



PARENTS IN CONTROL: *Education & Healthcare*

A GUIDE TO YOUR RIGHTS



ALLIANCE
DEFENDING
FREEDOM

THAT ALL MIGHT BE FREE



TABLE *of Contents*

4 How this guide can empower you to protect *your rights*

6 What are '*parental rights*'?

8 Threats to *parental rights*

- How are parental rights being threatened?
- Secret social transition plans
- Gender ideology in the classroom
- Free speech at risk
- Forcing prospective parents out of the adoption and foster care system
- Protecting fairness, safety, and privacy spaces

21 What is ADF doing to protect *parental rights*?

23 How you can *take action*

- Reviewing Your Child's Curriculum
- Advocating for opt-in and opt-out policies
- Actively engaging with school boards
- Advocating for parents with legislators
- Get legal assistance

29 Take action to protect parental rights in *your community*!

30 Connect *with ADF*

HOW THIS GUIDE CAN EMPOWER YOU TO PROTECT *your rights*

Today, many families face the experience of having a child struggle with anxiety, depression, or other mental health challenges.

When this happens, parents should have every opportunity to seek the care and support they believe their child needs.



However, as several families nationwide have discovered, government and school policies are increasingly threatening parents' fundamental rights.

When one 12-year-old girl in Wisconsin was struggling, school officials should have deferred to her parents, knowing that they knew and loved her more than anyone. Instead, school policy dictated that staff would refer to her using male pronouns and a masculine name—without her parents' consent and against their express instructions not to change their daughter's name or use inaccurate pronouns at school.

These parents were forced to remove their daughter from the school to protect her, but with the help of attorneys with

Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) and the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty, they filed a lawsuit to protect their rights and ensure that this wouldn't happen to any other parents. Praise God, the court ruled that school's policy violates parental rights.

Today, that girl is a thriving young woman who no longer struggles with her identity.

This kind of story should be rare. But every day, parents across the country are becoming more aware that efforts by federal, state, and local governments, as well as school districts, are aimed at influencing their children to embrace ideas and beliefs their parents may or may not share. These ideologies are not harmless theories—they have real-world implications that every parent should be aware of.

ADF created this guide to equip you to understand and navigate topics including gender ideology—and how it is impacting children inside and outside the classroom.

With this guide, you'll be empowered to:

- Explain what parental rights are and how parents can defend their own.
- Identify how gender ideology threatens parental rights in education and healthcare.
- Utilize essential tools that can help parents protect their children.

To protect children, parents must exercise their rights, and we must ensure that our laws and policies respect them.

This guide points to three broad principles that parents should keep in mind when advocating for the government to protect their rights: Accountability, Choice, and Transparency (ACT):

1 ACCOUNTABILITY FOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS—

Ensure that all parents can hold the government accountable for any infringements on their fundamental rights.

2 CHOICE—Ensure that all parents can choose the education and healthcare they deem best for their children.

3 TRANSPARENCY—Ensure that all parents have reliable information about their children's health and education so they can make the best decisions for their children.

WHAT ARE *‘parental rights’?*

Simply put, parental rights are the fundamental rights parents have to care for and direct their children’s *upbringing*.



But where do these rights come from?

Recognizing the source of parental rights completely shapes one’s understanding of them, including how far they extend and the harm violating them causes.

Parental rights, like all natural rights (such as free speech and religious freedom), are independent of and pre-date government itself. They are given by God, and governments exist to protect—not grant or withhold—these rights.

Families are the first, foremost, and foundational building blocks of any society or government.

That's an important distinction!

Governments have a duty to protect parents' rights, and every government official, school board member, and teacher has a responsibility to respect them.

Children do not "belong to all of us" in the way that some politicians are fond of saying. Parents have the primary responsibility for their children's education and well-being.

This is why—for over a century—the U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly affirmed that parental rights are fundamental and protected by the U.S. Constitution.

To illustrate this point, former Texas Senator Phil Gramm once told a woman, "My educational policies are based on the fact that I care more about my children than you do."

