

# Students and Educators Pushing Back, Leading the Way

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A few years ago, when my stepdaughter was still in elementary school, she asked me: “Why do we only learn about Indigenous Americans in the past tense at school?” She went on to describe what she *had* been taught about history. Unsurprisingly, it was the same white-centered, male-dominated narrative that I had learned in elementary school, that my American father had learned, and that his parents had learned before him. The difference was that she had the awareness to realize that what she was learning was simply that — one narrative — and she had the critical consciousness to question it.

There are many children with this critical consciousness, asking questions and advocating for access to diverse histories and complex narratives.

Lately, the news has been dominated by stories of (all too real, all too troubling) book bans and curricular erasures. At the same time, many young people are aware that this is happening and are pushing back. Across the country, students are organizing, protesting, walking out, and speaking out. They’re reading and distributing banned books. They’re even filing lawsuits in response to district policies.

When children are the ones advocating for their own access to honest, anti-racist education, the adults around them are more likely to rise to the occasion. Every day I work with educators who are actively diversifying and deepening their students’ access to racially honest history. Teachers are centering more texts by Black, Indigenous, and Latine authors. Schools are providing ethnic studies programs at younger ages. States are passing the first-ever mandates around Asian American studies. This work is happening at every level, and as long as young people continue to lead the way in advocating for this kind of learning, I retain my optimism for the future.

**Huge majorities of Americans believe that lessons about the history of racism, rather than being harmful to children, prepare children to build a better future for everyone.**

86% of Independents agree

95% of Democrats agree

76% of Republicans agree

[ipsos Poll for Parents Together Among American Adults](#)

**Dr. Sarah-SoonLing Blackburn** is an educator, speaker and professional learning facilitator. Sarah has experience teaching at both the secondary and elementary levels and in 2011 was named Teacher of the Year at Lakeside Upper Elementary School in Lake Village, Arkansas. As a professional trainer, Sarah’s areas of focus have included workplace cultures, leadership skills, and diversity, equity and inclusion, working with organizations across the country such as Learning for Justice, Microsoft and LinkedIn. Sarah has an M.A. in Social Justice and Education from University College London’s Institute of Education and an Ed.D. from Johns Hopkins University.