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# PERSPECTIVES OF FLORIDA PARENTS ON HB 1557, The Parental Rights in Education Act

AUGUST 2023

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Abbie E. Goldberg

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On March 28, 2022, the Florida Legislature passed HB 1557, the “Parental Rights in Education” Act (HB 1557), also dubbed the Don’t Say Gay bill. This bill prohibits classroom instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity (SOGI) before the 4th grade and requires such instruction to be “age-appropriate or developmentally appropriate” thereafter. This bill was signed into law on July 1, 2022, functionally taking effect during the following academic year (i.e., August/September 2022). In May 2023, limitations to classroom instruction related to SOGI were expanded to K-12 public schooling.<sup>1</sup> Based on a survey of 106 parents in Florida surveyed one year after HB 1557 was passed, and six months into the 2022-2023 school year (i.e., March 2023), this study represents a first look at how a diverse group of parents in the state feel about and perceive the impact of the law. It also explores how they feel about the proposed expansion of the law, such that classroom instruction on SOGI is prohibited through 8th grade. Findings reveal stark differences in how parents respond to and feel about the law based on partisan affiliation, with Democrats and Independents being much less likely to agree with the law and its expansion than Republicans. Democrats and Independents are also more likely to want to move out of Florida, compared to Republicans. Additionally, Floridians who have LGBTQ friends or family members are more likely to disagree with the law.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Beliefs About the Law

- Nearly 40% of participants (37%) disagreed with the original Parental Rights in Education Act and 46% disagreed with the expansion of the Act to K-12 schooling.
  - Those who disagreed with the Act emphasized their belief that children needed to learn about gender and sexuality and all types of people. They also voiced concern about a push towards fascism within their state and government overreach.
  - Participants who were against the Act largely agreed with the statement that it provoked hostility against the LGBTQ community. For example, 90% of those who were against the Act felt that it provoked hostility compared to 17% of those who supported it.
- Almost half of participants agreed with the original Parental Rights in Education Act and 43% agreed with the expansion of the Act.
  - Participants who agreed with the Act generally agreed with the statement that it protected parents’ rights and empowered parents, with most also feeling that it protected children’s rights and well-being. For example, 68% of those who agreed with the Act felt that it protected parents’ rights, compared to 5% of those who disagreed with it.
  - Participants who agreed with the Act voiced their belief that children shouldn’t be exposed to sexuality- or gender-related information because they were susceptible to being influenced. In addition, they often indicated a belief that LGBTQ identities were wrong or immoral.

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<sup>1</sup> FLA. ADMIN. CODE § 6A-10.081 (2023).

- 14% of participants expressed neutral or mixed feelings about the Parental Rights in Education Act, and similarly, 11% voiced neutral or mixed feelings about the expansion of the Act.
  - Participants who felt neutrally about the Act typically indicated that they did not feel that it applied to their situation and/or they did not have strong opinions about it. Those who indicated more mixed feelings often said that they agreed with it for younger children but not older children.

### Factors Associated with Disagreement or Agreement

- Two-thirds of Democrats and more than half of Independents disagreed with the Act, compared to about 10% of Republicans. Support for the expansion of the Act diminished among Democrats and Independents: 80% of Democrats and 60% of Independents did not approve of its expansion to older children. Republicans' views, on the other hand, were consistent across developmental contexts, with almost 90% approving of both the original Act and its expansion.
- Across all parents, those with a college education or higher were significantly less likely to agree with the Act than those with less than a bachelor's degree. And, across all parents, those with LGBTQ friends and LGBTQ family members were significantly less likely to agree with the Act than those without LGBTQ family or friends.

### Impact of the Law

- 19% of participants described observing the removal of books from school libraries and classrooms, and 13% observed the removal of signifiers of LGBTQ inclusivity such as Safe Space stickers.
- 12% of participants said that their children had expressed fear, anxiety, or avoidance of school related to the Act, and 9% expressed fears about the future related to living in Florida.
- 16% of participants said that they were more involved in their children's school (e.g., to make sure their voice was heard) since the passing of the Parental Rights in Education Act.
- 11% of participants had participated in advocacy or activism against the Parental Rights in Education legislation, while 5% had participated in advocacy or activism in support of it.
- 40% of the sample said they would like to move out of Florida (20% very much so, and 19% somewhat). An additional 15% felt mixed about moving, with 45% not wishing to move. Almost 11% said they were very likely to move in the next two years, with an additional 6% saying that this was somewhat likely. Barriers to leaving included jobs, extended family, and the hassle of moving.

## BACKGROUND: HB 1557 (PARENTAL RIGHTS IN EDUCATION ACT)

On March 28 2022, Florida’s Governor Ron DeSantis signed the “Parental Rights in Education Act” (HB 1557). The Act went into effect on July 1, 2022, and reads: “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.” In addition to barring discussion about sexual orientation and gender identity in public school classrooms from kindergarten through 3rd grade, the law also grants the state the power to sue teachers or schools if they believe they are not operating within the law.<sup>2</sup>

Initial reactions to the legislation varied widely. Some legislators and parents asserted that the law seeks to allow parents to determine if, when, and in what way to introduce LGBTQ related topics to their children. Others worried that it would have a chilling effect on schools in general (beyond just K-3) because it appears to send the message that LGBTQ identities are wrong or bad—potentially creating a climate and culture that will negatively affect LGBTQ parents, children, and teachers.<sup>3</sup> For example, critics have pointed out that the vaguely worded law will cause LGBTQ students and teachers to hide their identities, and teachers will avoid teaching important topics that are not directly addressed by the law out of fear of being sued. Indeed, in anticipation of and then soon after the passing of the bill, attorneys reportedly cautioned teachers that they should remove signifiers of LGBTQ inclusivity (e.g., flags and Safe Space stickers), highlighting how fear of litigation may impact educators’ speech and behavior such that they avoid saying or doing anything that directly or indirectly refers to LGBTQ people or identities.<sup>4</sup>

On July 1, 2022, the day the bill was passed into law, the White House released a statement that said: “This is not an issue of ‘parents’ rights.’ This is discrimination, plain and simple. . . It encourages bullying and threatens students’ mental health, physical safety, and well-being. It censors dedicated teachers and educators who want to do the right thing and support their students. And it must stop.”<sup>5</sup> The White House statement further characterized the bill as part of a nationwide trend of right-wing politicians targeting LGBTQ+ students, educators, and individuals to score political points.

In May 2023, the Florida Board of Education issued an administrative rule expanding the scope of the Parental Rights in Education Act. In addition to restating the law’s complete ban on classroom instruction related to SOGI in kindergarten through 3rd grade, the policy places strict limits on

<sup>2</sup> Diaz, Jaclyn (2022, March 28). Ron DeSantis signs the so-called ‘Don’t Say Gay’ bill. *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/28/1089221657/dont-say-gay-florida-desantis>

<sup>3</sup> Goldstein, Dana. (2022, March 18). Opponents call it the Don’t Say Gay bill. Here’s what it says. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/18/us/dont-say-gay-bill-florida.html>; Paluska, Michael. (2022, March 25). Parental rights? Or an attack on the LGBTQ community?: Breaking down HB1557. *ABC News*. <https://www.abcactionnews.com/news/full-circle/parental-rights-or-an-attack-on-the-lgbtq-community-breaking-down-hb1557>

<sup>4</sup> Izaguirre, Anthony, & Gomez Licon, Adriana. (2022, Sept 7). ‘Don’t Say Gay’ law brings worry, confusion to Florida schools. *PBS News Hour*. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/dont-say-gay-lawbrings-worry-confusion-to-florida-school>; Strauss, Valerie. (2022, July 1). Florida law limiting LGBTQ discussions takes effect — and rocks schools. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2022/07/01/dont-say-gay-florida-law/>

<sup>5</sup> Statement by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre on Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” Law Taking Effect - The White House

classroom instruction related to SOGI in grades 4 through 12.<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the Board adopted this policy, the state legislature enacted a statutory expansion of the Act, HB 1069. The new measure extends the original law's ban on classroom instruction related to SOGI through 8th grade.<sup>7</sup> The bill also prohibits all public K-12 educational institutions from referring to students using pronouns that do not match their sex assigned at birth, further stigmatizing vulnerable groups like transgender and nonbinary students.<sup>8</sup>

## IMPACT OF LAWS THAT RESTRICT TEACHING ABOUT LGBTQ PEOPLE

Florida is one of several states that have enacted classroom curricular restrictions related to SOGI. Other states that have enacted similar “No Promo Homo” or “Don’t Say Gay (or Trans)” laws (i.e., they censor discussion of LGBTQ topics in school) are Alabama, Arkansas, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah.<sup>9</sup> State laws that restrict curricular inclusion or discussion of LGBTQ issues are detrimental to LGBTQ students, teachers, and children with LGBTQ parents.<sup>10</sup> The laws are formatted in one of two general ways: either they are considered neutral in that they don’t specifically instruct school personnel to speak negatively about homosexuality but simply forbid discussion of the topic, or they mandate instruction that portrays homosexuality as evil, unlawful, or unsafe. In both cases, the effects may be harmful, in that they arguably convey the message that LGBTQ people’s identities and/or behaviors are so immoral that their existence must be denied.<sup>11</sup>

Such laws, which silence discussion about and may therefore marginalize LGBTQ identities, serve to contribute to the ongoing stigmatization of, and negative health outcomes among, LGBTQ people.<sup>12</sup> For example, research suggests that the message of exclusion, similar to that which is communicated by “Don’t Say Gay” laws, exacerbate existing stressors by amplifying feelings of shame surrounding people’s LGBTQ identities.<sup>13</sup> LGBTQ children as well as children with LGBTQ parents may experience silencing and fear related to their own and their families’ identities, potentially leading to anxiety and avoidance of peers and school, which may have health and educational consequences.

## Opinions About Parental Rights in Education Laws and Policies

Debates about parental rights in the realm of education have centered on a range of topics, including parents’ rights with respect to religious freedom, homeschooling, and children’s welfare, and advocacy for children with disabilities. They have also centered on children’s exposure to sexuality-

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<sup>6</sup> FLA. ADMIN. CODE § 6A-10.081 (2023).

<sup>7</sup> H.B. 1069, 2023 Leg., Reg. Sess. (Fla. 2023).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> Movement Advancement Project (2023, May 31). *Equality maps: LGBTQ curricular laws*. [https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular\\_laws](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular_laws)

<sup>10</sup> Lenson, J. (2015). Litigation Primer Attacking State “No Promo Homo” Laws: Why “Don’t Say Gay” Is Not O.K. *Tulane Journal of Law & Sexuality*.

<sup>11</sup> Kline, N. S., Griner, S. B., Neelamegam, M., Webb, N. J., Morales, J. J., & Rhodes, S. D. (2022). Responding to “Don’t Say Gay” Laws in the US: Research priorities and considerations for health equity. *Sexuality Research & Social Policy*, 19(4), 1397–1402.

<sup>12</sup> Kline et al., 2022.

<sup>13</sup> Berg, R. C., Lemke, R., & Ross, M. W. (2017). Sociopolitical and cultural correlates of internalized homonegativity in gay and bisexual men: Findings from a global study. *International Journal of Sexual Health*, 29(1), 97–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19317611.2016.1247125>

related information, such as in the context of sexual education.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, versions of *Don't Say Gay* laws have existed for decades. Specifically, laws that bar or explicitly restrict educators from discussing LGBTQ issues in schools first proliferated in the 1980s, when concerns about HIV/AIDS led to the expansion of sexual education in public schools, a move that generated a powerful response from religious conservatives who lobbied for anti-gay provisions in the curricula.<sup>15</sup> Both then and today, proponents of these laws defend them as necessary to uphold “family values,” asserting that discussion of diverse sexual or gender identities will ultimately “indoctrinate” children to think such identities are acceptable. These proponents also often center “parents’ rights” in their advocacy, pushing back against any instruction that conflicts with their values.<sup>16</sup> Scholars have pointed out that in advocating for policies to stop discussion of sexual orientation and gender diversity outside of the home, individual members of the public and lawmakers themselves ignore the reality that “LGBTQ students cannot avoid degrading scrutiny of their sexual orientation and gender identity,” also noting that while the laws and policies themselves do real harm, “the animus against LGBTQ people that inspires and justifies their codification is at the root of the issue.”<sup>17</sup>

Debates about parental rights reignited amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which was associated with sudden changes in the format of schooling, such that most schools across the U.S. moved to virtual learning, a shift that varied in length but ranged from months to almost a year in some districts.<sup>18</sup> Parents shifted, in many cases, from observers of their children’s education to actual participants. In some cases, they had strong feelings about the shifting nature, quality, and consequences of their children’s online learning, perceiving it as sub-par and feeling helpless surrounding their lack of voice in both the way education was implemented as well as the nature of COVID-19 restrictions once their children were back in in-person school.<sup>19</sup> Parents’ increasing dissatisfaction with schools led some to make alternative choices, including charter and private schools.<sup>20</sup> Accompanying this period of

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<sup>14</sup> Goldman, J. D. G. (2008) Responding to parental objections to school sexuality education: A selection of 12 objections. *Sex Education*, 8(4), 415-438. [10.1080/14681810802433952](https://doi.org/10.1080/14681810802433952)

<sup>15</sup> Sosin, K. (2022, April 20). ‘Don’t say gay’ bills aren’t new. They’ve just been revived. *The 19th*. <https://19thnews.org/2022/04/dont-say-gay-existed-before-florida-alabama-laws/>; Steinberg, A. (2021, April 6). Over the rainbow: The future of no promo homo laws in public education. *Brown Political Review*. [brownpoliticalreview.org/2021/04/over-the-rainbow/](https://brownpoliticalreview.org/2021/04/over-the-rainbow/)

<sup>16</sup> McGovern, A. E. (2012). When schools refuse to “say gay”: The constitutionality of anti-LGBTQ “No-Promo Homo” public school policies in the United States. *Cornell Journal of Law & Public Policy*, 22(2), 465–490. Steinberg, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> McGovern, 2012, p. 475.

<sup>18</sup> Cortez, Marjorie. (2022, April 12). From bake sales to ballot boxes: How the pandemic intensified parent activism. *Deseret News*. <https://www.deseret.com/utah/2022/4/12/23022017/parents-public-schools-covid-19-bake-sales-ballot-boxes-how-the-pandemic-intensified-parent-activism>; Toppo, G., Napolitano, J., & Toch, T. (2022, April). Leaning in: The new power of parents in public education. *FutureEd*. [https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FutureEd-Report\\_Leaning-in.pdf](https://www.future-ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FutureEd-Report_Leaning-in.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Cortez, 2022

<sup>20</sup> National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2021, Sept 22). New report shows families voting with their feet and choosing charter schools. *National Alliance for Public Charter Schools*. <https://www.publiccharters.org/latest-news/2021/09/22/new-report-shows-families-voting-their-feet-and-choosing-charter-schools>; Kamenetz, Anya. (2021, December 15). Where are the students? For a second straight year, school enrollment is dropping. *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/15/1062999168/school-enrollment-drops-for-second-straight-year>; Dickler, Jessica. (2021, May 7). During Covid, more families switch to private school from public education. *CNBC*. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/05/07/during-covid-more-families-switch-to-private-school-from-public-.html>

increased scrutiny on schools, some parents were increasingly objecting to the books their children were reading, as well as attending school board meetings.<sup>21</sup> In turn, some parents felt that their decision-making regarding their children's education was being undermined and expressed anger at how diversity issues such as race, sexuality, and gender identity were being handled in curricula.<sup>22</sup>

All of this occurred in the context of larger political dynamics and conservative organizing surrounding what should and what should not be taught in schools.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, some politicians have both encouraged and capitalized on parents' frustration and have increasingly positioned themselves as champions of parental rights in education.<sup>24</sup> Attempts to push back on parents' demands to eliminate or alter teachings related to race, gender, sexuality, and other diversity issues have occurred at both national and local levels.<sup>25</sup> Again, the battle over who gets to decide how children are educated and what they learn is not a new one. Nor is the heated debate over which parents' rights matter: framing the issue as one of "parental rights" ignores the fact that parents are not on one side against schools on the other side. In fact, some parents agree and some disagree with efforts to restrict teaching surrounding race, sexuality, and gender issues. As Arnold Fege, writing in 1997, observed, "One parent's right to have the school provide a particular school program such as sex education or a service such as school-based health clinics has become another parent's intrusion."<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, it is important to understand how Florida parents of diverse viewpoints think and feel about the Parental Rights in Education Act. Parents of diverse viewpoints live in the same community, have children who attend school together, and may volunteer alongside each other at the school fair. They may also sit side by side at a school board meeting—as elected representatives or as attendees. Learning more about how parents of different viewpoints make sense of the Parental Rights in Education Act (Don't Say Gay law), as well as how they feel their children and families are affected by it, is important, as is understanding what demographic factors are associated with more positive versus negative feelings about the Act and its expansion.

The current study surveyed 106 parents in Florida via the online platform Prolific to gain understanding of their feelings, experiences, and observations related to the Parental Rights in Education Act, six months after it went into effect during the 2022-2023 school year. Details about the sample are presented, as well as the findings from statistical analyses of the survey data. Summaries of the qualitative data are also provided, with sample quotes to illustrate themes in responses. All names used to refer to participants are pseudonyms.

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<sup>21</sup> Butcher, J., & Burke, L. M. (2022, April 11). Protecting children and families with parents' bills of rights. *The Heritage Foundation*. [IB5262.pdf \(heritage.org\)](#) Toppo et al., 2022

<sup>22</sup> Cortez, 2022; Toppo et al., 2022

<sup>23</sup> Nierenberg, Amelia (2021, October 27, 2021). The conservative school board strategy. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/10/27/us/the-conservative-school-board-strategy.html>

<sup>24</sup> Kilgore, Ed. (2021, Oct 13). Why Republicans may go all in on parental rights. *New York Magazine*. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/republicans-parental-rights-virginia.html>

<sup>25</sup> World Tribune Staff (2021, December 10). National School Board Association has lost 17 states, 40 percent of its budget. *World Tribune*. <https://www.worldtribune.com/national-school-board-association-has-lost-17-states-40-percent-of-its-budget/>; Moore, Kathleen (2022, May 6). *Hot button issues of race, sexuality playing out in school board elections*. *Times Union*. [timesunion.com/news/article/Hot-button-issues-of-race-sexuality-played-out-17147095.php](https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/Hot-button-issues-of-race-sexuality-played-out-17147095.php)

<sup>26</sup> Fege, A. (1997). Parental rights: yes! Parental rights legislation: no! ASCD. [Parental Rights: Yes! Parental Rights Legislation: No! \(ascd.org\)](#)



## FINDINGS

### DEMOGRAPHICS

This sample of parents in Florida (N = 106) contained somewhat more cisgender (cis) women (61, 57.6%) than cis men (44, 41.5%), with one transgender (trans) woman also participating. Regarding sexual orientation, 95 (89.6%) identified as heterosexual, and 11 (10.4%) as sexual minorities. Most (77, 72.6%) were married. A total of 80 (75.5%) identified as non-Hispanic White, 9 (8.5%) as non-Hispanic Black, eight (7.5%) as Latina/o/x or Hispanic, five (4.7%) as Asian, and three (2.8%) as multiracial. Participants' average age was 37.9 (SD = 7.35; range 23-58).

Almost one-third of participants (31, 29.2%) had less than a college education; in turn, 75 (70.8%) had at least a college degree. More than two-thirds (62, 67.9%) had a combined (family) income of less than \$100,000 per year. Most described themselves as middle-class (46, 43.4%) or working-class (36, 34.0%), with fewer indicating upper (21, 19.8%) or lower (3, 2.8%) class statuses. Most (98, 92.5%) were employed. Specifically, most (81, 76.4%) worked full-time, with 17 (16.0%) working part-time, six (6.6%) identifying as homemakers, and three (2.8%) as students.

Just over one-third of participants (37, 34.9%) had one child, 41 (38.7%) had two, and 28 (26.4%) had 3+ children. Sixty participants (56.6%) had at least one child under six, 77 (72.6%) had at least one child 6-17, and 13 (12.3%) had at least one child over 18.

Ninety-one parents (85.8%) had at least one child whom they identified as White, 17 (16.0%) had at least one Latina/o/x child, 15 (14.2%) had at least one Black child, six (5.75%) had at least one Asian child, and three (2.8%) had at least one child whom they identified as some other race. At least one child attended public school in 56 families (52.8%), at least one child attended private school in 14 families (13.2%), and 24 families (22.6%) indicated that at least one child was too young for school. Five (4.7%) indicated that at least one child was homeschooled. Six indicated something else (e.g., daycare).

Politically, 45 participants (42.2%) identified as Democrats, 26 (24.5%) identified as Republicans, and 30 (28.3%) identified as Independents. Two identified as Green Party, and three as something else (Democratic Socialist, Neutral, and "Registered Democrat but I vote both sides").

Geographically, 14 participants (13.2%) lived in Orange County, a county with a majority of registered Democrats.<sup>27</sup> Nine (8.5%) lived in Broward County, also a majority Democrat county. Seven (6.6%) lived in Duval County (slight majority Democrat), seven (6.6%) lived in Pasco County (majority Republican), six lived in Hillsborough County (majority Democrat), and five (4.7%) lived in Palm Beach County (majority Democrat). Between 1-4 participants lived in an additional 28 counties.

Eight participants (7.5%) of the sample reported that they had LGBTQ children, two (1.9%) had trans/nonbinary children, 38 (35.8%) had LGBTQ family members, and 62 (58.5%) had LGBTQ friends. Thirty-five (33.0%) said that they did not have any friends or family members who identified as LGBTQ.

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<sup>27</sup> Florida Division of Elections. (2023, April). [Voter Registration - By County and Party - Division of Elections - Florida Department of State \(myflorida.com\)](#)

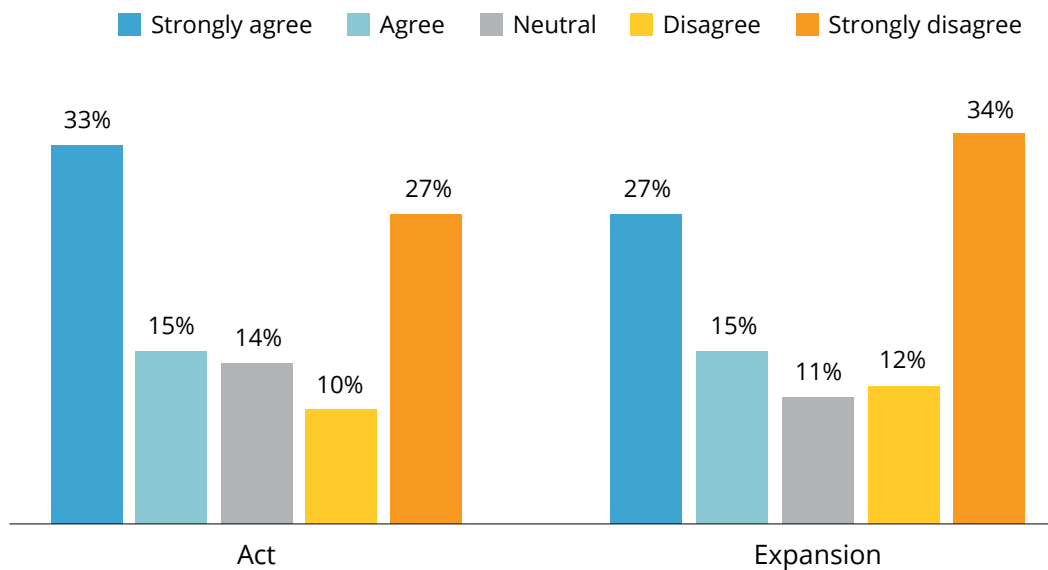
**Table 1. Sample demographics of study participants**

	N (%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Cisgender men	44 (41.5%)
Cisgender women	61 (57.6%)
Trans woman	1 (.9%)
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	
Heterosexual	95 (89.6%)
Bisexual	8 (7.5%)
Pansexual	2 (1.9%)
Gay	1 (.9%)
<b>Race</b>	
White	80 (75.5%)
Black	9 (8.5%)
Latino/a/x	8 (7.5%)
Asian	5 (4.7%)
Multiracial	3 (2.8%)
<b>Education</b>	
High school diploma/GED	8 (7.5%)
Some college/Associate's	23 (21.7%)
College degree	55 (51.9%)
Master's degree	16 (15.0%)
PhD/JD/MD	4 (3.8%)
<b>Family Income</b>	
<\$50K	17 (16.0%)
\$50K-\$100K	55 (51.9%)
\$101K-\$150K	20 (18.9%)
\$151K-\$200K	6 (5.6%)
Over \$200K	7 (6.6%)
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Married	77 (72.6%)
Divorced or separated	6 (5.7%)
<b>Number of Children</b>	
One	37 (34.9%)
Two	41 (38.7%)
Three or more	28 (26.4%)
<b>Type of Parent</b>	
Biological	105 (99.1%)
Adoptive	3 (2.8%)
Stepparent	7 (6.6%)

## AGREEMENT WITH THE PARENTAL RIGHTS IN EDUCATION ACT

Participants were asked about the extent to which they agreed with the Parental Rights in Education Act, as well as the proposed expansion of the Act (i.e., limiting teaching about gender identity and sexual orientation up to 8th grade).<sup>28</sup> Almost half agreed with the original law. Specifically, 35 participants (33.0%) felt “very positive; I agree with it”; 16 (15.1%) said “somewhat positive; I agree with it”; 15 (14.2%) said “neutral”; 11 (10.4%) said “somewhat negative; I don’t agree with it”; and 29 (27.4%) said “very negative; I don’t agree with it at all.” Participants were less likely to support the expansion than the original law. Twenty-nine (27.4%) participants felt “very positive; I agree with it”; 16 (15.1%) said “somewhat positive; I agree with it”; 12 (11.3%) said “neutral”; 13 (12.3%) said “somewhat negative; I don’t agree with it”; and 36 (34.0%) said “very negative; I don’t agree with it at all.” Thus, most participants espoused strongly held opinions, either negative or positive, highlighting how divisive the Act is for many parents.

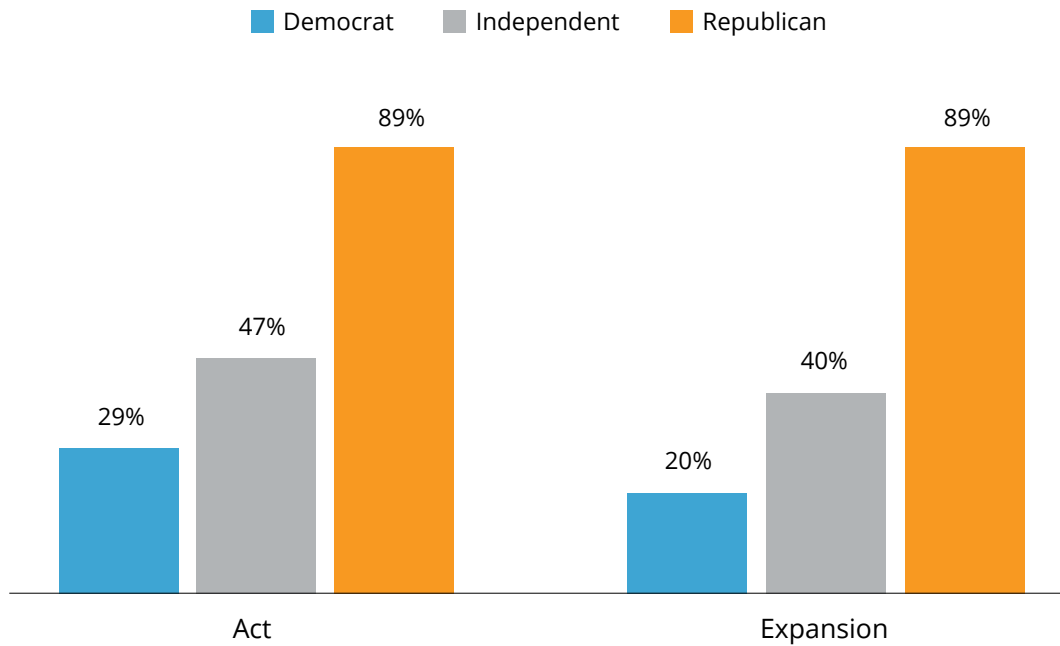
Figure 1. Agreement with Parental Rights in Education Act



Notably, responses varied by political affiliation: 13 of 45 Democrats (28.9%), 14 of 30 Independents (46.7%), and 23 of 26 Republicans (88.5%) agreed or strongly agreed with the law. Regarding the proposed expansion of the Act, nine (20.0%) Democrats, 12 (40.0%) Independents, and 23 of 26 Republicans (88.5%) agreed or strongly agreed with it. Thus, almost one-third of Democrats and almost half of Independents were in favor of the current law as applied to young children but most (80% of Democrats, 60% of Independents) did not approve of its expansion to older children. Republicans’ views, on the other hand, were stable across different developmental contexts, with almost 90% approving of both the original Act and its expansion.

<sup>28</sup>This study was conducted before the proposed bill passed.

Figure 2. Agreement with the Parental Rights in Education Act by political affiliation



*I don't think sexuality should be talked about to children in elementary school. However, expanding the law throughout 8th grade can be detrimental. Students between 6th and 8th grade usually begin to explore their sexuality and it could be beneficial for them to have information and support.*

**Mari, a Latinx cis heterosexual woman, Democrat**

*I agree that little kids don't need to hear about sexuality related issues before 3rd grade, but I think expanding on it is ridiculous. Kids often know about sexuality and have questions about it. It does not make them gay or bisexual to learn about it, and hiding it makes it seem bad or something. Kids should be able to question and learn. The only ones that do not want kids to know about it are the ones that have aversions to LGBTQ people.*

**Shayna, a White cis heterosexual woman, Independent**

## Does Agreement Vary by Demographic Factors?

We evaluated whether agreement with the original law as well as its expansion varied by political affiliation, as well as other factors, such as education level, having LGBTQ friends, having LGBTQ family members, or having LGBTQ children. Prior research, for example, has shown that more liberal political attitudes, higher levels of education, and greater contact with LGBTQ people are related to more favorable attitudes towards marriage equality.<sup>29</sup> To simplify our analyses, agreement with the law was dichotomized such that participants who strongly agreed, agreed, or felt neutrally about the

<sup>29</sup>Pew Research Center (2019). Fact sheet: Changing attitudes on gay marriage. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/fact-sheet/changing-attitudes-on-gay-marriage/>; Lee, H.-Y., & Mutz, D. C. (2019). Changing attitudes toward same-sex marriage: A three-wave panel study. *Political Behavior*, 41(3), 701–722. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-018-9463-7>

law were grouped together, and those who disagreed or strongly disagreed with it were grouped together. Political affiliation was dichotomized such that Republicans constituted one group, and Democrats, Independents, and others constituted another.<sup>30</sup>

Prior research has shown that Independents are more similar to Democrats in their views than Republicans, for example, with the former two groups showing more favorable views towards marriage equality than Republicans.<sup>31</sup>

**Differences by groups.** Republicans, as well as those with less than a college education, were significantly more likely to agree with the Act and its expansion. Those with LGBTQ friends and LGBTQ family members were more likely to disagree with the Act.<sup>32</sup>

**Predicting agreement with the Act.** In order to better understand the relative strength of the associations between respondent characteristics and agreement with the Act, we evaluated the following variables simultaneously as predictors of agreement: gender, sexual orientation, education, political affiliation, and having LGBTQ friends/family. The odds of agreeing with the Act were 8.4 times higher for Republicans than Democrats/Independents, 6.2 times higher for heterosexual parents than sexual minority parents, 3.5 times higher for those having no LGBTQ family or friends compared to those with LGBTQ family/friends, and .31 times lower for each additional level of educational attainment (e.g., high school diploma, Associate's degree, Bachelor's degree).<sup>33</sup> In summary, Republicans, heterosexual parents, people without LGBTQ friends or family, and people with less education were more likely to agree with the Act.

**The role of children's identities.** Some participants who reported having LGBTQ children spoke to how their children's sexual orientation and/or gender identity or presentation shaped their concerns

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<sup>30</sup>Preliminary chi-square analyses revealed that Independents were significantly less likely to agree with Republicans about the Parental Rights in Education Act ( $p < .05$ ), as were Democrats ( $p < .05$ ); Independents did not significantly differ from Democrats ( $p = .056$ ). Hence, we grouped Democrats and Independents together.

<sup>31</sup>Pew Research Center, 2019.

<sup>32</sup>Bivariate analyses revealed that Republicans were significantly more likely to agree with the Act,  $X^2(1, 106) = 13.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , and its expansion,  $X^2(1, 106) = 20.58$ ,  $p < .001$ . Those with less than a college education were more likely to agree with the Act,  $X^2(1, 106) = 4.99$ ,  $p = .020$ . Those who reported having LGBTQ friends,  $X^2(1, 106) = 10.57$ ,  $p < .01$ , and LGBTQ family members,  $X^2(1, 106) = 5.36$ ,  $p = .018$ , were more likely to disagree with the Act. Whether or not participants had LGBTQ children was not associated with agreement with the Act,  $X^2(1, 106) = 2.21$ ,  $p = .14$ , but it was associated with agreement with the expansion of the Act, such that those with LGBTQ children were less likely to agree with it,  $X^2(1, 106) = 5.90$ ,  $p = .018$ .

<sup>33</sup>To better understand the relative strength of the associations between respondent characteristics and agreement with the Act (while taking the effect of all of them into account), a multivariate logistic regression was fit, in which, the outcome, support for the Act, was predicted by gender (cis men vs. women [all cis woman, plus one trans woman]), sexual orientation (heterosexual vs. non-heterosexual), education (continuous), political affiliation (Republican vs. others), and LGBTQ contact (any LGBTQ friends or family vs. not). Holding the other predictors in the model constant, the odds of agreeing with the act are 743% higher for Republicans ( $B = 2.13$ ,  $SE = .80$ ,  $Wald = 7.05$ ,  $Exp(B) = 8.29$ ,  $p = .008$ ), 524% higher for heterosexuals ( $B = 1.83$ ,  $SE = .89$ ,  $Wald = 4.29$ ,  $Exp(B) = 6.24$ ,  $p = .039$ ), 247% higher for those having no LGBTQ family or friends ( $B = 1.24$ ,  $SE = .56$ ,  $Wald = 4.95$ ,  $Exp(B) = 3.47$ ,  $p = .026$ ), and 69% lower for each additional level of educational attainment ( $B = -1.17$ ,  $SE = .59$ ,  $Wald = 3.97$ ,  $Exp(B) = .31$ ,  $p = .046$ ). Gender was not significant ( $p = .340$ ).

related to the Act, and their overall (dis)agreement with it. Yet most also noted that they would have concerns regardless of whether their own children identified as LGBTQ. Pam, an Asian cis bisexual woman who identified as an Independent, said, “All my children are queer, and one is questioning her gender identity, but even if I weren’t directly affected by these laws, I’d still fully recognize the danger they pose to children with these identities. It’s pure villainy.” Indeed, several parents described how their children had experienced a chillier climate at school since the passing of the bill, noting that their children felt “targeted” and “singled out.” Dara, a White cis heterosexual woman who identified as an Independent, said, “My child and her friends have felt the ramifications of this already. They feel less accepted when acceptance was already not widely practiced amongst their peers.”

*One child is LGBT. It didn't really [have] a huge effect as I wouldn't have supported this [law] before that [child's sexual orientation/gender identity] was known. But I don't think this is good for their mental health, and my wife and I have both noticed, since all this started, that child being somewhat more withdrawn and changing physical appearance to cling to gender norms more closely.*

**Byron, a White cis heterosexual man, Democrat**

Several participants mentioned multiple identities, including race and family structure, that rendered their children vulnerable. “Our boys are long-haired and gender non-confirming so it’s pretty scary, not even mentioning us being gay parents,” said Leah, a White pansexual trans woman who identified as an Independent. “She is a mixed child which already leaves the door open for increased harassment. She is a daughter of a LGBT family so that’s probably going to have to be concealed for her own protection when she is older,” said Rick, a White cis bisexual man affiliated with the Green Party.

Eight participants noted that although their children did not currently identify as LGBTQ, they might do so in the future, in which case the legislation would directly affect them. “It has not had an effect as of yet. I’m open to my children expressing themselves for who they are and not being belittled or bullied for it, regardless,” said Jake, a White cis heterosexual man who identified as a Democrat.

*It hasn't really affected my or my children's experiences yet as they are very young. But I do anticipate it being harmful to them in the future as they will possibly themselves experience shame for their gender identities or sexual orientation.*

**Leslie, a White cis heterosexual woman, Democrat**

*I think about my youngest growing up, and maybe being gay, and I don't want them to ever feel excluded...if they were, I think it is horrendous that this state does nothing to support [them].*

**Shayna, a White cis heterosexual woman, Independent**

## BELIEFS AND OPINIONS ABOUT THE PARENTAL RIGHTS IN EDUCATION ACT

Participants were asked, “In your opinion, which of the following is true about the Parental Rights in Education law?” and asked to check all that apply. The distribution of responses appears in Table 2.

**Table 2. Beliefs about the Parental Rights in Education Act**

	N (%)
It provokes hostility against the LGBTQ community	47 (44.3%)
It targets students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, “othering” them	50 (47.2%)
It has heightened tensions between teachers and teachers/schools	46 (43.4%)
It has heightened tensions among students within schools	29 (27.4%)
It has heightened tensions among parents within schools	30 (28.3%)
It has led to decreased curricular inclusion of LGBTQ identities/people	37 (34.9%)
It has led to decreased visual support for/representation of LGBTQ identities (e.g., pride flags)	36 (34.0%)
It protects parents’ rights and empowers parents regarding their role in their children’s education	47 (44.3%)
It protects children’s rights and well-being	40 (37.8%)
It has had no effect on curriculum	22 (20.8%)
It has had no effect on school climate	14 (13.2%)

Note: Participants could select “all that apply” and therefore percentages add up to more than 100.

Participants who agreed with the Act generally agreed that the Act protected parents’ rights and empowered parents, with most also feeling that it protected children’s rights and well-being. For example, 68% of those who agreed with the Act felt that it protected parents’ rights, compared to 5% of those who disagreed with it. Participants who were against the Act largely felt that it provoked hostility against the LGBTQ community and targeted students with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. For example, 90% of those who were against the Act felt that it provoked hostility against the LGBTQ community, compared to 17% of those who supported it.

Individuals were given the opportunity to explain and elaborate on their feelings about the Act—that is, their feelings of agreement, neutrality or mixed feelings, or opposition. Participants’ open ended comments provided additional context and reasons for their perspectives.

**Disagreement with the Act.** Sixteen of those who disagreed with the Act noted that they felt that it would further stigmatize and delegitimize LGBTQ people, which they found offensive. They noted that the erasure of LGBTQ people and issues via the Act would serve to ultimately “disrespect, downplay, and hurt the LGBT community”; “Refusing to discuss differences. . .perpetuates oppression of minorities.”

*This is a bigoted act. . .There is nothing wrong with LGBTQ+ and to act as if it is something dirty and to be banished from discussion is [wrong].*

**Dawn, a White cis heterosexual woman, Democrat**

*It is a trash law that only exists to further attack the LGBT community.*  
**Pam, an Asian cis bisexual woman, Independent**

*It's an indirect way to fire LGBTQ teachers and staff. It's a witch hunt.*

**Laura, a White cis heterosexual woman, Independent**

- Of those who disagreed with the Act, 14 expressed their belief that children needed to learn about gender and sexuality, and the existence of LGBTQ people. Thus, the Act was denying their own children a worthwhile and well-rounded education. "There's no reason we should be restricting children and forcing heteronormative standards as a baseline. It's ruining the school system. Kids should be exposed to these topics. Nothing good comes out of trying to keep things a secret or hiding them from. . .the world," said Leah, a White pansexual trans woman who was an Independent.

*It's fine if you don't want your children taught something, but you shouldn't be removing that opportunity from all children. I think my child's education is being short-changed. . .regardless if you agree with different opinions or not, [it is] important for [children] to establish a world view, develop critical thinking skills, and have empathy for others.*

**Rayna, a White cis heterosexual woman, Democrat**

*I think it's ridiculous. I am a firm believer in not sanitizing education and providing factual information to students. Gay people exist. Trans people exist.*

**Greta, a White cis bisexual woman, Democrat**

- Ten of those who disagreed with the Act emphasized that they did not need to be personally affected to be very concerned about how it would affect others, feeling that "I do not want them to grow up in an environment that 'others' anyone," and noting that "it does not have to directly affect me for me to have empathy towards others." "I think in general kids should be able to be who they are and be comfortable and be able to express themselves and this and similar legislation is a barrier and silences their voice[s]," said Tyler, a White cis heterosexual man who identified as a Democrat.

*My son is mixed and in a single parent household. Although its more common now than when I was growing up, it still feels at times he's a great minority and that we are judged by it. He also has autism and ADHD that affects his behaviors at school. I think with those things I am much more tolerant and open to other people's opinions, lifestyles, and views than most. I feel like everyone is entitled to their own choices. It is not my place, or anyone's, to judge another person. Even if you may not agree with the LGBTQ community, they are people and children need to understand that. They are no different than anyone else. It shouldn't be forbidden in schools to talk about [gender and sexuality], or answer student questions in a way an educator thinks is appropriate, or that validates someone or their family. It seems these types of legislation promote intolerance and division. I have concerns that this is just the beginning.*

**Sara, a White cis heterosexual mother, Independent**



- Twelve participants contextualized the Act in terms of a larger push towards fascism and intolerance. “It is very scary and the beginning of more assaults on the LGBTQ community,” said Hope, a White cis heterosexual woman who was a Democrat. “It is part of the fascist transition of Florida. . .they are defunding public schools, busting teachers’ unions, carving out preferential treatment to military kids, banning books, raising the ballot initiative, attacking any liberal industry they can. . .they are even banning entire college majors,” said Laura, a White cis heterosexual woman who was an Independent.
- Relatedly, 10 participants felt that the law was government overreach, noting that their governor seemed to be in “imaginary culture wars” that required him to “sweep in. . .and save the day,” and this bill was a part of that, as well as an example of “right-wing propaganda.” They viewed the Act as unnecessary—prompted by an imaginary problem and therefore offering an imaginary solution but one with negative consequences. Andrea, a White cis heterosexual woman who was a Democrat, shared, “I think it is very unfair and not right. I think it is a huge overreach.” Indeed, a common sentiment from those who disagreed with the law was that it was simply not necessary, and responded to an imaginary threat (“Kids were not being taught about this type of stuff at that age before they decided to pass this law.”)
- Members of minoritized groups sometimes referenced their identities in explaining their opposition to the Act. Said Nikki, a Black cis bisexual woman who was a Democrat, “Being Black, I know what dog whistles are, and I also know that any time a minority community is targeted, it’s only a matter of time before Black people are also targeted as well. Because of that, this bill is precisely the type of othering legislation I would never support under any circumstance.”

**Neutral/Mixed.** Of the 16 participants who indicated a neutral or mixed stance regarding the Parental Rights in Education Act, half (eight) indicated that they did not have “strong opinions,” sometimes noting that the topic “does not affect my children.” Participants who indicated a neutral stance were typically fairly measured, noting, for example, that teachers might not be as “insightful” as parents in teaching about sexuality and gender—but they did not decry or denounce the notion of such teaching. Those who indicated more mixed than neutral feelings tended to assert that they agreed with some aspects of the Act but not others. For example, they agreed that it was a good idea to keep sexuality or gender out of formal curricula but felt that it was appropriate for teachers to address such issues “if they come up.” Or, they felt that it was appropriate to know about “the gender identity and sexual preference of a person from history, even if people don’t agree [with it],” but that teaching about sexuality and gender more broadly should be up to parents. A few noted that they agreed in theory with some aspects of the Act (e.g., sex education is not appropriate in kindergarten through third grade) but worried that the way that the bill was worded was “so vague that it makes me less positive. I agree with the idea but it worries me that this is so discriminatory.”

*I have mixed feelings about it. I don't believe it is the state's responsibility as part of education to go into detail about sexual orientation or gender identity. At the same time, I don't think it should be something that is absolutely restricted from the classroom. I think it's important for children to understand the world around them, but I think those foundations should be laid at home.*

**Otis, a White cis heterosexual man, Independent**

**Agreement with the Act.** Among those who agreed with the Act, 26 explained that young children should not be exposed to information about sexuality and gender. They felt that it was “inappropriate” to speak to young children about sexuality and gender, with some expressing that this was particularly inappropriate in schools, “behind parents’ backs.” Many emphasized their children’s innocence and highlighted their perception that it was “inappropriate for them to be ‘exposed’” to adult topics (“I refuse to push anything on him that he is not ready for. Let kids be kids. . .Why taint her?”)

*My children are young, I want them to learn and be happy and be social. At this stage, I do not want them learning about their sexuality at school, regardless of the message or perspective.*

**Leslie, a White cis heterosexual woman, Republican**

- Some of these parents implicitly or explicitly indicated their belief that sexual orientation and gender identity could be influenced and/or cultivated, such as by teachers or peers, believing that exposure to this material “could possibly cause them to have an unhealthy mindset.” Some noted specific concerns that being introduced to this information too early could confuse their children or cause them to question their gender or sexuality. “My daughter, as far as I know, identifies as a girl and has never said anything different to me, but then again we don’t discuss things like gender identity or identity really. I am happy to hear that the Act has been passed so that I don’t have to worry about her learning things that may confuse her at this young age,” said Cathy, a White cis heterosexual woman, a Democrat.
- Some of those who agreed with the original law provided the caveat that their agreement applied only to young children. Although they regarded the original law as “sensible,” they disagreed with the expansion of the Act, feeling, for example, that “waiting until Grade 8 is late; by that time, children are already well into puberty and have already had sexual experiences.” Those who offered more measured opinions and/or caveats related to their agreement with the Act were more often Independents or Democrats than Republicans.

*Kids in the third grade and younger are not old enough to comprehend sexuality and maybe even gender. Exposing them to such material at that young age is more likely to confuse them than to provide any real benefit. [But] the expansion I’m not sure I agree with. Kids in middle school are old enough to deal with those subjects.*

**Luis, a Latinx cis heterosexual man, Democrat**

- Other parents were clear that teaching about sexual orientation at any age was inappropriate, noting that such teachings were in contradiction with their own values. They did not want their children “exposed” to information or messaging that would normalize the existence of diverse sexualities. To them, LGBTQ identities were wrong or immoral, and they disagreed with any discussion or perceived validation of them in the school setting, seeing this as “inappropriate.” Participants’ responses often centered specifically on gender identity, voicing their distaste surrounding the notion that teachers or curricula might “promote the idea that [for] girls, it’s OK to identify as a man” or “[for] boys, it’s OK to identify as a woman.”

*I do not feel sexual orientation should be taught at any grade level, especially during the early elementary school years. I personally do not want my child to be indoctrinated to a lifestyle that is against my family’s core values.*

**Mindy, a White cis heterosexual woman, Republican**

- Fifteen parents emphasized their belief that it is not the place for schools to teach about sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender, feeling that parents should have the ultimate “say” in terms of what their children were exposed to. Threaded throughout parents’ narratives was a perception that teaching about sexuality or gender, or using children’s desired pronouns, was evidence of leftist pressures, which these participants resisted, inasmuch as they did not want their children exposed to “liberal” ideas in schools. Another core theme through their narratives was the issue of parents’ rights, feeling that “when it comes to gender issues, it’s up to the family to teach children.” Republicans in particular emphasized parents’ versus schools’ rights to “raise our children however we see fit. . .it gives the power back to parents” noting further that the law also protected children (“it protects children’s rights and well-being”; “this rule is aimed at protecting children psychologically and emotionally. . .[let them] have a school or educational institution dedicated only to children with sexual deviations”).

*Just like I don't want teachers teaching my kids about religion. . .that early, I don't want them teaching about gender studies. That's something the parents should be doing, and I do agree that there has been a push from the left that's been a little too strong recently.*

**Barry, a White cis heterosexual man, Independent**

*Children are being pressured too much by sex. Let them be kids, leave sex to the married adults. Sexual orientation is strictly about who you are attracted to and want to have sex with. This should not be taught in public school systems. It's absurd.*

**Colin, a multiracial cis heterosexual man, Independent**

## PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF THE ACT ON SCHOOL FUNCTIONING AND CHILD WELL-BEING

Respondents were asked about various specific things that had happened to their children as well as specific things they observed happening at their children’s schools in the past six months. Of note is that those who agreed with the Act were less likely to report changes at school (i.e., books being removed and signifiers of LGBTQ visibility and support being removed) than those who disagreed with it.<sup>34</sup>

**Table 3. Child experiences in the past six months**

	N (%)
My child/ren were bullied, teased, or harassed at school for being LGBTQ or having LGBTQ family members	4 (3.8%)
My child/ren worried about talking openly at school about their LGBTQ identities or having LGBTQ family members	2 (1.8%)
My child/ren was redirected or reprimanded by a teacher related to what they shared about their LGBTQ identities or LGBTQ family members	1 (.9%)
My child/ren were bullied, teased, or harassed at school for their racial, ethnic, or cultural identities	6 (5.7%)
My child/ren expressed fear, anxiety, or avoidance of school	13 (12.3%)

<sup>34</sup>  $\chi^2(1, 106) = 10.93, p < .001.$

	N (%)
My child/ren expressed fears about the future related to living in Florida	10 (9.4%)
Books (e.g., on LGBTQ topics) were removed from the school library or classrooms	20 (18.9%)
Signifiers of LGBTQ inclusion were removed from the school (e.g., rainbow flags)	14 (13.2%)

Note: Participants could select “all that apply” and therefore percentages add up to more than 100.

**Other observed changes in schools.** Parents were asked to elaborate on the changes they had observed over the past six months. Five noted that teachers seemed more “hesitant,” “scared,” and “afraid” to teach about sexuality, gender, and LGBTQ issues and to be “outspoken” in general. Mark, a White cis heterosexual man who was a Democrat, asserted, “I think many teachers are hesitant to teach about diversity, LGBTQ issues, equality issues, etc. because of these bills. I think my children are getting a lower quality education than they would otherwise because of it.” Katie, a White cis heterosexual mother who was an Independent, shared, “I feel that school staff and/or schools locally are open and welcoming, however it is hard not to notice that they feel pressured and/or fearful of retaliation for being accepting of all students.” Additionally, three parents noted that they had observed LGBTQ parents, teachers, and students being less out. And, three parents described the elimination of clubs and supports for students identifying as LGBTQ.

*Several books have been removed from the library, and teachers have openly expressed their concerns about teaching various topics in fear of being sued or fired.*

**Tara, a Black cis heterosexual woman, Green Party**

Seven noted mental health changes in their children, such that they experienced increased mental anguish, fear, or isolation. About his child, Dan, a White cis bisexual man who identified as a Democratic Socialist, said, “Their mental health is being destroyed by this bill and they don’t want to be as social, which I completely understand. It just affects the children, which is in no way at all their fault. I place the blame on the government.” Seven parents also observed changes in their children’s peers, or they had heard about such changes from their own children. Claire, a White cis heterosexual woman who was a Democrat, asserted, “My kids are fine but I know other kids are not. This bill is harming LGBTQ kids and putting them back into hiding. Essentially a target on their back.” Susie, a White cis heterosexual woman who was a Democrat, said, “I have been told that some children in their school are upset by this because they do not feel free to express [themselves] and some feel repressed and. . .this has created problems at school.”

Two parents noted changes in disciplinary action related to children’s gender expression, noting that there were more “extreme measures for. . .dress code violation,” including boys wearing makeup or kilts, resulting in kids being “sent home.” Two parents noted changes in their children’s willingness to talk about their own parents’ sexual identities. “The older kids refuse to mention they have lesbian moms,” said Amy, a White cis pansexual woman who identified as a Democrat. Two parents asserted that they had observed LGBTQ teachers leaving their children’s schools “since the passage of that bill.”

Some parents emphasized that they saw negative effects of the law beyond the school context. Four noted increased tensions and polarization within their community, emphasizing that the law served to further divide people and parents and “created issues where there shouldn’t be any.” Four observed

negative effects on the LGBTQ community as a whole, noting that it “isolated” people who were part of the LGBTQ community, and asserting that “the hostility in my county has only increased since this bill has been passed.” Three described increased racial tensions, with one stating, “I have noticed more open hostility as a mixed Black family.”

**Explaining a lack of observed effect.** Some participants with more critical and less positive views of the Act noted that their children had not been affected by the Act thus far, because of the fact that they were in private or charter school (five) or homeschooled (one). Hope, a White cis heterosexual woman who was a Democrat, who indicated that her 12-year-old daughter was gay, noted, “Her school is a charter school and hasn’t yet adopted these dystopian ideas. But, I fear Florida is trying to foster a hostile environment for her by treating her as something that should not be talked about.” Tori, a White cis heterosexual woman who identified as a Democrat, said, “They are in private school and don’t have to deal with this silly crap from DeSantis.”

Four noted that they felt that they had been relatively unaffected because they lived in a progressive area, which “shielded [them] from the worst effects of all this nonsense.” Anna, a Latinx cis heterosexual woman who was a Democrat, said, “My child is too young to have any sort of set identity, but I do worry about his schooling and what sort of curriculum he will be exposed to. Luckily, Broward is one of the most progressive counties in Florida so he probably will not be affected by the policies passed by our current administration as much as kids in other parts of the state.” Tom, a White cis heterosexual man who was a Democrat, said, “[We] live in a very liberal town. . . a very understanding college town with a diverse population. I believe the whole town is against the bill since they are very progressive.”

Four parents noted that their children were older, such as in high school, and were therefore minimally affected (“she is ready to graduate high school, so this doesn’t affect her directly”). Three noted that their children were older and unaffected but had nevertheless been active in fighting back against the law. Rob, a White cis heterosexual man who was a Democrat, said, “Both have participated in walkouts and other forms of protest (their choice, and they asked). But since both are older, they haven’t been very affected by it, as of yet.”

Five said their children were not yet school-aged, and thus had not yet been affected. Jake, a White cis heterosexual man who was a Democrat, stated, “My children are both very young and still in daycare. This doesn’t apply to them as of yet.”

**No perceived changes at school.** Many parents said they had observed no changes at school. A few of them framed this neutrally or somewhat positively, meaning, they had not observed an increase in hostility or censorship surrounding LGBTQ issues. Most, however, who framed the lack of change as positive clarified that they meant that gender and sexuality had not been taught or talked about before and continued to be absent from school curricula and culture. Said Steve, a White cis heterosexual man who was a Republican, “Not at all. They are pretty young though. They learn about typical normal subjects as they should.” Said Ron, another White cis heterosexual male Republican, “My children’s education hasn’t changed because luckily where I live the culture is in agreement even before the bill that these things shouldn’t be taught for the most part, especially in the Catholic school we have her go to.”

**Perceived positive changes.** Some parents who were in support of the bill noted positive changes they had observed. A few felt that children were better able to focus on school and the things that “mattered, such as their grades. . .instead of feeling pressured to fit into social trends by trying to come up with a cool unique identity.” A few described feeling that with the passage of the law, their children’s rights were now more “respected” in schools. Carl, a White cis man who was a Republican, asserted, “As heterosexuals, my children’s rights have been put on the back burner. We have spent so much time and effort catering to the small population of LGBTQ people that we have lost sight of what is good for all kids. . .My child should not have to alter his own lifestyle to make conditions for those kids.”

## EXPERIENCES AND ACTIONS RELATED TO THE PARENTAL RIGHTS IN EDUCATION ACT

Participants in this study were also asked about a series of experiences and actions that they may have engaged in over the past six months, in response to the Act, which approximated the time period since the law had been passed and school was in session (September-February).

**Table 3. Parents’ actions and experiences in the past 6 months**

	N (%)
I considered moving out of Florida	43 (40.6%)
I actively took steps to move out of Florida (e.g., looking for jobs/real estate)	10 (9.4%)
I considered moving my child to a new school	9 (8.5%)
I actively took steps to move/am moving my child to a new school	6 (5.7%)
I participated in advocacy or activism AGAINST the Parental Rights in Education legislation	12 (11.3%)
I donated to causes or people fighting AGAINST the Parental Rights in Education legislation	9 (8.5%)
I participated in advocacy or activism SUPPORTING the Parental Rights in Education legislation	5 (4.7%)
I donated to people or causes SUPPORTING the Parental Rights in Education legislation	5 (4.7%)
I was less involved in my child/ren’s school (e.g., volunteering)	3 (2.8%)
I was more involved in my child/ren’s school (e.g., to make sure my voice was heard)	17 (16.0%)
Something else	29 (27.4%)
I haven’t done any of these things/“I continued living my life”	20 (18.9%)
Other forms of activism (e.g., talking to other parents about the bills, writing my senators)	3 (2.8%)
Other	6 (5.7%)

Note: Participants could select “all that apply” and therefore percentages add up to more than 100.

Participants had been living in Florida for an average of 24.7 years (SD = 11.77; range 2–56). When asked how much they would like to move out of Florida after expressing their thoughts about the Act and its expansion, 21 parents (19.8%) indicated very much so, 20 parents (18.9%) said somewhat, 16 parents (15.1%) indicated neutral/mixed feelings, 16 (15.1%) said not really, and 33 (31.1%) said not at all. Parents who disagreed with the Act were more likely to say that they very much or somewhat wanted to move, and those who disagreed with its expansion were also more likely to say that they

wanted to move.<sup>35</sup> When asked how likely it was that they would move out of Florida in the next two years, 42 (39.6%) said not at all likely, 30 (28.3%) said not very likely, 16 (15.1%) said neutral/unsure, 6 (5.7%) said somewhat likely, and 12 (10.7%) said very likely.

Figure 3. Desire to move out of Florida

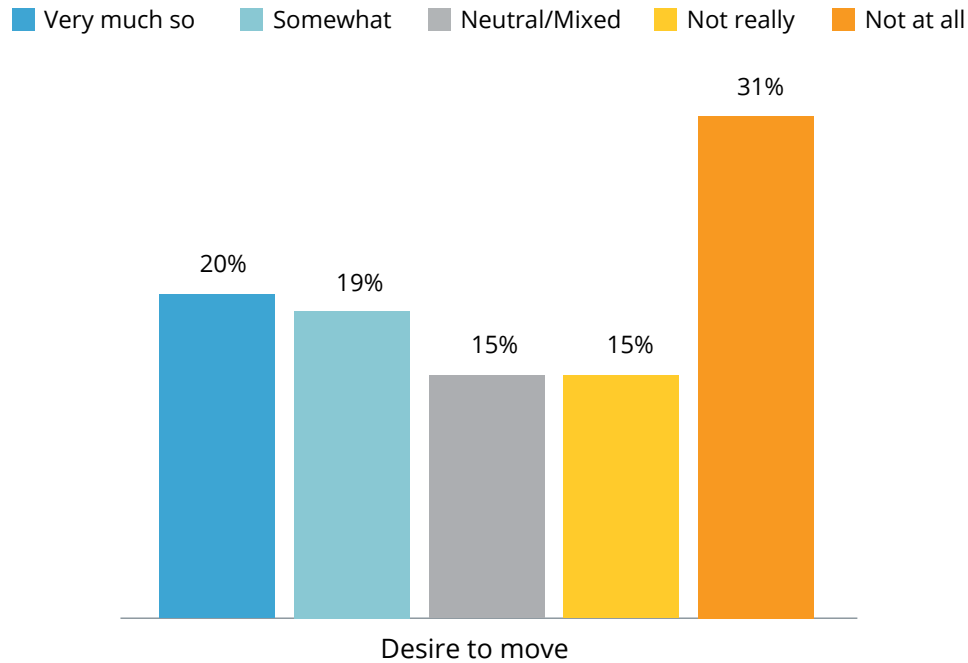
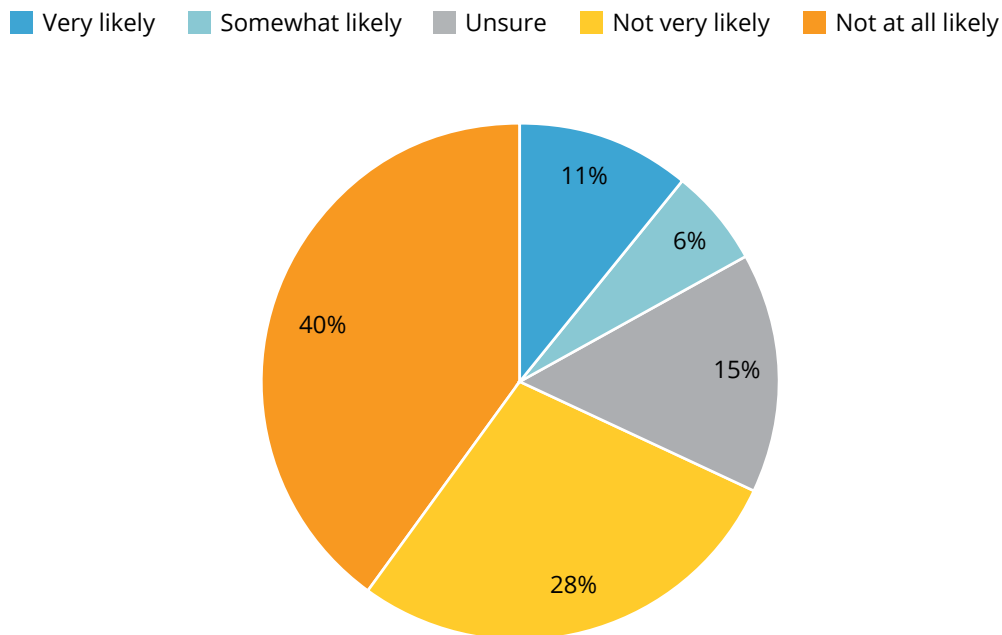


Figure 4. Likelihood of moving out of Florida



<sup>35</sup>Parents who disagreed with the Act were more likely to say that they very much or somewhat wanted to move,  $X^2(1, 106) = 30.98, p < .001$ . Those who disagreed with its expansion were also more likely to say that they wanted to move,  $X^2(1, 106) = 27.24, p < .001$ .

When asked about barriers to moving, 40 (37.8%) said not applicable, as they had no intention to or interest in moving. Will, a White cis heterosexual man who was a Democrat, stated, "It's all bureaucratic and political gesturing; nothing has changed in our lives." Cheryl, a White cis heterosexual woman who was a Republican, said, "I love it here and love that Desantis is focusing on what's important and wants our kids to be able to compete with other countries and LEARN!"

- Forty-four (41.5%) said job/employment was a barrier. Elaborating on this, Hope, a White cis heterosexual woman who identified as a Democrat, said, "We are both established in our jobs. Most of my family is in NY and we most definitely can't afford to live there."
- Thirty-six (34.0%) said that their extended family lived in Florida, and this was a barrier to moving. Bruce, a White cis heterosexual man who identified as an Independent, said, "The main thing holding me back from completely just ditching the state altogether is that my extended family is here, and we all have mixed emotions on the future of this state. It's pretty sad it's coming down to this for some people."
- Twenty-eight participants (26.4%) identified the hassle of moving as a barrier. Said Rob, a White cis heterosexual man who was a Democrat, "I've thought about it, but the costs and headache are huge barriers to a move like that."
- Twenty-four (26.4%) said family caregiving responsibilities were a barrier. Nelson, a Black cis heterosexual man who was a Democrat, said, "It's expensive to move right now and my with my son's medical issues we would have to find a whole new network of doctors for him."
- Twenty-two participants (20.8%) said that they loved their home, and 21 (19.8%) said their friends lived in Florida.
- Eighteen (17.0%) said they could not afford to move. As Jamie, a White cis heterosexual woman who was a Democrat, said, "Moving to another state is a long term goal of mine but I just cannot afford it for the foreseeable future." Some participants noted that moving would create unmanageable financial stress, stating "We are too poor to move" and "it would be a downturn in our finances to move out of state."
- Eighteen (17.0%) endorsed liking the weather, 15 (14.2%) said cost of living/lower taxes, 12 (10.7%) said they loved the state, nine (8.5%) said things to do/tourism, and nine (8.5%) said other reasons. Two individuals cited the fact that they were a military family; two said that they did not want to take the children away from their friends/school; one cited their love of the natural beauty of Florida; one cited a lack of homes for sale in the location they wanted to move to; one said that they would have to sell their business; and one said their wife wouldn't let them.
- Some participants described a complex array of interrelated barriers, noting the tension they experienced between their love and loyalty to their state, with many noting that they had grown up in Florida, and shifts in policies and politics that they found alarming. Nikki, a Black cis bisexual woman who was a Democrat, shared, "My family has been here since before Florida was a U.S. territory. I would feel like a failure if I allowed bigots to run my family off. . . Obviously, as a bisexual mother with a gay wife and gay and bi children, I'm not super fond of the law and it has even had us considering leaving the state. But I don't want to be bullied out of leaving the community I love just because of a sociopathic governor who thrives on culture wars."



*I have lived here my entire life. I have spent 40 years in the same area. I went to school here. I taught here. My entire family is here. When I left home, I stayed within 10 minutes of my parents' home. My husband is just like me. Both of us, independently and unironically, began thinking about how we could leave this state. It's just a matter of waiting for the opportunity to actually do it. I will be sad to be leaving my family, but I can't stand living in a place where such close-mindedness is becoming the norm. Honestly, if I could, I'd leave the country because there is no guarantee just leaving the state will make much of a difference.*

**Maya, a White cis heterosexual woman, Independent**

**Leaving or avoiding public schools.** Five participants who disagreed with the law volunteered that amidst an inability or unwillingness to leave the state, they were seriously considering or planning to remove their children from public school (e.g., send them to private school or homeschool them) or, in several cases, to homeschool their not-yet-school-aged children (“with the way things are headed . . . I will seriously consider homeschooling”). Three parents said that their decision to homeschool was reaffirmed and strengthened by the passage of the Act. Maya, quoted above, who was a home educator, said, “The act made me even more dead set on homeschooling rather than public school,” also noting that “My child keeps asking me about going to school. He wants to go to school with his friends. I cannot in good conscience allow him to be educated in such an environment.”

## CONCLUSION

This exploratory study provides a snapshot into how parents in Florida are thinking and feeling about the Parental Rights in Education Act, six months into the school year. It provides insight into some of the demographic factors that are associated with support or rejection of the Parental Rights in Education Act, such that more educated people, Democrats, sexual minorities, and people with personal ties to LGBTQ people are less likely to support it. It provides nuance into the reasons for people's support or non-support of the Act. Parents who did not support the Act expressed concerns about its impact on the overall climate at school (e.g., for LGBTQ students, teachers, and allies) as well as the curriculum (e.g., they felt that the elimination of LGBTQ and gender- and sexuality-related topics was not in the best interest of students in general). Parents who supported the Act voiced the belief that gender/sexuality should not be taught at schools, with some noting that children could potentially be influenced in negative ways through exposure to LGBTQ identities or topics.

Perceived impacts so far included, most often, the removal of books and LGBTQ signifiers—but in their open-ended comments, participants often described other impacts, including those on the mental health of their children and fellow students. Some participants explicitly noted that there had been no real changes at all. With regard to the future, 40% of the sample expressed interest in moving, although many identified serious barriers to doing so, such as employment factors, caregiving responsibilities, and financial limitations. This underscores the reality that for the most vulnerable individuals, moving may not be a realistic option, even as living in Florida becomes increasingly challenging.

## SURVEY DEVELOPMENT AND METHODOLOGY

The data come from a survey developed and launched by Abbie Goldberg (Clark University). The survey was entitled, "Florida Parents' Perspectives on the Parental Rights in Education Act." The study was approved by the Clark University Human Subjects Review Board.

The survey was fielded through Qualtrics and took about 25 minutes to complete (median duration = 27 minutes). It contained closed and open-ended questions.

Participants were recruited via Prolific. Prolific is a well-established platform for recruiting participants. Prolific performs rigorous checks and screening of potential participants to ensure confidence that research participants are who they say they are, and are paid directly by Prolific (which is in turn paid by researchers). Prolific studies are advertised to eligible participants based on pre-set criteria established by the researcher. Individuals could participate if they were a parent of at least one child under 18 and currently lived in Florida. The survey was available to complete March 22–March 24, 2023. Responses were gathered from 112 parents, with 106 complete or nearly complete responses (105 completed 100%; 1 completed 91%). Six participants were removed from the dataset due to partial responses (1 completed 7%, 3 completed 51%, and 2 completed 70%).

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## CORRECTION

A previous version of this report incorrectly reported 19% of Florida parents strongly disagreed with the original law. The correct percentage is 27%.

## ABOUT THE WILLIAMS INSTITUTE

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