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Teacher Perceptions of "Don't Say Gay" Bills

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Teacher Perceptions of “Don’t Say Gay” Bills

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Abstract

This study consisted of interviews with teachers in several Northeast Ohio schools with varying levels of experience and varying grade levels to determine their perceptions of proposed bills restricting or prohibiting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom. Since the passage of Florida’s House Bill 1557, also known as the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, many students and families have been asked to give their perspective on the legislation. However, research on these bills is fairly new, as the bills are also fairly new. Therefore, while students and parents have been considered in the new body of research, there has not been much research done on the perspectives of teachers. This study aims to help gain insight into teacher perspectives on bills restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in schools. Through these teacher perspectives, the educational community can learn what kinds of changes (if any) could be made to the legislation to ensure more effective teaching and optimal learning for students. Through this study, it has been discovered that most teachers think that if a bill of this nature were to be passed in their state, their classrooms would be impacted. Furthermore, most teachers believed their classrooms would be impacted negatively, through changes in the ways they relate to students or changes in the material used in the classroom. However, a minority of teachers believed that there would be little to no change in their classrooms, as they believed that LGBTQ+ related topics did not occur in their content enough to warrant change. Overall, most teachers had a negative perception of bills of this nature, emphasizing the need for teacher input in legislation going forward.

Introduction

Restrictions upon classroom material in America are not a new phenomenon. However, in March of 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida signed House Bill 1557 into law, representing the beginning of a new type of content restriction in the classroom: constraining the discussion of matters related to the LGBTQ+ community. Though explicit restriction of this type of content is relatively new, student and parent perspectives on such legislation have been widely sought out and published since the passing of Florida House Bill 1557. Though the content of the bills as well as student and parent perspectives show a somewhat complete picture of the educational community’s reaction to such bills, there has not been much focus on teacher perspectives. Therefore, this study aims to determine teacher perspectives on bills restricting discussion of LGBTQ+ related matters in the classroom. Through teacher perspectives on the bills, the educational community will gain a more complete view of what changes will have to be made in the classroom due to the proposal and/or approval of bills of this nature.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions of bills restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom. Currently, in some states (such as Florida), discussion of the LGBTQ community is completely banned or greatly restricted in the classroom, depending on grade level (National Education Association, n.d.). In 22 other states, legislation banning these discussions is proposed (Pendharkar, 2023). While the impact of legislation such as this has focused on the students, little attention has been paid to the effect these bills have on educators and how they feel it impacts their teaching. Research has mostly focused on how the bills will impact students, parents, and communities. However, not much

research has been conducted thus far about how the bills could impact teachers and their ability to perform in the classroom. This study is hoping to discover the impacts of such bills on teachers by allowing teachers to discuss their ideas and perspectives about what kinds of changes the passing of such bills would make in their classroom.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are teacher perceptions of “don’t say gay” bills, currently proposed or in effect?
2. To what extent do these bills impact teachers’ abilities to teach effectively, or what they teach?

Significance of Study

While student perspectives on bills like Florida House Bill 1557 have been widely considered, with many students in affected states like Florida giving their opinions to news outlets and participating in formal surveys. Student opinions are the most heavily studied because students will be the most heavily impacted. Student opinions are often considered because the bills will have a direct impact on their education, so it is important to seek out students to share their thoughts firsthand.

Another group that has been more widely considered for their perspectives on bills like House Bill 1557 is parents of affected students. Since parents typically take an active, involved role in their children’s education, parents are the second group of people that bills of this nature will impact, after students. While students will be impacted directly through the changes made to the classrooms they attend, parents will be affected indirectly as well because they will have to be aware of these changes in order to continue participating in facilitating and bolstering their child’s education at home. In addition, some parents of students in states where bills like this

have passed or are proposed may be members of the LGBTQ+ community themselves. Therefore, some parents may feel targeted by the legislation, leading to widespread interest in their opinions. Parent opinions are often considered since parents typically monitor students’ educations closely, or since some parents are also members of the LGBTQ+ community.

