

PARENTS AND STUDENTS
for Academic Freedom

*Without diversity of viewpoint,
there is no academic freedom.*



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Parents and Students for Academic Freedom

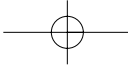
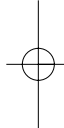
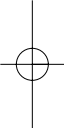
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ISBN 1-886442-37-1
Printed in the United States of America

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1. THE PURPOSES OF AN EDUCATION

America's schools have traditionally been the cornerstones of our political democracy, and the American idea of education has always been informed by the values of fairness, inclusion, and concern for the innocence of youth. The use of schools to indoctrinate children instead of to educate them is a tradition of totalitarian states and antithetical to the very idea of a democratic education. Yet all too frequently in our schools today, teachers are indoctrinating students in partisan ideologies and recruiting them for political activities and agendas to an unprecedented and worrying degree.

In a Delaware public school, for example, an eight-year-old second grader who wrote a composition declaring that he wanted to be a soldier like his grandfather was reprimanded by his teacher and told, "If you ever write anything like that again, you are going straight to the principal's office." When he informed his parents and they complained, the teacher scolded the child, accusing him of lying about the incident. The mother confirmed the story with two of the child's classmates but the child himself was so upset that he didn't want to return to class.

During the war against the Taliban following 9/11, the administration in a Catholic high school set up a table in the cafeteria where they encouraged students to send bags of rice

to President Bush to show him that the Afghan people need food, not war.

In California, "Wheels of Justice," a group organized by pro-terrorist organizations, has been allowed by high school administrators to use classrooms to proselytize students with anti-Israel, anti-American agendas.

At Santa Monica High School, teachers recruited their students to anti-war demonstrations and union picket lines with the support of the school administrators. A recent graduate of the school wrote, "My own U.S. history teacher instructed us that our nation's past fears about Communism were unjustified; in fact, that capitalism had been a sinister force in the world. We were told that through America's history as a 'terrorist nation,' she brought upon herself the sinister attacks of 9/11."

Schools once provided civic education in the principles of our democracy. But now they impose on inexperienced students radically anti-American texts like Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, and James Loewen's *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, which are regularly assigned to students of high school age in public, private and parochial institutions across the country. Howard Zinn is a well-known radical and lifetime supporter of America's Communist adversaries going back to the Korean War. After 9/11, Zinn described the United States as the world's chief terrorist state. Loewen's book portrays America as a racist, oppressive and imperialist nation whose citizens should be embarrassed by their own history. There can be no

justification for requiring these controversial screeds as authoritative texts in a high school setting.

In her book, *The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn*, author Diane Ravitch documents how political pressure groups have censored cultural and political viewpoints they disagree with in attempt to eliminate them from school curricula. The guidelines held by a typical textbook publisher she profiles include, "Women cannot be depicted as caregivers or doing household chores," and "Men cannot be lawyers or doctors or plumbers. They must be nurturing helpmates."

Often the political agendas at work are more sinister. One textbook publisher provides both text and resource material for a "Modern Middle East" curriculum that is transparently anti-Israel. The curriculum suggests that high school teachers should conduct class role-playing "exercises" in which students portraying advantaged Jews are contrasted with unfairly-treated Palestinian Arabs. The historical material presents an extremely one-sided version of the Arab-Israeli conflict, portraying Israel as a foreign entity that stole the Palestinian's "country," even though there has never been a country called Palestine and one million Palestinians who are Israeli citizens enjoy more rights in Israel than the Arabs of any other Middle Eastern country.

Unfortunately, these examples are typical rather than exceptional. The politicization of American schools has been proceeding apace since the radical decade of the 1960s. It is time to restore integrity to our educational system and to re-

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establish the respect for youth and innocence, intellectual diversity and American pluralism that were once the hallmarks of American education.

