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The Diverging State of Teaching and Learning Two Years into Classroom Limitations on Race or Gender

Findings from the 2023 American Instructional Resources Survey

In April 2021, the Idaho state legislature passed a law prohibiting public schools from “compel[ling] students to personally affirm, adopt, or adhere” to tenets it described as rooted in critical race theory, thus becoming the first state to enact a restriction on how teachers can talk about race- or gender-related issues in their classrooms (Idaho Legislature, 2021). In the following year, sixteen states followed suit and passed similar policies through state legislatures, state boards of education, state attorneys general, and executive orders. Many of these state policies prohibit instruction around “divisive concepts” relating to race or gender—concepts drawn from an executive order on “combating race and sex stereotyping” issued by the Trump administration in 2020 (Trump, 2020). These policies prohibit teaching such concepts as the notion that “the United States is fundamentally racist or sexist” or that “an individual, by virtue of his or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously” (Friedman, Tager, and Gottlieb, 2021). In March 2022, Florida became the first state to enact a restriction that explicitly barred instruction around sexual orientation and gender identity, signaling the beginning of a shift in the topics that have been targeted by state restrictions (PEN America, 2023).

In April 2022, one year after the first of these policies was passed, RAND researchers surveyed around 8,000 teachers across the nation to understand how these state-enacted restrictions—which govern how teachers can address issues related to race, gender, and sometimes other social and political topics in the classroom—were beginning to influence their instruction. At that time,

KEY FINDINGS

- In spring 2023, about one-quarter of teachers nationally reported that limitations on race- or gender-related topics influenced their curriculum choices or instructional practices—a share of teachers that has persisted since spring 2022.
- In states that have enacted restrictions, particularly in Florida and Arkansas, the share of teachers who perceived that limitations influenced their instruction grew between spring 2022 and spring 2023.
- Regardless of whether their state had enacted restrictions, the share of teachers who perceived that limitations influenced their instruction grew the most among teachers in conservative-leaning counties.
- As of spring 2023, 3 percent of teachers said that limitations on race- or gender-related topics positively impact student learning. Teachers were about ten times more likely to say that such limitations negatively impact student learning.
- Teachers who opposed limitations voiced concerns that these limitations constrain students’ learning opportunities, diminish students’ sense of belonging and capacity for empathy, and could lead to long-term consequences for students’ futures and the future of the education system, country, and democracy.
- The few teachers who supported limitations expressed the belief that race or gender are topics more appropriate for discussion at home than at school. They noted that emphasizing race or gender in the classroom is developmentally inappropriate for young students, creates division and confusion among students, and shifts the focus away from academic learning.

around three in ten teachers were not sure whether they were subject to restrictions, even in states in which these policies had been passed (Woo et al., 2023). Nevertheless, evidence suggested that the reach of these policies was spreading beyond the borders of the states in which they were passed. Teachers reported experiencing limitations on their instruction not only from the state but also from their schools or district leaders, students’ families, and community members (Woo, Wolfe, et al., 2022; Woo et al., 2023; Woo, Diliberti, and Steiner, 2024). As a result, one-quarter of teachers nationally reported that limitations placed on the topics they can address were influencing their instruction—including about one-fifth of teachers in states *without* restrictions (Woo et al., 2023).

We are again taking stock of how these limitations influence teachers’ instruction. To do so, we use nationally representative survey data drawn from thousands of K–12 public school teachers across the United States during spring 2023, two years after states first began enacting restrictions on teachers’ classroom discussions of race- or gender-related topics.

Since we last surveyed teachers in spring 2022, states have enacted new restrictions, and the nature of these restrictions has begun to shift. Arkansas enacted a restriction for the first time, and other states layered new restrictions on top of existing ones. In addition, states began to move away from targeting topics related to race and “divisive concepts” and toward restrictions that explicitly constrain instruction on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and more (LGBTQ+) issues, mimicking the Florida law that is colloquially known as the “Don’t Say Gay” law (Sachs and Young, 2023). (For more information about state policies enacted since spring 2022, see the box on the next page).