She said, "No, you don't."

Gramm replied, "OK: What are their names?"

Parental rights come with parental responsibilities. Every parent has not only the right but the duty to care for his or her children. Again, this is not because of a government law or edict but because of a fundamental, God-given order that exists apart from government.

Parents must promote their children's well-being and ensure they receive the education—including the moral and religious education—they need to prepare for adulthood.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Parents—not the government—have the fundamental right to direct their children's education and healthcare decisions. Governments are instituted to protect—not dispense—this God-given right.



READ MORE:

<https://adflegal.org/article/what-are-parental-rights>

THREATS TO *parental rights*

How are parental rights being *threatened*?

We need look no further than our local school boards to see the battle raging for our children's hearts and minds. In some schools, children who can't even tie their shoelaces are being taught that there are more than two genders and that they or their peers may have been born in the "wrong body." Students are being asked to complete invasive questionnaires about their sexual orientation, ethnicity, religion, and politics. In some places, kids are being taught that they (and their parents) are either "oppressors" or "oppressed" solely based on unchangeable characteristics.



Many parents have discovered that instead of focusing on math and reading scores, too many public schools have embraced gender ideology, weaving tenets of that agenda into every aspect of the school day while math and literacy scores plummet. As a result,

parents are asking questions.

That's why so many parents, legislators, and lawyers are pressing to protect parents' rights.

Lawsuits are being filed across the country to stop school officials from socially transitioning children in secret or committing other acts that drive a wedge between kids and their parents. And state legislators and governors are taking real action to protect families. While the state has an interest in promoting children's education and protecting their health and safety, it must seek to achieve those goals in a manner that respects parental rights. The state should always seek to support parents, not supplant them.

That's why the Supreme Court ruled in favor of a diverse group of Maryland parents in *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, a monumental victory for parents and their fundamental right to make decisions consistent with their religious beliefs about the upbringing and education of their children.

The Court made clear that "the Board's introduction of the 'LGBTQ+-inclusive' storybooks—combined with its decision to withhold notice to parents and to forbid opt outs—substantially interferes with the religious development of their children..."

That's a big win for parents of faith. And it's yet another example of why all parents should act to hold the government accountable when the state intrudes upon their rights—by engaging with school boards, filing lawsuits, and advocating for pro-parent legislation at the state and federal levels.

SECRET SOCIAL TRANSITION PLANS

Dan and Jennifer Mead had no reason to distrust their daughter's school. She was meeting regularly with the school counselor, and the Meads were receiving what they assumed were truthful and complete reports and updates from the school.



But their trust was shattered when an inadvertent disclosure by a school employee allowed the Meads to discover that the school had been socially transitioning their daughter behind their backs for months. The district was using a masculine name and male pronouns for her during school hours. Then school employees would communicate with Dan and Jennifer using her correct name and female pronouns. One staff member even altered a school record to hide those actions—trying to ensure that any reference to a masculine name and male pronouns was removed from a document that went home to the Meads.

The school saw loving parents like Dan and Jennifer as obstacles to maneuver around, not partners who have the primary responsibility for their child's upbringing.

Sadly, these secret social transition policies and practices (often called something like

“Gender Support Plans”) have been adopted by countless school districts across the country. Parents like Dan and Jennifer are finding out that their children’s teachers, administrators, counselors, and others are part of a concerted effort to encourage children struggling with their bodies to embrace gender ideology—and they are doing so without consulting parents.

What message does it send when schools exclude or deceive parents about their child’s well-being?

The message is that parents can’t be trusted to support their children as they walk through a difficult season. That only government-approved policies and school officials can help. And far too often, that “help” means denying reality and putting children on a difficult-to-escape path that can lead to harmful cross-sex hormonal interventions that permanently damage healthy body parts and organs.

Children experiencing confusion or discomfort with their sex deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. They need effective and compassionate care. They need their parents.

School officials and policymakers must remember that parents don’t abandon or relinquish their rights at the schoolhouse door. Parents love their children more than government officials ever could—and school policies must respect and reflect this truth.