However, teacher opinions have not been as widely sought out, studied, or published. While there are a few teachers who have shared their thoughts in news outlets, etc., there are few formal studies conducted on how teachers perceive bills like House Bill 1557. Through understanding teacher perspectives on such bills, the educational community can gain a much fuller insight into how these bills will affect students by understanding the changes that could be made by each teacher. Teachers can share their ideas about how their classrooms would be modified under such legislation, therefore helping the educational community comprehend the exact changes that would impact our students.

History of “Don’t Say Gay” Bills

The recent wave of bills restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom began with the passing of Florida’s House Bill 1557. In March of 2022, Governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill into law that banned the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in K-3 classrooms and required that discussion of such matters in 4-12 classrooms be “age appropriate” (Goldstein, 2022). In April of 2023, DeSantis then expanded the bill to completely ban discussion of such topics in grades K-12 (Pendharkar, 2023). Therefore, in Florida schools, the discussion of LGBTQ+ matters was entirely banned as of April 2023.

Since Florida’s House Bill 1557 passed, 22 other states have proposed similar legislation, including Alabama, Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Louisiana, South Carolina, Missouri, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Ohio. While not all states use the same language in their bills, most of them aim

to complete the same objectives as Florida House Bill 1557. The proposed bills restrict discussion of these topics to varying degrees. For example, Tennessee’s proposed legislation explicitly prohibits instructional materials “that promote, normalize, support, or address lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, or transgender issues or lifestyle,” (Franklin & Jones, 2022). However, Louisiana’s similar proposed legislation only prohibits discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics for some grades, while it restricts them partially in others. (Franklin & Jones, 2022). In Ohio, where teachers were interviewed for this study, the proposed legislature resembles Florida’s original law, prohibiting all discussion of LGBTQ+ matters in K-3 classrooms and restricting such discussion to that which is “age-appropriate” in 4-12 classrooms (Franklin & Jones, 2022). Therefore, individual states vary in the language of their proposed legislations, but Florida’s House Bill 1557 represented the beginning of a string of similar bills proposing restriction or prohibition of classroom discussions of LGBTQ+ topics.

Though laws have been passed and implemented in some states, such as Florida, there has been some pushback. In Florida, LGBTQ+ advocacy groups brought suit against the government. The suit ended in a settlement and a statement from the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals stating that the law does not prohibit classroom references to LGBTQ+ people or issues, groups, or anti-bullying measures (Kokal & Soulel, 2024).. However, the law does remain in effect, prohibiting classroom instruction relating to LGBTQ+ topics. In Florida, the law remains in effect, but the language of the law does not explicitly tell what is prohibited. The language of the Court of Appeals statement explains what is allowed, but what material would be prohibited remains more open to interpretation according to the language of the law. In addition, the language of each bill varies by state, but this study will focus on the Florida and Ohio versions of bills of this nature.

Literature Review

Content of Bills

The content of bills varies greatly by state. Though there are 22 states that have proposed legislation similar to Florida’s House Bill 1557 using their own language, the basic premise is similar. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the language of Florida’s House Bill 1557, as it is the only bill signed into law currently, and it is very similar to the proposed legislation in Ohio. The original text of the bill section relating to LGBTQ+ topics states, “Lines 97-101: Classroom instruction by school personnel or third parties on sexual orientation or gender identity may not occur in kindergarten through grade 3 or in a manner that is not age appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards.” (Goldstein, 2022). The bill does not explicitly give examples of what types of materials are prohibited in the classroom. In addition, the original language only prohibits LGBTQ+ topics in grades K-3, but this has since been updated to include grades K-12. Florida’s bill prohibits all discussion of LGBTQ+ matters in classroom instruction, but according to the recent aforementioned lawsuit, does not prohibit classroom references to LGBTQ+ individuals, issues, groups, or anti-bullying content; however, it does prohibit instruction on these topics. In Ohio, the text of the bill states, “(2) No school district, community school, STEM school, nonpublic school that enrolls students who are participating in a state scholarship program, or any employee or other third party representing a school district or school shall do either of the following: (a) With respect to a student in any of grades kindergarten through three, teach, use, or provide any curriculum or instructional materials on sexual orientation or gender identity; (b) With respect to a student in

