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"I know what's best for my child": A qualitative analysis of US cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ parents' perspectives on inclusive education policies

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Abstract

Diversity education in the K-12 years is a contentious issue in the contemporary US context. Given evidence that parental identity influences beliefs about and support for diversity education, we qualitatively explored cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents' ($N = 609$) beliefs about the appropriateness of inclusive educational policies in K-12 classrooms. We collected qualitative data on parental perceptions of inclusive signals in classrooms (e.g., displaying a rainbow flag) and on perceptions of inclusive curriculum (whether children should learn about diversity at school/from teachers or at home/from parents). Parents' responses reflected variability in support for inclusive signals. Cisgender-heterosexual parents were more likely to endorse that cues should not be allowed and were less likely to indicate holistic support of cues compared to LGBTQ+ parents. For inclusive curriculum, cisgender-heterosexual parents were more likely than LGBTQ+ parents to endorse that diversity information should be discussed only at home with parents. We contextualize

parents' responses within contemporary political rhetoric (e.g., discussions of Parents' Bills of Rights) and highlight implications for educators and policymakers.

KEYWORDS
elementary education, sexuality education, critical race theory, identity safety cues

Public significance statement

Parental identity influences beliefs about diversity education in US K-12 schools, with LGBTQ+ parents generally being more supportive of inclusive classroom signals and curricula than cisgender-heterosexual parents. Our findings highlight how parents grapple with ideas about inclusive education and factors underlying (lack of) support for inclusive educational policies. We outline potential spaces for intervention to promote parental support for inclusive curriculum.

A wave of attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, and particularly on the rights of LGBTQ+ youth, is underway in the United States (American Civil Liberties Union, 2024). This includes the introduction and passing of a record number of anti-LGBTQ+ bills stifling discussions about marginalized gender and sexual identities in K-12 education (Human Rights Campaign, 2023; Mervosh, 2023). Many of these bills implicitly or explicitly seek to give parents greater oversight of school curricula, particularly as it pertains to diversity-related content (e.g., teaching about race, gender, and sexuality; Gawthrop & Helmstetter, 2022). These bills reflect one front of the broader "parents' rights" discourse, which invokes the status of parents as experts on their own children and thus as having the right to determine to what their children are exposed (e.g., Foran, 2022; Walsh, 2022). Such distinctions of what parents believe their children should be exposed to have largely become politicized determinations which seek to limit exposure to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics based on their perceived "inappropriateness" for children (see Chaney et al., 2024).

In the current work, we contribute to ongoing conversations about the perceived role and appropriateness of DEI in educational spaces by unpacking parental perceptions of multiple facets of DEI in K-12 classroom contexts. Specifically, in a qualitative paradigm, we examine and contrast heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents' perceptions of DEI-related content and contexts in classroom environments. We focus on cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents as many recent bills restricting DEI-related K-12 curricula specifically target LGBTQ+ topics (e.g., American Civil Liberties Union, 2024; Goldberg & Abreu, 2024), and support for inclusive educational policies differs by parental identity (gender or sexual minority versus majority; see Chaney et al., 2024; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). We center parental LGBTQ+ identity as an important predictor of attitudes toward inclusive curricula, considering both the content and the context of K-12 education.

DEI in K-12 education: Content and context

Legislative attacks on DEI in education have tended to focus on the content of educational curricula, particularly in terms of restricting teaching of critical topics including race and racial histories, gender, and sexual orientation (Gawthrop & Helmstetter, 2022; Hornbeck & Malin, 2023). In justifying the censorship of these topics, legislators and parents have relied on discourses of (in)appropriateness (see Chaney et al., 2024; Phillips, 2022) as well as protecting (advantaged) students from experiencing feelings of guilt and shame (Hornbeck & Malin, 2023). For example, recent work indicates that parents who believe discussions about sexual orientation are not appropriate for children until they are older also endorse greater support for restricting LGBTQ+-related curriculum (Chaney et al., 2024). Similarly, parents' rights advocates who support banning critical race theory in education argue for the need to protect their (White) children from exposure to what are perceived as inappropriate and even threatening ideas about racial reform (Baldwin Clark, 2022; see also Sullivan et al., 2021).

These efforts to constrain teaching of DEI-related curriculum present a serious challenge to the well-being of youth, particularly marginalized youth. Inclusive K-12 curriculum is associated with positive outcomes among marginalized children and youth (e.g., positive perceptions of school climate, increased student engagement, reduced bullying; Blazar, 2021; Day et al., 2019; Dee & Penner, 2021; Kosciw et al., 2020; Piper, 2019). Conversely, prohibiting DEI-related curricula can exacerbate educational inequalities and negatively impact marginalized students (e.g., Hornbeck & Malin, 2023; Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023).

Alongside educational content, however, is the educational context. Particularly in the current political climate—which presents a macro-level threat to DEI—environmental signals of inclusivity in K-12 classrooms can serve as important cues to belonging (see also Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). Thus, in the current work, we consider how parents react and respond not only to the content of K-12 education, but also to DEI-related symbolism in K-12 classroom contexts.

Context: Environmental safety cues

Visual representations of DEI—for example, a rainbow pride flag or a Black Lives Matter (BLM) poster—can serve to signal information about inclusive norms in a given space (Chaney & Sanchez, 2018; Chaney et al., 2019). Such *identity safety cues* can signal to marginalized group members that their identities are valued or that they belong in that space, cuing positive expectations of how they will be treated (Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008). Indeed, one of few environmental signals that has been studied in the K-12 contexts, "Safe Zone" stickers—an environmental signal indicating that teachers have voluntarily undergone training on LGBTQ+ issues—enhance LGBTQ+ youth's perceptions of school climate and inclusivity (Evans, 2002; Katz et al., 2016).

Adults' perceptions of visible DEI cues in K-12 classroom contexts are mixed; for example, most Americans (56% of a large nationally representative sample) believe that elementary school teachers should be able to display a photo of their spouse on their desk at school even if their spouse is the same gender as them—though one quarter of those polled think that schools should ban all teachers from displaying photos of their spouses to side-step this issue, and one in five think that elementary teachers should only be allowed to display such pictures if they depict heterosexual couplings (Helmstetter, 2023). In a study of parental perceptions of identity safety cues in classroom contexts, Pereira-Jorge et al. (2025) found that inclusive signals in classrooms were generally perceived more negatively by advantaged than marginalized parents. Specifically, White parents

responded more negatively than Black parents to the presence of a BLM poster in a 3rd grade classroom, and cisgender-heterosexual parents responded more negatively to the presence of a pride flag in a 3rd or 8th grade classroom than did LGBTQ+ parents.

In the current work, we take a broad lens on inclusive educational policy, examining how parents reflect on inclusive environmental signals and inclusive curriculum in tandem. We briefly expand on our focus on parents before turning to the current study.

Parents' role in DEI in education

The growing parent's rights movement argues for the right of parents to direct their children's education, responding to perceived infringement on their capacity to control what children are exposed to in the classroom (Foran, 2022). Foran situates the growth of the movement in a swell of backlash surrounding the teaching of DEI-related concepts, including critical race theory. Indeed, many involved in the movement frame their concerns as fighting against indoctrination by politicized (liberal) education systems (see Walsh, 2022). This backlash against inclusive education policies has been noted in additional work, particularly among advantaged parents; for example, White parents are critical of racial equity policies and statements in elementary school contexts (Blaisdell, 2023), and White, as well as cisgender-heterosexual parents, demonstrate backlash to inclusive symbolism in K-12 classrooms (Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025).

The belief that parents should direct their children's education appears widespread; Nationally representative polling suggests that most Americans think parents should have the primary influence on shaping the curriculum their children are exposed to (Gawthrop & Helmstetter, 2022; Helmstetter, 2023). However, dissenting voices express concern that this will allow parental biases to seep into educational systems to the detriment of schools and education (e.g., Foran, 2022). Some marginalized parents suggest that the parent's rights movement infringes on their own parental rights; for example, one lesbian woman participant in Goldberg and Abreu's (2024) study of responses to Florida's "Don't Say Gay" parental rights bill—which restricts classroom discussions of LGBTQ+ topics—indicated that her right to not be discriminated against and to send her child to school without fear was restricted by the passing of this new bill. Further, we note that parents are able to impact curriculum via not only political action to support or condemn such education policies, but also more locally via school boards and parent teacher associations (PTAs), and via unorganized, interpersonal interactions with schoolteachers and administrators. In the current work, we aim to unpack how parents make sense of and respond to inclusive educational policies in this political climate. We sought to understand why some parents, but not others, rally against inclusive education policies through rich analysis of qualitative data. Furthermore, we examined the influence of parental gender and sexual identity (cisgender-heterosexual or LGBTQ+) on perceptions of and responses to inclusive educational policies. While we focus our comparative analysis on this axis of identity, we also include exploratory analyses of parent gender, political orientation, and racial/ethnic identity given evidence that these axes are relevant to and influence support for inclusive educational policies (e.g., Gawthrop & Helmstetter, 2022; Helmstetter, 2023; Hobby et al., 2021).

Positionality statement

We note that we are writing and conducting this work from the perspective of US-based academic social psychologists with programs of research rooted in feminist and queer science. Many of our

programs of research focus on social identity, safety, and environmental cues, which can signal this safety to marginalized group members (i.e., safety cues). Our authorship team consists primarily of queer women with varying racial/ethnic backgrounds, and a range of levels of academic experience. As members of the LGBTQ+ community, we share an investment in liberatory and inclusive practices in education and beyond.

THE CURRENT STUDY

We sought to explore how cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents make sense of inclusive signals and inclusive curriculum in K-12 classroom spaces. We used a qualitative methodology to gain rich insights into parents' processes of making sense of and responding to a range of inclusive educational policies, addressing both the content (curriculum) and context (classroom setting) in which early education takes place. We examine and contrast cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents' responses to these policies to better understand how parental identity and experience shape engagement with inclusive education, an analysis we further by including additional axes of identity in exploratory comparisons.

Our primary aim was exploratory: We sought to unpack the underlying thought processes of parents as they consider inclusive educational policies. Our secondary aims were confirmatory: Broadly, given existing evidence (Chaney et al., 2024; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025), we expected that marginalized parents would endorse more positive and supportive perceptions of and responses to inclusive educational policies than would parents from socially advantaged backgrounds. Naturally, this hypothesis remained flexible given the qualitative nature of the work; while we used a qualitative methodology that lends itself to quantitative comparison (see Analytic Approach below), comparison codes were established in a deductive fashion, directly informed by our analysis of the data, and thus we did not have hypotheses about specific comparisons prior to data analysis.

Methodology

Data were collected as part of a larger study on the use of inclusive signals in classrooms (see Design and Procedure). One other publication from this dataset includes a very brief, quantitative analysis of the qualitative data with a specific focus on (a) the age of appropriateness of inclusive signals and (b) whether parents or schools should have primary influence over children's exposure to diversity-related information (see Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). All research was conducted with IRB approval. An anonymized code sheet with all qualitative data, in addition to quantitative data and materials for the full study are available at https://osf.io/gba27/?view_only=55d1b3203ef947ec8c2fc99a547eb7cd.

Participants

US participants who identified as LGBTQ+ or cisgender-heterosexual and who lived with at least one child were recruited via Prolific. Sample size was determined based on the quantitative component of the study; a priori power analyses for the appropriate statistical test (2 × 2 between-subjects ANOVA with 80% power to detect a small-medium effect [$f = .20$]) revealed

a desired sample of 309 participants for each identity category, and we oversampled from this number to account for exclusions. From an initial sample of 630 participants, we excluded those who demonstrated clear evidence of using ChatGPT for long-form responses ($n = 8$), did not have a child ($n = 8$), did not indicate how many children they had ($n = 1$), or did not respond to at least one open-ended item ($n = 4$). The final sample ($N = 609$) included 302 LGBTQ+ participants and 307 cisgender-heterosexual participants. Tables 1 and 2 provide detailed demographic information.

Participants who indicated informed consent were allowed to continue forward in the survey, while those who did not consent were brought directly to the end of the survey. Participants, as part of their informed consent, were instructed that because their participation was voluntary, they could stop their participation at any time by exiting the survey or skipping questions they did not want to answer. Participants were compensated $8 an hour, meeting the fair rate of compensation on Prolific. The median completion time for LGBTQ+ participants was just over 19 minutes, whereas the median completion time for cisgender-heterosexual participants was just under 17 minutes.