Meanwhile, public debates about students’ access to instructional content have remained heated. In schools and libraries across the nation, book restrictions—which have occurred in both states with and without policies restricting teachers’ instruction—continued to accelerate during the 2022–2023 school year. These book restrictions often target books that feature people of color or people who identify as LGBTQ+ (American Library Association, 2023; Meehan et al., 2023). Additionally, teachers in states with and without restrictions on

Since Spring 2022, New State Restrictions Have Shifted Toward Constraining Instruction About Topics Related to Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

We last investigated the impact of state restrictions focused on race- or gender-related topics through the American Instructional Resources Survey (AIRS) using data gathered in spring 2022 (Woo et al., 2023). At that time, 17 states had enacted such restrictions. Since we last collected data through the AIRS in spring 2022, Arkansas became the 18th state to enact a restriction on how teachers can discuss race- or gender-related topics (PEN America, 2023). In January 2023, Arkansas’s governor signed an executive order to “prohibit indoctrination and critical race theory,” which barred teachers from providing instruction related to critical race theory or select divisive concepts (Sanders, 2023). In March 2023, Arkansas also passed the LEARNS Act. Similar to Arkansas’s executive order, the LEARNS Act prohibits schools from providing instruction related to critical race theory and divisive concepts, but additionally prohibits teachers from providing instruction on gender identity or sexual orientation to students enrolled below 5th grade (Arkansas State Legislature, 2023).

These newly enacted policies in Arkansas provide examples of how, since 2022, states have started to layer new restrictions on top of existing ones. For example, in March 2023, Utah layered new legislation prohibiting instruction related to various divisive concepts on top of an existing state board of education rule from 2021 (PEN America, 2023).

In addition, Arkansas’s new policies demonstrate how prohibitions on teaching about gender identity and sexual orientation have expanded (Sachs and Young, 2023), sometimes layering such prohibitions on top of existing restrictions on divisive concepts. In March 2022, Florida was the first state to enact restrictions on teachers’ instruction on topics related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Florida’s law prohibited such instruction in kindergarten through 3rd grade and also required that any instruction on these topics in 4th through 12th grade be age-appropriate (PEN America, 2023). Shortly after Arkansas passed its version of this policy, Kentucky followed suit by passing a similar law prohibiting instruction related to gender identity and sexual orientation at any grade level in late March 2023 (PEN America, 2023).

For our analysis in this report, we consider states’ policy context as of the start of the administration of the 2023 AIRS, which entered the field on April 13, 2023. However, we acknowledge that states continued to enact restrictions during and after the administration of the 2023 AIRS. For instance, in late April, Florida extended its prohibition on instruction related to gender identity and sexual orientation to 4th through 12th grade. In May 2023, Florida passed another law stipulating that instruction “must exclusively teach that sex is biological, stable, and determined at birth” (PEN America, 2023). Other states also began to model their policies after Florida’s prohibition against instruction related to gender identity or sexual orientation. Indiana and Iowa enacted similar policies in May 2023, as did North Carolina in August 2023 (PEN America, 2023).

Although our report focuses on state policies that explicitly restrict teachers’ instruction, we acknowledge that these restrictions on teachers’ instruction exist within a broader policy landscape. For instance, Florida, Arizona, Georgia, and Louisiana have enacted parents-rights laws that require schools to allow parents to review curricula, school budgets, and school books (FutureEd, 2023). Additionally, some states have passed laws that compel teachers to disclose students’ gender identities to their families without their consent and prevent transgender youth from using public facilities (such as restrooms), participating in school activities (such as sports), or using their desired pronouns (American Civil Liberties Union, 2023). Together, these policies might amplify the restrictions on teachers’ instruction by creating an environment that could be hostile to classroom conversations about LGBTQ+ people and issues. Meanwhile, other states have begun to move in the opposite direction. In summer 2023 and fall 2023, Illinois and California enacted policies to prohibit book restrictions (Government of Illinois, 2023; Office of the Governor of California, 2023). Altogether, these developments demonstrate that the policy environment around students’ access to and teachers’ instruction about race, gender, and other social and political issues is continually evolving and that states are not likely to abate the passage of new policies, either in support of or against restrictions.

their instruction have reported deciding to limit their classroom discussions concerning social and political issues because of potential parental challenges, job loss, and uncertainty about whether their school or district leaders would support them (Woo, Diliberti, and Steiner, 2024).

When conducting the spring 2023 survey, we hypothesized that we would see the impact of limitations on teachers' instruction accelerate and deepen over time because of this changing policy landscape. We thought that—as state or local leaders perhaps issued more guidance around the implementation of state restrictions, as states enacted new restrictions, and as teachers learned about state restrictions from their colleagues, school system leaders, and the media—teachers would report greater influence on their instruction. Furthermore, as limitations became a more established policy fixture in some states and continued to expand in others, we posited that teachers would perceive these policies as beginning to impact student learning, either positively or negatively.