any of grades four through twelve, teach, use, or provide any curriculum or instructional materials on sexual orientation or gender identity in any manner that is not age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate for students in accordance with state standards.” (Ohio State Legislature, 2022). Once again, as in the Florida bill, the language explicitly prohibits instruction around LGBTQ+ related topics in grades K-3, while restricting classroom discussion of these topics to what is “developmentally appropriate” in all other grades. As in the Florida bill, there is no provided example of prohibited types of instructional material. Therefore, at this time, it is not clear which types of instructional materials would be banned from the classroom under Florida’s House Bill 1557 or under Ohio’s similar HB616.

Existing Research on Bills

Existing research on bills of this nature have been focused on the impact to students. In addition, research has focused entirely on Florida, as it is the only state that has passed a bill restricting LGBTQ+ content in the classroom. According to research done by Seattle University, the impact on students who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community could be detrimental, as the parameters for restricting material are unclear and mental health issues are common in youth in the LGBTQ+ community. This research addresses the lack of explicit language in the law enacted in Florida currently: “This bill will remove any discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity from the classroom setting until third grade, and after third grade, school instruction must fall within vague, age-appropriate, state standards.” (Redding, 2023). Since the publication of this research paper, instruction on these topics has been prohibited entirely rather than giving educators the option of determining what is age-appropriate. Redding’s article addresses the lack of specificity within the law– while “age appropriate” instruction was permitted for about a year, this is no longer permitted under DeSantis’s expanded law. Later, the

lawsuit settlement awarded in 2024 added that “references” to LGBTQ+ people and issues were allowed under the law, but no instruction was permitted on the topics (Kokal & Soule, 2024).

Therefore, Redding’s paper acknowledges the issue of non-specific language which could ultimately harm students; in the time since it was written, LGBTQ+ topics have been seemingly entirely banned from Florida schools.

In addition, Redding’s research provides previous data on the mental health of LGBTQ+ youth in America, which could potentially be impacted negatively with the passage of legislation like Florida House Bill 1557. In 2021, 52% of transgender and nonbinary youths considered suicide, and 20% made at least one suicide attempt; in addition, 43% of LGBTQ+ youths reported being bullied on school property (Redding, 2024). Redding’s research provides insight into the environment in which LGBTQ+ students are being educated. Redding argues that the restriction and prohibition of LGBTQ+ topics in the classrooms could lead to worsening issues with bullying and mental health due to a lack of awareness.

While Redding’s research considers potential impacts using previous data, a research paper from UCLA Law considers the consequences that followed after the bill was passed, specifically with regard to LGBTQ+ families. This study focused on the potential impacts of the legislation on students who come from families with one or more members that identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. Rather than focusing on potential impacts to students through direct research on youth, this paper asked LGBTQ+ parents about how their children have been impacted at school. Most (88%) of LGBTQ+ parents reported being “somewhat or very” concerned about the impacts that a bill like House Bill 1557 would have on them. These parents have taken varying levels of action relating to the anxiety they feel due to this bill. Many parents (56%) have considered moving their children out of state, while a few (11%) have considered

