acknowledge parents' rights to not have their children engage in learning about certain topics that extend on the standards, and the teachers in collaboration with the principal and parents may provide appropriate standards-based alternative assignments for those students. Parents are encouraged to visit the following I-policies to learn more about instructional considerations: IKB (Controversial Issues); IFAA (Instructional Materials Selection and Adoption); and IFBC (Media Programs).



Dr. Morcease J. Beasley
Superintendent / CEO of Schools



Ms. Regina Wallace
Coordinator, K-12 Social Studies

IV. Key Takeaway from Georgia's Extended Framework for Teaching

The Georgia Framework for Teaching chart below highlights areas of instruction that demonstrate effective teaching. It is evident in this framework that Georgia supports teaching topics that may be considered sensitive, and such instruction does not violate the law. **Items highlighted in red explain that effective, accomplished, and advanced teaching considers the entire well-being of a student, is sensitive to a student's cultural identity, elevates such unique and diverse/multicultural backgrounds in learning, and involves parents in this learning in an objective manner.**

Utilizing this framework also enhances student learning experiences, as demonstrated by the **green** highlights in the chart below. **When teachers engage in effective teaching, students feel affirmed in the classroom, participate comfortably in class discussions, and leverage instructional material to support their learning in an objective manner.**

ADVANCED TEACHING

When teachers are teaching at an ADVANCED level for a given indicator, this may be evidenced by the following:

<p>Abide by laws related to the rights and responsibilities of students, educators, and families.</p>	<p>Explain and easily locate policies and procedures for addressing the legal rights and responsibilities of teachers, students, and families.</p> <p>Provide accurate information about laws related to rights and responsibilities to students, families, community members, and new educators, including where to go if laws are broken.</p> <p>Involve families in caring and sensitive discussions about student needs, rights, and responsibilities.</p>	<p>Seek support from teachers when they feel wrongfully treated.</p> <p>Receive accurate information from teachers about their rights and responsibilities as covered by law.</p> <p>Collaborate to learn with teachers and families.</p>
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ACCOMPLISHED TEACHING³⁸

When teachers are teaching at an ACCOMPLISHED level for a given indicator, this may be evidenced by the following:

Indicator(s)	Teacher Evidence	Student Evidence
<p>Are sensitive, alert, and responsive to all aspects of a child's well-being.</p>	<p>Recognize that learning is dependent on one's well-being and therefore readily accept the role of the teacher as a child advocate.</p> <p>Work with other teachers and school personnel to build a comprehensive picture of each child and his/her needs.</p>	<p>Demonstrate a sense of comfort and well-being in the classroom and the school.</p> <p>Are protected, when appropriate and necessary, in settings outside the school through the help of school personnel.</p>

³⁸. Georgia Extended Framework for Teaching 2005

<p>Are sensitive to and use knowledge of students' unique cultures, experiences, and communities to sustain a culturally responsive classroom.</p>	<p>Involve students, parents, colleagues, and the community in celebrating, being sensitive to, and supporting all cultures and groups.</p> <p>Infuse discussions of race, class, gender in their teaching, helping students negotiate the world as it is but also critique inequities.</p> <p>Examine strengths and weaknesses of multicultural curriculum designs and instructional materials and make necessary changes (e.g., quantity, accuracy, complexity, placement, purpose, variety, significance, authenticity of narrative texts, visual illustrations, learning activities, role models, authorial sources).</p> <p>Acknowledge unapologetically the reality of their own race/ethnicity /heritage and accept roles and responsibilities of being an ally to those from nondominant cultures.</p> <p>Recognize that status (social class, etc.) influences access to power.</p>	<p>Work with teachers, parents, and the community to plan activities that encourage appreciation of diversity.</p> <p>Participate comfortably and knowledgeable for their age in discussions of races, class, and gender as these characteristics impact themselves and others.</p> <p>Produce products that demonstrate personal connections with content.</p> <p>Use appropriate, well-considered, multicultural materials as a normal, on-going part of learning in the classroom and school.</p> <p>Recognize their teachers as advocates who strive to better learning conditions for all students.</p>
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SDPBC Voluntary Employee Networking Groups

Overview

Last updated April 7, 2023

Section 1: About Employee Networking Groups

The School District of Palm Beach County's Voluntary Employee Networking Groups (VENGs) will serve as a means to harness the talents and productive energy of our employees, provide opportunities for professional and personal growth, and foster an inclusive organizational culture. The VENGs are employee-led and are formed around common demographics, characteristics, or shared interests.