Importantly, we predicted that teachers' perceptions of how these limitations were impacting their instruction and student learning would be shaped by the location of their school. In particular, we hypothesized that teachers' perceptions might vary by their state policy context. For instance, whether a teacher works in a state with a restriction likely has consequences for the salience of limitations on teachers' instruction and, therefore, on student learning. Furthermore, the specific state policy context likely matters for teachers' awareness and perceptions of the influence of limitations on their instruction and student learning; states' restrictions vary across different dimensions, such as the content they prohibit, how long they have been in place, whether a violation results in a penalty, and the number of restrictions enacted in a single state. (For more information on the state policy context in each state with restrictions, see Table 1.)

We also hypothesized that teachers' perceptions might vary according to their local political climate—that is, whether they worked in a community that was conservative, contested, or liberal. Prior research has shown that support for teachers' instruction about a wide range of social and political

issues varies by political party: Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support instruction that addresses these issues, while Republicans are more likely than Democrats to support restrictions on such instruction (Hatfield, 2023; Polikoff et al., 2022; Turner 2023). Thus, local political climate could act as a measure of the extent to which teachers experience local public support for classroom instruction about such topics as race or gender, as well as other social and political issues.

In this report, we investigate the following three research questions:

- How have teachers' awareness of state restrictions on teaching about race or gender and their perceptions about the influence of limitations on their instruction changed since spring 2022?
- How do teachers characterize the impacts of limitations on race- or gender-related topics on student learning?
- How do teachers' awareness of state restrictions and their perceptions about the influence of limitations on their instruction and on student learning vary by state policy context and local political climate?

To answer these research questions, we used nationally representative teacher survey data from the spring 2022 and spring 2023 administrations of the American Instructional Resources Survey (AIRS). Both surveys were administered to more than 8,000 K–12 English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science teachers (including general elementary teachers) across the United States, which allows us to present cross-sectional comparisons across time and across a select set of states. (For more information about the data sources used in this report, see the “Overview of Data Sources, Terms, and Methods Used in This Report” section.)

We present our results in two sections. The first section focuses on teachers' awareness of state restrictions and their perceptions of the influence of limitations on their instruction. We present data at the national level, by state policy context, and by local political climate. At each of these three levels, we also present cross-sectional results on how teachers' perceptions have shifted over time from 2022 to 2023.

TABLE 1

States That Have Enacted Restrictions on How Teachers Can Address Topics Related to Race or Gender Through April 2023

State	Year of First State Restriction on Race- or Gender-Related Topics	Includes a Restriction on Instruction about Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation ^a	Includes a Penalty for Violating the Restriction	Number of Restrictions Passed ^b
Alabama	2021	No	No	1
Arkansas	2023	Yes	No	2 ^c
Florida	2021	Yes	Yes	3 ^d
Georgia	2021	No	Yes	1
Idaho	2021	No	No	1
Iowa	2021	No	Yes	1
Kentucky	2022	Yes	No	2 ^e
Mississippi	2022	No	No	1
Montana	2021	No	No	1
New Hampshire	2021	No	Yes	1
North Dakota	2021	No	No	1
Oklahoma	2021	No	Yes	1
South Carolina	2021	No	No	2 ^f
South Dakota	2022	No	No	1
Tennessee	2021	No	Yes	1
Texas	2021	No	No	1
Utah	2021	No	No	2 ^g
Virginia	2022	No	No	1

NOTE: This table captures policies that were passed prior to the administration of the 2023 AIRS, which was administered to K–12 public school ELA, mathematics, and science teachers from April 13, 2023, to June 19, 2023. We provide additional context to these state policies in the following table notes. Information on the details of state policies was drawn from PEN America, 2023.

^a Indiana, Iowa, and North Carolina have also enacted restrictions on teachers' instruction about topics related to gender identity, "human sexuality," or "sexual activity" in select grades. Indiana and Iowa enacted these restrictions in May 2023, and North Carolina enacted a restriction in August 2023 (PEN America, 2023). For the purposes of our analyses, we do not define Indiana or North Carolina as states with a restriction because their laws were passed during or after the administration of the 2023 AIRS. We classify Iowa as a state with a restriction because Iowa had already passed a law in 2021 prohibiting instruction around divisive concepts.