Materials

Participants responded to two open-ended questions in the order presented below. Each question was displayed on a separate page, and participants had unlimited time and space to respond to the questions. The questions read as follows:

1. To what extent do you believe inclusive signals, such as rainbow pride flags or Black Lives Matter stickers, are appropriate to display in school classrooms? When (i.e., what age) and where do you believe children should be exposed to diversity-related ideas?
2. Who do you believe should have the primary influence over a child's learning about sensitive subjects related to gender, sexuality, race, and other diversity-related topics? What level of control or involvement do you feel parents should have in determining the curriculum content and discussions about these diversity-related subjects?

We included multifaceted questions in order to capture a broader range of responses. We refer to the two questions throughout the manuscript as *DEI Appropriateness* (question 1) and *DEI Influence* (question 2), respectively.

Design and procedure

After providing consent and initial demographics, participants completed a virtual classroom tour task in which they viewed images of a third-grade classroom; participants were randomly assigned to either a cue condition in which the classroom included an inclusive signal of a rainbow flag, or a control condition which did not include an inclusive signal.[1] Participants completed a number of quantitative measures related to their perception of the classroom (e.g., appropriateness of the classroom décor, desire to have their child in the class; see Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025).

[1] We conducted Fisher's exact tests to examine whether resultant qualitative codes differed by experimental condition. No significant differences were detected (see OSF for output).

TABLE 1 Sociodemographic characteristics by parental LGBTQ+ status.

Characteristic	LGBTQ+ ($N = 302$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 307$)
Age	$M = 42.21$ (SD = 12.18)	$M = 48.43$ (SD = 12.71)
Ethnicity/race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	3.6%	2.0%
East Asian	1.3%	1.3%
Southeast Asian	.1%	.1%
South Asian	–	.1%
Black or African American	31.8%	15.6%
Hispanic or Latino/x/e	7.0%	4.9%
Middle Eastern or North African	.1%	.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	.1%	.1%
White	57.8%	75.6%
Biracial/Multiracial	1.3%	2.3%
Gender Identity		
Nonbinary/genderqueer	6.3%	–
Transgender woman	1.3%	–
Transgender man	2.0%	–
Cisgender woman	59.9%	63.8%
Cisgender man	27.2%	35.5%
Questioning/do not know	1.0%	–
Another identity	2.3%	.7%
Sexual Orientation		
Lesbian/gay	21.2%	–
Bisexual	58.9%	–
Pansexual	12.3%	–
Queer	2.3%	–
Questioning/not sure	1.3%	–
Asexual	2.0%	–
Heterosexual	1.0%	100.00%
Another identity	1.0%	–
Socioeconomic status		
Poor or just barely making it	17.5%	11.4%
Working or labor class	27.5%	25.7%
Middle class	42.1%	51.1%
Upper middle class	12.6%	11.4%
Wealthy	.3%	.3%
Relationship status		
Single	14.2%	8.5%
With a partner(s) I do not live with	6.6%	4.6%
With a partner(s) I do live with	21.3%	7.2%

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Characteristic	LGBTQ+ ($N = 302$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 307$)
Married	48.5%	61.6%
Divorced	6.3%	15.0%
Widowed	1.7%	2.9%
Other	1.3%	.3%
Political orientation	$M = 5.68$ (SD = 1.50)	$M = 4.25$ (SD = 1.81)

Note: Percentages rounded. Participants could indicate multiple ethnic/racial identities. The .7% of cisgender-heterosexual participants reporting "another identity" for gender identity used terms such as "female-born-female" to specify their gender. Participants rated their political views from "extremely conservative" (1) to "extremely liberal" (7).

After completing quantitative measures, participants were then prompted to respond to each of the open-ended questions. After completion, participants were debriefed about the specific purpose of the study.

Analytic approach

We used a consensual qualitative research—modified approach (CQR-M; Spangler et al., 2012) to analyze our qualitative data. CQR-M is a data-driven approach used to analyze large samples of relatively brief, simple qualitative data (Spangler et al., 2012). We coded responses to the two open-ended items separately, developing unique sets of codes to characterize each set of responses (one for DEI Appropriateness and one for DEI Influence). To improve coding integrity and limit bias in the coding process, we combined the data from our LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual samples for coding, and coders were unaware of which sample each piece of data belonged to.

Two trained authors coded the data. The coders first reviewed papers on best practices for CQR-M (Spangler et al., 2012), then separately read through the qualitative dataset as many times as it took to become familiar with responses before developing initial domains. Once coders had an initial scheme, the coders met to develop a collated comprehensive set of coding categories. We then developed a spreadsheet to track the responses of each participant and identify the presence and absence of each code in each response. This allowed us to calculate response frequency for each code (i.e., how many times each code was represented in the data). The same two authors who developed the coding scheme coded the data. We cross-coded the first 1/3 ($n = 203$) of the dataset independently and established interrater reliability, which was >90% across both questions. Upon reviewing interrater reliability, the two coders met to discuss divergent codes and resolve existing discrepancies, re-establishing code descriptions as necessary throughout the process. Given the high initial reliability, we opted to code the rest of the data independently, with each author coding 1/2 of the remaining data.

FINDINGS

We analyze the frequency of each domain and category and then examine the content of qualitative responses to better understand the significance and meaning of each code in context. When we present participant quotes, we contextualize these with information on participant age, sexual

TABLE 2 Child(ren) sociodemographic characteristics by parental LGBTQ+ status.

Characteristic	LGBTQ+ ($N = 302$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 307$)
Child(ren) amount 0 children-5 or more	$M = 1.87$ (SD = 1.01)	$M = 2.08$ (SD = 1.09)
Most frequent age (in years) of child 1	13 (5.6%)	17(4.9%)
Most frequent age (in years) of child 2	6, 7, 8 (4.0%, respectively)	18 (12.0%)
Most frequent age (in years) of child 3	11 (2.0%)	18 (1.6%)
Most frequent age (in years) of child 4	12 (1.3%)	13, 19, 20, 21, 23, 25, 30 (.7%, respectively)
Most frequent age (in years) of child 5	18 (1.0%)	20 (.7%)
Child(ren) currently enrolled in elementary school	$M = 1.80$ (SD = .82)	$M = 1.47$ (SD = .76)
1 child	49.3%	66.3%
2 children	35.1%	23.8%
3 children	12.5%	7.6%
4 children	2.7%	1.7%
5 children or more	.3%	.7%
Ethnicity/race		
American Indian or Alaska Native	.3%	2.5%
East Asian	1.3%	1.0%
Southeast Asian	–	1.0%
South Asian	–	.3%
Black or African American	25.2%	13.4%
Hispanic or Latino/x/e	3.0%	2.6%
Middle Eastern or North African	.9%	–
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	.3%	.9%
White	46.0%	66.8%
Biracial/multiracial	2.6%	2.0%
Parent's knowledge of child(ren) identified as LGBTQ+		
Yes	22.3%	12.5%
No	57.0%	80.9%
I do not know	16.9%	5.3%
I do not want to answer this question	2.6%	1.3%

Note: Percentages rounded. Participants could indicate multiple ethnic/racial identities. The most frequent age of children reported is of the parents who indicated having a 2nd, 3rd, 4th, or 5th or more children.

orientation, and gender identity. Lastly, we discuss further response trends and explore subsample differences. We separate primary findings by question and present findings in the order the open-ended questions were presented to participants (DEI Appropriateness followed by DEI Influence).

DEI appropriateness domains and frequency

We identified seven domains and 22 subdomains/categories that characterized responses for DEI Appropriateness. We coded participants as endorsing the idea that *cues shouldn't be allowed*, that

cues should be allowed under certain conditions, or reporting *holistic acceptance of cues*. Other themes captured participants who endorsed multiple of these ideologies, which we coded as *internal tension* (e.g., saying cues should never be allowed and then going on to describe conditions under which they should be allowed), explicit *expressions of prejudice*, participants who demonstrated *ignorance of the meaning of cues* (e.g., describing a pride flag as just a rainbow), and participants who described *cues as disconnected from DEI*. Table 3 provides labels, descriptions, examples, and frequencies of endorsement for each domain and category, with frequencies separated and compared by parent LGBTQ+ identity.

DEI appropriateness content and context

Responses to the DEI appropriateness prompt broadly represented three primary domains, each supported by numerous categories which provided specific reasons for the belief: beliefs that *cues should not be allowed* in K-12 classroom contexts, beliefs that *cues should only be allowed under certain conditions*, and *holistic acceptance of cues* in K-12 classroom contexts. We discuss each of these domains and categories below, generally presenting categories in order of overall frequency of endorsement in our sample.

Notably, some participants seemingly endorsed multiple of these categories, suggesting, for example, that inclusive signals were inappropriate for school contexts but going on to indicate that children should be exposed in middle school. We generated a domain to capture this internal tension or disagreement, which we present first here, in order to provide transparency in our process for coding these types of responses.

Internal tension

We generated a domain, labelled *internal tension*, which encompassed around five percent of participant responses, specifically capturing those who represented multiple perspectives in their response, or did not commit to acceptance or non-acceptance of inclusive signals. This domain was generated after an initial review of responses in which we established our three primary domains (*cues should not be allowed, cues should only be allowed under certain conditions, holistic acceptance of cues)*, as we begin to acknowledge a subset of responses which fulfilled the criteria of multiple of these domains. We sought to name and make explicit these tensions while still capturing the broad differentiation in responses between participants, which our three primary domains best captured.

Examples of responses coded as internal tension include a response from a 60-year-old White cisgender heterosexual woman, who stated:

> "I don't think that pride flags or anything related to Black Lives Matter belongs in the classroom. We don't celebrate heterosexual people German people Spanish people Native American people Polish ect. At age 13–16 children should be exposed to diversity-related ideas. Ideally this would be introduced by their family first."

We coded this response as demonstrating internal tension given that the respondent indicates that inclusive signaling and diversity topics are inappropriate for the classroom, but then goes on to suggest that 13–16 (an age within the K-12 range) is an appropriate time for these conversations;

TABLE 3 DEI appropriateness coding domains and frequency by parental LGBTQ+ status.

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Cues shouldn't be allowed	General disavowing of schools displaying inclusive symbols	"I don't think these should be displayed in schools at all actually"	**8.9%**	**41.0%**	<.001*
Schools should be apolitical	Schools should stay away from political topics	"Classrooms shouldn't reflect personal political views"	2.3%	8.8%	<.001*
Indoctrination	Backlash against the notion that cues are imparting or forcing a particular ideology	"I believe children should be taught about history but not indoctrinated by left leaning teachers"	2.3%	6.5%	.017*
Schools should stick to core courses	Education is about core subjects only	"Schools should stay out of it it's reading writing arithmetic let's stick to that"	1.3%	7.8%	<.001*
Cues may cause retaliation/backlash	Concern over retaliation or backlash if cues are implemented	"Morally, I think children should be exposed to these ideas in the classroom, but in reality, I don't think it's appropriate because I don't want to lose my job"	.3%	1.6%	.216
Cues may confuse children	Indication that children will be confused by DEI-related cues or information	"The suicide rate has skyrocketed since teaching this crap and kids are more confused and bullied than ever!"	.7%	2.3%	.176
Cues are divisive rather than inclusive	Cues focus on identity which promotes seeing differences	"Displaying these types of flags/stickers only creates more division"	2.3%	8.8%	<.001*
DEI should only be discussed at home/with parents	These topics are not appropriate for schools and should be left entirely to parents	"Learning about these topics (the how and the when) should be left up to the parents."	3.6%	15.3%	<.001*
Comparison to religious symbols	Cues are similar to religious symbols and thus inappropriate or at least shouldn't be allowed because religious symbols aren't	"All that stuff should just be treated as another religion, which it is, and has no place inside schools"	.3%	3.2%	.024*

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Cues should only be allowed under certain conditions	Cues are appropriate, but only under certain conditions or with certain caveats	"I think it's appropriate at around 6th grade or middle school as long as all signals are equal and not none overpowers the others."	**38.4%**	**37.5%**	.802
Only after a certain age	Only those who are older should be exposed to cues	"Children should begin learning about these topics around the time they enter middle school, as that is when they start coming into their identities and recognizing major differences in one another."	28.1%	25.7%	.523
Sexuality is particularly inappropriate	Sexuality is different from and less appropriate than race	"I see nothing wrong with this plain black lives matter is things in the classroom…where as rainbow flags and everything has nothing to do with the child because of that age they have no business worrying about their sexual orientation"	1.3%	4.2%	.046*
Cues must be situated in educational context	DEI is only appropriate if mentioned in educational context, like a history class	"I think if the classroom is an appropriate place to discuss and show support for civil right, then that should include all civil rights."	4.3%	3.9%	.552
Cues normalize when young, education later	Cues are acceptable, but play a different role across ages	"I think it appropriate to make them aware of the signals early in elementary school so they are familiar with them. They may not understand the nuance of what it means but it will at least given them an opportunity to be aware of it."	2.0%	2.0%	1.00
Cues must be supplemented with education	Cues are good but only if they are supported/backed up by education or information	"I think things like pride flags and thing that touch on black lives matter should be displayed by any teacher who truly believes in or identifies with them"	3.3%	2.9%	.820

