

MINORITY REPRESENTATION



IN SCHOOLS?

FIG 1

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OVERVIEW

While the world is becoming more inclusive and accepting overall, the United States has been taking steps backwards. This year, there has been an increased effort to ban books about sexual and racial identity in various states (e.g., Wyoming, Oklahoma, and Tennessee). Last fall, the American Library Association received an "unprecedented" 330 book challenge reports, each of which can each include several books (Alter). On February 24, Florida's House of Representatives passed a bill that prohibits "classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity" in Florida schools (Lavietes). This Parental Rights in Education, or "Don't Say Gay," bill introduced by Representative Joe Harding will now go to Florida's Senate and is expected to pass. In the same week, Texas Governor Greg Abbot told the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services that gender-affirming treatments for transgender youth should be investigated as "child abuse" (Ghorayshi).

While many similar bills have been proposed but not passed, the increase in these anti-LGBTQ+ laws and efforts to censor minority voices is reason to raise concern. Society's issue with minority identity acceptance around children leads to an inherent lack of exposure of children to marginalized minority voices. Representation is insufficient in many forms, from characters in media to school curricula at all levels of education. This issue involves the areas of contention of when, where, and how children should be exposed to topics of diversity and identity.

Is there a time that is too early? Should exposure be focused within the home under the discretion of each family, or should it be focused in schools where children spend much of their time learning and growing? What should this exposure to diversity and identity in context of minorities look like?

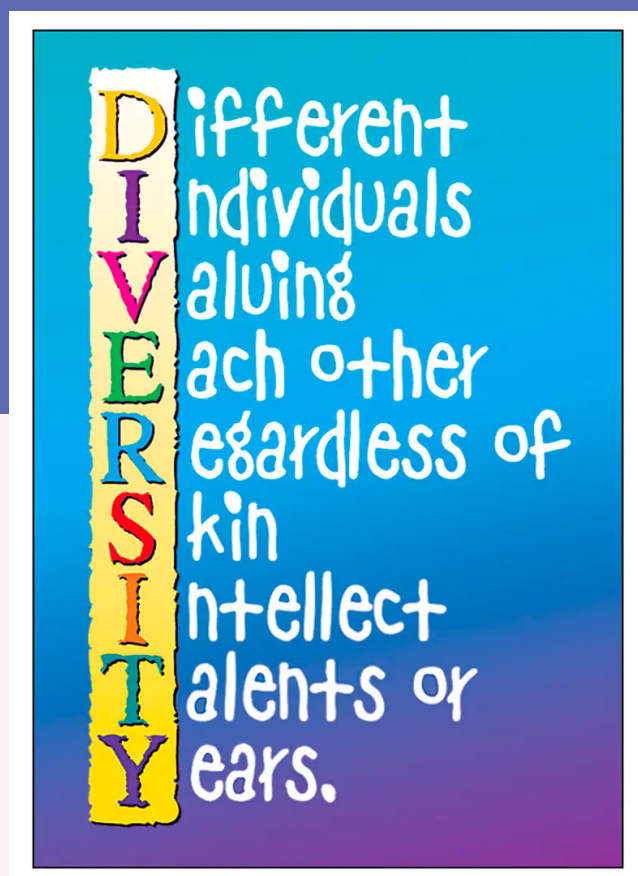


FIG 3

The fact of the matter is that more representation of minorities is needed, but the issue is how to achieve this additional representation. Many young people lack proper exposure to minority identities as resources inclusive of all racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and sexual identities are still limited. This deliberation guide will take a look at how to add minority representation specifically in schools.

The following sections of this guide describes three different approaches. They move from the most broad level that requires large-scale change, to the most localized and individual level that leaves change largely up to students, parents, and teachers. They will be called the federal, local, and free-market approaches. Across diverse perspectives, the relevant shared values are equal opportunities, fair education, and the wellbeing of children.

The recommended strategy for consuming the information in this guide is to read through the approaches in the order in which they are presented, weighing the pros and cons of each along the way. Then, read summary of the approaches in the form of a comprehensive list with abbreviated descriptions at the end of the guide.