As Maria Keffler of Advocates Protecting Children points out, the infusion of gender ideology into schools is insidious because “kids trust trusted adults.” Schools are, in effect, telling confused children not to

trust their parents if they don’t treat them as the opposite sex.

“Gender Support Plans” often direct school employees to deceive parents by keeping information about the social transition hidden from them. Therefore, parents may be unaware that the school is encouraging—and usually *requiring*—teachers and classmates to address their child by pronouns or names that correspond with the opposite sex.

In many cases, parents are challenging policies that purposefully keep them in the dark. Dr. Stephen B. Levine, a distinguished life fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, has provided evidence to courts stating that social transitioning of children is an experimental therapy that exposes vulnerable them to dangerous lifelong physical, social, and mental health risks.

According to Dr. Levine: “For a child to live radically different identities at home and at school, and to conceal what he or she perceives to be his or her true identity from parents, is psychologically unhealthy in itself, and could readily lead to additional psychological problems.”

In the Wisconsin case mentioned earlier, a school district said it would do just that: openly defy the parents’ wishes to have their 12-year-old daughter addressed only by her given name and female pronouns. School officials made it clear that they would call their daughter by whatever names and pronouns she requested, regardless of her parents’ express instructions to the contrary.

Her parents had no choice but to withdraw her from the school. Their daughter soon reconciled with her biological sex. She eventually told her parents, “Affirmative



**“For a child to live radically different identities at home and at school, and to conceal what he or she perceives to be his or her true identity from parents, is psychologically unhealthy in itself, and could readily lead to additional psychological problems.”
— Dr. Levine**

care [the school telling her she was a boy] really messed me up.”

School officials do not have the medical expertise, much less the authority, to make these kinds of decisions for students. When they treat students as the opposite sex without parental consent or notification, they violate parents’ fundamental rights to direct the upbringing, education, and healthcare of their children.

Policies that institutionalize deceit and see parents as potential obstacles are now going beyond local school boards. A California law forbids school districts from passing policies to ensure employees will notify parents if their child identifies as transgender or asks to be called by a different name or pronoun. Other states, including Colorado, Illinois, and New Jersey, have issued policies and guidance that weaponize words like “privacy” or

“confidentiality” and which can lead vulnerable children down a path that separates them from their parents’ counsel and toward a lifetime of pain and regret.

California’s law, in particular, was at issue in a Supreme Court opinion issued in March 2026, *Mirabelli v. Bonta*. The Court said that parents challenging the state’s secret social transition law ultimately are likely to succeed on their claim that the law violated their rights to freely exercise their religion and direct their children’s upbringing and education. This significant opinion builds on the Mahmoud decision and gives parents

hope that the courts will eventually put an end to these secret social transition laws and policies.

The opinion further bolsters the fundamental truth that parents—not the government—have primary authority with respect to their children’s upbringing and education. Additionally, parents have the right not to be shut out of decisions regarding their children’s mental health. The opinion promotes children’s safety by ensuring fit parents have the primary role in some of the most consequential decisions of their children’s lives.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Parents should support policies that hold school officials legally accountable for efforts to socially transition a student who is confused about his or her gender, including treating him or her as the opposite sex by using incorrect pronouns or names.

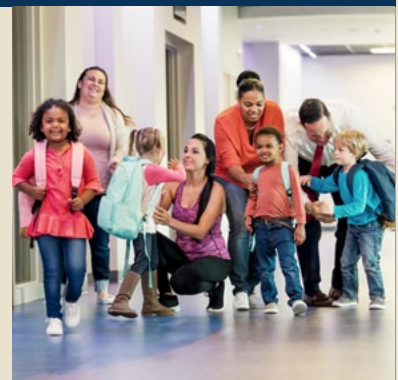


READ MORE:

<https://adflegal.org/article/wisconsin-court-strikes-down-schools-secret-gender-transition-plan>

ACT

Parents should actively insist that schools be honest and transparent about their policies regarding children’s healthcare. No policy should ever encourage or require a teach or school employee to lie to a student in service of an ideology. Parents have a right to expect their child’s school not to systematically deceive them about what goes on in the classroom.