finding alternative schooling options for their children (Goldberg 2023). In addition, over 16% of LGBTQ+ families in Florida have already begun the process of moving their families out of the state due to the passing of this bill. Parents expressed fears that their children would not be able to openly talk about their families at school as well as concerns that they would not be able to be involved in or volunteer at their children’s school. In addition, LGBTQ+ parents reported on the experiences their families already had with discussion of the LGBTQ+ community at school through Goldberg’s study. At school, students were already experiencing impacts of the bill in the first year after it passed: “LGBTQ+ parents reported that their children had already experienced a variety of impacts of the bill. This included harassment and bullying at school because they had LGBTQ+ parents, not being able to talk about their parents or their own LGBTQ+ identities at school or outside of school, and fears about continuing to live in Florida.” (Goldberg, 2023). Some students who have LGBTQ+ family members in Florida have previous negative experiences with peers due to their identities or their family members’ identities. In addition, LGBTQ+ parents have faced harassment in the year after House Bill 1557 passed in Florida: “LGBTQ+ parents reported on their experiences over the 3–6 months prior to the survey in a variety of areas: Almost one-quarter feared harassment by neighbors because of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. Twenty-one percent of LGBTQ+ parents had been less out in their neighborhood, workplace, or community.” (Goldberg 2023). According to Goldberg’s research, the legislation has a negative effect on LGBTQ+ families, including parents as well as students. Through harassment from neighbors and bullying in schools, parents and students respectively face discrimination for being a part of an LGBTQ+ family, especially since House Bill 1557 passed in Florida in 2022. Essentially, Goldberg’s paper states that, “Research has established that anti-LGBTQ legislation has both direct and indirect effects on LGBTQ+

parents and their mental health, in part via its effects on social climate, including community, neighborhood, and school climate,” demonstrating the amount of people impacted through surveys that express the factors by which and extent to which LGBTQ+ families have been impacted, including intent to move, bullying in schools, harassment by neighbors, and fears about expressing identities. Goldberg’s study helps to give insight into measured impacts on students and parents in the year after the passing of House Bill 1557 in Florida.

Research Study

Although student and parent perspectives are often considered when investigating the impacts of bills restricting or prohibiting discussion LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom, not much research has been conducted on the teacher perspective. Therefore, this study aims to fill that gap in research by inquiring about teacher opinions on bills of this nature. Teachers were asked to provide their perspective on what kind of changes they would make in their classrooms based on the content of bills similar to Florida’s House Bill 1557. Teachers were asked various interview questions designed to elicit responses about how each individual teacher would be impacted in the classroom. This research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are teacher perceptions of “don’t say gay” bills, currently proposed or in effect?
2. To what extent do these bills impact teachers’ abilities to teach effectively, or what they teach?

By answering these research questions, the educational community can gain a fuller insight into the impact that such bills would have in the classroom through obtaining direct information from teachers about how they see bills of this nature affecting their classrooms.

Demographic Information

In selecting participants, I aim to represent a wide range of teachers. Fifty teachers were contacted about their participation in the study and sent a survey to fill out demographic

information prior to the interview. From the consenting candidates, ten teachers were chosen to participate in the study based on demographic information. Teachers were selected from Northeast Ohio school districts. All ten teachers are based in secondary education, or grades 7-12. Of the ten teachers selected, ages ranged from 22 years old to 53 years old. Teachers ranged from 1 to 31 years of experience teaching. Grade levels represented ranged from 7-12. In addition, three different racial demographics were represented among participants—white/Caucasian, Black/African-American, and Asian. Through selecting teachers from varying demographic groups, I aim to represent a wide range of teachers in the perspectives included in the research.

Interview Questions

Interview questions were designed to gather demographic information not included in the survey, gain an understanding of each teacher’s prior knowledge of the bills, and inquire about what impacts teachers believe there would be on themselves, their colleagues, their students, and their classroom environment. Study participants were questioned about how many years they had taught as well as what grade level they taught. Then, participants were asked about their knowledge of and views on bills similar to Florida’s House Bill 1557, restricting discussion of LGBTQ+ topics in the classroom. After their initial knowledge and views were established, teachers were asked to share their ideas about how they believed these bills could impact themselves and their colleagues at work. They were also asked how they thought bills of this nature could impact their students if passed, and if their abilities to teach effectively would be impacted. Interviews provided a space for teachers to anonymously share their perspectives on how bills of this nature could potentially impact their classrooms if passed in their state. Each teacher provided their ideas about how they felt the bills could impact them individually; a better

understanding of how teachers think about these bills as well as the actions they would take if such a bill were to pass in Ohio provided valuable information that fills the gap between knowledge of student and parent perspectives on this topic.