2. PARENTS AND STUDENTS FOR ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Parents and Students for Academic Freedom is an organization created for the purpose of exposing this increased politicization in the American school system, and ultimately reversing it. Its basic principles are familiar American ideas: 1) a school is an educational institution not a political party; 2) a school's resources and educational authority should be used to further learning and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, not to indoctrinate students in partisan political ideologies; and 3) the principles of academic freedom and a good education require that students have access to a diversity of viewpoints in courses, required reading texts, and in campus activities programs.

Parents and Students for Academic Freedom will promote these values with school administrations and faculties. It will also promote legislation at the state and federal level that will ensure that students are protected by a Bill of Rights designed to guarantee them an education that is fair, inclusive and non-partisan.

We are encouraging parents and students to create their own chapters of Parents and Students for Academic Freedom at all K-12 schools. Information about Parents and Students for Academic Freedom and contact information is available at www.psaf.org.

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3. THE STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS

The Student Bill of Rights codifies the principles of free speech and free inquiry first introduced by the American Association of University Professors nearly one hundred years ago.

In 1915, the American Association of University Professors issued its first report on Academic Freedom and Tenure. The premise of this report was that human knowledge is a never-ending pursuit of the truth and learning is most likely to thrive in an environment of intellectual diversity that protects and fosters independence of thought and speech. Moreover, the 1915 *General Report* admonished faculty to avoid “taking unfair advantage of the student’s immaturity by indoctrinating him [or her] with the teacher’s own opinions before the student has had an opportunity to fairly examine other opinions upon matters in question, and before he [or she] has sufficient knowledge and ripeness of judgment to be entitled to form any definitive opinion of his [or her] own.”

A second report, issued by the AAUP in 1940 declared: “Teachers are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing their subject, *but they should be careful not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter which has no relation to their subject.*” (emphasis added) In other words, political lectures, however brief, that have no relation to the subject matter of a course are violations of students’ academic rights.

The Student Bill of Rights embraces five basic principles of academic freedom. These are:

- (1) **Students will be graded solely on the basis of their reasoned answers and appropriate knowledge of the subjects and disciplines they study, and not on the basis of their political or religious beliefs (except in religious schools whose commitment to a religious doctrine is explicitly announced; this exception applies to all six principles).**
- (2) **Instructors must not use their courses for the purpose of political, ideological, religious or anti-religious indoctrination, and that the classroom will not be used to recruit students for partisan political activities or events. (Instructors and school administrators should be careful to expose students to a wide range of significant scholarly viewpoints on the subjects examined in their courses. While instructors are and should be free to express their own findings and perspectives in presenting material in the classroom, they should present and make their students aware of other significant viewpoints, particularly on controversial or politically partisan matters, and should do so in a civil and respectful manner.)**
- (3) **Textbooks should adequately reflect the uncertainty and unsettled character of human knowledge particularly in the humanities and social sciences and a variety of significant scholarly viewpoints should be made accessible to students.**

(4) Student rights and grievance procedures should be established to ensure that intellectual, political and religious diversity is explicitly recognized and protected. These rights and grievance procedures should be adequately publicized to students and parents.

(5) The use of school resources and use of school district facilities by student groups and other extracurricular activities should meet the standards articulated by the United States Supreme Court for an open forum that is fair to all viewpoints, and the selection of speakers, speakers programs, and other student activities should adequately observe the principles of academic freedom and promote intellectual pluralism.

The following are examples of violations of these principles:

Assigning required readings or texts covering only one side of controversial issues

Introducing controversial material that has no relation to the subject of the course (such as regularly making remarks on political issues in a math or science class; lecturing on the war in a class that is not about the war or about international relations)

Compelling students to express a certain point of view in assignments

Mocking national political or religious figures in a one-sided manner (singling out only liberals for ridicule, or only conservatives)

Conducting political activities in class: recruiting students to attend or participate in political demonstrations or providing extra credit for one-sided political activism

Grading a students' political or religious beliefs (grading a student more leniently when they agree with the teacher's viewpoint on matters of opinion, or more harshly if the student expresses well-reasoned views contrary to those of the teacher)

Using school funds to hold special forums or "teach-ins" which present a one-sided, unchallengeable position on partisan or sectarian topics

A model legislative resolution embracing principles articulated in the Student Bill of Rights for adoption by State Legislatures is included at the end of this booklet.