GENDER IDEOLOGY IN THE CLASSROOM



Parents also should take an active role in reviewing the materials and curricula their children are exposed to in the classroom regarding gender ideology.

We believe that all individuals are made in the image of God, including those who struggle with questions about their sex or gender, and therefore have inherent human dignity and should be treated with respect.

However, gender ideology (an outgrowth of critical theory) promotes politicized views about sexual orientation and gender identity. Falsely asserting that sex is merely “assigned at birth,” gender ideology denies the objective, scientific truth that we are each either male or female from the moment of our conception. Our sex is as inherent in us as our membership in the human race. And our identity as male or female is

immutable, meaning that it cannot change.

However, gender ideology asserts that a young person’s purely subjective and often changeable feelings about gender are what is “true” about them, and that the concrete facts of biology must be ignored.

When gender ideology is taught in schools, students may feel pressured to conform to viewpoints that violate their own conscience or undermine their family’s values. Coercing or punishing speech in this way can violate that student’s freedom of speech, freedom of religion or conscience, and their parents’ rights to direct that child’s education and upbringing.

In some places, children as young as four are shown cartoons or introduced to imaginary figures like the Gender Unicorn or Genderbread Person. Gender ideology can also show up in learning materials that include false historical claims, including speculation on the sexual orientation of historical figures. They are taught falsehoods, including notions that

people have a gender identity not linked to their sex, that gender is fluid, and that a person's sex can change through the use of hormones and surgeries to alter the body's physical appearance. Such use of hormones and surgeries—often euphemistically dubbed “gender-affirming care”—is presented as a pathway to emotional peace. But the reality is quite different. And the tide is turning.

In November 2025, the U.S. Department of Health AND Human Services issued a report that cast further doubt on the idea that drugs and surgeries are an effective way to address gender dysphoria in minors.



According to the report, these drugs and surgeries “carry risk of significant harms including infertility/sterility, sexual dysfunction, impaired bone density accrual, adverse cognitive impacts, cardiovascular disease and metabolic disorders, psychiatric disorders, surgical complications, and regret. . .”

The report also dismantled the idea that there is any “consensus” among experts supporting the use of puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and surgeries to address gender dysphoria.

England’s National Health Service (NHS) also is paying attention to the growing body of science that “gender-affirming care” is neither safe nor effective, specifically for minor children. The NHS no longer prescribes puberty blockers for children—a good first step.

In the U.S., 27 states have taken action, passing laws to protect children from harmful, irreversible, and experimental procedures, which often lead to permanent damage, including sterilization.

Activist groups like the ACLU, as well as the Biden-Harris administration, challenged some of these laws. ADF stood with our pro-family partners in Tennessee and Alabama, and the Supreme Court’s ruling in *United States v. Skrmetti* confirmed that states are free to protect and defend children from these harmful drugs and procedures.

Political and advocacy organizations including the Human Rights Campaign and Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network integrate gender ideology into the framework of critical theory and its narratives of “power and privilege.” Students are taught that if they are comfortable with the sex God gave them, they are part of an “oppressor group.” This creates a hostile environment for students who do not conform to politicized views on gender ideology and undermines their right to an honest and meaningful education.

Parents cannot be forced to violate their

religious beliefs in exchange for a public education for their children. As the Supreme Court explained in *Mahmoud*, it “is both insulting and legally unsound to tell parents that they must abstain from

public education in order to raise their children in their religious faiths, when alternatives can be prohibitively expensive and they already contribute to financing the public schools.”

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Parents’ rights don’t end at the classroom door. Parents must be aware that gender ideology-based materials in the classroom can expose their children to harmful concepts and notions they strongly disagree with. Gender ideology teaches that sex and gender are not immutable but based on subjective feelings that require the “affirmation” of others, regardless of the truth..



