

Article

# Local School Boards and LGBTQ Policy Decisions: A Qualitative Case Study

A. Scott Henderson

Department of Education, Furman University, Greenville, SC 29613, USA; scott.henderson@furman.edu

**Abstract:** On 7 September 2022, the Miami-Dade School Board (MDSB), the governing body of one of the largest school districts in the U.S., rejected a resolution requiring the MDSB to observe October 2022 as LGBTQ History Month and directing the district’s superintendent to investigate the feasibility of providing “information and resources” about landmark LGBTQ Supreme Court cases for optional use in high school government classes. The current study coded the transcript of the September 7 meeting utilizing qualitative research protocols based on grounded theory. The resulting analysis identified three themes (curriculum, coercion, and illegality) associated with comments made by members of the public who opposed the resolution and three themes (curriculum, well-being, and anti-LGBTQ bigotry) associated with comments made by members of the public who supported the resolution. Analysis of the September 7 transcript also identified one primary theme (illegality) associated with MDSB members who opposed the resolution and two themes (disinformation and choice) associated with the MDSB member who supported the resolution. In addition to illustrating certain aspects of a contemporary moral panic in the U.S. and other countries, these results provide insights into how the public and U.S. school board members perceive the appropriateness and limitations of addressing the needs of contemporary LGBTQ students.

**Keywords:** LGBTQ; school boards; parental rights; history month; curriculum



**Citation:** Henderson, A.S. Local School Boards and LGBTQ Policy Decisions: A Qualitative Case Study. *Sexes* **2023**, *4*, 429–447. <https://doi.org/10.3390/sexes4030028>

Academic Editor: David L. Rowland

Received: 1 August 2023

Revised: 11 September 2023

Accepted: 14 September 2023

Published: 18 September 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. School Boards

There were 19,269 public school districts in the U.S. as of 2022 [1]. These districts, along with state education departments, typically determine the information and skills students should be taught. Such determinations are based on a number of factors, including student needs, community values, and parental input [2].

Approximately 49 million students are projected to attend public k-12 schools during the 2023–2024 academic year [3]. Therefore, understanding how and why U.S. school boards make decisions is important. Moreover, school boards are among the oldest units of democratic governance in the U.S. Their decisions have helped schools affirm racial/ethnic, religious, and sexual/gender identities within a larger multi-cultural framework [4]. This has been particularly true for LGBTQ students during the past two decades [5].

School boards—also variously called school committees, boards of education, and executive boards—govern school districts. Boards are generally composed of elected individuals who reside in the school districts they govern. Boards possess the power to hire and dismiss the district’s superintendent, to whom boards delegate the authority to conduct the daily operations of the district. In addition to curricular decisions, boards approve annual operating budgets, and some can set and levy taxes to generate revenues [6].

In 1959—building on the work of Henry and Kerwin [7], Vieg [8], Morlan [9], and Gross [10]—Eliot [11] was one of the first scholars to call for systematic analyses of the political dynamics of school boards. He contended that the country’s school boards, which comprised mostly professional educators, played a dominant role in curricular decisions; decisions to which the public largely deferred. Eliot cited neither governors nor state

superintendents of education as significant influences on school board decision-making. These findings were consistent with the subsequent work of Kirst [12], who maintained that school boards and superintendents exercised substantial power over local educational matters in the 1920s through the 1950s.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Tucker and Ziegler [13], Lutz and Gresson [14], and especially Greene [15] advanced a more complex, bifurcated model for understanding school board policymaking. One type of school board is “professional”, which describes boards that make decisions based on norms and standards accepted and advocated by professional educators; these norms and standards might conflict with those articulated by local residents (board members’ constituents). A second type of school board is deemed “political”, which denotes boards that rely on bargaining among board members, the superintendent, and constituents in determining policy outcomes; these boards place greater emphasis on the views and opinions of the general public. Greene’s study found that a majority of school boards he investigated could be characterized as “professional”.

Scholars and other commentators have posited a third stage in the evolution of school boards. Kirst [12] avers that boards, whether they are primarily “professional” or “political”, have been greatly weakened by the growing influence of state and federal policies. Although this attenuation of school board power began in the mid-1960s, it has accelerated during the past two decades as a result of state and federal laws and initiatives such as No Child Left Behind, high stakes standardized testing, Race to the Top, and Common Core curricular mandates [16].

This review indicates a relatively broad consensus over key transitions in the evolution of U.S. school boards over the past 100 years. For much of the 20th century, the public deferred to the expertise of school boards and other local education officials. Throughout that same period, school boards mostly conformed to what became known as the professional model of governance. Finally, during the past four decades, there has been a shift from local to state and federal control of public education policies.

#### 1.1.1. LGBTQ Issues and Policies

School and school district policies regarding LGBTQ issues have generated contentious debates since the late 1980s. Although the attempt to legalize same-sex marriage in the U.S. garnered significant media coverage, LGBTQ children and adolescents (and their parents) have been more affected by decisions being made by local and state education officials during the past two decades.

In some districts, school officials and community members have attempted to prevent the establishment of gay–straight alliances (GSAs), which are school clubs that address the emotional and social needs of LGBTQ students [17]. Moreover, student access to GSAs declined markedly during the COVID-19 pandemic, a development that has not been addressed by most school districts [18].

Proposed policies have also targeted curricular innovations that seek to introduce and broaden perspectives on sexual and gender diversity. State lawmakers have introduced legislation to forbid any mandatory gender or sexual diversity training for students, teachers, or administrators [19]. Opponents of gender and sexual diversity training view it as an attempt to influence the beliefs and attitudes of children and/or youth on matters that they think should be addressed by parents, not schools or state legislators, unless those legislators are opponents of diversity training [20].

Political and religious conservatives have expressed additional animus toward non-normative gender identities, particularly accommodations for, and affirmations of, those identities in public schools. Between 2010 and 2020, this concern was expressed mainly through opposition to gender-neutral bathrooms and locker facilities [21,22]. By 2022, lawmakers had proposed twenty-five bills in seventeen states requiring schools to use birth-assigned gender to determine student eligibility in athletic activities [23]. Policymakers have also introduced legislation that would prohibit teachers and administrators from

being compelled to address students by the gender with which they identify if it differs from the gender they were assigned at birth [19].

During the past five years, education policymakers, particularly local school board members, have required that an increasing number of books be banned from use in public schools [24]. According to recent data, approximately 80% of the children's books that parents and others challenge are books that highlight LGBTQ characters, often under specious allegations that such materials are pornographic and/or obscene [24].

Another target of criticism has been the observance, nationally and locally, of LGBT (often rendered "LGBTQ") History Month in public schools [25]. LGBTQ History Month was initiated by the efforts of a St. Louis, Missouri, social studies teacher, Rodney Wilson, in 1994 [26]. Similar to Black History, Women's History, and National Hispanic Heritage Month, the main purpose of LGBTQ History Month is to provide k-12 students with greater awareness of the contributions made by LGBTQ individuals throughout U.S. and world history. This, in turn, can provide positive role models for LGBTQ students. LGBTQ History Month is currently recognized in 15 countries, in addition to 11 countries that participate in the ASEAN SOGIE Caucus, a human rights organization focusing on sexual orientation and gender expression [27].

#### 1.1.2. Parental Rights

A related development has been the attempt by some parents to increase their control over decisions made by school and school district officials. These attempts at increased control, which have become identified with the phrase "parental rights", became widely apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic when parents protested school closings, remote learning, and mask mandates [28]. These protests led to the creation of organizations—for example, Moms for Liberty—that have demanded a greater role in monitoring local and state education policies [29,30]. Partly in response, Virginia governor Glenn Youngkin created a tip line for parents who want to report concerns about instructional materials [28]. Other state lawmakers and governors have adopted the phrase "parental rights" in their efforts to place restrictions on school district policies and classroom curricula, particularly when those policies and/or curricula pertain to race, sexuality, and/or gender expression [31].