2. RESEARCHING AND DEALING WITH ABUSES

Before approaching school administrators or faculty, school board members, or legislators, it is vital to document and compile a list of abuses. This can be done through interviews of students and parents, or reports from other teachers who witness abuses by their colleagues. All abuses should be

recorded. Because this kind of information helps the cause of academic freedom wherever it is being fought, it is important to send accounts of these abuses to the website complaint section at www.psaf.org and to the national director of Parents and Students for Academic Freedom.

In all cases, the best approach is to take the complaint directly to the teacher in question. Sometimes these abuses take place inadvertently or as a result of a laxity in the educational culture of a particular school. When apprised of the concerns expressed by students and parents, teachers who are committed to high educational standards will often take immediate steps to correct the problem. Often, a simple and respectful phone call from a concerned parent is enough to remind a teacher that their mission is to educate students and help them to think for themselves, and not to promote only one side of a particular issue or partisan agenda. This is by far the best solution. But if students or parents encounter resistance or hostility from a teacher, or an unwillingness to apologize for or correct inappropriate statements or actions in the classroom, there should be no hesitation in taking the matter to higher levels.

In such cases, having an organization to provide support and to make clear that it is a matter of principle and not merely personal opinion is essential. Therefore, organizing a school chapter of Parents and Students for Academic Freedom should be a first priority in all these efforts.

Next, parents and students should take their concerns to the principal of the school. Before doing so, however, be sure

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that you have accurate and complete information regarding the nature and extent of the abuse. After calling to set up an appointment to meet with the principal in his or her office, be courteous and respectful, but firm in expressing your concerns, and in proposing a fair and reasonable solution to the problem. For example, if a teacher is providing students with textbooks or required readings that unfairly present only one side of a controversial issue, it would *not* be an appropriate solution to ban or censor the controversial readings; rather, it is a relatively easy thing for a principal to remind a teacher that their obligation as an educator is to expose students to a broad spectrum of ideas in class, asking a teacher to include a reading that fairly presents the other side of the issue, and insisting that discussion in the classroom should be civil and respectful.

Be sure and take good notes during the meeting with principal, and get firm commitments from him or her as to what action will be taken, and when such action will take place. It is a very good idea to send a follow-up letter to the principal that outlines any decisions or commitments made regarding how the abuse will be dealt with, including any acknowledgements on the part of the principal that such an abuse was inappropriate. It is even a better idea to send a copy of that letter to the teacher in question and to the head of the local school board, putting them on notice that abuses of academic freedom and the educational mission of the school will not go unnoticed.

If the principal is unwilling to act to address or prevent continued and serious abuses, parents and students should be

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prepared to take their concerns directly to members of the locally-elected school board, to the state legislature, or even to the local media. Often, it is useful to work with the leadership of the local PTA organization, church leaders, or even other civic or community organizations (such as the Rotary Club, or the local Republican Women's Club) to mobilize broad support to address the concern, and call for changes in policy to be adopted. Remember to try to propose solutions that are fair and reasonable, and proportional to the nature of the abuse.

In nearly all cases, school board meetings are open to the public. Find out from your local school district office how to get on the agenda, and come prepared with an accurate and complete description of the nature of the abuse, and a reasonable proposal on how to address it. It is a good idea to contact members of the school board in advance of the meeting to share your concerns with them privately, and elicit their support. Whenever possible, it is often a good idea to let the school board member be the one to propose potential solutions, or act as your advocate for the reforms being called for.

In the case of abuses of academic freedom or the educational mission of a school occurring at private or religious schools, find out who the members of the board of trustees are from school officials or on the school website. Contact or write a letter to these board members which outlines the nature and extent of the abuse, and asks that the board member contact the principal on your behalf to help you address the problem. A call from a member of the board of

trustees is almost certain to elicit a response on the part of the principal or teacher. Be sure to be respectful, and follow-up.