READ MORE:

<https://adflegal.org/article/how-gender-theory-undermines-reality>

ACT

Parents should seek to review curricula before materials are presented in class, and advocate for and exercise their right to opt their children out of materials or activities that promote the false and harmful idea that they can choose or change their sex or gender.



FREE SPEECH AT RISK



Allowing government—through schools—to dictate and enforce its views on gender and sexuality has real consequences for free speech. When teachers are told that school policy requires them to refer to girls as boys and boys as girls, they’re effectively being required to lie. Compelling teachers to use inaccurate pronouns creates additional pressure on students to accept politicized views on gender.

When schools punish teachers and coaches for being truthful with students, that can violate their First Amendment freedoms.

Fortunately, a growing number of courageous teachers and school counselors have refused to lie to parents or otherwise deny the truth that sex is binary. They are doing this out of concern for their students’ well-being.

Parents should speak out and support these individuals who are willing to risk their careers in order to be truthful with children and parents.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

While many school policies seem to pit school employees against parents, it is critical to remember that many teachers, administrators, coaches, and others are facing severe punishments for being truthful with children about topics like gender.



LEARN MORE:

<https://adflegal.org/article/teachers-stand-against-harmful-loudoun-county-school-district-policy>



OR

<https://adflegal.org/support/k-12-guide>

FORCING PROSPECTIVE PARENTS OUT OF THE ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE SYSTEM



Some state government officials and policies reject religious families seeking opportunities to foster or adopt children who need safe, loving homes. Why? Because these families won't violate their beliefs in order to promote the state's gender ideology to children in their homes. With ADF's help, foster families in Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington have challenged policies that say they must agree to treat hypothetical children placed in their care as the opposite sex, if those children ever request it. These policies are made without any specific child in mind and require parents to surrender their basic rights before even becoming eligible to adopt or foster.

In practice, this means Christian and other religious families holding to a biblical and scientific view of sex must pledge in advance to use biologically false pronouns, facilitate children's access to harmful hormone treatments, and take children to events like pride parades.

While states struggle to find homes for tens of thousands of children living in group homes or even in unlicensed facilities like hotel rooms, they are telling loving families they can't

open their homes to children as long as they hold to their religious faith.

In short: States are instituting an ideological litmus test that forces parents to choose between their fundamental rights and providing homes for children in need.

That's wrong—and it hurts kids.



Thankfully, we are beginning to see courts act to protect Christian foster parents' fundamental rights. A favorable ruling in Oregon and a policy reversal in Vermont show that we're making significant progress. But there is much work left to be done. This is why ADF will continue to challenge these unlawful policies on behalf of families seeking to live out their calling to care for children who desperately need—and deserve—loving homes of their own.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Loving parents should never be subjected to a government-imposed ideological litmus test in order to open their home to a child in need.



READ MORE:

<https://adflegal.org/article/religious-discrimination-hurting-foster-kids>

ACT

Parents should take a stand and insist that government policy never forces them to choose between their Christian faith and an opportunity to foster or adopt a child. Check out ADF's free guide, *Confronting Religious Discrimination: A Guide to Foster & Adoptive Parents*, for more information. <https://adflegal.org/resource/religious-discrimination-foster-adoptive-parents/>





PROTECTING FAIRNESS, SAFETY, AND PRIVACY SPACES

In addition to what is happening in classrooms, gender ideology-based school policies in 23 states allow males to compete in girls' or women's sports. Many states also allow males to intrude into females' private spaces.

This inevitably results in harm on and off the playing field.

On the field, girls and young women who have trained in a sport for years can suddenly find themselves playing against male athletes who have clear biological advantages. When schools or athletic conferences choose to ignore reality and allow males to compete against females, young women lose honors and opportunities to compete at elite levels.

Athletes from Connecticut to Idaho have taken legal action to protect girls' right to a fair playing field under Title IX. In June 2026, the Supreme Court ruled that both federal law and the U.S. Constitution allow states to preserve women's sports for women. That decision allows the 27 states with laws like this already on the books to begin enforcing them. Twenty-three states have yet to pass such bills.