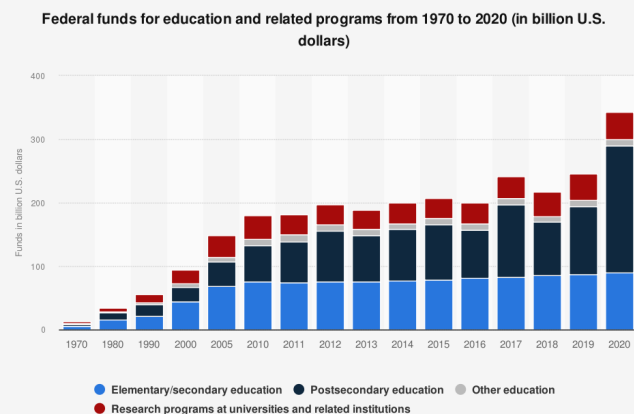
THE “FEDERAL” APPROACH

Overview

When it comes to education, the state and local governments take on the bulk of the responsibility. What would be the outcome, then, if the federal government had more of a role? State and Local governments provide for most schools’ funding, while the federal government provides 7.8% of funding for K-12 (Hanson). The criticism is that schools that receive funds from the federal government must accept and follow the rules and requirements mandated by said government. For example, a program called Reading First aims to help schools implement robust reading programs that utilize scientific-based research to support their success” through federal money to “help schools implement robust reading programs that utilize scientific-based research to support their success” (Chen). But schools can always refuse federal funding, and since the federal government does not have authority to set unfunded mandates for local schools, programs like Reading First can be ignored. Leaving the question posed, what would change for minority students if the federal government had more of a role?

Action 1: Use federal funds to incentivize adding more history on minorities into the curriculum

Concerning the education of the American youth, the federal government has a minimal say in state-run schools and institutions. While the constitutionality of the matter might prevent the federal government from getting directly involved in these schools' curricula, this does not mean the government cannot intervene in their ways. A simple way to convince states to adopt a more inclusive and diverse curriculum would be to simply incentivize it through the use of federal funding and resources. The act of incentivizing a more diverse curriculum through federal funding is not unprecedented at all. Besides the instance referenced in the overview, another example can be found in the Highway Trust Fund of 1984. In this instance, the federal government withheld a portion of the federal funding for state highways if they didn't establish a new drinking age of 21 (Resnick et al.). It is possible that a similar strategy could be used to incentivize educational courses relating to the history of America's many minority groups. The problem with federal funding is that schools are not required to accept the federal dollars and are not required to follow any programs or rules, such as incorporating more history on minorities into the curriculum. Also, no guarantee adding more history on minorities will improve the environment and implicit bias for minority students.



Source: NCES © Statista 2022

Additional Information: United States, 1970 to 2020

FIG 4

Action 2: Use federal funds to send teachers to higher quality preparations programs to reduce bias amongst teachers

Starting June 1, 2022, Kalamazoo, Michigan is making it a requirement for healthcare professionals to take part in implicit bias training (Painter). A similar approach could be done for teachers attending implicit bias training to ensure all students are being treated the same. It is important for a student to feel comfortable in their classroom, where they spend the majority of their day. Teachers control the environment of the room and can be the difference between a student feeling comfortable or not. School is already hard enough, but it is especially harder for underrepresented students such as the LGBTQ+ community and people of color. "In 2014, the high school graduation rate for white students was 87 percent, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. For black students, the rate was 73 percent" (Weir). This statistic from the American Psychological Association is a clear example that these factors cause POC to struggle more in school. It is important to make everyone feel equal and to treat everyone the same. And that can start with how teachers treat their students. Similarly to action 1, schools do not have to accept the federal dollars which means teachers would not need to take in-depth preparation programs, which would show no growth within the comfortability and success rates for minority groups.



FIG 5

Action 3: Make federal government fund all schools around the nation

An independent national education policy organization, The Education Trust, released a report on the nation's growing funding inequalities between wealthy and low-income school districts and the study revealed that Pennsylvania has the second-worst funding gap among states (Miranda). Federal funding throughout the nation can improve giant gaps between the wealthy and the low-income school districts. Many underfunded schools could improve from the help the federal government could provide. Which might improve graduation and success rates for people of color. Although this action sounds great, it comes with many trade-offs. If the government is funding all public schools around the nation and using their money to influence what is taught, there will be a lot of disagreement due to demographics. As of right now, schools are state and local ran which makes it easier for certain demographics to influence what is taught, but that would change if the federal government had more control. In addition, any programs created using federal dollars can be revoked and thrown away with a different president in power.