Voluntary Employee Networking Groups include:

- Black Excellence
- Empower HER
- Great Beginnings
- Haitians Stronger Together
- Healthy Thinking, Healthy Living
- Hispanic
- Pride & Allies

Section 2: Alignment

Voluntary Employee Networking Groups are purposefully aligned with SDPBC's vision, mission, as well as the district's Equity Statement: The School District of Palm Beach County will embrace, celebrate and honor our students, families, staff and community members and their unique cultural histories, while ensuring each student achieves personal, academic and sustainable success.

Objectives of the groups include:

1. Networking
2. Support

Section 3: Membership

All full and part-time employees of SDPBC are eligible to participate in Voluntary Employee Networking Groups, and all groups are inclusive of employees not matching the demographic or characteristic background around which they are centered. Both instructional and non-instructional employees may participate in VENGs equally. Membership in the groups is terminated if employment with the district is terminated. A Google Classroom will be created to manage membership and communication with each VENG.

Registration link: [Voluntary Employee Networking Groups - join now!](#)

Section 4: VENG Leadership

Each VENG is required to have a leadership team that leads the overall group.

4.1 Leadership Expectations

It is critical that we consider the impact of all actions on the future of this important work. A collaborative leadership team will serve to keep all leaders in the loop with the benefit of multiple perspectives.

Each leadership team member is expected to adhere to the leadership structure and to understand he/she is representing the School District of Palm Beach County in this role. It is, therefore, imperative that all decisions regarding the VENG are made collectively and in collaboration with the entire leadership team (Ambassadors, Consultant, Liaison, and Coordinator). All plans, events, and speakers must be discussed by the entire leadership team. **(Anything not created in collaboration with the leadership team must be presented to the leadership team before it can be shared.)** All leadership team members are expected to be included (CCd not BCCd) on all communications regarding anything related to the VENG.

While the giving of your time and talents is greatly appreciated, it is imperative that all leaders function together as a team. Therefore, failure to comply fully with this expectation can result in a suspension of duties as the VENG Ambassador, dismissal, or other penalty. Any infractions will be reviewed by the Consultant and Executive Liaison with the guidance of the VENG Coordinator.

4.2 Leadership Roles:

Each VENG is to have the following leadership roles: Volunteer Ambassadors (formerly Officers)

The **Volunteer Ambassadors** (formerly officers) will engage in the following:

1. Building collaborative relationships and providing supportive VENG spaces
2. Keeping the focus of the VENG on district employees, not students (About Us. By Us. For Us.)
3. Determining the purpose and scope of the “networking”
4. Attending VENG Council Meetings at least twice per year and Planning Hours for planning purposes
5. Checking in with your VENG Consultant at least two days before the VENG Hour
6. Organizing and/or facilitating “Hour” sessions and events
7. Recording planning notes, capturing Google Meet chats, preparing correspondence, etc.
8. Creating (and vetting) weekly posts in Google Classroom including a reminder and agenda each Hour, follow-up for each Hour, etc.
 - a. All Volunteer Ambassadors in addition to the VENG Consultant and VENG Coordinator will have edit rights in the Google Classroom with the “teacher” role.

4.3 Leadership Selection Process

All full and part-time employees of SDPBC are eligible to participate in the Voluntary Employee Networking Groups and serve in the Volunteer Ambassador leadership roles within the groups. Employees can either be nominated or volunteer for positions. Nominated individuals have the right to reject any nomination without question or explanation.

Nominations for Ambassador must be submitted to the group’s Consultant and Coordinator for approval and can be submitted at any time during the school year. The term for the Volunteer Ambassador is one school year ending in May.