#### 1.1.3. Theoretical Framework and Relevancy outside the U.S.

The defensive and often hostile views expressed toward the LGBTQ issues noted above—and the commensurate responses from some education officials and policymakers—often fail the test of rational scrutiny. For instance, a 2022 national survey of likely voters found that 45% of the Republican respondents believed that teachers and parents who support discussions about sexual orientation and gender identity in schools are "groomers", a term used to denote people who single out children/youth for sexual abuse/assault [32]. Such unsubstantiated fears conform to certain elements of a moral panic. Though psychologists and sociologists use different models to explain moral panics, they concur that moral panics are when an individual, group, situation, or event becomes identified as a threat to the existing social order, including its values and/or interests. Discussions of these threats can become a part of contemporary political discourse, and lead to passage of and/or changes in laws and policies [33,34].

Throughout most of the world, emerging and evolving definitions of sexuality and gender—and wider acceptance of these conceptualizations—are producing social anxiety that can also trigger moral panics. Adherents to far-right and even middle-right political ideologies in many countries (see Discussion section below) have come to believe that LGBTQ individuals, their allies, and various liberal groups are using public classrooms to brainwash, sexualize, and sexually predate on children and youth. These fears run counter to their beliefs that schools, as agents of socialization and national unity, should reinforce heterosexuality and traditional male–female sex binaries, while ignoring and/or castigating students who identify otherwise. In short, conservative lawmakers, cultural

traditionalists, and authoritarian regimes want to restore hierarchal social orders based on heteronormative masculinity, and one way to do so is by the erasure of LGBTQ subject matter from public visibility and classrooms [35].

## 2. Materials and Methods

The Miami-Dade School District is located on the southern tip of mainland Florida. It is the third largest school district in the U.S., serving 331,500 students. These students represent highly diverse demographic characteristics, including large numbers of Hispanics and recent immigrants [36]. The Miami-Dade School Board (MDSB) is composed of nine members who are elected for staggered terms of four years [37]. Its delegated functions are consistent with those of most school boards in the U.S.

On 7 September 2022, during one of the MDSB's regularly scheduled meetings, the main topic was discussion of Resolution H-11, which, if passed, would have required the MDSB to observe October 2022 as LGBTQ History Month and to direct the district's superintendent to explore the feasibility of providing curricular materials pertaining to landmark LGBTQ Supreme Court cases (*Obergefell v. Hodges* and *Bostock v. Clayton County*) for use in the district's 12th grade social studies classes [38].

Antecedent to the MDSB's September 7 meeting, Florida governor Ron DeSantis signed into law the Parental Rights in Education Act on 28 March 2022. Among other provisions, this legislation prohibited instruction or discussion of sexual orientation or gender identity in grades k-3 of Florida's public schools, and further limited instruction or discussion of those topics in grades 4–12 to what the state deems age and/or developmentally appropriate [39].

Discussions and comments relating to H-11 at the September 7 meeting consumed approximately 5 h and 40 min, an inordinate amount of time for any school board to devote to any issue during one meeting. Public comments occurred first, followed by comments and a vote on H-11 by board members. The meeting was videotaped, and a copy of that tape was uploaded onto the MDSB's website, which is publicly accessible; a written transcript in raw form can be downloaded from that same website/link [40]. The present investigation undertook an analysis of the meeting transcript, an analysis based on grounded theory, which is a common form of qualitative research.

Qualitative research, which emerged between 1925 and 1945, is an analysis of non-numerical data to produce generalizations and hypotheses [41]. It considers non-quantitative materials as valid empirical data. This mode of systematic research is especially useful in determining the meaning(s) and/or perceptions that individuals ascribe to what they experience. In this respect, it utilizes a phenomenological approach as the basis of scholarly inquiry [42].

Grounded theory, initially expostulated by Glaser and Strauss [43], and further articulated by Charmaz [44] and Corbin and Strauss [45], is a type of qualitative research that relies on induction. Investigators collect and/or analyze data—for example, interview or meeting transcripts—applying descriptors (referred to as codes) to discrete segments of their data. After additional analyses and reflection, investigators translate these codes into higher levels of abstraction, from which they attempt to adduce emergent themes and conclusions about the data [46].

As previously noted, debate over H-11 at the September 7 meeting included comments from the public (n = 82). Members of the public had a maximum of three minutes to speak, but were not permitted to speak more than once on H-11. Most members of the public spoke from between two and three minutes; they were asked by the MDSB chairperson to sit down if they had reached their time limit. Board members are not allowed to respond to public comments. MDSB procedures prohibit clapping, shouting, profanity, and other outbursts from speakers or the audience. Members of the public generally observed the MDSB's rules of decorum during the September 7 meeting, though the chairperson had to admonish them several times about the need to refrain from clapping.

All of the MDSB members (n = 9) provided comments on H-11. Per operating procedures, board members are not limited in how long or how many times they can speak on a given issue. Each of the board members spoke substantively only once on H-11, and their comments averaged ten minutes.

The comments/discussions of H-11 fill approximately 63 single-spaced pages. This portion of the transcript was subjected to multiple rounds of analysis and reflection, which achieved a level of focused coding that permitted the identification of salient themes. In places where the transcript was unclear, the investigator watched/listened to the video recording in an attempt to achieve clarification. Given that the September 7 meeting had already occurred, data collection was not concurrent with coding.

Coding was undertaken with three related queries in mind:

1. What were the reasons given by the public for supporting and opposing H-11?
2. What were the reasons given by MDSB members for supporting and opposing H-11?
3. What do these reasons suggest about how the public and MDSB members perceived the appropriateness and/or limitations of addressing the needs of LGBTQ students in public schools?

### 3. Results

In this section, the results of analyzing/coding the public's comments (pro and con) about H-11 are presented. These are followed by the results of analyzing/coding the board members' comments (pro and con) about H-11.

#### 3.1. Public Comments Opposing H-11

Out of the 82 members of the public who commented on H-11, 48 opposed it. There were three themes associated with their comments: curriculum, coercion, and illegality. Elaborations of these themes are offered below:

**Curriculum:** This theme pertains to speakers (48%) who expressed beliefs about what was appropriate or inappropriate subject matter for k-12 schools to teach, as well as the topics parents had the exclusive right to teach to their children.

**Coercion:** This theme pertains to speakers (42%) who expressed an opinion that the intentions and/or consequences of H-11 were related to efforts to force k-12 students to accept/espouse certain beliefs and/or values.

**Illegality:** This theme indicates speakers (31%) who expressed an opinion that H-11 would violate Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act.

##### 3.1.1. Curriculum

Among members of the public who spoke against H-11, curricular arguments were the most common. Many of these arguments stressed the need for school officials to focus on a core curriculum that avoided other subjects. This core curriculum was often articulated as a set of three disciplines:

*'The purpose of the public schools is very simple. The three Rs. Reading, writing, arithmetic.'*

Other speakers enumerated longer lists of subjects on which they felt schools should devote their instructional time:

*'I contend that the public schools' main focus should be on teaching the basics—reading, writing, mathematics, science, and civics.'*

One speaker who felt that civics was a core subject nonetheless noted that the two court cases mentioned in H-11 should be excluded:

*'I urge the board to strike down Resolution H-11. . .and deny consideration of Obergefell and Bostock cases from 12th grade U.S. government curriculum due to their sexually based foundation.'*

Notably, many of the subject lists presented by H-11 opponents often excluded history, though a couple of speakers made references to it:

*'The public school system is here to teach basic subjects such as math, reading, writing, science, and history.'*

Another speaker, while acknowledging that schools should teach students history, erroneously argued that H-11 was a disingenuous attempt to teach other concepts:

*'And I find it very interesting and very smart on the advocates of this agenda that they added the word history to this item. This is not history. This is sex identity and teaching sex identity to the children and it's causing confusion to the children.'*

Still other speakers argued that the core curriculum should be vocational:

*'Why don't we concentrate in teaching them how to create a resume, how to apply for a job, how to create a company, how to apply and create a foundation instead of getting into the sex life of kids.'*

Another speaker noted:

*'You gotta think about that kids are graduating without the ability to put air in their tires.'*

A significant subset of the comments that constituted the curriculum theme indicated the belief that parents, not schools, had the exclusive right/obligation to teach their children about certain subjects:

*'Sexuality should be something left for the home, not for the school.'*

One speaker, whose children attend a school where a bisexual adult had given a talk to students, put it this way:

*'My rights were taken away from me.'*

Another speaker was more explicit:

*'Eradicate any teaching of children about taking care of their bodies when they have sex and so forth. That's not your responsibility. That's my responsibility. . . I should have the right to tell them those things.'*

For another speaker, sexuality was directly connected to what was considered right and wrong, which she did not believe was a legitimate topic of instruction:

*'This proposal H-11 goes against a lot of the values of people that live here. . . You are taking a step in a direction that violates someone's right as a parent. You know it is the parents' right to teach their children about morals and how to live their life.'*

### 3.1.2. Coercion

The second theme expressed by members of the public who opposed H-11 was coercion. In expressing this theme, speakers conveyed anxiety over forces that they could not precisely identify or locate. The theme's most frequent articulation was in the allegation that H-11, if implemented, would be a form of "indoctrination", a word that occurred in the remarks made by 31% (n = 15) of the speakers who opposed H-11. The following comment is a characteristic example:

*'I believe that declaring October LGBTQ History Month does absolutely nothing to promote education. I see it more as a tool to promote LGBT indoctrination, which has no place.'*

One speaker found it necessary to remind board members that indoctrination was inherently negative:

*'Indoctrination is to instruct in an ideology, especially to imbue with a specific partisan or biased belief or point of view.'*

H-11 opponents argued that indoctrination would not only result in biased instruction; it could also actually harm students. One speaker unscored this point by claiming that indoctrination was tantamount to child abuse, though linking H-11 to child abuse was wildly fallacious and an example of moral panic:

*'The American College of Pediatrics defines LGBT indoctrination as child abuse. . . don't be recorded on the wrong side of history as the perpetrators of institutionalized child abuse.'*

Some opponents saw H-11's putative indoctrination as an attempt to promote and/or endorse an LGBTQ agenda, though speakers never specified what was on this agenda or exactly who lay behind its promulgation. Clearer in the minds of opponents was that indoctrination sought to sanction certain behaviors rather than simply affirm someone's identity. As one speaker put it:

*'It's indoctrination. I do not use that word lightly, but it's the truth. . . We are moving in a direction that will create entitled, confused, depressed, and potentially dangerous adults. Providing support and being accepted is very different from promoting and encouraging a certain lifestyle.'*

Though they did not provide any evidence, opponents argued that coercion would lead to nefarious consequences:

*'This [H-11] is an invitation for sexual predators to take advantage of them [children in school]. Not even older predators. I mean in the school itself.'*

Another opponent was equally afraid that H-11 might open the door to providing an opportunity for identifying and cultivating children/youth for the purpose of sexual abuse/assault ("grooming") [47]:

*'The resolution fails to address the. . . legitimate fears that this resolution may give rise to. . . sexual grooming, yes sexual grooming.'*

Once again, such claims regarding H-11 were not factual, but emotional responses that conveyed unsubstantiated fears.

### 3.1.3. Illegality

Illegality was a third theme expressed by members of the public who opposed H-11. Opponents who expressed this theme almost always noted it at the beginning of their remarks. In some cases, their references to state laws were very general:

*'Florida law states that parents have the right to choose what kind of education our children receive and we, the parents of Miami-Dade County, believe that H-11 violates our rights as parents.'*

Most H-11 opponents specifically referenced the recently enacted Parental Rights in Education Act as the reason that they believed H-11's passage would be illegal. While H-11 did not mandate any instruction whatsoever—and while the MDSB's attorney had given written and oral assurances that H-11 would not conflict with the Parental Rights in Education Act—opponents of H-11 did not believe this was the case, including a speaker who identified himself as an attorney:

*'I have been an attorney for 35 years, and there's little doubt that H-11 is violative of state law.'*

Opponents worried about the ramifications for students if H-11 were passed in violation of the Parental Rights in Education Act. One speaker rhetorically asked:

*'Do I pull them out of school? Do I need to withdraw them from that month of school?'*

Another speaker spelled out what he thought the consequences should be for MDSB members for having simply proposed a resolution he considered illegal:

*'I'm here to demand that you not only desist from Proposition H-11, but also to demand a public apology [from the board] and to ask for the resignation of those who had the audacity to consider this horrendous H-11. H-11 violates state law that prohibits LGBT indoctrination of the public school system.'*

Another speaker suggested that the board was proposing H-11 as a way to get around the Parental Rights in Education Act. In other words, H-11 was legally questionable because it was a covert way of ignoring the Parental Rights in Education Act's strictures:

*'Taking this junk that has been intentionally removed from the classroom and bringing it into the hallways is a sleazy, manipulative, and perverted way to circumvent the Parental Rights in Education Act signed into law earlier this year.'*

#### 3.1.4. Multiple Themes in Public Comments Opposing H-11

Some speakers opposed to H-11 articulated more than one of the three themes in their comments. The highest overlap occurred between curriculum and illegality. Of the 30 speakers who expressed the themes of curriculum or illegality, 27% (n = 8) mentioned both. The lowest overlap occurred among all three themes. Of the 43 speakers who expressed the themes of curriculum, coercion, or illegality, only 7% (n = 3) mentioned all three.

#### 3.2. Public Comments Supporting H-11

Three themes emerged from the 34 members of the public who indicated support of H-11 during the September 7 meeting: curriculum, well-being, and anti-LGBTQ bigotry. This first theme (curriculum) was expressed in nearly 70% of the public's supportive comments, which was a predominance not evinced by any of the three themes associated with opponents of H-11. Moreover, while "curriculum" denoted a theme expressed by both supporters and opponents of H-11, supporters of H-11 had very different opinions about what constituted an appropriate k-12 curriculum. Further elaboration of the three themes is provided below:

**Curriculum:** This theme pertains to speakers (68%) who expressed beliefs about the appropriate *nature of subject matter*, especially history, that should be taught to k-12 students.

**Well-being:** This theme indicates speakers (32%) who expressed their belief that passage of H-11 would contribute to the well-being of LGBTQ k-12 students.

**Anti-LGBTQ Bigotry:** This theme relates to speakers (32%) who linked the general prevalence of, and the fight against, anti-LGBTQ bigotry with the need to pass H-11.

##### 3.2.1. Curriculum

Supporters of H-11, unlike opponents, did not focus on listing subjects that they believed should or should not constitute the core curricula of k-12 schools. They took for granted that history was one of those subjects, noting not *whether* it should be taught, but *how* it should be taught. In this respect, there was consensus among H-11 supporters that the scope of historical study should be as inclusive as possible; in fact, the word "inclusive" occurred in the comments made by 29% (n = 10) of H-11 supporters. One of many variations was:

*'As we all know, Miami-Dade County public schools strives to foster an inclusive, safe, and premier academic experience for all-inclusive history.'*

For H-11 supporters, inclusive history was necessary because local, state, and national historical narratives could not be fully understood if they excluded the stories of various subgroups. One speaker concisely expressed this belief:

*'LGBT history is American history because LGBT Americans are Americans.'*

Supporters acknowledged that the history of LGBTQ individuals and social movements sometimes involved conflict and painful episodes, but that was an additional reason for its inclusion in the teaching of history:

*'There's a rich history of our community overcoming hardship and violence to be our authentic selves. We have more than earned the right to see ourselves represented in curricula.'*

Another supporter phrased it this way:

*'History is a subject that we, as a society, cannot afford to downplay, especially for marginalized groups. Those with the intent to harm often do whatever they can to revise it or erase it for their own ends.'*



The concept of inclusive history not only had intellectual/pedagogical rationales, but it also reflected, for H-11 supporters, the accurate assertion that certain imperatives inhered in public education itself:

*'But if you want to send your child to a public school in America, your child will have to learn about people who are different from them.'*

### 3.2.2. Well-Being

Members of the public who supported H-11 believed that its passage would enhance the well-being of LGBTQ students in Miami-Dade schools, specifically their mental health needs:

*'I've seen over and over how critical it is to have recognition, support, and visibility for the mental health of these [LGBTQ] young people.'*

Another supporter articulated similar arguments:

*'[LGBTQ] youth are at much higher risk of depression, anxiety, self-harm, and thoughts of suicide in comparison to their straight counterparts. . . Some of our clients have shared with us that they have a hard time imagining a future for themselves. Seeing themselves represented in history curricula would help to foster hope for their future.'*

Speakers who expressed the theme of well-being stressed that visibility and affirmation of LGBTQ individuals (as proposed by H-11) would enhance LGBTQ students' confidence and self-actualization:

*'We should nurture our youth and members of the community with opportunities to learn about role models and the extraordinary local, national, and international contributions of LGBT people throughout history. Research shows that this provides positive health outcomes and paths for success.'*

The well-being of LGBTQ students would also be enhanced by H-11, according to supporters, because it would create safer school environments, and this was primarily due to how H-11 would affect non-LGBTQ students:

*'Lack of understanding and unfamiliarity leads to fear. It is human nature to fear the unknown and fear of groups of people oftentimes leads to hate, discrimination, and prejudice. It is absolutely imperative that we learn about each other, all aspects of history.'*

Longstanding research confirms the validity of these comments regarding LGBTQ youth [48].

### 3.2.3. Anti-LGBTQ Bigotry

A third theme that supporters expressed was their belief that advocating for H-11's passage was a way to combat present and possibly future social and/or political movements based on intolerance and hate. One speaker remarked:

*'Because it is crucial knowledge of the atrocities, atrocities of the past, is the only way we can see the incoming signs of another tragedy. The genocide of the Holocaust did not begin with gays. It began with dehumanizing certain populations using hateful rhetoric, hate groups, and targeted attacks. And this is what we're seeing again today from the extremist hate groups present today.'*

Another H-11 supporter echoed those sentiments:

*'This rhetoric is not new. It is the exact same rhetoric that has been used repeatedly in the past to dehumanize and demonize minorities, Jews, African Americans, and gays. And this is the exact reason that this history must be taught. We teach the history of fascism and the Holocaust to warn students against anti-Semitism and xenophobia.'*

Although there is no empirical evidence to suggest that teaching about historically oppressed minorities will prevent such oppression from occurring again, these comments

by H-11 supporters are implicitly connected to broader findings that have been reported in sociological and psychological research. Increased visibility of, as well as familiarity and contact with, members of a stigmatized group usually leads to an increase in favorable attitudes toward that group. Likewise, it is harder to dehumanize and/or demonize group members if one's contact with them is limited, which can include limited exposure to positive representations in historical texts and popular culture [49,50].

For some H-11 supporters, the debate occurring during the September 7 meeting itself was an example of the struggle against anti-LGBTQ bigotry:

*'And these people here who preach their faith and Christianity want to continue to push LGBT people to the margins. They want to strip us from history. . . They do not want us to exist.'*

For supporters such as the previous one, taking a stand for or against H-11 at the meeting was tantamount to taking a stand for or against anti-LGBTQ bigotry, which revealed one's fundamental values:

*'So you must decide if your values are honesty, integrity, and respect, or if your values are dishonesty, hate, and bigotry.'*

### 3.2.4. Multiple Themes in Public Comments Supporting H-11

Some speakers articulated more than one of the three themes in their comments. The highest overlap occurred between curriculum and anti-LGBTQ bigotry. Of the 23 speakers who expressed the themes of curriculum or anti-LGBTQ bigotry, 48% (n = 11) mentioned both. The lowest overlap occurred among all three themes. Of the 30 speakers who expressed the themes of curriculum, well-being, or anti-LGBTQ bigotry, only 5% (n = 1) mentioned all three.

### 3.3. Board Member Comments Opposing H-11

All but one of the nine MDSB members voted against passage of H-11. A nearly unanimous theme emerged from comments made by those members, which was illegality, summarized below:

**Illegality:** This theme pertains to board members (8 out of 9) who expressed the belief that H-11 violated the Parental Rights in Education Act.

#### Illegality

Board opponents of H-11 were succinct in their belief that H-11 would violate the Parental Rights in Education Act:

*'It is my opinion that this agenda item [H-11] does not comply with the enacted law signed by the governor.'*

Several board members contended that the Parental Rights in Education Act should guide school district policy decisions, a process that H-11 would illegally disrupt. One board member was candid about the relationship between parental rights and policymaking:

*'We can never forget who our customers are. Our customers are our parents.'*

Other board members argued that H-11 would run afoul of the Parental Rights in Education Act because it would open the door to instruction/instructional materials prohibited by the act:

*'I tried to study this [H-11]. I saw what it says. I just really think it's a change to instruction. . . I certainly cannot support changes to the instruction of our students.'*

Two other members believed that H-11 would implicitly violate the Parental Rights in Education Act because of its vagueness. As one of the those two rhetorically asked:

*'What does LGBT History Month mean exactly? What will be celebrated? What are the guidelines? Who determines what can be said? What will be depicted in our hallways?'*

Finally, several of the opposing board members noted that they would break their oath of office if they took any actions that violated the Parental Rights in Education Act, which voting to pass H-11 would do:

*'My obligation as an elected school board member is one that has to comply with a law that has now changed, and I have to be mindful of that.'*

Another board member put it more succinctly:

*'My responsibility here is to follow the law.'*

As noted earlier, the MDSB's attorney had advised board members that H-11 did not run afoul of the Parental Rights in Education Act.

### 3.4. Board Member Comments Supporting H-11

Only one of the nine MDSB members spoke in support of H-11. Two themes emerged from that member's remarks: disinformation and choice, as elaborated below:

**Disinformation:** This theme indicates comments made by the board member in an attempt to refute various claims about H-11, refutations that the member believed were sufficient reasons to vote for passage of H-11.

**Choice:** This theme refers to the board member's belief that H-11 should be supported because it provided options for parents, students, and teachers, which meant that it complied with the Parental Rights in Education Act.

#### 3.4.1. Disinformation

The board member asserted that H-11 would not mandate any actual instruction, and that there was no specific curriculum to teach anyway:

*'They attacked this item by falsely claiming that this item required that we teach an LGBTQ curriculum and that's just false. As we debunked last year, there is no LGBTQ curriculum. No taxpayer dollars have been spent to make an LGBTQ [history] curriculum.'*

The board member also denied other claims that had been made as rationales for opposing H-11:

*'But unfortunately, because I think that this is an election year, our anti LGBTQ rhetoric has just become a powerful tool used by some to spread disinformation. So once again, just to be clear, this item does not indoctrinate students. It does not force an agenda on students.'*

#### 3.4.2. Choice

The board member noted that H-11 would not impair teachers' academic freedom by forcing them to teach the two Supreme Court cases mentioned in H-11:

*'That in those [12th grade government] classes that teachers have the academic freedom to choose different Supreme Court cases that they like to teach. . .'*

The board member further indicated that parents could choose to keep their children at home if/when those court cases were taught:

*'I do want to be clear again that there is the decision to opt out if any parent does have an objection.'*

As for concerns that H-11 might conflict with parental rights, the member was adamant that it would not:

*'This item [H-11] does not take away parental choice.'*

A plain reading of the text of H-11 is consistent with this board member's comments.

#### 4. Discussion

A qualitative analysis of the comments made by the public and MDSB members at the September 7 meeting identified major themes expressed by speakers regarding H-11.

Public speakers opposed passage of H-11 by a margin of 59% to 41%. Those who opposed H-11 articulated their concerns through the themes of curriculum, coercion, and illegality. They indicated unequivocal notions about which subjects constituted appropriate k-12 curricula, rejecting inclusions of sexual orientation and gender identity as inappropriate in almost all instructional contexts. They also expressed the belief that k-12 students were at the mercy of coercive forces that were vaguely defined as “indoctrination” and/or a “gay agenda”; H-11, they insisted, was an example of these coercive forces. Equally clear was the opponents’ view that H-11, if passed, would violate the recently enacted Parental Rights in Education Act, a law that the MDSB was obligated to follow.