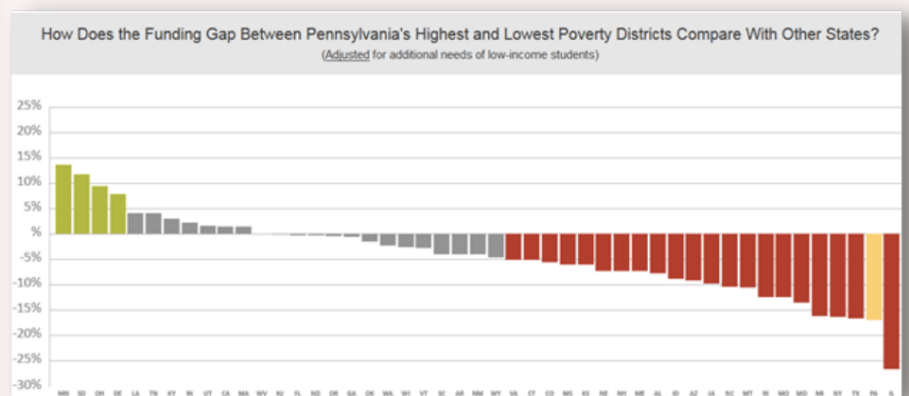


FIG 6

THE “LOCAL” APPROACH

Overview

To ensure that communities do not feel forced by exterior bodies to change their public school curricula and modify their children’s education against their will, which could lead to widespread rejection of the ideals necessary to encourage inclusivity in public schools, this approach centers on community-led action to address minority exclusion in broader American school curricula. This would entail reshaping the content taught in school jurisdictions to reflect the cultural make-up of local communities and best teach children their cultural heritages. To enact this change, engagement for the students, both in course materials and in school cultural events, will be curated to give proportional representation to authors and social events significant to the student population in each jurisdiction. Additionally, faculty will be selected from and reflect the community they teach and be trained in conflict resolution and awareness of non-curricular stressors of their community that may affect the performance and mental well-being of their pupils. This approach contends with the reality of tyranny of the majority, which, at such small scales, may result in exclusion of local minorities in shaping public school curricula and environments.

Action 1: Integrate more diverse literature and history directly into curriculums based on the demographic of the school district

The achievement gap, a discrepancy in educational performance among students of different racial and ethnic groups, results in significant disparity in success post-graduation (Hanover Research). Therefore, addressing factors that may influence the achievement gap ought to be considered when specializing curricula for different and diverse communities. A noteworthy means of increasing educational success is to engage students with material they find interesting and want to learn more about; and, one way this can be achieved is presenting students with content they can personally relate to and see as relevant to themselves (“Representation Matters”). For many students of color, this can be quite difficult with many of the legacy works of literature used in classrooms having been written by and feature individuals of European descent and their cultural heritages (Cavalovitch). This approach recommends fitting the materials used in coursework to reflect the demographics of students in the classroom to ensure that those students can identify with, relate to, and thus engage with their coursework. Unfortunately, this tactic would sacrifice space in the curricula normally held by traditional academic texts (e.g., the works of Shakespeare, Homer, Orwell, Steinbeck, etc.), a substitution many will not be comfortable making.

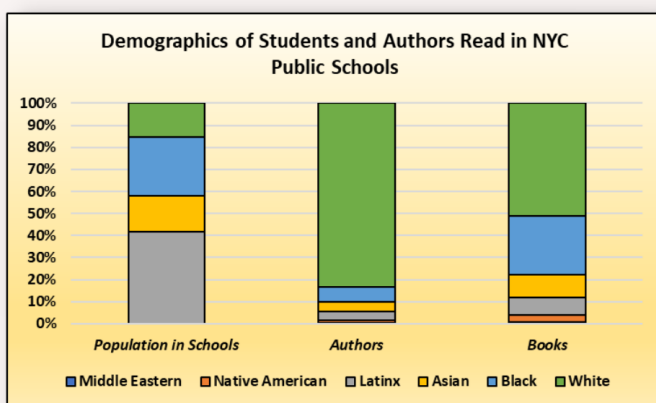


FIG 7

Action 2: Diversify the ethnic and cultural makeup of faculty, as well as train them to handle cultural sensitive topics