Section 5: Support Structure

The VENGs are jointly supported by the group's Consultant and the Executive Liaison in collaboration with the VENGs Coordinator.

The **VENG Consultant** (formerly Advocate) is the primary point-of-contact for support for the VENG leadership team. Guidance for events, communication pieces, etc. and everyday requests for input are to be directed to the VENG Consultant via the group's appointed leadership team.

The **VENG Consultant** (formerly Advocates) will engage in the following:

1. Hosting the first "Hour" of each new school year, in collaboration with the Coordinator, to welcome members and discuss the framework of the group
2. Helping to build collaborative relationships and provide supportive VENG spaces
3. Helping to keep the focus of the VENG on district employees, not students (About Us. By Us. For Us.)
4. Participating in each VENG Council Meeting at least twice per year and Planning Hour to support the Volunteer Ambassadors as they prepare for the upcoming Hour or event
5. Participating in the "General Hour" when possible
6. Responding to posts in Google Classroom to engage with participants when possible; post information when available

The **Executive Liaison** is available to provide input and guidance on group plans, and to help champion the group's initiatives throughout the organization. Specific details of the relationship between an individual VENG and their Executive Liaison - preferred method of communication, etc. - is a result of an agreement between the group leaders and the liaison.

The **Executive Liaison** will engage in the following:

1. Helping to build collaborative relationships and provide supportive VENG spaces
2. Helping to keep the focus of the VENG on district employees, not students (About Us. By Us. For Us.)
3. Participating in VENG Council Meeting and Planning Hour when available
4. Attending "General Hours" to specifically engage with participants to determine opportunities for additional support
5. Relaying group concerns and/or opportunities for additional support to upper leadership

The **VENG Coordinator** is an additional source of support for the VENG leadership team, particularly the Consultant who is supporting the Ambassadors.

1. Managing the master calendar and coordinating activities across all VENGs
2. Facilitating the VENG Council Meetings and Leadership Google Classroom
3. Managing the team@palmbeachschools.org email account and forwarding emails as needed

The **VENG Council** will consist of the Consultant, Executive Liaison, the Volunteer Ambassadors of each group as well as the VENG Coordinator and other appointed stakeholders. The purpose of the Council is to maintain open communication and collaboration between all SDPBC Employee Networking Groups. In addition to having access to a Google Classroom for Leaders, the Council will meet three times per year.

Section 6: Tentative Implementation Action Steps

1. In collaboration with the VENG Consultant and Executive Liaison, the VENG Coordinator develops materials to introduce the group to advertise the groups through:
 - SDPBC Newsletters
 - Email blasts
 - The Hub
 - Ads on interoffice note-boards
 - Networking with staff
2. The VENG membership opens to all stakeholders and the date of the first meeting is communicated.
 - Google Classroom created for the group
3. The VENG Consultant, in collaboration with the Coordinator, will host the first session to welcome participants and to discuss the framework of the group.
4. The VENG Consultant and Executive Liaison will release facilitation of the subsequent sessions to the Volunteer Ambassadors after the volunteers attend a planning session.
5. General meetings will be planned and facilitated by the Volunteer Ambassador(s) with the support and guidance of the Consultant and Executive Liaison.

Section 7: Measurement & Accountability

Each VENG is expected to continually monitor the success and alignment via the feedback of group members.

Section 8: New Group Formation

In the instance of starting a new Employee Networking Group, the VENG Coordinator will work with the interested individuals to assess the potential of the group's formation, determine the group's purpose, mission and objectives, and identify an Executive Liaison.

[Voluntary ENG Request Form](#)

Networking: [ENG ToolKit](#) and [A ToolKit for ENGs](#)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS | FAQs

General

1. What is the “Protect Students First Act,” and what is its purpose?

A new law passed in Georgia that requires teachers not to espouse personal beliefs and defines nine concepts deemed divisive that are prohibited from being taught in school ([See Overview of Divisive Concepts pp.8-9](#)).

2. Is this law applicable to charter schools?

Yes, the Protect Students First Act is applicable to both traditional public and public charter schools.