Speakers from the public who supported passage of H-11 expressed their views through the themes of curriculum, well-being, and anti-LGBTQ bigotry. In contrast to opponents, H-11 supporters discussed curricular appropriateness not in terms of *particular* subjects, but in how teachers should present an inclusive version of a *specific* subject, history. They also asserted that by fostering visibility for, and affirmation of, LGBTQ individuals, H-11 would enhance the well-being of LGBTQ students. Finally, supporters contended that advocacy for passage of H-11 was itself part of a broader struggle against anti-LGBTQ bigotry that had occurred—and was continuing to occur—in the U.S.

MDSB members opposed passage of H-11 by a margin of 89% to 11%. Although the comments made by the eight opposing board members averaged nine minutes, the theme of illegality is the only major/consistent one that emerged from those remarks that had any bearing on the queries posed by this analysis. Instead of addressing H-11, opposing board members tended to congratulate themselves for their service on the board or on the audience’s and/or board’s conduct during the several hours of discussion that had just taken place. One member observed:

*“One of the things I admired most before getting on this board was the way that the discussion always remained respectful and there was adherence to the type of behavior that is required to talk about things that we all have strong opinions on”.*

Another member noted similarly:

*“I wanted to first thank all the public speakers that are here and, uh, to listen to all the different points of view. Sometimes it’s hard to hear things that you may not want to hear, but that’s what democracy is all about. That’s the beauty of living in a democracy and we are very blessed by it”.*

A third one took the opportunity to mention her family background:

*“This is the beauty of living in the United States of America, a free country. My family left Cuba so we could be in a free country like this one and I respectfully, um, like to allow everyone to give their points of view and then you can either respectfully agree or disagree”.*

These references to democracy were not connected to H-11 or any other substantive issue that had been raised concerning H-11. Without sufficient context, such references functioned more as shibboleths or bromides, not as counter-arguments to those who supported H-11. Another opposing board member—also without providing a relevant context—took the opportunity to profess her religious faith:

*“I’ll say it again and I’ll say it to everyone that I believe in Jesus Christ [and I also] believe in the Holy Spirit because, you see, I am someone of deep faith”.*

Other opposing board members lauded the MDSB’s achievements, implicitly taking credit for them as they might do if they were in the midst of a re-election campaign:

*“As you have heard me say before many times, student achievement has been an area of great concern to me and to the board for quite some time. . .we are very happy that we have done such a great job and gotten an A”.*

Although only one MDSB member spoke in favor of H-11, two themes emerged from that member’s comments, disinformation and choice. According to this member, speakers who opposed H-11 were guilty of disseminating inaccurate information about it, which obscured its actual intent and merits. The supportive board member also argued that H-11 contained provisions that gave teachers options over what to teach and parents options over what their children learned; these provisions, the member opined, would prevent H-11’s passage from violating the Parental Rights in Education Act.

#### 4.1. Public Discourse

The results of this study have implications for understanding public discussions of LGBTQ issues related to schools and schooling. The themes associated with members of the public who supported or opposed H-11 demonstrated little connection on critical points, giving the impression that supporters and opponents were not engaging the other side’s arguments. For instance, perhaps the most surprising omission was how few supporters ( $n = 2$ ) attempted to refute the contention made by opponents that H-11 would violate the Parental Rights in Education Act. Conversely, none of the opponents of H-11 attempted to refute the supporters’ assertions that H-11 would enhance the well-being of LGBTQ students. On the theme of curriculum, which might have offered a shared frame of reference, supporters and opponents viewed the issue from two entirely different perspectives, a phenomenon that makes it difficult to determine if there is agreement or disagreement over basic terms and/or values [51]. Even more confounding, the opponents’ theme of coercion sometimes appeared to cross the line into conspiracy theories, a type of argumentation whose lack of logical reasoning tends to stifle instead of encourage further discussion [52]. This created a sense of moral panic, a phenomenon outlined earlier in this article.

When members of the public who were either H-11 supporters or opponents expressed more than one theme, they almost never integrated those themes into a unified narrative or thesis; rather, speakers presented those themes as relatively disconnected rationales for opposing or supporting H-11. This may have been due to the limited amount of time speakers were given and the fact that the video recording indicates that most speakers spoke extemporaneously without notes. Whatever the reasons, this suggests that such fora (public hearings during school board meetings), however important to democratic norms, do not provide ideal venues for discussion of potentially controversial and/or complicated issues.

Exchange of views and opinions among board members was also limited. Members who opposed H-11 addressed only one theme (illegality) that had also been raised by members of the public who opposed H-11. For these board members, their firm belief that H-11 would violate the Parental Rights in Education Act seemingly foreclosed any additional discussion of the resolution’s ramifications. Indeed, this theme was so pervasive among members who opposed H-11—despite prior reassurances from the MDSB’s attorney that passage of H-11 would not be legally problematic—that it raises the question of why those board members would have allowed H-11 to have been considered in the first place.

The comments made by the lone board member who supported H-11 focused on two themes (disinformation and choice) that were both defensive in nature. Although these themes did offer refutations of certain points—refutations that had been absent from the remarks made by supporters and opponents of H-11—they provided few rationales for why board members should *support* passage of H-11. This board member’s comments did not appear to have a significant impact on her colleagues who had already expressed their opposition to H-11.

#### 4.2. School Board Governance

Perceptions regarding school board governance were clearest among members of the public who opposed H-11. Not only did opponents express their views about the inappropriateness of LGBTQ curricula (through the themes of curriculum and coercion); they also emphasized their belief (though the theme of illegality) that they possessed parental rights that were acknowledged and safeguarded by the Parental Rights in Education Act. Passage of H-11, they averred, would violate these rights. While this does not conform precisely to any particular model for understanding school board governance, it comes closest to Greene's "political" typology [15], whereby members of the public believe they have the right to play a role, sometimes a determining one, in policy decisions. H-11 opponents' lack of deference to the professional knowledge and expertise of the MDSB's attorney provides further evidence that opponents were speaking and acting in ways that implicitly align with Greene's political model. On the other hand, even though public supporters of H-11 expressed themes that reflected their belief that LGBTQ curricula were appropriate (through the themes of curricula and well-being), those themes did not convey any perceptions of how school boards should operate per se. H-11 supporters saw their comments mostly in the context of exercising their right to free speech, not as an exercise of parental rights that should determine the MDSB's policy decisions.

MDSB members, whether they supported or opposed H-11, perceived school board governance in different terms. For board opponents, the only salient factor (expressed through the theme of illegality) was the likelihood and/or certainty that H-11 would violate state law. To put it differently, members did not cite input from parents as the determining factor in their decision to vote against H-11. Even the one board member who supported H-11 indicated that her support (via the themes of disinformation and choice) was predicated on the belief that voting in favor of H-11 would not contravene state law—otherwise, she would oppose its enactment. Thus, board members' views align closely with Kirst's argument that the decisions of local school boards have become increasingly dictated and/or constrained by state (and federal) legislation during the past several decades [12].

### 5. Conclusions

#### 5.1. Limitations

Although the data source for this study was extensive, it was limited to one U.S. school district, albeit a very large one with a diverse demographic profile. Moreover, the data for this qualitative research study were static—that is, the investigator did not interview informants from whom clarification and/or elaboration could be sought if their responses were unclear. These limitations could be addressed in future studies that focus on additional school districts and that utilize different research methods.

#### 5.2. U.S. Context

Limitations notwithstanding, the current study's results are analogous to other developments in the U.S. and elsewhere, which lends confidence to the present findings. In sum, school board elections, their agenda items, and their meetings have become the latest flashpoints in a moral panic involving LGBTQ issues, causing one commentator to describe school boards as the "new front line in LGBTQ+ rights" [53]. This is literally true in some cases. On 6 June 2023, a violent altercation among various groups erupted outside a board meeting of the Glendale United School District (California), a meeting at which the board was to vote on whether to designate June as LGBTQ Pride Month [54]. Shouting, jeers, pushing, and other forms of incivility and violence have occurred at school board meetings elsewhere [55].

The MDSB's action—its refusal to acknowledge October 2022 as LGBTQ History Month or to ask the MDSB to investigate the possibility of providing instructional resources pertaining to two LGBTQ Supreme Court cases—had the practical effect of eliminating sources of information and emotional/psychological support for LGBTQ children and youth. This can be seen in similar efforts regarding k-12 curricula throughout the U.S. As

was the case with Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act, many such efforts have begun at the state level, with more than a dozen states attempting to pass their own "Don't Say Gay" laws in the aftermath of Florida's actions [56].

Over the past two years, hundreds of laws have been proposed in the U.S. that would curtail information and/or instruction concerning LGBTQ history and contributions. In fact, during the first three months of 2023, state legislatures had proposed 283 anti-LGBTQ education laws, more than twice the number for the entire preceding year [57]; as of 1 September 2023, the American Civil Liberties Union was still tracking 230 of these laws [58]. To provide just one example, pending bills in the Oklahoma legislature would eliminate all instruction on sexual orientation and gender identity in k-12 schools, ban all sex education in k-12 schools, and prohibit "grooming" in public k-12 schools and colleges [19]. Eleven states now explicitly censor discussion of LGBTQ people or issues in school [59]. School boards and district officials have also engaged in censoring or limiting LGBTQ materials. In late summer of 2022, Duval County (Florida) School District officials told teachers to remove all posters, wall decorations, stickers, or other items that might show support for LGBTQ students, which would likely include references to LGBTQ History Month [60]. On 18 July 2023, the Temecula Valley Unified District School Board (California) rejected supplemental instructional materials that contained a three-paragraph section on Harvey Milk, a key figure in the history of the LGBTQ rights movement [61]. Thus, the action taken by the MDSB was not aberrant, but part of a nationwide trend limiting or removing educational resources for k-12 students.

### 5.3. Global Context

This study and its connection to broader anti-LGBTQ trends in the U.S. are also symptomatic of global developments. The closest parallel pertains to Italy. The country celebrated its second annual LGBTQ History Month in August of 2023, a notable event in a nation that has lagged behind other Western European nations in providing legal and social rights to LGBTQ individuals [62]. Even still, the current Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, identifies as "pro-family" and has been a vocal opponent of same-sex marriages, adoption of children by same-sex couples, and gender studies as part of school curricula. Consequently, LGBTQ leaders in Italy fear that Meloni might prevent or limit future celebrations of LGBTQ History Month. Much of the rest of Western Europe has experienced increased levels of anti-LGBTQ misinformation, which points to a European version of the moral panic occurring in the U.S. over sexual minority groups and gender expression [63]. As supporters of H-11 noted at the MDSB meeting, celebrations of LGBTQ History Month can counter some of this misinformation.

Developments in Eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary, Poland, and Russia, are also illustrative of global and U.S. anti-LGBTQ trends regarding information about, and visibility of, LGBTQ individuals and history, even if those countries administer schools differently to the way the U.S. does. On 15 June 2021, the Hungarian Parliament, under control of the conservative Fidesz Party, passed the so-called the Anti-LGBT Law by a vote of 157 to 1 [64]. This legislation, ostensibly aimed at protecting children from pornography and pedophiles, prohibits any individual or group from disseminating material in schools that affirms sexual minorities or gender reassignment. Only individuals or groups who are on a state-approved list can provide sex education in Hungarian schools. This law has resulted in an almost complete cessation of discussions about LGBTQ issues in schools. Poland's Parliament is considering similar legislation, which has been promoted by the country's Minister of National Education, Przemyslaw Czarnek, a vocal critic of LGBTQ rights [65]. Officials in both Hungary and Poland have been inspired by a Russian law (passed in 2013) that prohibits any person or group from propagating information, including educational materials, to minors about non-heteronormative sexuality or non-binary gender expressions. Strongly supported by Vladimir Putin and the Russian Orthodox Church, this law has influenced state legislation in the U.S., including Florida's Parental Rights in Education Act,

which was the basis for the MDSB's opposition to LGBTQ History Month and supplemental instructional materials. [35,66].

In many other countries, there is continued or increased suppression, especially in schools, of information about sexual orientation and gender expression [67]. This is particularly true in countries with non-democratic political institutions and/or regimes. Uganda, which has been in a near-constant state of moral panic over male homosexuality, launched a recent investigation into claims that schools are promoting same-sex sexual activities [68]. In Saudi Arabia, which is governed by Sharia law, schools teach strict condemnation of any non-heteronormative sexual activity—even rainbow-colored toys have been confiscated because of government fears that they might promote homosexuality [69]. Although data are difficult to collect about LGBTQ issues in China, the government of Xi Jinping began increasing restrictions on LGBTQ individuals and groups on college campuses in the late 2010s [70]. Finally, North Korea, which has perhaps the world's most authoritarian government, teaches nothing about sexual minority groups because party officials deny that any such people exist in the country [71].

#### 5.4. Implications for LGBTQ Students

This study has identified factors that are impeding the ability of schools and school districts to address the needs of LGBTQ students; students who are facing significant challenges and increased mental health risks [18,72]. A parents' rights movement and restrictive state laws are manifestations of a moral panic regarding sexual minority groups and non-heteronormative gender expressions [73]. Variations of this moral panic can be seen in many parts of the U.S. and the world. One consequence of this panic is the trend toward restricting the information provided to k-12 students about LGBTQ people and issues. In the case of H-11, this information included specific acknowledgement of centuries of LGBTQ history, as well as the expansion of resources related to two court cases that have greatly enhanced LGBTQ rights in the U.S.

These actions can have a tangible impact on k-12 students. Healthy identity formation, including the affirmation that accrues by encountering positive portrayals of real and fictional individuals like oneself, correlates with heightened self-esteem, greater self-knowledge, and lower levels of anxiety [74,75]. Eliminating exposure to and/or refusing to acknowledge LGBTQ history can reduce the number of these positive portrayals available to LGBTQ students. On the other hand, inclusive curricula help promote affirming school environments that can increase the well-being of LGBTQ students, including a reduction in attempted suicides [76]. Furthermore, in schools where subject matter is made more inclusive (an approach the MDSB rejected), LGBTQ students are less likely to miss school or hear negative remarks about sexual orientation and gender expression, but more likely to feel safe and a sense of belonging [48]. These positive outcomes are consistent with the views expressed by those who supported passage of H-11.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Institutional Review Board approval was not necessary for this research.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Informed consent was not necessary for this research.

**Data Availability Statement:** The data analyzed in this study are available online as part of the Miami-Dade School District's website.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

1. National Center for Education Statistics. Common Core of Data. Table 2. 2021–2022. Available online: [https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/202122\\_summary\\_2.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/202122_summary_2.asp) (accessed on 12 July 2023).
2. Imber, M.; Geel, T.; Blokhuis, J.; Feldman, J. *Education Law*, 6th ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2021; ISBN 978-0367195250.