Another way to cater education to the demographic of the student body would be to diversify the educators meant to guide them. According to statistics drawn from federal data in 2018, 6.8% of teachers in America are black and 81.9% are white (Anderson). A way to level the playing field for students of color would be to hire staff and teachers that fit the demographic of that community and staff that specializes in conflict resolution, meaning more teachers of or connected to black heritage being hired to teach in a town filled with predominantly black individuals. The U.S. District Court of Louisiana in New Orleans issued and later reissued a consent decree that called for school districts to hire more black educators, enough to align the amount of black students to black educators. While the decree remained unenforced from 1975 to 2009, when it was reissued there was a spike in the amount of black educators being considered to be hired in that district. As a result, the black-white achievement disparity in test scores narrowed by 5 percent (Anderson). The problem with implementing hiring practices that hire teachers of certain demographics is that there is a significant shortage in teaching staff available. The demand for teachers exceeds the current supply of teachers currently in the United States (Garcia and Weiss). A sizable amount of funds are necessary for new hiring practices to be put in place, and in white minority majority schools being low on funds, it would be difficult for them to fund the programs that could improve education in these specific communities (Barnum). Furthermore, hiring staff that is meant to fit a certain group of students rather than the majority can lead to preferential treatment and neglect of those who do not fit the main demographic, eventually devolving into a separation of groups, declaring those in the larger group to have more power and resources and the minority. This plan falls short in the many communities that are made of predominantly white citizens because white middle-class students are already well catered to in the current American educational system. These action plans propose a change that could brighten the futures of many students of color or risk jeopardizing the current equilibrium of the educational curriculum set in schools to prevent inequality.

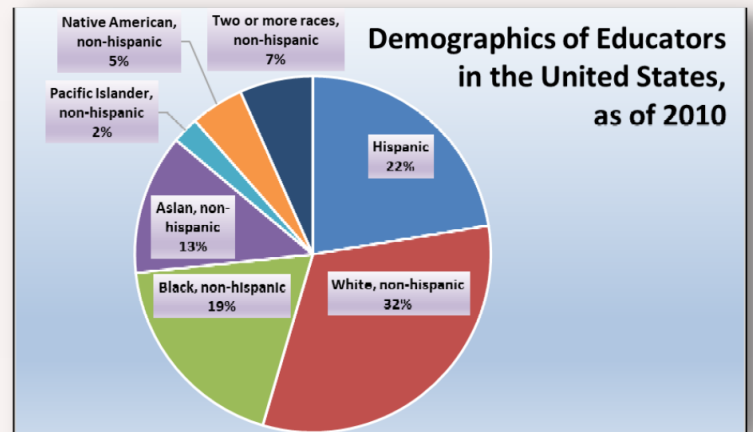


FIG 8

Action 3: Celebrate minority holidays and heritage months in the classroom

The United States designates Martin Luther King Jr. Day, LGBTQ+ Pride Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and many different cultural holidays and heritage celebrations. By actively celebrating these in the classroom, teachers create a space for children of different backgrounds to celebrate their own or others' culture and history. By learning about these celebrations, it creates the opportunity to reframe American history to children. Desiree Raught, award winning writer and educator for LGBTQ+ youth explains that after the creation of Pride Month, teachers were given the opportunity to create a culture of empowerment and support for kids who did not receive it elsewhere (Raught). However, celebrating these heritage months and cultural holidays would expose children to stark societal differences between races and cultures. It also reduces the individual histories to one time period such as a single month or day out the year, while simultaneously further defining the lines between races and cultures in America (Fortin). Expert Paul Gorski, the founder of the Equity Literacy Institute explains, "Requiring students of color to participate in these diversity spectacles while failing to attend adequately to inequity can be exploitative" (Gorski). "Gentle diversity education" such as the celebration of designated holidays creates a hides further the establishment of inequity with the delusion of diversity (Gorski).

THE "FREE MARKET" APPROACH

Overview

The "free market" approach focuses on the option of allowing all individual parties (teachers, parents, and students) to choose how they wish to display or consume representation in school. Without any necessary representation in the curriculum, there is the possibility of developing additional after school classes or clubs that delve deeper into topics of minority groups and identity at the discretion of teachers or students. This would foster connections within the community and engage both students and parents as they desire. Any additional exposure to minority identity representation is entirely optional and up to the individual.

