

AAUW-WA Position Statement Supporting Public School Educators, Academic Freedom and Equity Efforts in Schools

Whereas AAUW-WA has worked for gender equity since 1904, with the founding of AAUW Seattle Branch, and has over 25 branches across the state;

Whereas AAUW-WA supports a commitment to learning about gender issues, both past and present, without fearing the discomfort that can accompany such learnings;

Whereas students benefit greatly from:

- The study of literature and art that addresses the full range of being human, including sex and gender
- STEM education that encompasses evidence-based science, technology, engineering and math, and is available to all students
- Health and wellness education that includes age-appropriate sexual health education and emotional social learning
- Critical thinking skills training that includes media and digital literacy, and how to verify information and information sources;

Whereas AAUW-WA supports public education systems and public school educators, as well as academic freedom, and the right of educators to make decisions that are in the best interests of all students, consistent with peer-reviewed research and best practices;

Whereas hateful rhetoric against teachers, school librarians, school administrators, and policymakers is an infectious form of misconduct, and proposals to ban discussions of sexual orientation

and gender identity in schools send a profoundly negative message of non-acceptance to students;

Whereas AAUW-WA is committed to learning about and addressing, through education and policy change, the violence and oppression experienced by women, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, immigrants and all others who have suffered oppression in this country;

Whereas Washington State has an explicit policy for curricula development that respects local communities, includes parents, and acknowledges and respects the professional standards of educators;

Whereas school board directors, as nonpartisan, elected public officials, have a paramount duty to uphold Washington State laws, including inclusion and anti-discrimination laws; and

Whereas on-going thoughtful evaluation of teaching methodology and content is a necessary part of strengthening our public schools, but harassment of teachers, school librarians, administrators, and school board members is harmful to them, to the schools and educational systems they represent, and, most especially, to the students they serve;

Therefore AAUW-WA takes the following stance:

1) We stand in support of Washington State's gender-inclusive public education programs and stand against:

- Efforts to inflame the public with hateful rhetoric toward educators
- Censoring or banning what is taught in public school classrooms
- Censoring or banning books and media in school libraries

- Denying the histories of oppression experienced by marginalized groups
- Denying racism, sexism, heterosexism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism, and other forms of prejudice, bias, and hate
- Imposing burdensome disclosure mandates related to classroom lessons, assignments, and activities

2) We recognize the historical, immediate and long-term need to address gender identity and gender equity in schools from primary to higher education; and for all students to be given the opportunity to access truthful information and to learn from our past.

3) We believe public education must ensure that students are better equipped to advocate for, and to reach, their full potential as critical thinkers in school environments that continually strive for equity in all aspects of schooling, from academics and curriculum to extra-curricular activities and school culture. This is vital for every person, of every race, skin color, culture, religion, language status, gender, sexual orientation, disability, income, and/or family background.

4) We encourage all AAUW-WA branches to develop talking points for their members to address these issues and we commit to supporting branches in these local endeavors.

5) We commit to supporting state policies and practices that meet these goals.

Final version approved by the Board on July 20, 2023. Revised July 21 for copyediting and formatting. School librarians added.