3. What are the potential consequences or penalties for non-compliance?

There are many potential consequences for non-compliance both at the system and individual levels. At the systems level, districts can have strategic waivers suspended if found to be in violation of law. At the individual level, teachers risk being fired.

4. Are there any changes or restrictions regarding curriculum selection and implementation?

There has not been an update on whether or not large-scale changes to curriculum will occur as a result of this law. Any updates and changes to curriculum will happen at the district level. Standards level changes or updates can be found at the Georgia Department of Education’s site [here](#).

5. How will the law be monitored and enforced at the school level?

All school systems were required to adopt a complaint resolution policy. This policy will guide how the law will be monitored and enforced.

6. Are there any training or professional development requirements associated with the law?

No, the law does not require teachers or school-based personnel to undergo specific training to adequately adhere to the law. However, this toolkit can serve as a guide to properly adhere to the law.

7. Are there any specific concepts or curricula that teachers are now prohibited from using or advocating for?

Yes, teachers are prohibited from promoting the nine divisive concepts discussed in the law ([See Overview of Divisive Concepts pp.8-9](#)).

For Teachers

1. How does the law impact the role and responsibilities of teachers?

This law impacts teachers in a variety of ways. Teachers now face greater limitations in preparation, instruction, and training than has been traditionally experienced or expected. This may cause teachers to have less confidence in teaching concepts that are generally objective but appear subjective based on the context. Teachers may limit utilizing supplemental instructional materials to enhance student learning due to fear of violating the law. Teachers may also not get access to professional development opportunities that train them in social-emotional learning and culturally responsive learning.

2. What are the key provisions or requirements that teachers need to be aware of?

Teachers need to be mindful of divisive concepts and ensure that their lessons are grounded in facts. Teachers must maintain objectivity during instruction and continue fostering a safe learning environment for all students, including not offering personal beliefs about sensitive topics.

3. Are there any specific steps or actions teachers must take to ensure compliance with the law?

No, there are no actions teachers must take to ensure compliance with the law aside from refraining from teaching divisive concepts.

4. How should teachers address complaints or concerns related to potential violations of the law?

Teachers should familiarize themselves with the [parent complaint form](#) (p. 40), [divisive concepts checklist](#) (p.16-17), and [complaint process overview](#) (p. 35) in this toolkit. If teachers want to handle concerns before they escalate to formal complaints, they should refer to [Tool 14](#) in the toolkit above.

5. Can teachers still affirm students' identities under this law?

Absolutely! Teachers still can and are encouraged to affirm students' identities under [Georgia's Extended Framework for Teaching pp. \(59-60\)](#).

For Administrators and District Leaders

1. How does the law impact the role and responsibilities of administrators and district leaders?

The largest burden for administrators and district leaders is the additional administrative responsibilities they must adhere to and oversee as a result of this law. It may prove difficult to objectively assess when teacher or staff actions violate the law due to the subjective nature of the complaint process and administration of the law.

2. What are the key provisions or requirements that principals need to be aware of?

Administrators and district leaders need to be mindful of divisive concepts and ensure that their staff lessons are grounded in facts. Administrators must also have a strong grasp of the complaint resolution policy.

3. Are there any specific steps or actions that administrators and district leaders must take to ensure compliance with the law?

Administrators, to the best extent possible, should review supplemental material that teachers decide to use when teaching sensitive topics. Additionally, administrators and district leaders should educate school-based instructional personnel on the law. Regardless of the format for educating such personnel (e.g., professional development), lessons (topics) must not promote or advocate for divisive concepts.

4. How should principals address complaints or concerns related to potential violations of the law?

Principals should be responsive and amenable to parent complaints. Principals should ensure that parents' concerns are handled delicately and that they are well-informed about the complaint process once a complaint is received. It is important for principals to remain unbiased throughout the process until a resolution is determined, regardless of the outcome or parties involved. Principals should refer to the [parent complaint form \(p. 40\)](#), [divisive concepts checklist \(p. 16-17\)](#), and [complaint process overview \(p. 35\)](#) in this toolkit.

5. Are there any training or professional development requirements associated with the law for administrators and district leaders?