Action 1: Teachers can include representation as they see fit

Presenting teachers with the ability to choose if and how to incorporate diversity and representation into their classes gives them a lot of freedom in the classroom, aside from the necessary curriculum. They can set up and decorate their rooms as they desire, with the possibility of using this as an opportunity to display diverse identities, which is important for the wellbeing of students. Zaretta Hammond, author of Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain, believes that "every student deserves to see themselves represented in their classroom,' so teachers should 'work on finding culturally congruent images that communicate a positive sense of accomplishment, success, and triumph.' This is beneficial because 'images like these can help empower students and help them see themselves in the success stories of the world" (Barile). Going along with this idea, elementary school teachers can fill their classroom libraries with books chosen apart from the standard curriculum, presenting another opportunity to expose students to diversity and minority representation that reflects their own identities.

In certain areas, parents might get upset about materials available in the classroom, and without protections, teachers may be at risk of receiving complaints and being fired in extreme cases.

Action 2: Students and parents can choose their level of exposure to diverse identities

Students will be able to engage with classroom materials and consume representation as they want, giving them freedom to choose their exposure to representation. Giving students the power of choice at a young age can help them later in formal education, as well as in life in general. Rules and expectations are important for classroom order, "but by centering choice, educators signal openness to negotiating the middle ground and offer students scaffolded opportunities to practice decision-making, explore their academic identity, and connect their learning to interests and passions" (Merrill). However, participating in some lessons that involve discussion of identities such as sexual education may ultimately be left to the discretion of parents, regardless of what the students prefer. "More than 93 percent of parents place high importance on sex education in both middle and high school," but issues may arise with the proposal of introducing young students to various sexual and gender identities outside of the heterosexual and cisgender norm (Kantor).



FIG 9

THE “FREE MARKET” APPROACH

In terms of "opt-out" programs, parents must reach out to the school to express an issue with the content, which as led to “fewer than 5 percent of parents exercis[ing] their option to remove their children from sex-education courses” (Blad). Another option is to hand out consent forms in advance so parents and students are aware of what content to expect, but this may lead to more parents deciding to shelter their children from LGBTQ+ identities. If there is both a significant number of students who choose to and choose not to (or alternatively are permitted by their parents and are not permitted to) engage in lessons about minority representation, classes can be separated into different sections to continue instruction. An issue that may arise, however, is the risk of isolating students of the majority from students of the minority, which can result in increased discrimination and decreased acceptance among diverse children.

Action 3: Create optional diverse and inclusive classes or after-school programs to keep this content separate from general education

The creation of identity-focused after-school clubs and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs centered on learning about minority experiences will encourage both students and parents to engage with teachers to be exposed to representation of the greater community. As optional clubs outside of the curriculum, they would supplement the school experience by providing opportunities for a greater understanding of self and others. At the middle and high school levels, student-run clubs can lead to an increased understanding of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. Building traits through interactions with people of different identities will increase the students' wellbeing and ability to comprehend difficult subjects as they progress through their education. Despite the apparent positive results of this action, "there are not enough programs