^b We provide information on the number of policies passed in each state that restrict how teachers can discuss topics related to race or gender. These policies include legislation, state board of education rules, executive orders, and opinions from state attorneys general.

^c Arkansas passed both an executive order to "prohibit indoctrination and critical race theory in schools" (Sanders, 2023) and a law that prohibits instruction related to critical race theory or "sexual orientation or gender identity in grades K–4" (Arkansas State Legislature, 2023).

^d Among states with restrictions, Florida had the greatest number of restrictions. In 2021, Florida passed a state board of education rule prohibiting instruction related to critical race theory. In 2022, Florida passed the aforementioned "Don't Say Gay" law (Florida Legislature, 2022a) and another law prohibiting instruction around divisive concepts, known colloquially as the "Stop WOKE Act" (Florida Legislature, 2022b). During the administration of the 2023 AIRS, Florida enacted two additional policies limiting instruction related to sexual orientation or gender identity (PEN America, 2023).

^e In April 2022, Kentucky passed legislation that requires schools to provide instruction aligned to race-related concepts specified in the law (Kentucky General Assembly, 2022). In March 2023, Kentucky passed a law prohibiting schools from providing "any child, regardless of grade level . . . any instruction or presentation that has a goal or purpose of students studying or exploring gender identity, gender expression, or sexual orientation" (Kentucky General Assembly, 2023).

^f South Carolina passes its state restriction as part of an annual budget resolution and enacted a third restriction through this process in June 2023, after the administration of the 2023 AIRS.

^g In 2021, Utah's state board of education passed a rule prohibiting educator professional learning and instruction related to divisive concepts (Utah State Board of Education, 2021). In March 2023, Utah also passed legislation requiring districts to "provide an annual assurance to the state board that the [district]'s professional learning, administrative functions, displays, and instructional and curricular materials, are consistent with . . . principles of individual freedom," which correspond to various divisive concepts (Utah State Legislature, 2023).

The second section focuses on teachers' perceptions about the impacts of limitations on student learning. Again, we present results at the national level, by state policy context, and by local political climate. In addition, drawing on teachers' open-ended responses, we present qualitative findings on teachers' perceptions of *how* limitations impact student learning.

Overview of Data Sources, Terms, and Methods Used in This Report

We use nationally representative data from the 2023 AIRS to explore teachers' awareness of state restrictions, their perceptions of the influence of limitations on how teachers can address race- or gender-related topics on their instruction, and their perceptions of how such limitations impact student learning. The 2023 AIRS was administered to 8,530 K–12 public school teachers who teach ELA, mathematics, or science—including general elementary teachers who teach multiple subjects—between April 13, 2023, and June 19, 2023.

We define the term *limitations* expansively in acknowledgment of the complexity of teachers' experiences. Prior research suggests that teachers experience limitations on how they can address race- or gender-related topics from many sources, including state policies, state leaders, school and district leaders, as well as from families and community members (Woo et al., 2023). Additionally, teachers experience limitations on many aspects of their teaching experience, such as their instruction, use of curriculum materials and books, discussions, and interactions with students. Teachers also experience limitations on a wide array of social and political topics besides race or gender, including topics related to people who identify as LGBTQ+, social and emotional learning, and climate change (Woo et al., 2023). Thus, when referring to limitations, we intentionally refer to the multitude of types of limitations that teachers have reported experiencing. However, we are unable to determine which types of limitations teachers referenced when presenting their per-

ceptions of the impact of those limitations on their instruction or on student learning.

We differentiate limitations from state *restrictions*, or the formal policies that states have enacted to restrict teachers' instruction or discussions of race- or gender-related topics. We refer to state restrictions on race- or gender-related topics because state restrictions' prohibitions against “divisive concepts” often specify race or sex, in alignment with the Trump administration's executive order on “combatting race and sex stereotyping” (Trump, 2020). However, we acknowledge that state restrictions include other topics. Notably, restrictions in some states increasingly specify topics related to gender identity and sexual orientation (Sachs and Young, 2023). Some state restrictions also specify other social identities, such as national origin or religion; contain requirements about how teachers discuss “widely debated and currently controversial issue[s]”; and constrain how teachers can engage students in “political activism or advocacy” (PEN America, 2023; Schwartz, 2021). State restrictions influence teachers' experiences in the classroom in various ways. Some policies specifically target classroom instruction or teachers' instructional materials and curricula; others constrain classroom discussions or promotion of prohibited topics or ideas (PEN America, 2023). Thus, in recognition of both the broad nature of states' policies and teachers' broad interpretation of these policies, we often refer to the way restrictions limit teachers' instruction or how teachers can address race- or gender-related topics.