There are no training or professional development requirements for administrators or district leaders. However, administrators and district leaders must ensure that they do not require or offer training or professional development opportunities for teachers that advocate for divisive concepts.

6. What resources or support will be provided to principals to navigate the requirements of the law?

It is up to the district/school to provide support to principals. This toolkit can serve as an additional support tool for administrators and district leaders.



CONCLUSION: LOOKING AHEAD

It is critical for all stakeholders to realize that the provisions of HB 1084 do not prohibit instruction around difficult topics; rather, the law targets the language and materials used to discuss these topics. Any suggestion that the United States is a fundamentally racist country violates the law; however, teachers can still teach that groups of people have experienced discrimination and harm in the United States based on their identities.

The creation of this toolkit represents a significant step toward fostering inclusivity, promoting thoughtful dialogue, and ensuring compliance with divisive concepts law within our educational institutions. As districts, teachers, and principals grapple with the complexities of these regulations, this resource serves as a guiding light, offering practical solutions and best practices for navigating the new landscape.

With the toolkit in hand, educators can confidently strike a balance between complying with legal mandates of the law, upholding the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and teaching how the history of the United States impacted different groups of people—elements that are essential to the holistic development of our students. By leveraging the knowledge and insights contained within this toolkit, we hope to empower our education communities to continue providing a safe environment that fosters critical thinking and respect for the lived histories and experiences of all students, where learning thrives and diversity is celebrated.

As we embark on this journey, let this toolkit be a symbol of our commitment to a future where education remains a powerful force for positive change, fostering empathy, understanding, and unity among our students, our educators, and our communities.



PROJECT TEAM

The Metro Atlanta Schools Equity Officers Consortium joined forces with Learn4Life, and commissioned Versa Impact Group to develop the HB 1084 equity toolkit to help school districts navigate the divisive concepts law. The project commenced in January 2023, and the project team worked collaboratively over six months to research and develop the content for the toolkit. The project included researching the political landscape locally in Metro-Atlanta and across target states with current laws banning teaching CRT in K-12 and an assessment of stakeholders across Atlanta-Metro to determine the resources to include in the toolkit based on the needs of teachers, principals, parents, and district leaders.

Metro Atlanta Schools Equity Officers Consortium

Metro Atlanta Schools Equity Officers Consortium (MASEC) is a professional learning community of regional district equity leaders from across the region. The Consortium meets monthly to learn and grow together as a community and share ideas and resources to ensure equity in each of their respective districts:

Districts Represented in the Consortium:

- Atlanta Public Schools
- Dekalb County School District
- Gwinnett County Public Schools
- City Schools of Decatur
- Forsyth County Schools
- Clayton County Public Schools

The Consortium served as the visionary for the “Best Practices Toolkit for HB 1084: Protect Students First Act” and provided strategic guidance throughout the development of the toolkit.

Learn4Life

Learn4Life is a collective-impact non-profit composed of people and organizations committed to improving cradle-to-career outcomes for the nearly 600,000 students in metro Atlanta’s five-county, eight-school district region. We have a vested interest in making sure all students succeed, especially those furthest from opportunity – our Black, Latinx, and low-income students, because we know Atlanta’s long-term vitality and prosperity depends on our commitment to educating our young people and preparing the next generation of leaders and citizens.

Versa Impact Group

Versa Impact Group is a team of really smart humans who nerd out on helping organizations use data to develop their strategy, people, and operations to make an impact in the world. We do the work that we’re most passionate about. Led by executive leaders with over 20 years of experience across sectors, we bring a wide spectrum of subject matter expertise in technical assistance, strategic planning, non-profit management, program design, and mixed methods research.

Versa served as the project lead in the research and development of the “Best Practices Toolkit for HB 1084: Protect Students First Act,” working alongside the Metro Atlanta Schools Equity Officers Consortium to establish the objectives of the research, conduct the research and develop the content for the toolkit.

Project Team

The Versa project team consisted of team members across the areas of policy, research, and district and school administration, and each project lead managed a team of consultants who contributed to the development of the toolkit.



Queen Nwafor
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Learn more about Versa: www.versaimpactgroup.com

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