3. National Center for Education Statistics. Digest of Education Statistics. Table 203.10. 2022. Available online: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22\\_203.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_203.10.asp) (accessed on 10 July 2023).
4. Biegel, S. *The Right to Be out: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in America's Public Schools*, 2nd ed.; University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, USA, 2018; ISBN 978-1517905729.
5. Rosky, C. Anti-gay Curriculum Laws. *Columbia Law Rev.* **2017**, *117*, 1461–1542.
6. National School Boards Association. About School Board and Local Governance. Available online: <https://www.nsba.org/About/About-School-Board-and-Local-Governance> (accessed on 9 July 2023).
7. Henry, N.B.; Kerwin, J.G. *Schools and City Government: A Study of School and Municipal Relationships in Cities of 50,000 or More Population*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1938.
8. Vieg, J.A. *The Government of Education in Metropolitan Chicago*; University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL, USA, 1939.
9. Morlan, R.A. *Intergovernmental Relations in Education*; University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, MN, USA, 1950.
10. Gross, N. *Who Runs Our Schools?* John Wiley: New York, NY, USA, 1958.
11. Eliot, T.H. Toward an Understanding of Public School Politics. *Am. Political Sci. Rev.* **1959**, *53*, 1032–1051. [CrossRef]
12. Kirst, M.W. Turning points: A history of American school governance. In *Who's in Charge Here? The Tangled Web of School Governance and Policy*; Epstein, N., Ed.; Brookings Institution Press: Washington, DC, USA, 2004; pp. 14–41. ISBN 978-0815724728.
13. Tucker, H.J.; Zeigler, L.H. *Professionals Versus the Public: Attitudes, Communication, and Response in School Districts*; Longman: New York, NY, USA, 1980; ISBN 978-0582281417.
14. Lutz, F.W.; Gresson, A. Local School Boards as Political Councils. *Educ. Stud.* **1980**, *11*, 125–144. [CrossRef]
15. Greene, K.R. Models of School Board Policy-Making. *Educ. Adm. Q.* **1992**, *28*, 220–236. [CrossRef]
16. Pelsue, B.; Harvard Graduate School of Education. Ed. Magazine. When It Comes to Education, the Federal Government Is in Charge of... Um, What? 2017. Available online: <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/ideas/ed-magazine/17/08/when-it-comes-education-federal-government-charge-um-what> (accessed on 18 July 2023).
17. Hartinger, J.; The Advocate. Triumphs and Setbacks of Gay Straight Alliances. 2011. Available online: <https://www.advocate.com/society/education/2011/08/01/triumphs-and-setbacks-gay-straight-alliances-1> (accessed on 18 July 2023).
18. Pendharkar, E. What School Is Like for LGBTQ Students, By the Numbers. Education Week. 2022. Available online: <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-school-is-like-for-lgbtq-students-by-the-numbers/2022/10> (accessed on 1 July 2023).
19. PEN America. PEN America Index on Educational Gag Orders. 2022. Available online: [docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Tj5WQVBmB6SQg-zP\\_M8uZsQQGH09TxBY73v23zpyr0/htmlview](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Tj5WQVBmB6SQg-zP_M8uZsQQGH09TxBY73v23zpyr0/htmlview) (accessed on 2 August 2023).
20. Akbarzai, S.; CNN. New Jersey Is the Latest State to Require Schools to Offer Courses on Diversity and Unconscious Bias. 11 April 2021. Available online: <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/11/us/schools-new-jersey-new-law-unconscious-bias/index.html> (accessed on 2 August 2023).
21. Potter, C.; Public Seminar. Anti-Trans Bills Are Driving a New Moral Panic. 2022. Available online: <https://publicseminar.org/esays/anti-trans-bills-are-driving-a-new-moral-panic/> (accessed on 20 July 2023).
22. Pepin-Neff, C.; Scientific American. Anti-Trans Moral Panics Endanger All Young People. 2023. Available online: <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/anti-trans-moral-panics-endanger-all-young-people/> (accessed on 21 July 2023).
23. Freedom for All Americans. Legislative Tracker: Youth Sports Bans. 2022. Available online: <https://freedomforallamericans.org/index.html> (accessed on 5 August 2023).
24. Flood, A.; The Guardian. LGBTQ Children's Books Face Record Calls for Bans in U.S. Libraries. 2020. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/apr/21/us-libraries-say-lgbtq-children-books-most-calls-for-bans-last-year-al-ex-gino-george> (accessed on 20 July 2023).
25. Johnston, J.; The Daily Citizen. October Is 'LGBT History Month': Who Are Your Children Learning about in School? 15 October 2020. Available online: <https://dailycitizen.focusonthefamily.com/october-is-lgbt-history-month-who-are-your-children-learning-about-in-school/> (accessed on 20 August 2023).
26. Wilson, R.; Boyer, K.; Boyce, J.; Jennings, K.; The Advocate. The Story Behind the First LGBT History Month. 2 September 2015. Available online: <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2015/09/02/op-ed-story-behind-first-lgbt-history-month> (accessed on 28 August 2023).
27. International Committee on LGBTQ+ History Months. History Months. 2023. Available online: <https://www.internationallgbtqh.com/history-months/> (accessed on 30 August 2023).
28. Ujifusa, A. How Politics are Straining Parent-School Relationships. *Educ. Week* **2022**, *41*, 8–9.
29. Little, O.; Media Matters for America. Unmasking Moms for Liberty. Media Matters for America. 12 November 2021. Available online: <https://www.mediamatters.org/critical-jace-theory/unmasking-moms-liberty> (accessed on 25 August 2023).
30. Moms for Liberty. Who We Are. 2023. Available online: <https://www.momsforliberty.org/about/> (accessed on 21 July 2023).
31. Hubbard, K.U.S.; News & World Report. DeSantis Signs 'Don't Say Gay' Bill. 2022. Available online: <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2022-03-28/desantis-signs-dont-say-gay-bill> (accessed on 16 July 2023).
32. Data for Progress. LGBTQ School Ban Polling. 2022. Available online: <https://www.filesforprogress.org/datasets/2022/4/dfp-courier-lgbtq-school-ban-polling.pdf> (accessed on 30 August 2023).
33. Cohen, S. *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3rd ed.; Routledge: London, UK, 2003; ISBN 978-0415267120.

