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Across the United States, there has been increasing uproar by parents over what their children are being taught in schools. There has been panic over sex education, critical race theory, and LGBT+ issues being taught in school, which have sparked protests for “parents’ rights” all over the country. Parents have shown up to school board meetings to state their case and have even been attempting to pass legislation such as Florida HB 1557, the Parental Rights in Education bill, also called the Don’t Say Gay bill, by its opponents. This bill aims to prevent the topics of sexual orientation and gender identity from being discussed in classrooms.

Many parents justify their imposition on their children’s education by saying that they know what is best for their child, but do they? Most parents aren’t experts in anything that their children are learning about in school, and many remember very little of their own grade school education. Some may be experts in one thing that their children are learning about, but that is not the case for most parents. In the case of most parents, they are no more equipped to determine what their children should learn than their children are. Parents also use this statement to mean that they know what information, true or not, is suitable for their children to know because of how that information would affect their children. This is also false on its face. Parents may know their children personally, but most are not child psychologists or experts on education.

Allowing parents to dictate what their children learn also increases opportunities for abuse. The parents advocating for greater parental control of school curriculum may or may not be doing so with the intention of abusing their children, but the outcome is the same. Even when parents have the best intentions for their children, they still often act against their best interest. When children are restricted in what they are allowed to know, they are less likely to understand when what is being done to them is wrong. The restriction of information is also abusive in and of itself. It robs children of the intellectual and emotional growth that can be gleaned from the restricted information.

Young people should be given the tools to think for themselves, and parents invading the only space that many they have for freely exploring new ideas stifles their intellectual growth. When students aren’t challenged with different and potentially difficult ideas, they don’t learn the critical thinking skills that will help them succeed throughout life. Students may struggle with upsetting information that they learn later in life if they aren’t talked about in a safe school environment and aren’t taught to think critically about them. It is important for the ideas presented in school settings to be age-appropriate, but parents are not the best judges of this standard. They are too close to the issue and will often try to shelter their children from truths that the children should learn about. This can cause children to grow up with a warped sense of reality.

Some may say that parents should be allowed to prevent their children from learning about any topics the parent wants, even if it harms the child. Such parents often do cause harm to their children and should not have the power to. Children are not their parent’s property, and parents should not have absolute power over them. They have their own thoughts, emotions, and desires that should be respected.

School curriculum can also not be determined by the consensus opinion of parents. It is a fallacy to suggest that what most people believe is true, and arguing that curriculum should be based on consensus means basing the argument on that fallacy. Additionally, one parent’s sensibilities are likely to be different from any other given parent’s. One need only look to history to see that parental consensus is not a good way to make decisions for schooling. If the consensus of parents had been able to make decisions for schools in the 1950s, racial segregation in schools would have lasted a lot longer.

Even if parents did have the right to make decisions for their children that would harm them, this right certainly does not extend to other children. Private and home schools already give parents a great deal of control over what their children are learning without negatively impacting the public education of other children. Most private schools have little to no requirements for what they must teach and what they can not teach.

Parents can not be trusted to make the best decisions for schools, affecting their own and other children. As a society, we have seen examples throughout history of parents railing against changes to schools that were made in the best interest of the students and society at large. It would be foolish to cede the power to make these decisions to parents and risk setting us all back.