Additionally, female athletes forced to compete against males have suffered serious injuries as a direct result of the biological advantages male opponents enjoy. In some cases, the injury's impact can be severe and long-lasting. One teenage girl was even sexually assaulted during a

wrestling match by an opponent she did not know was a male—and the athletic association’s policy prevents officials from telling girls or their parents when they might face male opponents. This denies female athletes the right to even know whether they could face bodily injury before competing in the athletic arena.

Simply put—beliefs don’t change biology. And allowing males to compete against females is anything but fair or safe.

Off the field, female athletes’ safety and dignity are threatened when government officials prioritize gender ideology. Allowing male athletes into private female spaces—like restrooms, locker rooms, and even

hotel rooms for team travel or school trips—harms women and girls. In some cases, female athletes changing for competitions have been forced to crowd into smaller restrooms to avoid male teammates in the locker room. In at least one instance, a young female athlete was subjected to taunts and vile sexual comments by a male athlete on her team who was unfairly robbing her of opportunities to compete.

Forcing women and young girls to compete against males has nothing to do with equality. It has everything to do with ideology, and it’s creating real victims. Parents must act to help stand for girls’ sports. When school boards or athletic leagues and associations choose to embrace gender ideology, parents should be aware that their daughters are at risk of harm—both on and off the field.

KEY TAKEAWAY:

When truth is abandoned and ideology prevails, there are consequences. Allowing male athletes to compete against female athletes is unfair and unsafe.



READ MORE:

<https://adflegal.org/article/redefining-sex-threatens-title-ix>

ACT

Parents must hold schools, athletic associations, and governments accountable for choosing ideology over the safety and dignity of women and girls. That includes standing with the courageous female athletes who have spoken out and are challenging unlawful policies.



WHAT IS ADF DOING TO PROTECT *parental rights?*

In response to growing threats, ADF created its Center for Parental Rights, which litigates precedent-setting cases. Also, ADF's Center for Public Policy is actively working with state lawmakers and Congress on legislation that protects parental rights.



Our efforts include:

- Defending parents' rights to make informed decisions on their children's behalf and to oppose efforts by government officials to hide information from parents.
- Ensuring that people of faith are allowed into the foster and adoption systems so they can provide loving homes to children without being forced to compromise their beliefs.
- Standing with teachers and parents who are challenging public school policies that violate their rights and push false ideologies on students about human sexuality and other controversial topics.
- Partnering with organizations including the Family Policy Alliance to launch the Promise to America's Parents, an initiative to address divisive government policies that promote racial division and gender ideology.
- Strategically engaging in litigation to guarantee parents' fundamental right to direct their children's upbringing, education, and healthcare.
- Crafting legislation and providing legal testimony and resources to state and federal legislators working to protect parental rights.



HOW YOU CAN *take action*

Equipping yourself with knowledge of the threats to parental rights that already exist is only *half the battle*.

Parents must be willing to take advantage of opportunities to increase accountability, choice, and transparency regarding school or other government policies that threaten their rights.

Here are just a few tools you can utilize to make a difference.

REVIEWING YOUR CHILD'S CURRICULUM



Many children spend a minimum of 30 hours each week in a classroom setting. It is generally a parent's right and obligation to know what is taught, which materials (written, audio-visual, online, and spoken) are utilized during the school day, and whether these materials contain elements of harmful ideologies. When parents cannot readily review the curriculum, their child can be indoctrinated in radical ideology that undermines the family's values and beliefs.

The easiest way for parents to learn what is being taught is to reach out directly to their child's teacher or principal and request the opportunity to review the textbook, syllabi, and other materials used in the classroom. Many schools have procedures in place for parents to examine the curriculum, and parents should learn and follow those procedures. When parents request to review their child's curriculum, they are entitled to expect a thorough response from the district or local school administrator.

But too often, this is not the case. What can parents do if the school declines their request? There are both federal and state laws that protect parents' access to curricula.