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Holistic acceptance of cues	Reflects support, agreement with, or inclusive signals are "appropriate."	"I believe that all environments should have signs of support to all groups that do not encourage hate or harm others."	**55.0%**	**25.4%**	<.001*
Cues are appropriate at any age	Support the use of inclusive symbols at any age/ the younger the better.	"I think they're appropriate at any age."	32.5%	12.7%	<.001
Cues create a welcoming space	Cues in a classroom promote a broader ideology of inclusion and create a welcoming space.	"I think that it is very appropriate to display inclusive signal in classrooms as it creates a welcoming space for all."	15.9%	6.2%	<.001
Cues prompt identity safety for kids	Inclusive signals may elicit safety for the children of the classroom	"As a gay person, who has lived through the prejudice in my elementary school years, I am very much in favor of these displays… If I had had this openness available, I would not have spent most of my life thinking I was the only one and needing to hide myself from society."	7.0%	2.6%	.013*
Cues can be conversation starters	Cues can be a meaningful way to spark a conversation or introduce children to diversity-related topics.	"I believe the are appropriate and can start meaningful conversations about respect and valuing all people"	5.3%	4.2%	.573
Kids are exposed to diversity anyways	Cues are acceptable because diversity is a natural fact of life.	"Elementary school aged children are already exposed to these things outside of the classroom, so ignoring it in the classroom is not solving any concerns."	7.6%	3.9%	.056
Kids experience prejudice	Cues are valuable/ important specifically because children will be exposed to prejudice	"around 7 or eight years old they should be told about it because they're going to face it."	3.6%	.7%	.011*
These are factual or civil rights issues	Acknowledgement of DEI topics as legitimate civil and historical issues	"I think a teacher has the right to display images that support human rights, BLM, LGBTQIA+ flags, etc."	4.6%	2.0%	.072

(Continues)

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Internal tension	Does not commit to being for or against inclusive symbols or represents multiple perspectives	"This topic is so conflicting to me. I feel we are all equal and should be treated as such. I honestly feel all these flags, signs, stickers and so on just stir up conflict. Diversity is important and inclusive is important but I am not sure of the proper way to educate on it."	**4.0%**	**5.9%**	.350
Expressions of prejudice	Explicit expressions of prejudice	"If rainbow flags and Black Lives Matter stickers are being displayed, why not confederate flags and Nazi symbolism?"	**2.6%**	**8.1%**	.004*
Racism	Generally, refers to stereotype content of racial groups or anti-Black stance	"I don't think that pride flags or anything related to Black Lives Matter belongs in the classroom. We don't celebrate heterosexual people German people Spanish people Native American people Polish ect."	.7%	2.3%	.177
Heterosexism	Generally, refers to stereotype content of LGBTQ or anti-LGBTQ stance	"You cannot change sex. Gender identity is made up garbage."	2.3%	5.9%	.039*
Challenging the meaning of cues	Focus on rainbow flag not supporting gay people, BLM as a bad movement/not good for black people	"In the classroom pictured it did no [sic] state it was a gay flag. I am okay with pictures of stripes or a rainbow. God created rainbows I get offended when people refer to a rainbow as gay"	**1.3%**	**4.2%**	.046*
Cues as disconnected from DEI	Inequality/bullying seen as bad, but cues are also seen as bad/not an appropriate response.	"It seems like something that should be done at home more than at school unless there's significant bullying at which point, a discussion needs to happen at school."	**2.0%**	**4.2%**	.161

Note: Percentages rounded. Significance column tests association between LGBTQ+ identity and endorsement of domain using 2-sided Fisher's exact test, except for underlined p-values which use chi square due to violations of expected count. * = $p < .05$. Bolding denotes primary coded domain.

despite suggesting that these conversations should occur with family first, we read this as leaving space for these conversations to also occur (second) in educational spaces. Similarly, another participant responded that, "Inclusive signals, should not be used in school area's because kids are always curious and once they see something they don't know they ask questions and they always get the answer one way or the other. This exposure should be done when they are teenagers in school" (36-year-old Black cisgender-heterosexual man); this response was also coded as internal tension due to the simultaneous rejection of these topics in schools and the suggestion that these topics should be covered for teenagers in school.

We suspect that these internal tensions reflect participants' grappling with these complex issues, potentially for the first time, as they responded to the survey questions. While such responses trouble our imposed coding approach, they represent the naturalistic, multifaceted nature of the issue at hand. We opted to capture this tension through the use of this code, but also coded participants responses into the appropriate categories—that is, participants grappling with these and similar tensions could be coded into multiple of the primary themes—for example, as endorsing conditional acceptance of cues and that cues should not be allowed. Hence, percentages of endorsement for each of these domains (see Table 3) do not sum exactly to 100%. Having addressed these tensions, we now turn to the content comprising these primary domains.

Cues should not be allowed

Cisgender-heterosexual parents were significantly more likely than LGBTQ+ parents in our sample to endorse beliefs that DEI-related cues should not be allowed (see Table 3 for all statistical comparisons), often citing the inappropriateness of DEI topics for the classroom. For example, one 69-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual man simply stated, "These signals are all inappropriate in a school" and another participant responded with their perception that such cues are, "Extremely inappropriate. It teaches biased behavior towards a group of people and teaches that those who are not involved are not important. It should never be a part of schools to segregate without segregation" (39-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual man).

The most frequently endorsed reason that cues should not be allowed was the perception that *DEI-related topics should only be discussed at home or with parents*, which was endorsed significantly more frequently by cisgender-heterosexual parents than LGBTQ+ parents in our sample. Participants described beliefs that discussions of and decisions surrounding these topics were best left to parents, "I believe children should never be exposed to this in school. It should be up to their parents to decide when to expose them to this" (55-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman), sometimes suggesting that sexuality was particularly inappropriate for non-parents to broach with children: "I think it's odd to have such a sexual topic covered with children by adults who are not their parents" (25-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman). Notably, some LGBTQ+ parents endorsed similar beliefs; for example, one 49-year-old White cisgender gay man stated, "Children should not be exposed to diversity-related issues in schools in general… because they should learn about these issues from their parents at home."

Many participants also endorsed that cues should not be allowed in K-12 classroom contexts because *schools should be apolitical*. Again, cisgender-heterosexual parents were more likely to endorse this notion than were LGBTQ+ parents in our sample. Participants described beliefs in a conceptualization of the role of education that did not involve political topics, simultaneously implicitly asserting that diversity-related issues and rights are too political to be factual or historical. For example, one 29-year-old White and Hispanic cisgender-heterosexual man opined that

"These issues are matters of politics, not human rights…Same with religious beleifs [sic], sexual orientation DOES NOT BELONG IN OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM. History and achievements are okay. Not beleifs [sic] or political perspectives." Similarly, another participant suggested that such cues should not be allowed because, "Children should be taught the true history of all people, but I do not think schools should become political battlegrounds. Schools should be unbiased and teach facts and truths, not opinions or beliefs" (57-year-old White and American Indian/Alaskan Native heterosexual woman-born-woman).

Significantly more cisgender-heterosexual than LGBTQ+ parents endorsed the notion that cues should not be allowed because *cues are divisive rather than inclusive*. Participants who endorsed this notion suggested that the identity-focused nature of inclusive signals promoted seeing rather than obfuscating differences, stoking division. For example, one participant opined that, "Diversity is division, let children be children. There's plenty of time to worry about the problems of the world when they're adults" (39-year-old White heterosexual man). A 42-year-old White participant who identified their gender as "FEMALE I REFUSE TO USE YOUR CIS SLURS" and sexual orientation as "WHY DO YOU CARE WHO I HAVE SEX WITH" described the perception of inclusive signals as divisive and their willingness to act against this perceived divisiveness, stating, "These are POLITICAL TOPICS used to create division and my child will have NO PART of it even if I have to remove them from the public school system!"

Parents also endorsed the notion that cues should not be allowed because *schools should stick to core courses*; again, significantly more cisgender-heterosexual than LGBTQ+ parents in our sample endorsed this idea. Participants who endorsed this notion indicated a belief in a specific role that schools should play in educating children, which did not include diversity-related topics. For example, a 58-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman described the belief that, "schools are nothing more than indoctrination centers! this is on purpose and it must stop! nothing about gender or sex should be in schools. Reading writing, and basic math. That's it." Another parent in our sample voiced concern over the capacity of schools to introduce this additional material on top of existing curricular demands, stating, "Students are falling behind in math and reading at totally unacceptable rates. The focus needs to be learning math, reading etc." (59-year-old White and Indigenous cisgender-heterosexual woman).

A number of parents in our sample specifically invoked the concept of *indoctrination* when considering the presence of inclusive signals in the classroom; again, significantly more cisgender-heterosexual than LGBTQ+ parents in our sample endorsed this idea. Participants voiced the belief that the introduction of these topics was a form of ideological indoctrination, stating, for example, "I believe children should be taught about history but not indoctrinated by left leaning teachers" (62-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman) and "I don't believe those types of political statements and ideologies have any place in a classroom. The classroom is for educating the student academically, not for indoctrination" (42-year-old White and Black bisexual cisgender woman). One 55-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman described her perception of this indoctrination as follows, also invoking asserted LGBTQ+ perspectives by proxy, "I have many friends who are LGBTQ+ and many of them agree with me. These topics belong in the home and not the public school system. The level of indoctrination in these and other topics has almost led me to remove my son from public school."

A number of participants invoked *comparisons to religion* when discussing the appropriateness of inclusive signals in the classroom, drawing on parallels to religious materials being banned in classroom contexts. Cisgender-heterosexual parents were more likely to draw comparisons to religion than were LGBTQ+ parents in our sample. One parent described their perspective that, "Discussions are one thing, but displaying diversity signals is no different than a teacher who

displays a cross in the classroom. Things that represent personal social/religious beliefs don't belong in a classroom setting" (62-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman). Similarly, a 44-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman stated that, "I don't think it's appropriate at all to be allowed in schools. I mean look they took praying out of school for goodness sake, and people quite [sic] standing for the national anthem, why should that be allowed?!"

Smaller portions of participants also endorsed the ideas that *cues may confuse children* or that *cues may cause retaliation or backlash*; endorsement of these categories did not differ by parental identity. Participants who endorsed the idea that *cues may confuse children* suggested that inclusive signals and diversity-related information might be psychologically harmful to kids; for example, one 64-year-old White cisgender bisexual woman suggested that pride flags in the classroom, "…my [sic] not be appropriate in the sense that is [sic] has a lot of indications associated to sexual orientation of the child, hence it makes the child confused about his or her sexual orientation before they grow up to decided for the themselves." Participants concerned that *cues may cause retaliation or backlash* voiced concern for teachers and other administrators, as well as the broader school climate, which they perceived as potentially being harmed by controversy surrounding inclusive signals. One participant who identified themself as a teacher stated that, "I'd love to support these initiatives in my classroom but I fear retaliation. Morally, I think children should be exposed to these ideas in the classroom, but in reality, I don't think it's appropriate because I don't want to lose my job."

Cues should only be allowed under certain conditions

Many parents in our sample expressed conditional acceptance of cues, dependent on a number of contextual conditions. Similar numbers (just over one-third) of both cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents in our sample broadly endorsed conditional acceptance of inclusive signals in K-12 classrooms.

The most commonly reported condition for acceptance was that inclusive signals were appropriate *only after a certain age*; endorsement of this condition did not differ by parental identity. Parents who endorsed this condition generally described assumptions that children would only be able to understand the meaning of cues after a certain age; notably, estimates of that age varied widely. For example, one participant described how, "It might be appropriate to display inclusive signals such as those mentioned above in college settings" (54-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman), while another suggested that, "I think it's perfectly okay to display these things for older elementary-aged children" (44-year-old White cisgender asexual woman). Many participants also suggested that the way topics are presented to children should scale with age to be appropriate to children's developmental stages. One 56-year-old White cisgender-bisexual woman exemplified this opinion, stating:

> "It may not be appropriate for the youngest kids but elementary kids should be taught that prejudice and bullying is not acceptable. Children as young as 5 to 7 yr olds learn about minority groups and that's the age they start bullying others. It would be best to teach them to honor and tolerate different groups than to let misinformation and vitriole [sic] continue."