Survey Administration, Content, and Sample

A total of 19,260 teachers were invited to participate in the 2023 AIRS. The survey was completed by 8,530 K–12 public school ELA, math, and science teachers, including general elementary teachers (a completion rate of 49 percent).

The AIRS, which has been administered yearly since 2019, is a survey focused on teachers' use of instructional materials and the supports they receive to use their instructional materials effectively to meet student needs. Items pertaining to teachers'

perceptions of the influence of limitations on their instruction and student learning made up only a small portion of the overall AIRS. For more information on the administration and content of AIRS and survey completion rates, see Doan et al. (2023).

The AIRS sample includes teachers who teach ELA, mathematics, and science; all teachers in the sample teach at least one of these subjects, but some participating teachers ($n = 1,613$) also teach social studies (e.g., geography, history, civics, government), about three-quarters of whom are general elementary teachers. A small proportion of teachers ($n = 55$) identified social studies as their main subject assignment, almost 90 percent of whom are secondary teachers. We acknowledge that our sample of teachers whose main subject is social studies is only a very small proportion of our sample. Similar to our prior work (Woo et al., 2023), we highlight the responses of these few social studies teachers when possible because we believe that race- or gender-related topics are likely to arise during social studies instruction. We also acknowledge that we are unable to speak to the experiences of other types of educators who might be heavily affected by these policies, such as health education teachers or school librarians. We suspect the underrepresentation of social studies teachers and lack of representation of other types of educators in our survey sample could contribute to an underestimation of the influence of limitations that we discuss throughout this report.

To facilitate comparisons between spring 2022 and spring 2023, we also present data from the 2022 AIRS. The 2022 AIRS was administered in April and May 2022 to 8,063 K–12 public school ELA, mathematics, and science teachers. Samples for the 2022 and 2023 AIRS were drawn independently. However, because both survey samples were drawn from RAND’s American Teacher Panel, a nationally representative panel of around 25,000 teachers, there is partial but not complete overlap in survey samples and respondents. Around half of the teachers who responded to the 2023 AIRS also responded to the 2022 AIRS. We use these two surveys as cross-sectional samples because we do not have a set of longitudinal survey weights that correctly accounts for the partial overlap in the sample. Although we present comparisons between teachers’ responses in

spring 2022 and spring 2023, we acknowledge that some of the differences over time could be driven by differences in sample composition at each time point.

We supplement our teacher survey data with nationally representative survey data from 1,500 K–12 public school principals collected through the 2023 AIRS during the same time frame as the 2023 AIRS teacher survey. Although the focus of this report is on teacher perspectives, we include some data from principals to compare teacher and principal perspectives.

Analyses of Teachers’ Survey Responses by Subgroup

We report sample-wide and subgroup-specific means and proportions of variables of interest, weighted using a set of nationally representative weights that are described in further detail in the 2022 and 2023 AIRS Technical Documentation (Doan et al., 2022; Doan et al., 2023).

Specifically, we explore variation in teachers’ responses by their state and local context. We explored state-level variation in two ways. We first sorted teachers into two groups based on whether they taught in a state that had enacted a restriction on teachers’ discussion of race- or gender-related topics as of the start of our survey administration (Schwartz, 2021; PEN America, 2023). The 18 states that had enacted restrictions by this time are shown in Table 1. Throughout this report, we refer to these two groups as *teachers in states with restrictions* and *teachers in states without restrictions*.

We also explored how teachers’ responses to our survey items differed by the specific state in which they taught during the 2022–2023 school year because the specific policy context is different even among those states that have enacted restrictions. To do so, we leveraged the fact that sampling for AIRS was done intentionally to allow for production of state-level estimates in 17 states (Arkansas, California, Delaware, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Maryland, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington).¹ Six of those states (Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee, and

Texas) have enacted restrictions on teachers' discussions of race- or gender-related topics. This sample construction allows us to report state-level estimates for six states with restrictions and 11 states without restrictions, providing some indication of how much a state's specific policy context influences teachers' perceptions. Our state-level analyses exclude a small percentage (about 2 percent) of spring 2023 respondents who moved states at some point during the 2022–2023 school year. (For more information about these 17 states, see the appendix).

