

Show teachers respect, not stifle them

TEACHERS just never seem to catch a break. Even though most of them go above and beyond to provide our children the best possible education, some of our state lawmakers appear to have it out for them.

In addition to teaching our children to read and write and do algebra, we expect teachers to align instruction with mandated state standards that anyone can see at in.gov/doi/students/indiana-academic-standards. We expect teachers to provide individual attention to struggling students. We expect teachers to coach and assist with extracurricular activities. We expect teachers to keep the peace in the classroom and in the hallways between class, then find time for all manner of bureaucratic busy work.

We expect and expect and expect.

And the truth is, we expect them to do all they do for salaries nowhere near what they're worth. Yet they teach anyway, because it's a calling: they are inspired to teach and to ignite in young people the love of learning.

Given all they do — and especially all they've done throughout this pandemic — you'd think Hoosier teachers would be due a little respect. But that's the last thing they're getting from the Indiana General Assembly's Republican supermajority.

Consider House Bill 1134, authored by State Rep. Tony Cook, R-Cicero. As The Republic's Mark Webber reported last week, that bill, among other things, "would limit what teachers can say in class on sensitive subjects, prohibiting them from using materials that 'present any form of racial or sex-stereotyping or blame on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion, color, national origin, or political affiliation.'"

So much for history, social studies, literature, civics, current events and more. In fact, many of the state's very educational standards that we insist teachers teach would be swept up by such sweeping language.

This legislation is a teacher trap and an embarrassing assault on education. Regardless, the bill received the support of local Reps. Ryan Lauer, R-Columbus, and Jim Lucas, R-Seymour, and it passed the House last week in a 60-37 vote.

There's good reason to believe, or at least hope, that this bill will die in the Indiana Senate without being called to a committee hearing. Senate President Pro Tem Rodric Bray pulled the plug on a similar Senate bill recently, conceding "there is no path forward for it and it will not be considered." There should be no path forward for HB 1134, either.

Lawmakers ought to be ashamed such anti-education legislation. More over, they should be ashamed of how little they support Indiana teachers and education in general. Lawmakers may offer faint praise now and then, but as the song says, it's money that matters.

And on that subject, Indiana gets a failing grade. According to the National Education Association, Indiana ranked 42nd out of the 50 states in average teacher salary in 2021. We ranked 41st in per-student spending on education. Meanwhile, Indiana lawmakers sit atop a budget surplus of some \$4 billion.

Even if you never got algebra, you know something just doesn't add up here.

If state lawmakers really cared about education, they would spend more time adequately funding it and less time trying to restrict it.

Send comments to editorial@therepublic.com.