Another frequently endorsed condition was the notion that *cues must be situated in educational contexts*. Endorsement of this condition did not differ by parental identity. Participants who

endorsed this theme argued that inclusive signals and DEI information were appropriate only if relevant to more traditionally understood curriculum, like history or social studies classes on civil rights. For example, one participant described how inclusive signals are appropriate only when embedded in the curriculum, stating, "I think it's appropriate in a history or social studies class. I feel that in other classrooms it may cause conflict amongst other educators, parents, and students" (43-year-old multiracial cisgender-heterosexual woman). Similarly, a 49-year-old Black cisgender bisexual woman described the notion of age-appropriate and curriculum-embedded teaching, stating that, "… Stressing equality and that everyone is valuable should be first. As they get older, at the elementary school level, it can be introduced through history lessons."

A similar code, the endorsement of which did not vary by parental identity, captured the notion that *cues must be supplemented by education*. As opposed to the idea that diversity-related information needed to be embedded into existing core curricula, this code encapsulated the notion that inclusive signals are valuable but must be supported or backed up by additional information or teaching. For example, a 37-year-old Black and Hispanic nonbinary bisexual participant articulated the need for educational context for inclusive signals. "They are appropriate to display as long as you teach where they came from and their history and how it can relate to you or others. It is not ok to just display them and say this is the right way without giving an explanation."

Participants who endorsed this idea thus emphasized the need for education specific to these topics, rather than embedding diversity-related topics into existing curricula.

Smaller portions of parents also endorsed the idea that *cues normalize DEI-related ideas* when children are young, but supplemental education should come later; endorsement of this notion did not differ by parental identity. These parents suggested that cues are acceptable even for young children, but that the role these inclusive signals play should change over time as children develop deeper understandings of these topics. One participant described this as follows:

> "Signals like rainbows with no other words are fine from the beginning, but as they get closer to middle school, around age 9 or 10, they are old enough to start learning about more in-depth history, and signals like flags and stickers are totally appropriate ways to open conversations" (53-year-old Hispanic cisgender bisexual woman).

Others highlighted the notion that such signals can normalize ideas about diversity; for example, one 44-year-old White cisgender asexual woman described her belief that, "I think it's perfectly okay to display these things for older elementary-aged children. Diversity is an important concept, and children should have these ideas normalized."

Finally, some parents—significantly more cisgender-heterosexual than LGBTQ+ parents—endorsed the notion that, while some forms of DEI education and related signals may be appropriate for the K-12 context, *sexuality is particularly inappropriate*. For example, one 69-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman explicitly contrasted learning about sexuality and sexuality-related signaling (pride flags) with learning about other forms of diversity:

> "I don't think anything before middle school is appropriate for pride flags. (I grew up back when rainbows were 'just rainbows' and thus more acceptable in younger classrooms.) I think undue focus on these matters before ~13 is probably not a good idea. Children are impressionable and these are serious choices. Other diversity matters could be broached earlier (like race-related matters.)"

Similarly, a 56-year-old Black cisgender-heterosexual woman expressed that:

> "These are two separate issues black lives matter is about people of a certain ethnicity being subjugated to abuse discrimination wrongdoing foot 400 years as opposed to gay people who would like to all the sudden be given rights that they have nothing yet I don't think that you can compare the two I see nothing wrong with this plain black lives matter is things in the classroom because it's letting little black children know that their lives matter where as rainbow flags and everything has nothing to do with the child because of that age they have no business worrying about their sexual orientation."

Holistic acceptance

Many parents in our sample expressed *holistic acceptance of cues*, or general support for or agreement with the presence of inclusive signals in K-12 classrooms. Significantly more LGBTQ+ parents—just over one half of those in our sample—endorsed holistic acceptance relative to cisgender-heterosexual parents, for whom about one-quarter of our sample endorsed this acceptance.

The most frequently reported reasoning for holistic acceptance was that *cues are appropriate at any age*; significantly more LGBTQ+ parents than cisgender-heterosexual parents endorsed this notion. This category encompassed participants who endorsed ideas that cues were appropriate from birth or from kindergarten age, given that our focus was on appropriateness in K-12 contexts. For example, one parent suggested that "I think inclusive signals are always appropriate, because even if the kids don't notice, their parents will. Children should be exposed to diversity-related ideas starting at birth" (37-year-old White cisgender lesbian/gay woman), while another opined that, "I think that kids should be exposed to diversity related ideas as soon as possible. I think that age appropriate decorations are fine starting in kindergarten or first grade" (51-year-old White cisgender queer woman).

Many parents also acknowledged the primary function of inclusive signals as a reason for holistic acceptance, suggesting that *cues create a welcoming space* in the classroom context; LGBTQ+ parents were significantly more likely to endorse this idea than were cisgender-heterosexual parents in our sample. One 32-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual man described this perceived function of inclusive signals: "I think they are appriopriate [sic] because they show support for a wide variety of beliefs and support for groups that are discriminated against. By showing those signals, it shows the sign of support for any individual that might fall into one of those groups." Similarly, a 26-year-old Southeast Asian cisgender bisexual woman described her belief that, "I think they should be included in any classroom as it shows support for those minority groups."

A number of participants suggested that inclusive signals and DEI information in the classroom are appropriate because *kids are exposed to diversity anyways*; endorsement of this notion did not differ by parental identity. This category reflected the notion that diversity is a natural fact of life, and classrooms should or can reflect that. For example, a 37-year-old Black nonbinary lesbian/gay person stated, "I believe children are going to be exposed to certain things in life no matter what pace they go it's not about avoiding this or avoiding that it's about growing and being mature." Similarly, one 75-year-old White cisgender lesbian/gay woman described how, "I think they are always appropriate because they are part of life and society in this country and it is magical

thinking for anyone to think that because they are not on the walls of a classroom their children will not be exposed to them anywhere else."

Significantly more LGBTQ+ than cisgender-heterosexual parents in our sample endorsed support for holistic acceptance resulting from the notion that *cues can prompt identity safety for kids*. That is, parents described how cues might make children, particularly those with marginalized identities, experience greater belonging or inclusion in classroom spaces. One participant described this function of inclusive signals, highlighting the notion that children are aware of their identities and whether those identities are included: "I think it's great to be inclusive in the classrooms. It's extremely important for children to feel included and supported in a setting such as school where they spend the majority of their days. I feel this should be incorporated in elementary classrooms. Kids know who they are from young ages" (38-year-old White cisgender lesbian woman). A 48-year-old Black cisgender-heterosexual woman similarly reasoned that cues were appropriate for children with marginalized racial and/or sexual identities:

> "I believe inclusive signals are very appropriate at even primary school age. If Black children can experience racism at 2 and older, white kids can deal with learning about it. If young children feel different in their bodies or toward the same or opposite sex, they should have age-appropriate education surrounding those topics to feel included and to help figure out and process thei [sic] feelings."

A similar proportion of LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual parents endorsed acceptance of inclusive signals in K-12 classrooms given the belief that such *cues can be conversation starters*, sparking meaningful conversations to introduce children to diversity-related topics and education. Participants generally described inclusive signals in the classroom as "prompt[ing] questions and discussion's. This opens the door for an age appropriate conversation about the topics" (40-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman) and having the potential to "start meaningful conversations about respect and valuing all people" (42-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman).

A similar proportion of LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual parents also endorsed the holistic acceptance of inclusive signals with the reasoning that *these are factual or civil rights issues* and thus deserve a place in the classroom and the curriculum. One 54-year-old Hispanic cisgender-heterosexual woman articulated this reasoning, stating that, "I think if the classroom is an appropriate place to discuss and show support for civil rights, then that should include all civil rights. LGBTQ and Black Lives Matter are just an extension of civil rights." However, overlapping with the notion of sexuality as particularly inappropriate and troubling the notion of truly holistic acceptance, some parents suggested that race-related issues, but not LGBTQ+ issues, are historically relevant and should be taught; for example, one participant described how, "Basic information on the history of racial tensions in our country and the history of slavery is appropriate. But I don't agree with anything regarding sexual orientation should be discussed in younger grades" (41-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman).

Finally, some parents—significantly more LGBTQ+ than cisgender-heterosexual parents—endorsed the notion that inclusive signals are appropriate because *kids experience prejudice*. Participants who endorsed this category specifically suggested that cues are valuable or important signals for children who will themselves be exposed to prejudice. For example, a 28-year-old biracial cisgender bisexual woman described how, "There are many children of color who experience racism early in their lives, and there are children who have LGBT+ parents or other family members. It's important for children to know early on they'll be supported." Similarly, highlighting this

reasoning for holistic acceptance of inclusive signals, one participant described how, "children of color and children from LGBT+ families don't get to choose when they get exposed to these ideas, as they start experiencing bias from their communities immediately. Therefore, I believe it's essential for children to start being exposed to messages about DEI from infancy" (29-year old White genderflux pansexual participant).

Challenging the meaning of cues and cues as disconnected from DEI

Two additional domains captured meta-reflections on the meaning of inclusive signals. *Challenging the meaning of cues* captured responses which sidestepped, critiqued, or ignored the inclusive function of cues. For example, some participants distinguished between the pride flag and just a rainbow, with one stating, "I noticed the rainbow picture in the 8th grade classroom and I think that since it is a rainbow, it probably does not bother people that much. However, if it is a pride flag or black live matter stickers, etc. I don't think that those need to be displayed at school at all" (42-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman). Some participants challenged whether BLM signals could serve an inclusive function; for example, a 45-year-old White cisgender bisexual man stated that, "BLM is a violent hate group. Their logo should never be displayed. Black Pride is fine big [sic] something actually constructive." Participants thus de- and re-constructed the meaning of what we framed as inclusive signals, challenging the broader context of the questions and the research paradigm.

The domain of *cues as disconnected from DEI* captured responses which highlighted inequality as a legitimate issue, but presented inclusive signals as reinforcing inequality or being an inappropriate response. For example, a 46-year-old Hispanic and White cisgender bisexual woman described resistance to inclusive signals despite endorsing the belief that diversity and inclusion do belong in the classroom: "I think politically motivated information should never be displayed in the classroom. Children should be taught to be inclusive of everyone instead of pointing out what these different subjects are. Diversity and inclusivity should always be one of the most important things schools teach our kids." Another participant indicated that, "None of that needs to be on display. As long as those groups of people are respected and appreciated, that's all that mattters [sic]" (37-year-old Black cisgender-heterosexual man). These responses indicate an overarching belief in diversity and inclusion, but challenge the notion that inclusive signals can play a role in promoting those outcomes, thus representing the notion of cues as disconnected from DEI.

DEI influence domains and frequency

We identified nine domains and eight subdomains/categories to capture responses for DEI Influence. We coded participants as endorsing the belief that DEI *should be learned at home and parents have primary influence*, that DEI *should be learned at school but parents have primary influence*, or that DEI *should be learned at school and the school and teacher has primary influence*. Participants who described that multiple influences should play a role in educating children about DEI were coded as *collaborative endeavor*. Other domains included holistic endorsement of children learning DEI with the code s*upport for diversity education*. Table 3 provides labels, descriptive, examples, and frequencies of endorsement for each domain and category, with frequencies separated by parent LGBTQ+ identity.

DEI influence content and context

Three main domains emerged by *who* should have primary influence of teaching DEI topics and *where* such DEI topics should be learned: DEI topics *should be learned at home and parents have primary influence*, DEI topics *should be learned at school but parents should have primary influence*, and DEI topics *should be learned at school and teacher has primary influence*. Another domain emerged with endorsement of multiple influences behind DEI teaching, or *collaborative endeavor*. Responses that did not list a definitive source of influence, or provided no opinion, were captured under the *indecisive or no opinion* domain.

Other responses that characterized mixed support of children learning DEI topics were captured with *teach racism not sexuality*. An additional domain emerged for the context of influence with DEI teaching, such as *kids should be able to decide*. We discuss each domain and its categories in terms of overall frequency of endorsement in our sample.

Should be learned at home and parents have primary influence

Many parents indicated that DEI topics *should be learned at home and parents have the primary influence*. This domain captured parents' belief that DEI topics are appropriate for discussion only within the household and parents should be the source of influence and exposure for any DEI topics. Nearly two-thirds of all cisgender-heterosexual parents endorsed this domain, showing significantly greater endorsement than LGBTQ+ parents. For example, a 70 year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman stated that "Parents should teach what they want. Not school." A 29-year-old Hispanic and White cisgender-heterosexual man similarly stated the primary influence and educator is "100% the parents." Notably, some cisgender-heterosexual parents specifically endorsed parents as the primary influence because they did not want their child(ren) exposed to DEI topics, stating "Parents. Parents should be able to be against teaching them that kind of stuff" (45-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman). A 33-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual man emphasized that DEI topics are at the discretion of the parent, stating, "gender, sexuality, race, and other issues related to diversity should come from parents." Over half of LGBTQ+ parents also indicated endorsement of this domain, indicating similar sentiments that "Parents should be actively involved" (52 year-old Black transgender gay/lesbian man) or "it starts from home" (53 year-old Black cisgender bisexual man).