First, the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) is a federal law that empowers parental involvement in public schools. It requires all public schools to “develop and adopt policies” that, among other things, protect parents’ right to “inspect ... any instructional material used as part of the educational curriculum for the student” and ensure access is given to parents “within a reasonable period of time after the request [to inspect the curriculum] is received” (20 U.S.C. § 1232h(c)(1). Under the statute, “instructional material” includes all instructional content provided to a student, regardless of its format, but does not include academic tests or assessments (20 U.S.C. § 1232h(c)(6)(A). And if a school refuses to comply with PPRA, parents can file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education. (See <https://studentprivacy.ed.gov/file-a-complaint>.)

Second, most states have a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), also known as open records or Sunshine Laws, that provides another tool for parents. Open-records requests give parents the right to request many kinds of recorded information

held by public authorities. They also can be an important way to find out what is going on behind classroom doors because they can expose supplemental materials, outside resources, teachers’ manuals, and information regarding teachers’ ongoing training.

It is imperative that a FOIA request be very specific. The following guidelines will help you formulate such a request:

- Ask to review all instructional materials, including books, handouts, videos, online resources, assemblies, and teacher-created content.
- Identify the specific teacher and classes that are the subject of your request.
- Remember that “curriculum” includes anything used to teach or influence your child—not just textbooks.
- If you suspect that a teacher is using third-party sources, such as materials or speakers from outside groups, specifically ask for the speakers’ identities and all materials used in any presentations shown to students.

When submitting a request, remember that it is just a starting point. The information provided will likely create more questions, but it will also point parents toward additional and more specific documents to request. State FOIA laws may contain exceptions and requirements that could impact these requests. Under some of these laws, schools may be able to charge you for any copies of instructional materials or even the time it takes a staff member to collect the materials you requested.

Do not be intimidated by the process. With perseverance, parents can prevail. Many already have.



ADVOCATING FOR OPT-IN AND OPT-OUT POLICIES

Opt-in and opt-out policies are both ways to achieve greater transparency and control when objectionable subjects are included in public school curricula.

Opt-in policies require schools to obtain permission from parents before teaching certain topics—often sex education—to students. More than a dozen states require parents to opt in to all or part of the sex education curriculum.

Opt-out policies allow parents to have their child excused from specific classes or lessons. More than 30 states allow parents to opt their children out of any sex education. But a handful of other states go much further by allowing parents to opt their kids out of any classroom activity or lesson they find objectionable or which conflicts with their beliefs.

In 2025, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a landmark decision solidifying parents’ right to be notified and opt their kids out from controversial material that “substantially interferes” with the religious upbringing of their children. This decision made it clear that parental rights do not end at the schoolhouse gate and extend into the public school classroom.

For more detailed information about parents’ notification and opt-out rights, see ADF’s free guide *Parents in Control: **Parents’ Guide to Protecting Your Child at School.*** >>





ACTIVELY ENGAGING WITH SCHOOL BOARDS

Engaging with school boards and legislators can be intimidating, but it is an important element of protecting children and preserving parental rights. Becoming a parental rights advocate requires courage and persistence, but protecting children is every parent’s responsibility and duty.

- 1** Parents should know whether school board members are elected by residents of distinct geographic zones within the district or whether they are elected “at large”—meaning everyone in the district has the chance to vote on who sits in every seat on the board. (Some school districts are mixed, with certain board members elected by specific zones and others elected at large.) And parents should know the names, email addresses, and telephone numbers of the school board representatives either for their zone or, if elected at large, for their whole district.

Parents should regularly engage their school board members by calling and writing about matters and topics of concern to them and their children.

- 2** Parents should register in advance (information on how to do so is easily found on most school district websites) to speak at scheduled board meetings about issues impacting their children’s education, safety, and physical and mental health. **All communication with school board members (whether in person, by phone, or in writing) should be clear, concise, civil, and courteous (the “4Cs” of communication)** but should also be personal, relevant, and impactful. When speaking publicly, having well-prepared statements that can be read in the time allotted can ease nerves and spotlight with great impact the importance of the issues at hand.
- 3** Parents should connect with other concerned parents and citizens for the benefit of sharing information, strength in numbers, and encouragement for the task at hand. Being willing to show up and speak at school board meetings is a victory for all parents. The rights to government Accountability, Choice, and Transparency (ACT) must be proactively exercised and relentlessly preserved.