Often, a good way to highlight the nature and extent of the abuses occurring in schools throughout the state is to support the introduction of a legislative resolution in the state legislature. Since the majority of public schools are controlled at the county or local level through individually elected school boards, often the state legislature has limited authority in governing school policies by revising state statutes (i.e. passing new laws). In most cases, the individual grievance policies, curriculum decisions, and teacher hiring and firing policies are up to the local school boards. Although a legislative resolution is usually not binding in the sense of being state law, it is a forceful reminder to teachers, principals, and local school boards that it is their obligation to ensure the quality of education, and protect students from abuses of academic freedom taking place in the classroom. In essence, a legislative resolution on this topic is a way for state senators and representatives, acting on behalf of the people, to express their view that school administrators and school board members need to take these concerns seriously, and act quickly and firmly to rectify any abuses that are taking place.

It is essential to note that a legislative resolution of this sort should not be a partisan issue—it is in the interest of both Democrats and Republicans that children in the public school system are not subjected to harassment or ridicule because of their beliefs, and that schools are living up to their

educational mission of exposing students to a broad spectrum of ideas and encouraging critical thought in a civil and respectful manner, and are not advocating only one particular set of viewpoints or ideology.

If you would like assistance in supporting a legislative resolution in your state, please don't hesitate to contact the national director of Parents and Students for Academic Freedom for helpful suggestions and advice. A model legislative resolution is included at the end of this booklet.

5. CONCLUSION

Parents and Students for Academic Freedom supports the free speech rights of educators and believes that faculty members should be able to determine the content of their courses. These rights, however, do not provide a license to use the classroom as a political soapbox, or provide an excuse for teachers to ridicule or otherwise demean particular religious or cultural views a student or a student's parents may hold. Nor do they supersede educators' obligations to uphold professional educational standards. These include fairness to all students and the responsibility to make students aware of the spectrum of scholarly viewpoints on any given subject. They include the responsibility to counsel students and to encourage their intellectual development. Treating students as political adversaries is counter-productive to the educational mission and a betrayal of teachers' professional obligations.

Parents and students must be alert to the possibility of these abuses in the classroom. It is especially important that younger students be taught that they have the right to disagree with their teachers on matters of politics and religion, and should bring any conflicts to the attention of their parents or to those administrators and elected officials entrusted with the obligation to ensure that schools live up to their educational missions.

Parents and Students for Academic Freedom is committed to working to promote the principles that: 1) a school is an educational institution not a political party; 2) a school's resources and educational authority should be used to further learning and the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, not to indoctrinate students in partisan political ideologies; and 3) the principles of academic freedom and a good education require that students have access to a diversity of viewpoints in courses, required reading texts, and in campus activities programs.

We strongly encourage parents and students to create their own chapters of Parents and Students for Academic Freedom at all elementary, middle schools, and junior and senior high schools. Additional information about Parents and Students for Academic Freedom and contact information is available at the organization's website at www.psaf.org.

STUDENT BILL OF RIGHTS

Concerning Academic Freedom in Primary and Secondary Education

WHEREAS, Public primary and secondary education in the State of _____ is an important and valued institution that fosters learning, culture, and economic vitality; and

WHEREAS, Providing students with a solid foundation in the language arts, mathematics, science, history, the humanities, and the social sciences to adequately equip students to learn to think critically, acquire an understanding of our shared national heritage and the richness and diversity of our culture, and prepare them to lead productive lives as informed and responsible citizens in our democratic republic is among the principal purposes of public primary and secondary education; and

WHEREAS, The academic freedom of instructors and the academic freedom of students are essential and complementary elements of successful education; and

WHEREAS, Teachers and school administrators from the state's public elementary schools, middle schools, junior and senior high schools have often expressed their commitment to valuing and respecting diversity; and

WHEREAS, A commitment to respect diversity in the educational context necessarily includes a respect for the diversity of intellectual, political, and religious viewpoints, and this commitment must remain strong; and