Results

The majority of teachers (80%) hypothesized that the passing of a bill restricting discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom would negatively impact their classrooms in some way. Many teachers (60%) cited “relationship building” with students would be impacted if students could not trust their teachers to handle sensitive topics in the classroom with care. In addition, many teachers (60%) believed that “classroom discussion” of some materials (an example given was *The Great Gatsby*) would be hindered by the passing of such bills. Overall, the majority of teachers believed that in some way, passing a bill restricting discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom would negatively impact their classrooms or students in some way.

A minority of teachers interviewed (20%) believed that the passing of a bill restricting LGBTQ+ would not significantly impact their classrooms. These participants did believe that a bill of this nature would change some content, but they did not think changes were substantial enough to impact the classroom on a daily basis.

Knowledge

The majority of teachers (80%) knew of House Bill 1557 in Florida as well as proposed similar bills in other states, but they were not aware of the content of such bills. Therefore, participants who did not know the content of the bill were asked to read the content of Florida's House Bill 1557 as well as gain a general knowledge of proposed legislation in other states

before continuing their interviews. These teachers read the content of House Bill 1557 and a list of other similar proposed bills in other states before continuing.

A minority of participants (20%) knew the content of Florida House Bill 1557 as well as the content of proposed bills in other states. These participants continued the interview without reviewing the content of the bills.

Overall, between both groups of teachers, there was no measurable difference in perspectives based on prior knowledge of the bills. The majority of teachers perceived bills restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom as impacting their classrooms.

Impact on Themselves

The majority of teachers (90%) felt that there would be an impact on themselves. These teachers felt that by restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom, their students may feel overlooked. Therefore, these teachers perceived a bill of this nature to impact them as teachers through the changes that each teacher would have to implement to avoid talking about such matters. Specifically, teachers felt that they would be impacted indirectly due to changes that would have to be made in curricula, classroom environments, and materials; in addition, teachers felt they would be indirectly impacted through the reactions of students to the changes that would need to be implemented in these areas if a bill of this nature were to pass in their states.

A minority of teachers (20%) felt that there would be little to no impact on themselves. These teachers, who did not feel that there would be an impact in their classroom, cited that “the material [they] teach wouldn’t change” enough for them to feel impacted by the passing of such legislation. To these teachers, since they did not perceive that there would be significant changes

to the material, they did not perceive much of a student reaction either. Therefore, this minority of teachers perceived that since material would not have to change much, there would not be an impact on them through those changes or student reactions to them.

Impact on Other Teachers

All teachers selected as participants believed that a bill restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom would have some kind of impact on other teachers, whether positive or negative.

All participants expressed a belief that some teachers would be impacted in a negative manner. Teachers cited a few reasons for this perceived negative impact on other teachers. One participant explained, “Some of the teachers [in this district] are members of the LGBT community themselves. They would probably feel outcast if a bill like that were to pass.” This participant believed other teachers would feel ostracized due to a bill restricting a topic that would relate to their personal lives. Another participant felt that other teachers would mostly be impacted through material: “I think it would change a lot for [the English] department here. You know, we read books with characters who hint at identifying as members of those communities. I’m teaching *The Great Gatsby* right now. Nick’s identity is ambiguous in that book, and I don’t know if we would be allowed to teach it under those bills.” This participant thought that their colleagues would see the most impact through changes to instructional materials. Both of these participants expressed that the impact to other teachers would be mostly negative, through perceived restriction of their personal lives or through changes in materials.

In addition, one participant expressed that some teachers may actually view the changes made by such a bill in a positive way. They stated, “Some teachers would probably love it if a bill like this passed. They may think it’s needed and that these types of conversations should not

be allowed in schools. They may think kids shouldn’t know about the LGBT community because it’s not appropriate.” This participant believed that some teachers may welcome changes made in material to restrict LGBTQ+ topics in curriculum because some teachers may believe covering such topics is inappropriate.