A small number of cisgender-heterosexual parents specifically reported *predatory assumptions* as part of their reasoning, describing a perception that instructors who are not the parents are likely to be (sexually) predatory to their children. No LGBTQ+ parents reported this notion. One parent indicated,

> "FULL CONTROL PERIOD PEOPLE HAVE PARENTS FOR A REASON mind you I have friends and relatives who are gay but they keep a low profile and are not in the streets acting perverted around children IT IS A PARENTS JOB TO PROTECT they are trying to brainwash straight kids its sickening" (56-year-old White person, who identified their gender as "what ever happened to the word hetrosexual houston theres a problem" and sexual orientation as "straight yet I once had a fling with my friend and her husband all this in politics is obnoxious its a private matter").

Other parents, if not explicitly naming instructors as predators, indirectly indicated that people they perceive as unfit are trying to instruct about DEI topics, which may result in harm to a child.

For example, a 53-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual man stated "100% parents, too many crazy people teaching these days. Look around the kids are not alright."

Should be learned at school but parents have primary influence

Some parents reported that the belief that DEI topics *should be learned at school but parents have primary influence*; endorsement of this domain did not differ by parent identity. Cisgender-heterosexual parents emphasized indirect control of how information is taught in schools, with one 33-year old cisgender-heterosexual woman reasoning "Parents definitely should have primary influence. They should have the option to choose where and how much their child learns about it." A White, 54 year old cisgender-heterosexual woman was more explicit in her desire for parents to be involved in shaping curriculum, stating, "Parents should be solely responsible for deciding when and how children learn about these topics. Parents should have a large say in determining the curriculum surrounding these issues." LGBTQ+ parents also indicated that parents should have some influence in school curriculum and varied in their degree of involvement. For example, a 41-year-old Black cisgender lesbian/gay woman indicated small curriculum involvement is reasonable for parents: "Children's parents should have the primary influence. Parents can have a small involvement when determining curriculum." Similarly, a 67-year-old Black cisgender lesbian/gay woman indicated that, particularly with sensitive topics, parents should have a larger involvement in the curriculum: "parents should have a large level of control over the education of their children. Sensitive topics like this need the approval and understanding of parents if children are going to be introduced to them."

Some parents reasoned that this is an extension of *parent's rights*, mimicking the political movement's claim that parents should have the ultimate say in what is taught in schools. This endorsement did not differ by parent identity. Parents who endorsed this notion often discussed having full control and total involvement, approval, or regulation of curriculum regarding DEI topics. Even without explicitly appealing to "Parents' rights", such reasoning abided by the values and aims of "Parents' rights." For example, a 37-year-old Hispanic cisgender-heterosexual woman indirectly appealed to parents' rights, stating: "Parents/guardians ONLY. Parents/guardians should have full control and involvement in determining curriculum content and discussions related to these subjects." Another parent explicitly appealed to parent's rights in their support of full parent regulation of diversity education:

> "Parents should always have the say what curriculum their student might be exposed to. They should be able to opt out or have their student attend alternatives for credit. A parent's rights should be respected even if it goes against what diversity education is trying to accomplish" (56-year old White cisgender heterosexual woman).

A 34-year old White cisgender pansexual woman echoed this sentiment, stating, "Parents should ultimately be in control of what their child learns regarding these sensitive topics. Parents should have complete control over that and not the teachers/schools."

Other parents suggested a model of *parental consent/opt out*, indicating the belief that parents may regulate their child's education by removing them from exposure to content they do not approve of. However, these parents did not necessarily indicate desire to regulate what every child is learning in the classroom. Endorsement of this category did not differ by parent identity. A 27-year old Hispanic cisgender lesbian/gay woman stated that "I believe it is 50/50. I

think schools should remain inclusive but should have specific days to discuss these topics and then let the parents decide if they would like their child to go or not." Similarly, a 37-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman indicated that, "Parents should have control over the things their child learns until the child is old enough to understand others views. Basic public schools should teach basics. Allow parents to sign their kids up for other classes when they are age appropriate."

Should be learned at school and teachers have primary influence

Some parents believed that DEI topics *should be learned at school and the teacher has primary influence* in its teachings; endorsement of this domain did not differ by parent identity. In this domain, some parents indicated that although these topics should also be happening in the home, they conceded that DEI topics should be in schools. For example, a 48-year-old White cisgender pansexual woman stated, "Parents should definitely expose children to these concepts, but they shouldn't be hidden in schools either. They should be a natural part of a curriculum chosen by teachers like everything else." Other parents indicated that schools are qualified to teach DEI topics in an age appropriate manner, using this reasoning to indicate support of schools as having decision-making influence. For example, a 56-year-old White cisgender bisexual woman indicated the importance of schools incorporating DEI topics:

> "Public school education should reflect the values of this country as a whole, and ideally we value equality, justice and tolerance. This should include age appropriate education on our history with respect to all American peoples, indigenous, minority and LGBTQ+, not just White cis hetero Americans of Christian European background. It is never too early to teach love, understanding and tolerance of our differences and this shouldn't scare or concern parents in any way."

A 50-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman also appealed to how American values of anti-discrimination should be reflected in public school education when explaining their support of schools teaching DEI topics, stating, "If the country as a whole has laws in place to protect against discrimination, then the public schools should be promoting this way of acting and thinking. Patent's [sic] who disagree should send their kids to private school or homeschool." Cisgender-heterosexual parents also indicated that parents should have these discussions with their children but emphasize that educators are most knowledgeable about how to discuss such topics with children, and should be able to do so. A 56-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman explained that "parents need to step back and let teachers teach and stop overreacting to everything. Parents should also broach those subjects with their kids, but many do not, unfortunately."

As alluded to in some parents' reasoning for supporting schools and educators as primary influences of DEI topics, both LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual parents emphasized that some *parents are biased*. This category indicated acknowledgement that schools should have primary roles in DEI teaching because of how parent's individual biases may perpetuate biased perspectives. For example, a 37-year old Hispanic cisgender gay/lesbian man stated, "I think schools should have a say and i think parents need to allow it especially bc most of the parents who wouldn't allow it would have some kid who is homophobic or racist or whatever. they need to be taught that ppl are different and they are normal too."

A 48-year-old Hispanic cisgender-heterosexual man indicated support for experts to teach about DEI, since individual parents may have preferences that do not benefit every child, indirectly addressing concerns of parent bias:

> "I think matters like this are best left to the experts who handle these types of cases, and that legislation should be required regarding diversity-related topics. There are many types of parenting methods and there are many types of parents, and what one wants may not be what's best for the overall picture."

Similarly, some participants endorsed the belief that *parents should have no influence on the curriculum*; endorsement did not differ by parent identity. These parents reasoned that parents' influence on DEI topics is limited to the household and should not interfere with school curriculum; "Parents have no business developing school curriculum. Their influence in teaching these topics should be limited to their in-home interactions with their child" (38-year old White cisgender bisexual woman). Though some parents acknowledged that both educators and parents have important roles with educating children, diversity education in curriculum should not be influenced by parents: "Parents and teachers are both instrumental in the education of children. This would include a discussion about various forms of diversity. It is up to the school to determine curriculum content, not parents" (70-year old White cisgender-heterosexual man).

Some parents indicated support of school's influence for teaching DEI through endorsement of the notion that *parents can pull their children out*, which did not differ by parent identity. This category indicated the belief that all children should have exposure to these topics, and dissenting parents may regulate what their own child is exposed to by removing them, but that dissenting parent may not control what every child is exposed to. For example, a 46-year-old East Asian cisgender-heterosexual man stated, "I think it should be a combination of school board and partial regulation for public schools. Parents should have some limited input, if they do not agree with it they can take their kids to a private school then." A 59-year-old White nonbinary/genderqueer asexual parent emphasized that disagreement with DEI topics means that parent should change their individual child's learning environment, but not the overall curriculum: "If a parent doesn't want their children exposed to these ideas, they need to educate their children in a different environment (homeschool, religious school, etc.) rather than change public school curriculum."

Collaborative endeavor

Collaborative endeavor is a domain that described parents' perceptions that there should be no one ruling influence in DEI topics, instead opting for multiple influences to play a role in DEI education. Endorsement of this domain did not differ by parent identity. Participants endorsed a range of actors as ideally having influence on DEI-related programming; for example, a 54-year-old Black, cisgender-heterosexual woman stated, "PARENTS FIRST THEN SCHOOLS," a 54-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman stated, "Parents and federal government," and a 37-year-old White cisgender pansexual woman stated, "the community and parents". Other cisgender-heterosexual parents elaborated on what the collaboration process would look like, with one 31-year-old White cisgender heterosexual woman stating: "A board of educators and scientists who determine what is best for each stage of development should be in control of a public student child's learning goals. There can be a parent board that has some input but no guarantee of changing the curriculum."

Some parents initially listed one primary ideal source of influence, but then went on to indicate additional sources of influence for DEI teaching. For example, a 46-year-old White cisgender

bisexual woman stated, "The primary influence should be the parent. They should not be the sole influence however. When it comes to subjects about diversity I think parents should be able to review curriculum and give input but the final decision should be the school district's." A 63-year-old White cisgender bisexual man delineated the collaborative process, stating "Collaboration between parents, educators, and experts in the field can help create age-appropriate and culturally sensitive approaches to teaching diversity-related subjects, taking into account the developmental stage of the child and the educational environment." A similar sentiment was echoed with a 46-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman, w, "I believe that the entire village forms a child, so the responsibility lies with everyone: parents, educators, society."

Some parents also reported a sense of *general distrust, so checks should be in place*. This category referred to how no one system of influence is impervious to bias, so multiple influences should be involved to have a fair "unbiased" teaching of DEI topics; endorsement did not differ by parent identity. A 40-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual man stated that schools may provide additional resources on DEI topics to account for when parents exert some bias over DEI topics, "It should be a combination of parents and public schooling. Parents have a general bias, whereas the schools should be clinical in those sorts of subjects. Teaching children that something exists is not the same as indoctrination." One parent suggested that collaborative endeavors with schools should also provide information to educate parents as a point of checks in place:

> "Parents should always have some control over what their children learn. Unfortunately children growing up in very religious families will miss out on accurate information. I think that there should be seminars for parents in the public schools. They won't reach everyone, especially the most narrow minded and bigoted, but those who are open to learning and discussing can attend and be helpful in sharing information and awareness" (60-year-old Black cisgender-heterosexual woman).

Support for diversity education

LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual parents endorsed at similar levels *support for diversity education*, or general endorsement that diversity education is important was expressed by both cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents. Among cisgender-heterosexual parents, indirect support of diversity education was reported by emphasizing the harm of education without DEI. For example, A 44-year-old White cisgender-heterosexual woman stated:

> "parents should be doing it at. home from an early age, ideally. however they aren't so schools need to provide it as well to raise a good citizenry. parents aren't educators they need to step back. lots of parents want to keep their kids in the dark about so much. it hurts their kid and the society."

A 50-year-old White cisgender lesbian/gay woman parent viewed diversity education as part of what makes a well-rounded education:

> "I think the State should. As with all subjects if we left it up to the parents we would have a very odd curriculum historically. I think students need a well-rounded education. I think well-meaning parents would leave out a whole lot of things that they think are useless in many subjects and students need to keep elevating past what their parents and grandparents knew."

Diversity education simply included people of all backgrounds as having representation in educational settings, as stated by a 52-year-old White transgender pansexual woman, "I believe a progressive society should decide when, and to ALWAYS teach children about diverse orientations and racial histories to protect children from sheltering, restrictive ideologies that create theocratic fascist ideals."

LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual parents also reported at similar levels the belief that *diversity education should be ongoing*. For example, a 36-year-old White cisgender lesbian/gay woman stated, "I think parents should be teaching this to their children from the start. Age appropriate discussions can be started at any time." Similar notions were endorsed by a 67-year-old American Indian or Alaska Native and White cisgender-heterosexual parent stated, "Hopefully parents start to address this early, at home. If they don't, the schools should. Ignoring something doesn't make it go away."