WHEREAS, A respect for intellectual, political, and religious diversity means that a student should never be penalized because of the opinions he or she holds that differ from a teacher's, and that all students should be made to feel comfortable in exercising their right to listen critically, to express and defend their views, and to challenge an instructor's opinions; and

WHEREAS, It is an inappropriate abuse of academic freedom to use the classroom or class assignments to provide students with only a single perspective on matters of opinion, or to regularly introduce controversial material which is substantially unrelated to the subject being studied, or to promote or oppose the election of a particular political candidate or party, or to advocate or oppose a particular political ideology or particular public policy position, or to ridicule or attempt to undermine the religious or moral beliefs of a student or the teachings of his or her parents; and

WHEREAS, Although the State of _____ has a legitimate oversight role in ensuring the quality of state-sponsored primary and secondary education, the individual schools, their duly elected school boards, and other local

governing bodies, parent-teacher associations, and individual parents and students are in the best position to help develop and implement specific policies to safeguard the academic freedom of students and instructors; and

WHEREAS, It is in the interest of the citizens of the State of _____ to ensure that taxpayer-supported and state-sponsored primary and secondary educational institutions adequately protect the rights and academic freedoms of students and instructors and continue to provide a quality education to students;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the State of _____, the House of Representatives concurring herein:

(1) That we, the members of the General Assembly of the State of _____, strongly encourage each state-supported institution of primary and secondary education to ensure that students will be graded solely on the basis of their reasoned answers and appropriate knowledge of the subjects and disciplines they study, and not on the basis of their political or religious beliefs.

(2) That instructors must not use their courses for the purpose of political, ideological, religious or anti-religious indoctrination, and that classrooms will not be used to recruit students for partisan political activities or events. Instructors and school administrators are encouraged to

remember that exposing students to a wide range of significant scholarly viewpoints on the subjects examined in their courses is a major responsibility of instructors. While instructors are and should be free to express their own findings and perspectives in presenting material in the classroom, they should present and make their students aware of other significant viewpoints, particularly on controversial or politically partisan matters, in a civil and respectful manner.

(3) That each state-supported institution of primary and secondary education is encouraged to review its course offerings, curriculum, and choice of textbooks, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, to ensure that they adequately reflect the uncertainty and unsettled character of human knowledge in these areas by providing students with dissenting sources and significant scholarly viewpoints where appropriate, and to ensure that a diversity of intellectual, political, and religious views will be respected.

(4) That each state-supported institution of primary and secondary education is encouraged to review its student rights and grievance procedures to ensure that intellectual, political and religious diversity is explicitly recognized and protected, and to ensure that rights and grievance procedures are adequately publicized to students. Each institution is further encouraged to ensure that the use of school resources and use of school district facilities by student groups and other extracurricular activities meet the standards articulated

by the State Supreme Court and United States Supreme Court for an open forum that is fair to all viewpoints, and that the selection of speakers, speakers programs, and other student activities adequately observe the principles of academic freedom and promote intellectual pluralism.

(5) That parents and locally-elected school board officials are strongly encouraged to be vigilant and hold instructors and school administrators accountable for abuses of academic freedom, recognizing that it is their responsibility to protect the rights and interests of students and ensure the quality of education that students receive.

(6) That state and local officials in primary and secondary education are encouraged to meet periodically with the Education Committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives to discuss their on-going effort to ensure that the environment in elementary schools, middle schools, junior and senior high schools across the state is open and respectful to students of all religious, political, and intellectual viewpoints.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this Joint Resolution be sent to the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the State Treasurer, the Secretary of State, and the State Attorney General; to the executive director of the Department of Primary and Secondary Education with the request that copies of this Joint Resolution be forwarded to

each board member of the Department of Primary and Secondary Education; to the chairman of each primary and secondary education governing board in the state, including each school district board, with the request that copies of this Joint Resolution be forwarded to each principal of each state-supported institution of primary and secondary education in the state.

PRESIDENT OF
THE SENATE

SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

SECRETARY OF
THE SENATE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES