Overview

Book bans and censorship in schools negatively impact our children's education today and their access to opportunity in the future. We all want our kids to receive an excellent education that prepares them to lead and succeed in the real world, but our country's future leaders are being denied essential aspects of a well-rounded education as state legislatures and school boards pass sweeping measures that restrict access to books with diverse authors and subject, cut programs that strengthen students' social and emotional skills, and ban conversations about racism and inequality.

Parents and schools should work together to ensure that every child gets a quality education — one that recognizes their unique needs and provides them the resources they need to reach their full potential, no matter their race or background. We're asking lawmakers at the local, state and federal levels to join the chorus of those speaking out against efforts to censor our children's education and deny them the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Our families, communities, and futures depend on how our public schools prepare the next generation of leaders.

The talking points below reflect research-backed language we can use to advocate for the freedom to learn in conversations with local, state and federal lawmakers. These talking points provide a framework for how to communicate about the freedom to learn, and to be useful for a variety of messengers, and can be adapted for your specific context.

Messaging Architecture

To address misinformation and shift the narrative, here are the four main elements to focus on. While the exact language for each message section might vary for your context, we explain why each of these steps will help your message:

	Why this works:
Start with shared values:	Shared values start the conversation from a place of agreement, likely making them more interested, particularly if we align with families, invoke patriotism, and focus on individual student success.
Define the impact:	Once you've established shared values, pivot to how the gag orders and divisive rhetoric (or downstream impacts) undermine those same values. People need to know why this issue matters to them, and real life examples help. In particular, we want to focus on how this impacts students on an individual level, rather than talking about consequences for society at large.
Highlight benefits of honest and inclusive education:	Once the harm has been established, pivot to explain how honest and inclusive education DOES support those shared

	values. It's especially important to connect our vision for education to students' individual success, in college, career, or life in general.
Call into action for a positive vision:	Finally, leave folks with a clear idea of what the future could look like, with specific calls to action that support honest and inclusive education. A positive vision helps the audience realize what's possible and recognize the role they play in sparking change.

Books Bans Examples

Start with shared values: Parents want to make sure kids are safe, supported, and successful in school.

- When we ban books and restrict ideas, even in the name of safety, we aren't protecting our kids. We are censoring free thought and discussion, preventing parents from making individual decisions about what children can learn, and harming our kids' education.
- Wanting to make sure material is age-appropriate is a valid concern for many parents. That's why teachers are trained to teach about difficult subjects in an age-appropriate way. Gradually introducing topics at a pace they can handle builds on childrens' natural curiosity and empathy as they learn about their world.

Define the impact:

- Some of the books currently being banned are about great American heroes like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ruby Bridges - or are by Pulitzer Prize-winning authors like Toni Morrison.
- Parents like us want truthful education, classrooms where students are valued and accepted, and curriculum that sets kids up to succeed.
    - According to a We Believe x Ipsos poll from 2023, seventy-eight percent (78%) of Americans say they are less likely to support a political candidate in the 2024 elections who favors book bans.
    - Only seven percent (7%) of parents support the removal of a book from library or classroom shelves based on one parent's objection.
    - In May 2023, the Washington Post connected 660+ book challenges to just 11 individuals. Book bans are NOT what the majority of parents want.
- The parents I talk to say/feel/think… [insert an anecdote about local community sentiment]

Highlight the benefits:

- Books broaden our children's perspectives, help them learn about themselves and others, inspire creativity, and help them navigate life's toughest moments. They help children feel valued and accepted and form healthy identities. They also help students learn about how others feel, especially those whose race, ethnicity, or background is different from their own.
- Our children want to read, explore and be challenged. That's why so many students are standing

up against these book bans, forming book clubs, and fighting to keep these books on their library shelves.

Call into action for a positive vision:

- Children are America's future — and that future is at stake. We wanted our elected officials to work with us to fight for our kids' freedom to learn.
- The parents in my community want their kids to be a part of learning environments where students feel accepted and valued, regardless of race, gender identity, religion, or anything else.
- When we remove books from our libraries or censor curriculum, we're taking away the right of parents to determine what's best for their children. And most parents don't believe that politicians should be making decisions about what can and can't be taught or what books their kids are allowed to read.
- We want lawmakers like you to use your power to protect the freedom to learn by ensuring access to books and that parents and teachers can work together to provide what kids can learn.
- States like Illinois and Washington have already successfully passed legislation that prevents book bans and safeguards places of learning. With your leadership, our community can and must do the same.

Censorship Examples

Start with shared values: Most Americans want to see their elected leaders fighting for honest and equitable public education.

- We need politicians like you to listen and respond to what parents actually want for our children's education.
- The parents in my community want politicians who are putting kids and families first.
- Most parents don't want censorship in the classroom. What parents actually want for their kids is for them to be free to learn about our shared history, our diverse stories, and each other, and will support politicians who fight for honest education.
- Parents, schools, and legislators should work side-by-side to give children the tools, skills, and resources they need to be good citizens, members of their community, and leaders.
- The parents I talk to say… [insert an anecdote about local community sentiment]

Define the impact:

- We can't censor the real world if we want our kids to be prepared to succeed. Our kids need to learn how to work across differences, handle challenging topics, and ask hard questions in order to succeed and lead in a diverse world.
- Policies that would censor what our children can read and learn are….
    - Limiting our kids' knowledge of history and ability to understand current events
    - Making many students feel that they aren't valued or accepted
    - Denying our kids life skills that are essential to their future success, like how to navigate a challenging conversation and interact with people who are different from them

    - Shutting our kids out of opportunities with the major employers who are looking for students who can work with people from a diverse range of people, places and perspectives
    - Rejecting our deeply-held American values of free speech and expression
- Banning curriculum in the name of parent rights is a misnomer. According to a We Believe x Ipsos poll from 2023:
    - The reality is, parents are fed up with politicians messing with our kid's classrooms in the name of "parents' rights."
    - Roughly seven in ten say they would be less likely to support a candidate who supports statewide policies limiting what can be taught in public schools (71%) or supports curriculum restrictions around race, gender, and sexual orientation (66%).

Highlight the benefits:

- An education that empowers, inspires, challenges, and informs our children with age-appropriate lessons about our shared history and diverse identities is the best way to prepare our kids for success in the classroom, college, and beyond.
- Giving kids access to diverse curriculum in age-appropriate ways has a positive impact on their career and life success. Major employers and business leaders say that they want students to learn about a diverse range of people, places, and perspectives because it helps them learn how to work with people who are different from them.

Call into action for a positive vision: Children are America's future — and that future is at stake. Policymakers have the power to advance this fight for our kids' freedom to learn.

- Honest education is about teaching our full history — the good and the bad — celebrating our diversity, and giving our kids the opportunity to ask questions, read books, and express themselves, which is not only vital for their success in the classroom but also for the growth and success of our nation.
    - And an overwhelming majority of parents agree — 87% of parents believe that lessons about the history of racism prepare children to build a better future for everyone.
    - 82% of parents believe that teachers should be able to talk about race, gender, and sexual orientation at school, whether that be through answering students' questions or by having age-appropriate curriculum that includes these topics.
- What parents actually want from elected officials, when it comes to K-12 education, is to focus on adequate funding and keeping our kids and schools safe — instead of dictating what can be taught in the classroom.
    - We trust teachers to work together with parents and families to support our kids' learning and build the kind of community we want for our kids.