



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
School Psychologists

4340 East West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD 20814

PHONE: 301-657-0270

FAX: 301-657-0275

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Honorable Aaron Bean, Chair
House Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary, and Secondary Education

Honorable Suzanne Bonamici, Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Early Childhood,
Elementary, and Secondary Education

Re: Academic Freedom Under Attack

On behalf of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), I appreciate this opportunity to provide expert testimony for the record to the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education. NASP represents over 25,000 school psychologists who work with students, families, educators, administrators, and communities to support student success in school and in life. NASP is committed to advocating for the rights, education, mental health, and behavioral needs of students and believes *all* students are entitled to receiving a public education in a positive and inclusive environment where they can learn about themselves and the world around them.

NASP firmly believes that censorship has no place in our education system and that educators, policymakers, and families alike should uphold the academic freedom of students and educators in both the K-12 and higher education space. Students have the right to an uncensored, well-rounded, and fact-driven education that empowers them to understand the complex world and ideas around them and to thoughtfully examine conflicting perspectives using facts and evidence without ideological or political interference. Equally important is allowing educators to help students critically examine the context of the world in which they live. Understanding the perspective of others, even when there is disagreement, is foundational to the learning process and prepares students to be engaged citizens of the world. Importantly, academic freedom is inclusive of students' right to express and explore their and others' identities through school curriculum and resources. The free exchange of ideas is the bedrock of our democracy.

Schools have long served as a place for children and youth to explore complicated and, at times, controversial topics in developmentally appropriate ways. NASP strongly supports the inclusion of developmentally appropriate discussion and formal curricula on critical topics such as systemic racism, equity, cultural responsiveness, diversity, social-emotional learning, romantic and sexual orientation, and gender identity. Critical thinking and respectful dialogue about important and complex topics are necessary for students to understand an increasingly diverse society and their place within it. Most notably, these critical skills prepare children and youth to participate fully in our society, its institutions, and our treasured democracy. Banning curricula, books, or even mere conversation about these topics does not guarantee that parents will have total control over what and how their student learns. Rather, these efforts are antithetical to young people's developmental trajectory, including their curiosity and desire to explore topics, and their identity, independently of their parents. Censorship harms our students and will only drive them to seek the information they desire from peers, social media, the internet, and other avenues without adult guidance.

The Communist Party of China has a history of limiting academic freedom and maintains total control over the kinds of information available to Chinese citizens. In December 2020 on the House floor, Chairwoman Foxx stated, "There is no place for Chinese censorship in America, especially not on college campuses where American ingenuity should

take flight.” NASP agrees that censorship has no place in America. NASP agrees that academic freedom is under attack and these attacks must be addressed, whether they come from other countries or from within the United States. Unfortunately, at present, academic freedom is under attack from within.

School boards, state legislatures, and Congress have proposed and passed policy and law that restricts coursework, critical examination, or mere discussion of issues related to diversity, the LGBTQ+ community, racism, equity, and even some historical figures and events in both the K-12 and higher education settings. These same bodies have endorsed the banning of books from schools and public libraries, the elimination of specific majors and coursework on college campuses, and the removal of educators and professors exercising their academic freedom. These efforts are antithetical to the U.S. Constitution, and the promotion of censorship and the erasure of history or the historic marginalization of different groups establishes a dangerous path for our country. Academic freedom cannot co-exist with the purposeful misrepresentation of history or the replacement of educators’ expertise and students’ right to fully access public education with government control and overreach.

The biggest threat to academic freedom today is the continued weaponization of education and educators. NASP is unequivocally committed to ensuring the ability of students and educators to engage in critical dialogue necessary to understand our history, to understand each other, and to build a more equitable society.

Members of Congress take an oath in which they pledge to defend the Constitution of the United States, and the courts have routinely held that academic freedom is enshrined within the First Amendment. Specific to the higher education arena, *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234 (1957) affirmed that academic freedom is protected by the Constitution. In his concurring opinion, Justice Frankfurter outlined the “four essential freedoms” of a university: “to determine for itself on academic grounds who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study.”

We call on Congress to uphold their oaths of office, promote genuine academic freedom, and reject any proposal that seeks to limit classroom discussion, sanitize history, or erase groups of people from curricula, instructional materials, and books.

We appreciate the Subcommittee’s consideration of this testimony, and we welcome opportunities to work with Congress to protect the academic freedom of all students. If you have any questions, please contact NASP’s Director of Policy and Advocacy, Dr. Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach (kvaillancourt@naspweb.org).

Sincerely,



Kathleen Minke, PhD, NCSP
Executive Director
National Association of School Psychologists