Parents who desire to see gender ideology decisively rejected in schools should strongly consider running for their local school board and supporting like-minded candidates who will promote protective policies for children and respect for parents’ fundamental rights.

ADVOCATING FOR PARENTS WITH LEGISLATORS



Parents with the courage to face a school board should have no problem engaging their state legislators regarding education and healthcare issues affecting children. The first step is knowing who your legislators are and how and where to reach them. This information is easily found at OpenStates.org via a simple address search.

The second step is proactively reaching out. Legislators are elected to represent their constituents' interests and to respond to the concerns of the people they represent. As with school boards, it is important to use the 4 Cs of communication—be clear, concise, civil, and courteous in asking elected officials to take specific action on important matters related to children's education and healthcare.

Engaged parents should:

- Know the issues
- Build relationships with legislative staff
- Voice concerns regarding important issues in a timely manner, and
- Freely share information with friends, family, and neighbors to facilitate community engagement.

Parents can also partner with state and national grassroots organizations like ADF, The Heritage Foundation, the Family Policy Alliance, ParentalRights.org, their state's family policy council, or any of several other groups.

These organizations link arms with parents and concerned citizens to protect pro-family values and engage legislators through online petitions, grassroots efforts, and calls to action.

Legislators must be encouraged to introduce and support legislation that ensures government **accountability** for violations of parental rights, offers choices for parents to obtain the best possible education and healthcare for their children, and creates **transparency** so parents know what their children are being taught and how they are being treated.

GET LEGAL ASSISTANCE

In some situations, parents may wish to seek legal guidance—particularly if a school refuses to:

- Provide access to curricula or instructional materials
- Ignores or denies requests for advance notice
- Rejects opt-out requests, with or without explanation
- Withholds information about a child's education or well-being
- Requires staff to conceal information about a student from his or her parents

In some circumstances, free and confidential legal help may be available. Parents should not have to fight simply to stay informed about their own children. Parents who believe that their (or their child's) rights have been violated in education or healthcare can contact ADF and potentially receive critical legal assistance. The U.S. Constitution and both federal and state laws protect the rights of students and parents. These protections are well-established principles on which our nation was founded, but these freedoms must be constantly promoted and protected by courageous parents in order to preserve them for future generations.



TAKE ACTION TO PROTECT PARENTAL RIGHTS IN *your community!*

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT (FOIA)

It is a parent's right and obligation to know what is taught, which materials (written, audio-visual, online, and spoken) are utilized during the school day, and if these materials contain elements of harmful ideologies.

Parents can equip themselves by not only familiarizing themselves with FOIA requests and requirements, but knowing how the state and local laws that govern open-records requests apply to them and their child's school district.



FIND OUT MORE:

<https://www.foia.gov/how-to.html>

ADVOCATING FOR OPT-IN POLICIES

Opt-in policies give parents the most choice. When schools have opt-out policies, parents must actively engage with them, preferably at the beginning of each school year and separately for each enrolled child.

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WITH SCHOOL BOARDS

Engaging with school boards can be intimidating, but it is an important element of protecting children and preserving parental rights. Becoming a parental rights advocate requires courage and persistence, but protecting children is every parent's responsibility and duty.

ADVOCATING FOR PARENTS WITH LEGISLATORS

Parents who confidently address their school boards are well-equipped to engage with their state legislators on important issues affecting children's education and healthcare.



The first step is knowing who your legislators are and how to reach them. This information is easily found at OpenStates.org via a simple address search.

GET LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Parents who believe that their (or their child's) rights have been violated in education or healthcare can contact ADF for legal advice. ADF never charges clients a dime to represent them in court.



LEARN MORE:

<https://adflegal.org/request-legal-help>

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