All teachers believed that other teachers would be impacted in some way, with many of them citing that their colleagues would perceive the impacts as negative, and some of them citing that some colleagues may welcome changes restricting this content.

Impact on Materials

The majority of teachers (80%) believed that materials would be impacted in some way. Most teachers (60%) cited that some of the books that are read in school may have to be omitted from the curriculum because they contain characters or topics that relate to the LGBTQ+ community. One participant explained, “I don’t know what we would do with stories that contain LGBT characters. I don’t think we would be allowed to teach them. I think [teaching these stories] is important because many students see themselves in the characters.” This participant believed that the material taught in class would have to be changed, which they perceived as a negative change because it may restrict students from seeing characters that they could possibly relate to. Another participant explained that they like to use works of diverse authors in their classroom: “I try to make sure that my students aren’t just reading books written by white males. I want them to read about people they can relate to, so I try to include authors of color and LGBT authors in my class. That would have to change if this bill passed.” This participant perceived the changes in material as negative because they feared a decrease in author diversity, which could lower student engagement by making the works students read in class less relatable.

A minority of teachers (10%) felt that material would not be significantly impacted. This teacher explained that they already try not to cover “controversial topics” in the classroom to avoid division between students. Therefore, this participant did not think that their materials would have to change much to accommodate the passing of a bill restricting discussion of LGBTQ+ related topics.

Impact on Students

All teachers who participated in the interviews believed that there would be an impact on students. All teachers interviewed believed that there would be some negative impact on students, while a few explained that some students may react positively to the passing of such a bill.

All teachers expressed that students who identify with the LGBTQ+ community may feel ostracized by a bill restricting LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom. One participant stated, “Students may feel like we don’t care about them.” All teachers in the study felt that students in this community may feel alienated if such a bill were to pass. Participants explained that students in the LGBTQ+ community would likely feel less safe about expressing their identities at school if bills similar to House Bill 1557 were to pass in their states. However, two participants (20%) expressed that some students would likely react positively to a bill of this nature passing, due to their personal beliefs about the LGBTQ+ community. These students “may have a negative view of the LGBT community, so they may feel more comfortable.” These participants expressed that students who hold negative views of the LGBTQ+ community may be enthusiastic about the restriction of topics related to that community in schools. All teachers saw a significant impact on students, particularly on students who identify with the LGBTQ+ community and students who oppose the LGBTQ+ community.

Another participant expressed that students whose families identify with the LGBTQ+ community would likely also feel ostracized: “Some of these students have two moms or two dads, so I don’t think that they would feel comfortable talking about their families at school anymore.” This participant believed that students who come from LGBTQ+ families would feel less safe discussing their families, echoing Goldberg’s 2023 research. All participants believed that there would be a negative impact on students, whether through their identities or the identities of their families.

Impact on Classroom Environment and Teaching Abilities

All interviewed teachers felt that such a bill would impact their classroom environment. All participants agreed that their classroom environment would change with the bill because they believed students who identify as LGBT wouldn’t feel as comfortable. Therefore, they felt that the classroom environment would be impacted indirectly through the impacts that would already exist for students. Additionally, through these impacts on students, 60% of the participants believed that their ability to “build relationships” with students would be negatively impacted, therefore impacting the classroom environment through relationships with students. Participants all believed there would be some degree of impact to the classroom environment through the passing of such bills.

In addition, through these changes, a majority (60%) of teachers said that their ability to teach effectively would be impacted. These teachers explained that with a less effective relationship building component of their classrooms, which they perceive would occur if such a bill passed, they would have a diminished ability to teach effectively. These participants believed that their credibility and relationship building skills with students would be diminished

by excluding the discussion of the LGBTQ+ community since some students are members themselves.