34. Goode, E.; Ben-Yehuda, N. *Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance*, 2nd ed.; Blackwell: Malden, MA, USA, 2009; ISBN 978-1405189330.
35. Moreton, B.; Washington Post. The Bond That Explains Why Some on the Christian Right Support Putin's War. 5 March 2022. Available online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/03/05/bond-that-explains-why-some-christian-right-support-putins-war/> (accessed on 28 August 2023).
36. Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Homepage. 2023. Available online: <https://www3.dadeschools.net/home> (accessed on 1 July 2023).
37. Miami-Dade County Public Schools. School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida. 2023. Available online: <https://www3.dadeschools.net/SchoolBoard/members> (accessed on 1 July 2023).
38. Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Meeting Archives. Summary Agenda for 7 September 2022. H-11. Available online: <https://pdfs.dadeschools.net/Bdarch/2022/bd090722/agenda/h11rev.pdf> (accessed on 12 June 2023).
39. Florida Statutes. Title XLIX. Chapter 1014. Available online: [http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App\\_mode=Display\\_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1014/1014.html](http://www.leg.state.fl.us/statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=1000-1099/1014/1014.html) (accessed on 15 June 2023).
40. Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Meeting Archives. Meeting Video for 7 September 2022. Available online: <https://m-dc.ps.eduvision.tv/default.aspx?q=3SfVi13wT7Si875ZAQyPCXfjBhsjKHGrh7orwU%252f0YSe5KH%252bzxzuOxw%253d%253d> (accessed on 12 June 2023).
41. Hammersley, M. *What is Qualitative Research?* Bloomsbury: London, UK, 2013; ISBN 978-1780933351.
42. Pernecky, T. *Epistemology and Metaphysics for Qualitative Research*; Sage: London, UK, 2016; ISBN 978-1446282380.
43. Glaser, B.; Strauss, A.L. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*; Aldine: Chicago, IL, USA, 1967.
44. Charmaz, K. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis*, 2nd ed.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2014; ISBN 978-0857029140.
45. Corbin, J.; Strauss, A.L. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 4th ed.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2014; ISBN 978-1412997461.
46. Birks, M.; Mills, J. *Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide*, 3rd ed.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2023; ISBN 978-1529759273.
47. Kruesi, K.; Phan, K.; Associated Press. 'Grooming': The Ubiquitous Buzzword in the LGBTQ School Debate. 2022. Available online: <https://apnews.com/article/education-gender-identity-adf10ff5f169fae9c9af4d08a7b0c2bc> (accessed on 1 July 2023).
48. Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network. 2021 National School Climate Survey: Executive Summary. 2022. Available online: [https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Executive\\_Summary-EN.pdf](https://www.glsen.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/NSCS-2021-Executive_Summary-EN.pdf) (accessed on 25 August 2023).
49. Brown, R.; Hewstone, M. An integrative theory of intergroup contact. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*; Zanna, M., Ed.; Elsevier Academic Press: San Diego, CA, USA, 2005; Volume 37, pp. 154–196, ISBN 978-0120152377.
50. Wright, S. Cross-Group contact effects. In *Intergroup Relations: The Role of Emotion and Motivation*; Otten, S., Kessler, T., Sassenberg, K., Eds.; Psychology Press: New York, NY, USA, 2009; pp. 262–283, ISBN 978-1841697055.
51. Schroeter, F.; Schroeter, L.; Toh, K. The Limits of Metalinguistic Negotiation: The Role of Shared Meanings in Normative Debate. *Can. J. Philos.* **2022**, *52*, 180–196. [CrossRef]
52. van Prooijen, J.W.; Douglas, K.M. Basic Principles of an Emerging Research Domain. *Eur. J. Soc. Psychol.* **2018**, *48*, 897–908. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
53. Hamilton, C.; Them. School Board Meetings Are the New Front Line for LGBTQ+ Rights. 7 September 2022. Available online: <https://www.them.us/story/school-boards-anti-lgbtq> (accessed on 1 September 2023).
54. Guzman, F.; USA Today. 3 Arrested as Large Fight Breaks Out While California School Board Discusses Pride Month. 7 June 2023. Available online: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2023/06/07/california-school-board-meeting-pride-fight/70296609007/> (accessed on 1 September 2023).
55. Brody, P.; The Observers. Anti-Transgender Policies Incite Vitriolic Debate at US School Board Meetings. 15 November 2022. Available online: <https://observers.france24.com/en/americas/20221115-usa-transgender-students-education-policy-school-board-meetings-debate> (accessed on 26 August 2023).
56. Mizelle, S.; CNN. In Wake of Florida Law, Additional States Seek to Restrict Certain LGBTQ Discussions in Schools. 18 March 2023. Available online: <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/18/politics/lgbtq-school-discussions/index.html> (accessed on 28 August 2023).
57. Choi, A.; CNN. Record Number of Anti-LGBTQ Bills Have Been Introduced This Year. 6 April 2023. Available online: <https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/06/politics/anti-lgbtq-plus-state-bill-rights-dg/index.html> (accessed on 28 August 2023).
58. American Civil Liberties Union. ACLU. The ACLU Is Tracking 230 Schools & Education Bills in the U.S. 1 September 2023. Available online: <https://www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights?impact=school> (accessed on 1 September 2023).
59. Movement Advancement Project. Equality Maps: LGBTQ Curricular Laws. 6 September 2023. Available online: [https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular\\_laws](https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/curricular_laws) (accessed on 6 September 2023).
60. Bloch, E.; Florida Times Union. Equality Florida Slams Duval Schools for Removing "Safe Space" Rainbow Stickers amid "Rebrand". 15 August 2022. Available online: <https://www.jacksonville.com/story/news/education/2022/08/15/duval-schools-replace-safe-space-stickers-rebrand-no-rainbows/10312688002/> (accessed on 26 August 2023).
61. Lozano, A.; NBC News. Southern California School Board Rejects Curriculum that Mentions Harvey Milk. 19 July 2023. Available online: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/southern-california-school-board-rejects-curriculum-mentions-harvey-mi-rcna94732> (accessed on 26 August 2023).

62. Carlo, A.; Euronews. Italy Celebrates Its Second Ever LGBT History Month: Here's Why It Matters. 4 August 2023. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/culture/2023/04/08/italy-celebrates-its-second-ever-lgbt-history-month-heres-why-it-matters> (accessed on 30 August 2023).
63. France 24. Surge in Anti-LGBTQ Disinformation Targets Pride in Europe. 23 June 2023. Available online: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230623-surge-in-anti-lgbtq-disinformation-targets-pride-in-europe> (accessed on 27 August 2023).
64. Rankin, J.; The Guardian. Hungary Passes Law Banning LGBT Content in Schools or Kids' TV. 15 June 2021. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/15/hungary-passes-law-banning-lgbt-content-in-schools> (accessed on 29 August 2023).
65. Euronews. Poland: MPs Back Control of Schools to Stop "Threats to Children's Morals". 14 January 2022. Available online: <https://www.euronews.com/2022/01/14/poland-mps-back-control-of-schools-to-stop-threats-to-children-s-morals> (accessed on 29 August 2023).
66. Essig, L.; Kondakov, A. A cold war for the twenty-first century: Homosexuality vs. Heterosexuality. In *Soviet and Post-Soviet Sexualities*; Mole, M., Ed.; Routledge: New York, NY, USA, 2019; pp. 79–102, ISBN 978-1138654709.
67. Blanco, S.; Baroja, A.; El Pais. The Worldwide Offensive Against the Rights of LGBTQ People. 28 June 2023. Available online: <https://english.elpais.com/international/2023-06-28/the-worldwide-offensive-against-the-rights-of-lgbtq-people.html> (accessed on 29 August 2023).
68. Biryabaremi, E.; Reuters. LGBT Ugandans Face Backlash as Parliament Launches Schools Investigation. 3 March 2023. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/lgbt-ugandans-face-backlash-parliament-launches-schools-investigation-2023-03-03/> (accessed on 30 August 2023).
69. Gritten, D.; BBC. Saudi Authorities Seize Rainbow Toys for Promoting Homosexuality. 15 June 2022. Available online: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-61813390> (accessed on 29 August 2023).
70. Bhandari, B.; Hu, E.; Foreign Policy. "Rainbow Hunters" Target LGBTQ Students. 28 July 2023. Available online: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/07/28/china-rainbow-hunters-target-lgbtq-students/> (accessed on 29 August 2023).
71. Sang-hun, C.; New York Times. North Korean Defector Opens up About His Long-Held Secret: His Homosexuality. 5 June 2015. Available online: [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/06/world/asia/north-korea-defector-jang-yeong-jin-gay.html?\\_r=2](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/06/world/asia/north-korea-defector-jang-yeong-jin-gay.html?_r=2) (accessed on 30 August 2023).
72. Pendharkar, E. Florida Board of Education Restricts Bathroom Access and Pronoun Use for Trans Students. Education Week. 2023. Available online: [https://www.edweek.org/leadership/florida-board-of-education-restricts-bathroom-access-and-pronoun-use-for-trans-students/2023/07?utm\\_source=nl&utm\\_medium=eml&utm\\_campaign=eu&M=7320356&UUID=0fc106d9e7bc212e3340bbe9afb8acee&T=9759845](https://www.edweek.org/leadership/florida-board-of-education-restricts-bathroom-access-and-pronoun-use-for-trans-students/2023/07?utm_source=nl&utm_medium=eml&utm_campaign=eu&M=7320356&UUID=0fc106d9e7bc212e3340bbe9afb8acee&T=9759845) (accessed on 25 July 2023).
73. Stanford, L. 'Parents Can't Trust Their Schools', Moms for Liberty Co-Founder Tiffany Justice Says. Education Week. 2023. Available online: [https://www.edweek.org/leadership/parents-cant-trust-their-schools-moms-for-liberty-co-founder-tiffany-justice-says/2023/06?utm\\_source=nl&utm\\_medium=eml&utm\\_campaign=eu&M=7176297&UUID=0fc106d9e7bc212e3340bbe9afb8acee&T=9577606](https://www.edweek.org/leadership/parents-cant-trust-their-schools-moms-for-liberty-co-founder-tiffany-justice-says/2023/06?utm_source=nl&utm_medium=eml&utm_campaign=eu&M=7176297&UUID=0fc106d9e7bc212e3340bbe9afb8acee&T=9577606) (accessed on 15 July 2023).
74. Cox, S.; Gallois, C. Gay and Lesbian Identity Development: A Social Identity Perspective. *J. Homosex.* **1996**, *30*, 1–30. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
75. Jordan, J.; Washington Post. LGBTQ Youth Want Role Models. Queer Elders Have a Lot of Advice. 10 February 2023. Available online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wellness/2023/02/10/lgbtq-queer-elders-role-models/> (accessed on 26 August 2023).
76. Trevor Project. The Trevor Project Research Brief: LGBTQ Youth Suicide Prevention in Schools. August 2021. Available online: <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Trevor-Project-Schools-Research-Brief.pdf> (accessed on 1 September 2023).

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.