To explore patterns at the local level, we used a measure of the local political climate. To proxy the local political climate, we used data from MIT's Election Data+ Science Lab (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022). Specifically, we use a five-category measure defined by the share of votes received by President Donald Trump in the 2020 presidential election in the county in which the respondent's school is located. The categories are as follows:

- *very liberal*—counties in which Trump's vote share was less than 40 percent
- *liberal leaning*—counties in which Trump's vote share was between 40 and 45 percent
- *contested*—counties in which Trump's vote share was between 45 and 55 percent
- *conservative leaning*—counties in which Trump's vote share was between 55 and 60 percent
- *very conservative*—counties in which Trump's vote share was 60 percent or greater.

For ease of interpretation, we used the vote share of a single candidate. We chose to focus on President Trump because he was the incumbent candidate in the 2020 presidential election. These cut points are aligned with those used in a similar analysis by Pollock et al. (2022) and Rogers et al. (2022).

We also explored whether teachers' responses differed according to their demographic characteristics, their main subject assignment, their school context (e.g., grade band), or the characteristics of the students in their school, which we obtained from the National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data (2022a). When examining teachers' awareness of state restrictions and their perceptions of the influence of limitations on their instruction

by these demographic characteristics, we found that our results largely mirrored the results from our report on the 2022 AIRS (Woo et al., 2023). Because of the similarity in results across years and because we mostly focus on how teachers' perceptions of limitations vary by their state policy context and local political climate, we have omitted these results from this report and instead direct readers to our report on the 2022 AIRS (see Woo et al., 2023). However, we do present analyses of teachers' perceptions of the impact of limitations on student learning by teacher- and school-level characteristics because these findings have not been reported previously.

When comparing the responses of teachers of different demographic characteristics or in different school contexts, state contexts, or local political climates, we discuss only the differences that are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, unless otherwise noted. In select cases, we tested the robustness of significant differences across teacher subgroups to adjust for observable school-level characteristics (e.g., poverty level, racial and ethnic composition of the student population, locale) and educator-level characteristics (e.g., race, gender). We did not make statistical adjustments for multiple comparisons because the intent of this report is to provide exploratory, descriptive information.

Analyses of Trends over Time in Teachers' Survey Responses

When examining trends over time, we discuss differences between years that we believe are sufficiently large to be meaningful. We do not have longitudinal survey weights that properly account for the partial overlap in our 2022 and 2023 teacher survey respondents and are thus unable to conduct significance tests of differences between years. Instead, we examined the 95-percent confidence intervals for each estimate when comparing results from 2022 and 2023. For cases in which 95-percent confidence intervals overlapped, we describe changes over time as *non-substantial* or essentially the same. For cases in which 95-percent confidence intervals did not overlap, we describe these changes over time as *substantial*. Note that the results we display are cross-sectional and

are not intended to measure change over time for the same sample of teachers.

Qualitative Analyses of Teachers' Open-Ended Responses

In addition to our quantitative survey data, we leveraged a qualitative data set to more deeply understand teachers' perspectives on *how* limitations are impacting student learning. In the 2023 AIRS, in an open-ended question, we asked teachers, "Briefly describe how you think limitations on race- or gender-related topics impact your students' learning." Only teachers who responded to an earlier close-ended survey item that they believed limitations have a negative, neutral, or positive impact on student learning were presented with this open-ended survey item. This survey item was presented to 4,101 teachers, 4,055 of whom provided a response. We limited our analysis to the responses from 3,707 teachers that were clear enough for us to interpret and code; we did not include 348 responses that we considered uninterpretable. About 42 percent of these uninterpretable responses were some variation on "not applicable," which included responses from teachers in states with and without restrictions. The remaining uninterpretable responses were unintelligible, too vague for qualitative analysts to decipher (e.g., it was unclear whether teachers were referring to *conversations* about race or gender or *classroom limitations* on race- or gender-related topics in their responses), or did not answer the question that was asked.