Indecisive or no opinion

Some participant responses were coded as *indecisive or no opinion*, where participants did not express a clear opinion on who should have influence over DEI-related programming. LGBTQ+ parents were significantly more likely to have indecisive responses than cisgender-heterosexual parents in our sample. For some, more information was needed for a definitive answer, with a 66 year old White cisgender bisexual woman stating, "I don't have an answer to this. It really depends on the quality of information they're getting." Indecision was also marked when parents reflected on the consequences of one primary influence in educating DEI, noting the potential biases or repercussions of sticking with one source. Rather than noting collaborative endeavors, parents would often view these influences as conflicting with no obvious solution in sight. In reflecting on her own experiences, a 26-year-old White cisgender bisexual woman stated that:

> "It's hard for me to say. I had to learn it all on my own– neither my parents or any class taught me anything to do with LGBT+ topics. I suppose I'd say life should have the most influence, not really a class or your parents– especially considering most parents aren't well educated on any of it… But, in any case, parents /do/ have a right to know what their child is being taught."

A similar process of indecision from inadequate systems working to fairly promote diversity education was also noted in 41-year-old White cisgender bisexual woman stating:

> "eeehhhh. There is no right answer to this. Parents screw up their children on these topics all the time. School boards and teachers have no immunity to horrible belief systems, either. I'd prefer that children have the opportunity to be exposed to impartial, unbigoted information about all of these topics, wherever it comes from. I don't know, right now I don't have control of a lot of suspect crap that is taught in my daughter's school - the remnants of First Thanksgiving mythology come to mind. I would strongly object to a school teaching garbage that encourages hate and/or is in defiance of the best research. But there are a lot of idiots who can and do nonsensically object to things like, To Kill a Mockingbird. I am not confident in parents making non-idiotic choices for their kids any more than I am confident in schools doing so."

Participants also indicated no opinion, "NA" (38-year-old Black cisgender bisexual man) or did not comment on any aspect of the question asked of them, "No" (54-year-old Black cisgender-heterosexual man).

Kids should be able to decide

Some parents in the sample expressed that *kids should be able to decide*, highlighting that children should also have some say in their exposure to DEI topics. Endorsement of this domain did not vary by parent identity. Embodying this notion, a 54 year-old White cisgender bisexual women stated, "I think parents need to talk to their children about what they want to learn instead of shoving what they want down their kids throats." Some parents emphasized centering DEI teaching to what the child notices or is curious about. For example, a 25-year-old White cisgender lesbian/gay woman stated:

> "The child should have the most control over learning about these topics. Children are curious and sometimes 5,6,7,8 year olds ask questions that make adults feel uncomfortable, but if the child is asking about it, I think the questions should be answered. Maybe in more simple ways when the child is young. But the child should set the pace."

A 34-year-old biracial cisgender-heterosexual woman focused on centering the child's comfort in learning DEI topics, stating, "I believe parents should help and ask their child if they are comfortable with this subject. It should not be forced on children. I think the parents should be involved."

Teach racism not sexuality

We also developed a domain capturing partial support for certain DEI topics over others, highlighting mixed or conditional support of diversity education. *Teach racism not sexuality* captured the notion that racial inequity, racism, or the topic of race should be in the classroom—often framing these topics as a matter of history; however, topics related to gender, sexuality, or LGBTQ+ themes were perceived as less legitimate than topics of race and racism. For example, a 56-year-old Black cisgender-heterosexual woman stated, "These are two different things the racial history of this country needs to be taught to every child beginning at the age of the as far as a sexual orientation that is up to the parent." Preference of teaching about race and history of racism over sexuality in the classroom was not related to parental identity.

Additional trends and insights

Subsample differences

We conducted exploratory analyses to examine whether endorsement of domains and categories differed by gender identity, racial identity, and political orientation. Given statistical assumptions, we recoded each of these variables to create groups large enough for comparison.

For gender identity analyses, we created three groups: men, women, and non-binary/genderqueer people. Participants who reported their gender identity as trans men or trans women were grouped with men and women respectively. Table 5 depicts frequency of endorsement by gender for each domain and category. Generally, men, women, and non-binary/genderqueer participants did not differ in terms of their perceptions of DEI Appropriateness.

However, in terms of DEI influence, non-binary/qenderqueer parents were less likely than other parents to believe that *DEI topics should be learned at home and parents should have the primary influence*. Accordingly, non-binary/genderqueer participants were also more likely to report that *parents are biased* as a reason for endorsing the teaching of DEI topics in schools. For other significant differences, women and nonbinary/genderqueer parents tended to share perspectives which differed from those of participants who identified as men (see Table 5).

For racial identity analyses, we created two groups: White people and people of color (POC). The POC group was inclusive of participants with multiracial identities, even if those included a White identity. Table 6 depicts frequency of endorsement by racial identity for each domain and category. In terms of DEI appropriateness, White parents endorsed more strongly than POC parents that *cues are appropriate at any age*, while parents of color were more likely to endorse that cues are appropriate *only after a certain age*. White parents also endorsed more strongly that *cues are divisive rather than inclusive* and that DEI topics *should only be discussed at home with parents*. In terms of DEI Influence, White parents more strongly endorsed the notions of *parents as biased* and that *parents should have no influence on curriculum*, but also more strongly endorsed *general support for DEI education*.

For political orientation analyses, based on the initial seven-point Likert type scale, we created three groups: conservatives (originally scored as 1–2 on the scale, indicating strong or moderate conservatism), moderates (originally scored as a 3–5 on the scale, indicating neutrality or mild leanings), and liberals (originally scored as 6–7 on the scale, indicating strong or moderate liberalism). Table 7 depicts frequency of endorsement by political orientation for each domain and category. Political orientation differences existed for the majority of domains and categories, with conservatives tending to endorse more strongly codes which rejected inclusive education policies. Moderates tended to score between conservatives and liberals (see Table 7).

Expressions of prejudice

Across questions, we noted and captured a number of explicit expressions of prejudice, primarily taking the forms of racism and heterosexism (see Tables 3–4). Cisgender-heterosexual parents were more likely than LGBTQ+ parents to endorse heterosexism, but not racism, in their responses to the DEI appropriateness questions. In responses to DEI influence questions, LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual parents did not differ in expressions of prejudice. Expressions of prejudice did not differ by participant gender identity or racial identity. In terms of political orientation, conservatives expressed greater prejudice—both racism and heterosexism—than liberal participants.

Perceived motives of diversity education

Some themes capture parents' perceptions of *why* such diversity education efforts are being implemented in schools, indicating perceived motivations for inclusive education. Though two

TABLE 4 DEI influence coding domains and frequency by parental LGBTQ+ status.

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Should be learned at home and parents have primary influence	Learning starts at home with parents as primary teachers of diversity topics	"i believe the parent should be the primary influencer of the child"	**56.6%**	**65.8%**	.025*
Predatory assumptions	Anyone besides parents educating on this topic is likely a predator	"No parent in their right mind would want a teacher who may or may not be a paedophile or other creep trying to indoctrinate their child. Let's stop pretending that all people have the same pure intentions with children"	.0%	1.6%	.026*
Should be learned at school but parents have primary influence	Schools should only teach these topics if parents have primary influence over what their children learn	"Parents should also have a primary role in determining the curriculum relating to such topics"	**16.9%**	**13.0%**	.211
Parents rights	Parents should have ultimate control of what is taught in school	"Parents should have the primary influence over a child's learning of diversity related subjects. They also should have complete control over the curriculum"	15.9%	15.0%	.823
Parental consent/opt out	Parents should have control over what *their own child* is exposed to, not what all children are exposed to	"parents should have the option to opt out of topics they are uncomfortable with"	6.3%	10.1%	.104

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Should be learned at school and teacher has primary influence	Schools and educators should have primary influence when teaching these topics	"I believe parents should but with ultimate authority lying with the teacher and school board"	**13.2%**	**12.7%**	.904
Parents are biased	Parental bias is problematic to learning about these topics	"Parents have a general bias, whereas the schools should be clinical in those sorts of subjects."	13.6%	10.7%	.322
Parents should have no influence on curriculum	Parents should not have any influence on the curriculum	"I believe parents should be aware of the curriculum but should not be able to get it changed."	9.3%	7.2%	.378
Parents can pull their children out	These topics should be taught in schools; if parents do not like these topics, they can remove their child	"If they don't like it, they can homeschool. Students need to know about the existence of queer and trans people."	5.3%	4.2%	.573
Collaborative endeavor	More than one source of influence in educating children (e.g., parents, school, government, community)	"It should be a combination of parents and public schooling"	**31.1%**	**26.7%**	.246
General distrust, so checks should be in place	Multiple systems need to work together, as there is distrust in any one source of influence to educate children in these topics	"I believe there should be regulated and peer reviewed set curriculum to account for households that may hold more biased mindsets, but a lot of this learning should happen at home."	14.6%	11.4%	.278

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Kids should be able to decide	Children should have a say or control over their own education in these topics	"A child as they become a teenager should be allowed to decide for themselves when they learn about this. Adults should not push agendas on children."	**2.3%**	**2.6%**	1.00
Indecisive or no opinion	Indicates being unsure, indecisive, or feels they need more information	"I am unsure. I think its a touchy subject for some people but I think it should be up to the community"	**6.3%**	**2.3%**	.016*
Teach racism not sexuality	Indicates that learning about racism is appropriate, but learning about gender, sexuality, or LGBTQ+ themes is inappropriate for the classroom	"I do believe that parents should have a say in whether their kids should be exposed to certain topics pertaining to LGBTQ but I do think that things such as racial issues and discrimination with all minorities should be included in the history curriculum because kids of every race should know about it."	**.3%**	**1.0%**	.324
Expressions of prejudice	Explicit expressions of prejudice against marginalized groups	"FULL CONTROL PERIOD PEOPLE HAVE PARENTS FOR A REASON mind you I have friends and relatives who are gay but they keep a low profile and are not in the streets acting perverted around children IT IS A PARENTS JOB TO PROTECT they are trying to brainwash straight kids its sickening"	**.3%**	**1.6%**	.106

(Continues)

TABLE 4 (Continued)

Coding domain	Domain description	Example quote	Frequency		Sig
			LGBTQ+ ($N = 317$)	Cisgender-heterosexual ($N = 292$)	Fisher's exact p
Support for diversity education	General endorsement that diversity education is important	"I see gender, diversity and sex ed as not being a one-time thing, but will be part of a continuing dialogue between my children and myself."	**20.9%**	**15.3%**	.092
Diversity education should be ongoing	Educating children about these topics should be when the child is young	"The child should have the most control over learning about these topics. Children are curious and sometimes 5,6,7,8 year olds ask questions that make adults feel uncomfortable, but if the child is asking about it, I think the questions should be answered. Maybe in more simple ways when the child is young. But the child should set the pace"	4.0%	3.9%	1.00

Note: Percentages rounded. Significance column tests association between LGBTQ+ identity and endorsement of domain using 2-sided Fisher's exact test, except for underlined p-values which use chi square due to violations of expected count. * = $p < .05$. Bolding denotes primary coded domain.

TABLE 5 Coding domains and frequency by parental gender identity.