A minority of teachers (40%) felt that though students would be impacted in some way by the passing of such legislation, their abilities to teach would be unaffected. These teachers also stressed the importance of relationship building, but they also believed that their content was the main component of their classrooms. Therefore, they did not feel that their abilities to teach effectively would be impacted.

Discussion

Through participating in these interviews, most participants made it clear that they disagreed with the restriction of LGBTQ+ related discussions in schools. Each teacher brought their own individual perspective to the discussion about how bills restricting these topics in schools would impact them, but nearly all teachers agreed that there would be some impact. Most teachers agreed that the impacts on their classrooms would be negative, whether through how it impacts students or how it impacts material. A majority of teachers believed that a bill of this nature, if passed, would negatively affect their ability to relate to students, which in turn would harm their classroom environment. Overall, teacher perspectives of “Don’t Say Gay” bills were in opposition to passing the bills.

In addition to sharing their perspectives on how their classrooms would have to change under new legislation, most teachers shared their concerns about how such a bill would be enforced. A majority of teachers (60%) shared that they did not know if they would be able to follow these bills if restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ topics would clearly harm their students. For example, many teachers expressed that they would be unwilling to shut down classroom discussion or a one-on-one conversation with a student if the student(s) brought up a

topic relating to the LGBTQ+ community. These participants believed that these discussions were helpful to students’ social-emotional learning and therefore should not be avoided or shut down, even if there were to be a bill restricting these discussions. Teachers who mentioned being unsure about how they would comply with such bills cited concern for students’ emotional wellbeing and “mental health,” demonstrating that teacher perspectives on bills of this nature are often negative due to the potential negative impact on students.

This highlights the need for consideration of teacher viewpoints in both future research about the impacts of bills restricting LGBTQ+ related topics in the classroom as well as the need for consideration of teacher viewpoints in the creation of future legislation.

Conclusion

Continuing Research on Teacher Perspectives

In conclusion, the findings of this research have significant implications, but there is still much more research that could be done on how teachers perceive bills restricting LGBTQ+ topics in the classroom. While the literature and this study both show that the majority of teachers perceive bills of this nature as causing a negative impact on their classrooms, more research is still needed. At this time, the legislation has only been in effect in Florida for two years, and in other states, bills are still being processed. Therefore, the body of work published on perceptions of “Don’t Say Gay” bills is relatively small and focuses mostly on student and parent perspectives. In order to make conclusions about teachers across the country, more research will need to be done with respect to teacher perceptions of such bills specifically, as opposed to student and parent perspectives. There must be more research pertaining to teachers in order to determine best practices for educators when it comes to these bills. Overall, as time goes on, more research will need to be done concerning the perceptions of students, parents, and teachers

on these bills before making a conclusion about the nationwide perceptions of such bills so that a course of action can be determined in the future.

Future Legislation

While more research is needed on how teachers will be impacted by bills restricting the discussion of LGBTQ+ related content in the classroom, this study emphasizes the importance of teacher perspectives on education-related legislation. Most participants in this study perceived that the passing of one of these bills would result in a negative impact on their classroom. While politicians, lawmakers, parents, and sometimes even students are considered in the lawmaking process, teachers are not often consulted. This study reveals a need to collaborate with teachers when creating education-related policy.

Bills of this nature continue to be proposed in various states around the country, and while we study the effects of such legislation on students and parents, the perspective of teachers will be paramount in ensuring that future legislation is conducive to optimal learning for students. Teachers must be consulted about legislation changes in order to continue to advance the future of education and provide students with the best possible opportunities for success.

APPENDIX

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What grade do you currently teach?
2. How long have you been a teacher?
3. What do you know about any of the bills in our country that focus on LGBTQIA+ individuals, also known as “don’t say gay” bills?
4. Do you believe that these bills will impact you or your classroom? If so, how?
5. In what ways might you perceive a bill of this nature impacting other teachers?
6. How do you perceive a bill of this nature impacting the material you teach?
7. How do you think a bill of this nature might impact your students?
8. Overall, do you think there would be any difference in your ability to teach effectively with the passing of such bills?

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