To identify emergent codes and create an initial coding scheme, one lead coder read through an initial sample of about 225 responses. We then used established procedures to ensure reliability in the process of coding the qualitative data (Bernard and Ryan, 2010). The lead coder met with a team of four coders to review the coding scheme and clarify definitions for each code. The team coded the same sample of 25 responses to ensure that they were applying the codes reliably and to clarify any discrepancies. Using three different sets of 25 responses each, the qualitative team repeated this process of independently coding the same set of responses and meeting to clarify code definitions and ambiguities

three times to bolster consistency of coding across the team. The qualitative team then divided the remaining responses from the full qualitative data set among the five coders and coded all remaining responses. The coding team met throughout the process to ensure reliability in applying the codes, resolve ambiguities, and discuss revisions to codes or the addition of emergent codes. When all responses were coded, the qualitative lead developed inductive second-level codes as appropriate to analyze themes under each code.

Because of the broad nature of the open-ended question, teachers provided us with a set of responses that also varied widely in content and depth. Some teachers provided responses that consisted of just a few words; other teachers wrote a sentence or two or even a short paragraph. Consequently, we designed our qualitative coding scheme to capture high-level themes and finer-grained subthemes to meaningfully describe the variety of responses.

When we discuss the open-ended data, we provide frequency counts (e.g., about 20 teachers, about 300 teachers, one-fifth of teachers) to provide a sense of how frequently some themes arose. However, we note that one of the primary goals of our qualitative analysis was to understand the varied ways in which teachers believed limitations impacted their students' learning rather than to determine the prevalence of different kinds of responses.

As we mention in our "Research Limitations" section, our findings related to this question might not be representative of teachers nationally because they are based on only the teachers who provided an interpretable response to the open-ended survey item. In addition, we stress that, because of the broad nature of the open-ended question and teachers' responses, as well as the nonrepresentativeness of our qualitative sample, the perspectives expressed by the teachers in our sample might be more or less prevalent in the general population of teachers than our data currently suggest.

Additional information about each of the items we analyzed is included in the AIRS technical documentation (Doan et al., 2022; Doan et al., 2023).

Teachers' Reports of Awareness and Influence of Limitations from 2022 to 2023

Teachers' Awareness and Reports of the Influence of Limitations Increased Considerably in Some States

When we reported on teachers' awareness and perceptions of the influence of limitations on their instruction in spring 2022, we expected awareness of state restrictions and the perceived impact of limitations to increase over time as teachers learned more about these limitations and perhaps received guidance from state or school system leaders about how to implement them. In contrast to our prediction, we observed nonsubstantial changes in teachers' reported awareness and perceived influence of limitations between spring 2022 and spring 2023. In spring 2022, 27 percent of teachers did not know whether they were subject to limitations at the state or school system level. One year later, in spring 2023, we observed essentially no change in this percentage (28 percent).

Similarly, we found that teachers' reports of the influence of limitations on their curriculum choices or instructional practices persisted from spring 2022 to spring 2023. In spring 2022, about one-quarter (24 percent) of teachers nationally reported that limitations influenced their instruction to a slight, moderate, or large extent. One year later, this percentage (26 percent) largely remained constant.

Although we did not observe any substantial changes in teachers' awareness and perceptions of the influence of limitations on their instruction at the national level, we did observe variation across states. State-level variation is unsurprising because the types and number of policies that states have passed vary, as does the extent to which state leaders and media have publicized those policies. In this section, we explore trends over time in teachers' awareness and instructional decisionmaking across states.

In States That Enacted New Restrictions, Teachers' Awareness of State Restrictions Grew

Among teachers in states with restrictions, only 32 percent were aware of state restrictions; this percentage was essentially unchanged from 2022 (30 percent).