Coding domain	Frequency			Sig
	Women ($n = 381$)	Nonbinary/ genderqueer ($n = 31$)	Men ($n = 197$)	Chi square
DEI Appropriateness				
Cues shouldn't be allowed	**26.8**	**16.1**	**23.4**	.331
Schools should be apolitical	5.2	6.5	6.1	.895
Indoctrination	4.7	3.2	4.1	.884
Schools should stick to core courses	4.7	6.5	4.1	.824
Cues may cause retaliation/backlash	1.0	.0	1.0	.849
Cues may confuse children	1.8	.0	1.0	.585
Cues are divisive rather than inclusive	6.8	.0	4.1	.151
DEI should only be discussed at home/with parents	11.3	3.2	7.1	.130
Comparison to religious symbols	1.9	.0	2.0	.858
Cues should only be allowed under certain conditions	**37.3**	**25.8**	**37.3**	.243
Only after a certain age	25.2	19.4	31.5	.169
Sexuality is particularly inappropriate	3.7	3.2	1.0	.185
Cues must be situated in educational context	4.5	3.2	3.5	.590
Cues normalize when young, education later	2.1	3.2	1.5	.783
Cues must be supplemented with education	3.1	6.5	2.5	.507
Holistic acceptance of cues	**40.2**	**54.8**	**37.6**	.189
Cues are appropriate at any age	23.9	35.5	17.8	.051
Cues create a welcoming space	11.8	16.1	8.6	.330
Cues prompt identity safety for kids	5.8	6.5	2.5	.201
Cues can be conversation starters	5.8	3.2	3.0	.316
Kids are exposed to diversity anyways	6.8[a]	12.9[a]	2.5[b]	.024*
Kids experience prejudice	1.8[a]	12.9[b]	2.0[a]	<.001*
These are factual or civil rights issues	4.2	6.5	1.0	.075
Internal tension	**5.2**	**3.2**	**4.6**	.848
Expressions of prejudice	**6.0**	**9.7**	**3.6**	.257
Racism	1.3	3.2	1.5	.697
Heterosexism	4.2	9.7	3.0	.221
Challenging the meaning of cues	**2.6**	**6.5**	**2.5**	.271
Cues as disconnected from DEI	**3.9**	**.0**	**2.0**	.446
DEI Influence				
Should be learned at home and parents have primary influence	**63.8[a]**	**38.7[b]**	**59.4[a]**	.018*
Predatory assumptions	.8	3.2	.5	.295

(Continues)

TABLE 5 (Continued)

Coding domain	Frequency			Sig
	Women ($n = 381$)	Nonbinary/ genderqueer ($n = 31$)	Men ($n = 197$)	Chi square
Should be learned at school but parents have primary influence	**16.0**	**22.6**	**11.7**	.179
Parents rights	17.6	9.7	12.2	.151
Parental consent/opt out	10.8[a]	3.2[b]	4.1[b]	.012*
Should be learned at school and teacher has primary influence	**12.9**	**19.4**	**12.2**	.540
Parents are biased	12.6[a]	25.8[b]	9.1[a]	.028*
Parents should have no influence on curriculum	8.4	16.1	6.6	.194
Parents can pull their children out	6.3[a]	6.5[a]	1.5[b]	.034*
Collaborative endeavor	**32.3[a]**	**38.7[a]**	**20.8[b]**	.007*
General distrust, so checks should be in place	15.2[a]	19.4[a]	7.6[b]	.020*
Kids should be able to decide	**1.8**	**.0**	**4.1**	.174
Indecisive or no opinion	**3.9**	**.0**	**5.6**	.314
Teach racism not sexuality	**1.0**	**.0**	**.0**	.300
Expressions of prejudice	**1.0**	**3.2**	**1.0**	.357
Support for diversity education	**19.2**	**16.1**	**16.2**	.661
Diversity education should be ongoing	4.2	6.5	3.0	.605

Note: Percentages rounded. *Indicates statistically significant difference. Differing superscripts indicate statistically different patterns of responding between gender groups.

questions asked about appropriateness of inclusive signals in classrooms, and beliefs about who should influence diversity education, some parents overlapped in their belief that diversity education and inclusive classrooms are ways of indoctrinating children with certain political ideology, as captured with our subthemes, "schools should be apolitical", "schools should stick to core courses", "indoctrination" (under DEI appropriateness) and "predatory assumptions" (under DEI influence). Such subthemes indicate that some parents perceive efforts for inclusion in classrooms (i.e., representation of marginalized race, gender, and sexual orientation identities) as motivated to corrupt children, since exposure to these topics are attempts from "too many crazy people" to "brainwash straight kids." From this perspective, merely acknowledging the existence of marginalized groups and non-White, cisgender, or non-heterosexual groups' histories in the United States is perceived as motivated from political indoctrination efforts, and are at odds with the factual core subjects that students should be learning. Together, we note that some parents are examining motivations for implementing diverse and inclusive education, and those who perceive such political and ideological indoctrination are less likely to support such education.

On the other hand, some parents reflected on perceptions of diversity education as motivated by equality-seeking, or providing equitable representation of marginalized groups and identities. Our subthemes of "these are factual or civil rights issues", "kids experience prejudice", "cues can prompt identity safety for kids", "kids are exposed to diversity anyways", and "cues create a welcoming space" (from DEI appropriateness) highlight that some parents perceive diversity education and inclusive signals are benefiting a variety of children's wellbeing and preparing children

TABLE 6 Coding domains and frequency by parental racial identity.

Coding Domain	Frequency		Sig
	White ($n = 392$)	POC ($n = 217$)	Fisher's exact
DEI Appropriateness			
Cues should not be allowed	**27.0**	**21.7**	.172
Schools should be apolitical	5.9	5.1	.854
Indoctrination	5.4	2.8	.155
Schools should stick to core courses	4.8	4.1	.841
Cues may cause retaliation/backlash	1.3	.5	.429
Cues may confuse children	1.3	1.8	.728
Cues are divisive rather than inclusive	7.4	2.3	.009*
DEI should only be discussed at home/with parents	11.7	5.5	.014*
Comparison to religious symbols	.3	.9	.435
Cues should only be allowed under certain conditions	**33.4**	**46.1**	.002*
Only after a certain age	21.9	35.9	<.001
Sexuality is particularly inappropriate	3.1	2.3	.798
Cues must be situated in educational context	4.9	2.3	.407
Cues normalize when young, education later	1.5	2.8	.363
Cues must be supplemented with education	3.6	2.3	.472
Holistic acceptance of cues	**42.9**	**35.0**	.070
Cues are appropriate at any age	26.0	16.1	.006*
Cues create a welcoming space	9.4	13.8	.106
Cues prompt identity safety for kids	4.1	6.0	.322
Cues can be conversation starters	5.6	3.2	.234
Kids are exposed to diversity anyways	5.6	6.0	.857
Kids experience prejudice	1.8	2.8	.559
These are factual or civil rights issues	3.3	3.2	1.000
Internal tension	**4.3**	**6.0**	.435
Expressions of prejudice	**5.9**	**4.6**	.579
Racism	1.8	.9	.503
Heterosexism	4.3	3.7	.832
Challenging the meaning of cues	**3.1**	**2.3**	.798
Cues as disconnected from DEI	**3.3**	**2.8**	.811
DEI Influence			
Should be learned at home and parents have primary influence	**61.0**	**61.3**	1.000
Predatory assumptions	1.0	.5	.660
Should be learned at school but parents have primary influence	**13.5**	**17.5**	.194
Parents rights	14.0	18.0	.241
Parental consent/opt out	8.7	7.4	.645

(Continues)

TABLE 6 (Continued)

Coding Domain	Frequency		Sig
	White ($n = 392$)	POC ($n = 217$)	Fisher's exact
Should be learned at school and teacher has primary influence	**14.5**	**10.1**	.132
Parents are biased	14.8	7.4	.007*
Parents should have no influence on curriculum	11.2	2.8	<.001
Parents can pull their children out	5.6	3.2	.234
Collaborative endeavor	**29.3**	**28.1**	.780
General distrust, so checks should be in place	14.5	10.1	.132
Kids should be able to decide	**2.8**	**1.8**	.590
Indecisive or no opinion	**3.3**	**6.0**	.143
Teach racism not sexuality	**.3**	**1.4**	.132
Expressions of prejudice	**1.3**	**.5**	.430
Support for diversity education	**21.2**	**12.4**	.008*
Diversity education should be ongoing	4.1	3.7	1.000

Note: Percentages rounded. * Indicates statistically significant difference. Significance column tests association between racial identity and endorsement of domain using 2-sided Fisher's exact test, except for underlined *p*-values which use chi square due to violations of expected count.

for the "real world" where they are likely to encounter people of diverse backgrounds. Parents who perceive such inclusive education efforts as being motivated to benefit their child(ren) may be more likely to support this education.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Our qualitative analysis indicated general alignment with prior work examining attitudes toward race, gender, and sexuality in classroom settings (e.g., Gawthrop & Helmstetter, 2022; Helmstetter, 2023; Hobby et al., 2021), capturing rich variability in parental reflections on this type of education. Parent LGBTQ+ identity—in tandem with other identities (e.g., gender, political orientation)—systematically influenced perspectives on DEI in classrooms. Overall, and supporting our predictions, cisgender-heterosexual parents demonstrated greater resistance to inclusive educational policies than did LGBTQ+ parents in our sample.

For example, cisgender-heterosexual parents were more likely to find inclusive signals inappropriate in classrooms, compared to LGBTQ+ parents. However, both LGBTQ+ and cisgender-heterosexual parents were equally likely to report on specific conditions in which such inclusive signals are appropriate. Consistent with prior trends (e.g., Walsh, 2022), cisgender-heterosexual parents were more likely to endorse that DEI topics should be learned at home and from parents than were LGBTQ+ parents. Many parents expressed internal tension when reflecting upon who influences DEI teaching and if DEI is appropriate in public classrooms, as shown in multiple endorsements of seemingly dissonant beliefs (e.g., endorsing beliefs that inclusive cues shouldn't be allowed, to then list conditions in which said cues would be acceptable).

TABLE 7 Coding domains and frequency by political orientation.

Coding Domain	Frequency			Sig
	Conservative ($n = 79$)	Moderate ($n = 236$)	Liberal ($n = 294$)	Chi Square
DEI Appropriateness				
Cues should not be allowed	**59.5[a]**	**35.6[b]**	**7.5[c]**	<.001*
Schools should be apolitical	12.7[a]	8.1[a]	1.7[b]	<.001*
Indoctrination	12.7[a]	5.5[b]	1.4[c]	<.001*
Schools should stick to core courses	17.7[a]	5.5[b]	.3[c]	<.001*
Cues may cause retaliation/backlash	2.5	1.3	.3	.179
Cues may confuse children	1.3[a]	3.0[b]	.3[a]	.044*
Cues are divisive rather than inclusive	15.2[a]	7.2[b]	1.7[c]	<.001*
DEI should only be discussed at home/with parents	20.3[a]	14.0[a]	3.1[b]	<.001*
Comparison to religious symbols	3.8	2.9	.3	.084
Cues should only be allowed under certain conditions	**27.8**	**39.8**	**39.1**	.136
Only after a certain age	21.5	28.8	26.9	.449
Sexuality is particularly inappropriate	5.1[a]	5.1[a]	.3[b]	.002*
Cues must be situated in educational context	1.3[a]	5.9[b]	3.4[b]	.014*
Cues normalize when young, education later	1.3	1.3	2.7	.436
Cues must be supplemented with education	.0	4.2	3.1	.172
Holistic acceptance of cues	**8.9[a]**	**25.0[b]**	**60.5[c]**	<.001*
Cues are appropriate at any age	5.1[a]	13.6[b]	34.4[c]	<.001*
Cues create a welcoming space	3.8[a]	7.6[a]	15.6[b]	.001*
Cues prompt identity safety for kids	1.3[a]	2.5[a]	7.5[b]	.009*
Cues can be conversation starters	1.3[a]	2.5[a]	7.5[b]	.009*
Kids are exposed to diversity anyways	1.3	5.1	7.5	.093
Kids experience prejudice	.0[a]	.8[a]	3.7[b]	.027*
These are factual or civil rights issues	.0[a]	1.7[a]	5.4[b]	.012*
Internal tension	**6.3[a]**	**7.2[a]**	**2.7[b]**	.050*
Expressions of prejudice	**13.9[a]**	**8.1[a]**	**1.0[b]**	<.001*
Racism	6.3[a]	1.3[b]	.3[b]	<.001*
Heterosexism	8.9[a]	6.4[a]	1.0[b]	<.001*
Challenging the meaning of cues	**3.8[a]**	**5.1[a]**	**.7[b]**	.008*
Cues as disconnected from DEI	**2.5**	**4.2**	**2.4**	.450
DEI Influence				
Should be learned at home and parents have primary influence	**72.2[a]**	**71.2[a]**	**50.0[b]**	<.001*
Predatory assumptions	2.5	1.3	.4	.053

(Continues)

TABLE 7 (Continued)

Coding Domain	Frequency			Sig
	Conservative ($n = 79$)	Moderate ($n = 236$)	Liberal ($n = 294$)	Chi Square
Should be learned at school but parents have primary influence	**16.5**	**14.0**	**15.3**	.851
Parents rights	25.3[a]	15.7[a,b]	12.6[b]	.021*
Parental consent/opt out	2.5	8.9	9.2	.142
Should be learned at school and teacher has primary influence	**1.3[a]**	**7.6[b]**	**20.4[c]**	<.001*
Parents are biased	1.3[a]	7.6[b]	18.7[c]	<.001*
Parents should have no influence on curriculum	.0[a]	3.0[a]	14.6[b]	<.001*
Parents can pull their children out	.0	4.2	6.5	.051
Collaborative endeavor	**15.2[a]**	**25.4[a]**	**35.4[b]**	<.001*
General distrust, so checks should be in place	.0[a]	8.9[b]	19.7[c]	<.001*
Kids should be able to decide	**2.5**	**3.8**	**1.4**	.194
Indecisive or no opinion	**2.5**	**3.0**	**5.8**	.201
Teach racism not sexuality	**.0**	**1.3**	**.3**	.310
Expressions of prejudice	**1.3**	**1.7**	**.3**	.281
Support for diversity education	**2.5[a]**	**15.3[b]**	**24.5[c]**	<.001*
Diversity education should be ongoing	.0[a]	2.1[a]	6.5[c]	.006*

Note: Percentages rounded. *Indicates statistically significant difference. Differing superscripts indicate statistically different patterns of responding between gender groups.

Cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents did not differ in endorsement of having DEI topics learned at school with parental influence, or in endorsement that multiple sources of influence should play a role in DEI teaching. This is consistent with Americans' endorsement that multiple educational resources should be at play when determining how to teach about slavery and race (e.g., parents, teachers, the state department of education, local school board should have "a great deal of influence") despite an overarching preference indicated for parents as the primary influence (Gawthrop & Helmstetter, 2022).

Gender, race, and political orientation effects

In additional exploratory demographic analyses, we identified relatively few systematic differences in responses by parental gender, though nonbinary/genderqueer parents, relative to parents of other gender identities, were more likely to endorse the notion that kids themselves experience prejudice, more likely to endorse the notion that parents are prejudiced, and less likely to endorse the notion that parents should have the primary influence on DEI education. These patterns reflect those seen among LGBTQ+ parents, likely because genderqueer parents belong to the broader queer community and may share many of the same experiences.

In analyses of parental race, parents of color were more likely than White parents to perceive the appropriateness of DEI cues as contingent on children being of a certain age. While it may be

assumed that parents of color would be more open to DEI-related policies and signals as a result of their experiences of oppression in a racist society, existing literature suggests that parental race does not influence the perceived appropriateness of talking to children about race or the age at which those conversations are perceived to be appropriate (Sullivan et al., 2021). Our findings build upon this to suggest that parents of color may believe that diversity-related information is appropriate at a later age than White parents; recent literature suggests that parents of color may be wary of backlash when diversity-related information is present in educational spaces (Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025), which may shape responses. Parents of color were also less likely than White parents to endorse the notions that parents are biased and should have no influence on curriculum; it is possible that parents of color may consider themselves to be less biased on DEI-related topics as a result of their lived experiences as minority group members, which may have shaped these response patterns.

Finally, analyses of political orientation differences revealed significant discrepancies in perceptions of educational DEI practices. Liberal participants, relative to conservatives, were overall more supportive of inclusive cues and of DEI policies in education, less likely to express prejudice, and more in favor of DEI education occurring in schools rather than being left entirely to parents. Political moderates tended to fall between liberals and conservatives, or to align with conservatives in their perceptions of educational DEI practices. These findings align with existing data indicating that conservatives are less likely to support DEI policies in education (e.g., Gawthrop & Helmstetter, 2022) as well as work highlighting conservative backlash to such policies (e.g., Foran, 2022; Walsh, 2022).

Parents against DEI: Evidence of rhetoric from parents' bill of rights

Some parents utilized discourses of appropriateness to reject inclusive classroom policies, for example, by indicating that inclusive signals are inappropriate for children and the classroom (e.g., Chaney et al., 2024; Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). These parents expressed that they (parents) should have the primarily influence over DEI topics for their children, consistent with the conservative-led movement of "Parents' Bill of Rights" (Baldwin Clark, 2022; Foran, 2022; Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023; Walsh, 2022); indeed, such sentiments were significantly more common among conservative participants. We captured several subthemes in (primarily conservative) parents' responses (i.e., schools should be apolitical, indoctrination, cues are divisive rather than inclusive, parents' rights) that were consistent with *backlash pedagogy*—where parents' efforts to monitor and regulate the curriculum for "divisive topics" is meant to discourage educators from utilizing *any* inclusive educational practices (Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023).

Indeed, some participants in our sample acknowledged concerns about cues potentially resulting in retaliation or backlash, which educators must now navigate alongside their typical duties. Recent research shows that educators, who are under pressure from policymakers and parents spearheading local and state initiatives to legally bar teaching of DEI topics, are less likely to cover any topic potentially construed as falling under vague definitions of critical race theory, sex, gender, and so on—including topics such as the Civil Rights Movement (see Baldwin Clark, 2022; Hornbeck & Malin, 2023). This "chilling effect" (Clark, 2022; Hornbeck & Malin, 2023) is sustained by fear of backlash from parents and policymakers alike. Our analysis highlights in rich detail how parents construct and navigate their disagreement with, and regulation of, DEI signals or topics in the classroom. The findings from this work may thus be informative in responding to these chilling effects and reinstating important historical and social information in the classroom. For

example, knowing that parents rely on discourses of indoctrination and inappropriateness to rally against DEI discussions provides insight into intervention points to begin challenging these opinions. Some research highlights that greater LGBTQ+ acceptance and inclusion from conservative Christians can occur from reading Bible passages and interpretations that highlight how Jesus would accept derogated social outgroups, which reduces perceived threat of LGBTQ+ visibility at the expense of Christian visibility (i.e., zero-sum beliefs, Wilkins & Martin, 2023; Wilkins et al., 2022). Similarly, interventions that highlight important values of cisgender-heterosexual parents (e.g., religious, moral, egalitarianism, justice) may be tailored to incorporate, or value, minority groups. Future research is needed to examine if such interventions generally mitigate all beliefs predictive of anti-LGBTQ+ attitudes (e.g., perceived indoctrination and inappropriateness).

Notably, over 50% of LGBTQ+ parents indicated DEI topics should be learned at home with parents as primary instructors and LGBTQ+ parents did not differ from cisgender-heterosexual parents in endorsing beliefs about parents' rights, which reflected desire for control over the curriculum; we also found no identity-based differences in endorsing beliefs about parents' rights on the basis of gender or race. It is important to contextualize that LGBTQ+ parents, in the face of legislative threat targeting discussion and acknowledgement of their identity in public school settings, may indicate preference of teaching topics related to their identity at home for safety reasons (e.g., Goldberg & Abreu, 2024). LGBTQ+ parents may choose to teach about their LGBTQ+ identity in the safety of their household and may facilitate conversations that encourage resistance and resilience in their child in the face of increasing anti-trans and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric (Goldberg & Abreu, 2024). Legislation like the "Don't say gay" bill elicited LGBTQ+ parents' concerns that their children may be at risk of peer exclusion or bullying due to their own identity or family structure, that their children may not be able to fully participate in school (e.g., assignments involving family), or are being educated in a hostile environment where being LGBTQ+ is understood negatively due to the censoring around the identity (Goldberg & Abreu, 2024).

Hence, rising conservative-led political movements around Parents' Bill of Rights, which seek to eliminate diversity topics from the classroom, may lead marginalized parents to prefer educating children about diversity in their household, rather than to place trust in the school, teacher, or classroom to handle these discussions. This process of careful deliberation about how to discuss identity and preferences in who should influence DEI topics may also be reflected in our finding that LGBTQ+ parents were more likely than cisgender-heterosexual parents to endorse the "indecision or no opinion" subtheme.

Recommendations for policy

Without schoolboard and broader district support, instructors are concerned about parental and administrative backlash when implementing inclusive curriculum (Bynum, 2023; Hermann-Wilmarth & Ryan, 2019; Lin et al., 2024). As legislation targeting the discussion and perspective of marginalized groups is enacted, instructors need explicit guidelines about how to navigate state-level restrictive policy on what is acceptable for the classroom in order to maintain compliance with legislation but avoid wholesale abandonment of any critical acknowledgement of DEI-related topics during instruction (e.g., Baldwin Clark, 2022; Hornbeck & Malin, 2023).

Such actions are warranted, given the positive impact of inclusive curriculum on both marginalized and advantaged students in terms of increasing feelings of belonging, reducing bullying, and improving school climate (Blazar, 2021; Dee & Penner, 2021; Kaerwer & Pritchett, 2023; Snapp et al., 2015). While parents in our sample tended to assume that inclusive signals such as rainbow

flags were directed at children themselves—and at times reacted defensively to the notion that children could hold awareness of their own gender identity or sexuality—such cues can also serve as signals to children from LGBTQ+ families (e.g., children of queer parents). Children of queer families might experience stigma by association, or associative stigma (see King, 2001; Oswald et al., 2023); Inclusive signals in school settings may also serve to signal safety to children who do not themselves hold marginalized identities, but who share close relationships with those who do.

Many parents in our sample report the desire to teach DEI topics in their household (56.6% of LGBTQ+ parents, 65.8% of cisgender-heterosexual parents). More resources should be available to parents from schools, such as online or in person workshops to learn diverse perspectives and backgrounds, in order to prepare them to support their children's education on these topics. Socially advantaged and marginalized parents may find such resources useful to guide conversations at home with their children. Most districts already offer teachers professional development workshops with regards to DEI (e.g., Meyer et al., 2023; Rutledge, 2024).

Hence, similar district-based educational opportunities for parents to learn more about DEI topics through online or in-person workshops may support parents in developing comfortability with exploring such topics, and standardized resources may also help to limit biases in at-home teaching. Parents may be more willing to engage in DEI topics, like race and sexuality, with more information available on how to best approach those topics (see also Hobby et al., 2021). Further, while parents should be supported in educating themselves on these manners, parents should also be reminded that teachers receive specialized training in these matters as well as in childhood education and child development broadly, and are thus well-equipped to manage these conversations with children.

Limitations and future directions

A number of limitations of the current study center on demographic diversity and demographic data. For example, our cisgender-heterosexual sample consisted of predominantly White parents, limiting the generalizability of our findings to Black and other racially marginalized cisgender-heterosexual parents. Furthermore, we did not collect data on participant religiosity, which is linked to support for diversity education and inclusive education policies (Helmstetter, 2023; Hobby et al., 2021) or on socioeconomic status, which may influence concerns about diversity education. Indeed, prior research demonstrates that more affluent LGBTQ+ parents reported less concern about restrictions regarding inclusive education and curriculum content since their children were instructed in private schools, and were thus less subject to the legislative regulation of diversity education in public schools (Goldberg & Abreu, 2024). Additionally, we did not collect data on participant occupation. While one participant explicitly identified themself as a teacher in their open-ended responses, it is possible that additional participants also straddle multiple roles as both a parent and an educator, a position which would provide unique insight into the dynamics under investigation. Future research may focus specifically on samples who are both parents and educators to identify unique insights and perspectives incorporating both points of view.

Given that the data analyzed in the current manuscript were drawn from a larger, experimental paradigm, it is possible that responses may have also been influenced by the larger study paradigm in which parents evaluated an elementary or middle school classroom with an inclusive symbol (i.e., pride flag). For example, parents exposed to the pride flag or BLM cue condition may have had heightened understanding of or emotional response to the question about inclusive signals in

the classroom given the exposure in the experimental component of the study, despite our codes not varying significantly between participants from different classroom conditions.

While our analysis focused on parental perceptions, we encourage future research to examine children's own perceptions of safety cues in classroom spaces, particularly as they relate to children's social identities. We focused on parental perceptions as these play a significant role in shaping curriculum (see also Pereira-Jorge et al., 2025). However, the identity safety effects of concern—that is, whether children, especially marginalized children, actually feel more comfortable or greater belonging in educational contexts which embrace inclusive policies—occur among children rather than parents (e.g., LGBTQ+ and heterosexual students experiencing belonging from LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum, Snapp et al., 2015). Children's own marginalized identities –- which may differ from those of their parents—should thus be attended to; whether parents are attentive to inclusive signals that are relevant to their children but not to themselves (e.g., whether straight parents of LGBTQ+ children are attentive to queer-inclusive cues) remains unknown.

CONCLUSION

Diversity education in the K-12 years is a contentious issue in the contemporary US context. We qualitatively explored cisgender-heterosexual and LGBTQ+ parents' ($N = 609$) beliefs about the appropriateness of inclusive educational policies in K-12 classrooms, finding that parental identity predicted support for these policies overall, with cisgender-heterosexual parents generally more likely to support restrictions on inclusive educational policies. Though not of primary focus in the current study, we also found that parental racial and gender identity demonstrated some capacity to predict support for DEI-related educational policies, and political orientation played a significant role in shaping perceptions of these policies. Our rich data provides novel insight into how parents grapple with ideas about inclusive education, and factors underlying (lack of) support for inclusive educational policies—for example, perceptions of DEI education as indoctrination and perceptions of sexuality as a particularly inappropriate topic. Together, our findings highlight potential spaces for intervention to promote inclusive curriculum. We provide educational and policy recommendations with the goal of empowering parents and teachers to provide children with an inclusive learning experience.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data and materials are available on OSF (https://osf.io/gba27/?view_only=55d1b3203ef947ec8c2fc99a547eb7cd).

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