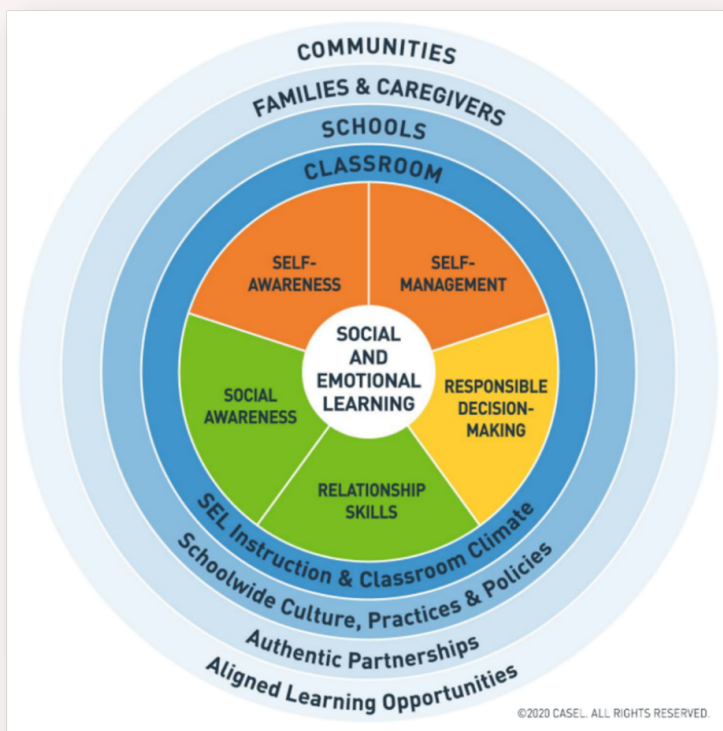


FIG 10

available to meet demand” (Academic Effects of after-School Programs). Some schools such as those with large populations of students from low income backgrounds that would greatly benefit from a safe space available after school are unable to implement programs because of a lack of funding and resources. In other areas, there is enough funding for additional after-school activities, but these schools lack enough manpower to make this possible. The involvement of young students is also limited by family situations, resulting in “few children attend[ing] after-school programs” (Academic Effects of after-School Programs). More after-school activities would require a lot of time and work put in by teachers for the club creation and necessary supervision all year, with the chance that very few students will end up attending. Optional classes during the school day could be a way to combat the issue of students not being able to stay after school to be engaged. However, the problems of insufficient funding and adequate staffing would remain, with additional concerns about available space and what would need to be cut to allow the inclusion of these extra classes that would replace the incorporation of minority identity representation within the typical class and lesson structure.

01 Approach 1: The "Federal" Approach

Pros

- If there is federal involvement in schools it can allow for more consistency within all schools over the nation
- The federal government can use their federal funds to pay for higher quality preparation programs for teachers to help reduce bias
- Ensuring a better environment for minority groups to improve success rates

Trade-Offs

- Disagreement with what is taught based on demographics
- There is no guarantee that the results will be positive
- The forced teaching of history on minority groups can result in a backlash from many families and can cause more of a division within the United States
- Public schools are not required to take federal funds, especially richer schools

02 Approach 2: The "Local" Approach

Pros

- Students feel represented in school materials
- Implementing this approach would allow students to connect with educational professionals that have a cultural insight and understanding of barriers students of color may experience
- Children celebrate their own and others' cultures and history

Trade-Offs

- Classics are deemphasized
- Incentivizing this action would prove to be difficult because of the national teacher shortage, funding issues, the varying demographics around the nation, and the separation of groups that will come as a result of hiring teachers for a certain demographic of students
- Individual histories may be reduced to a single month or day, while simultaneously further defining the lines between races and cultures in America

03 Approach 3: The "Free-Market" Approach

Pros

- Teachers can include diversity and representation without formal policies
- Students of all identities can find a safe space in schools
- Students can find individualized opportunities that are outside of the regular curriculum
- Giving students the power of choice increases self confidence and willingness to learn

Trade-Offs

- Teachers risk disapproval or punishment in certain areas where diverse representation could upset parents
- If teachers personally do not think it is necessary or do not take the initiative to include more representation, it will not happen
- Schools risk isolating the minority from the majority if different class sections are available for choosing
- It is already difficult for schools to get funding for existing after school programs
- Student choice may turn into parents choosing for them



FIG 11

Despite the general trends of increasing inclusivity in today's world, there is much evidence of the adult population's hesitance to expose children to diverse identities. Actions have been taken to hinder the volume of minority voices in schools, where the vast majority of our youth spends their time growing into more mature individuals. The representation shown within classrooms impacts the wellbeing of upcoming generations and ultimately affects how they approach their life choices. Knowing when, where, and how to introduce minority representation depends on the perspectives and experiences of all parties involved.

After reading through the three aforementioned approaches, it is important to take the time to think through all aspects of each in order to gain a better understanding of their respective requirements and consequences. It is crucial to be mindful of the trade-offs and sacrifices that would need to be made for the betterment of our school communities. In a discussion such as this, also try to be aware of how certain decisions or action would affect other groups of people with beliefs and backgrounds different from your own.

Tackling the impact of representation in schools is a difficult topic, and one that should be looked at from all perspectives to understand the scope of the issue. Should we aim to remedy this at the federal level, local level, or individual level? At what grade is it best to intervene and begin talking about representation in the classroom, or should these identities not be emphasized more within the existing curriculum? The ideas and approaches in this guide are meant to make addressing these issues more approachable within a civil and deliberate conversation.



Scan for post-deliberation survey

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