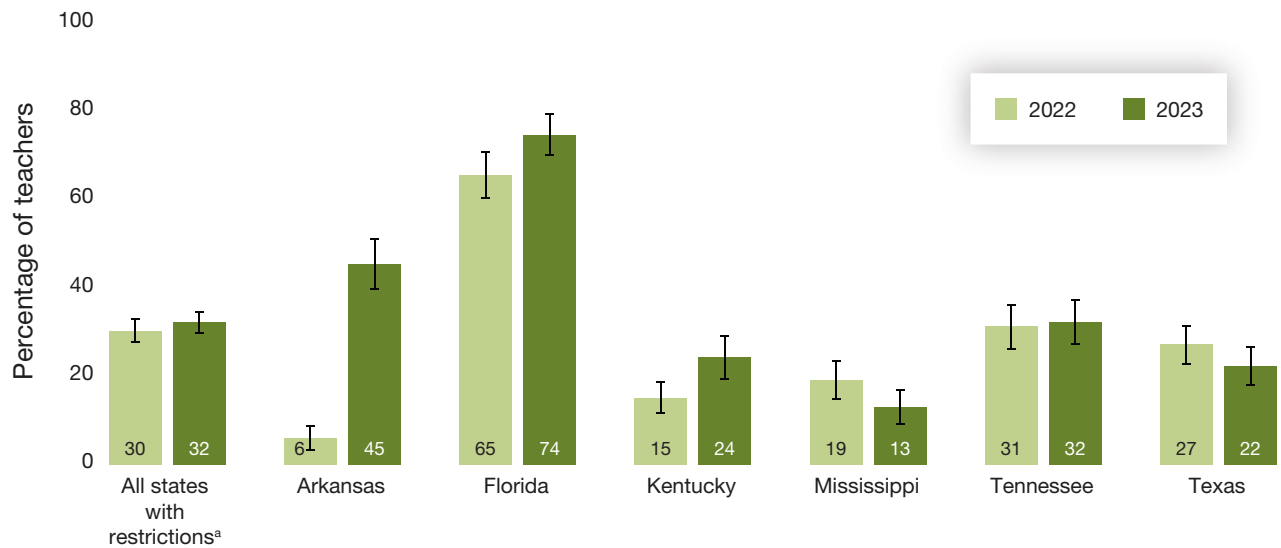
However, teachers' awareness of the restrictions in their state varied widely by state. Figure 1 shows the percentage of teachers who were aware of their state's restrictions in the six states for which we have oversamples, which allow us to produce state-representative estimates. In 2023, Florida teachers were by far the most likely to be aware that their state had enacted restrictions: 74 percent of Florida teachers were aware of their state's restrictions. Even in Arkansas, which had the second-largest share of teachers who were aware of their state's restrictions, 45 percent of teachers reported being aware. On the other end of the spectrum, 13 percent of Mississippi teachers knew of their state's restriction.

When we examined whether teachers' awareness of state restrictions grew between 2022 and 2023, we observed substantial growth in Kentucky and Arkansas. In spring 2022, 15 percent of Kentucky teachers were aware of their state's restrictions; by 2023, 24 percent of teachers were aware. We observed the same pattern of heightened awareness in Florida, although the difference was within the margin of error. Meanwhile, we did not observe substantial changes in other states, such as Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas.

Differences in awareness across states and the differences in changes over time within states could be related to state policy contexts because these six states represent a variety of different policy landscapes. For instance, Florida is unique among states with restrictions because it has enacted the greatest number of restrictions. Additionally, Florida has also been involved in highly visible public debates regarding students' access to instructional content about political and social issues. In January 2023, the state decided to ban Advanced Placement (AP) African American Studies from its high schools (Pendharkar, 2023). Meanwhile, in Kentucky, the legislature first enacted a restriction in 2022, and then enacted

FIGURE 1

Teachers Who Were Aware They Were Subject to State Restrictions, Among States with Restrictions, in 2022 Versus in 2023



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: “Some states and school systems have recently placed limitations on how K-12 public school teachers address topics related to race or gender. Has your state or school system recently placed limitations on how K-12 public school teachers address topics related to race or gender?” We display the percentage of teachers who responded, “Yes—my state has” (*n* = 2,821 in 2023; *n* = 2,419 in 2022). The figure shows data from the six states that have passed restrictions and for which AIRS includes teacher oversamples. We exclude a small percentage of respondents (about 2 percent) who moved states during the 2022–2023 school year. Black bars represent 95-percent confidence intervals.

^a This total consists of teachers in the 18 states that have passed restrictions: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kentucky, Mississippi, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.

an additional restriction in 2023. This layering of restrictions could explain why slightly more Florida and Kentucky teachers were aware of their states’ restrictions in 2023 than in 2022.

We also observed a substantial increase in teachers’ awareness of their state restrictions in Arkansas, likely because of recently enacted state policy. In spring 2022, Arkansas had not yet enacted a restriction on teachers’ instruction; it was therefore unsurprising that very few Arkansas teachers (6 percent) believed that their state had enacted a restriction. In early 2023, Arkansas enacted two restrictions by executive order and legislation. By spring 2023, 45 percent of Arkansas teachers were aware of these restrictions, second only to teachers in Florida. Arkansas teachers’ relatively high levels of awareness of their state’s restrictions might be because the governor’s signing of Arkansas’s first restriction—an executive order prohibiting critical race theory—was publicized as one of her first actions in office (Meckler, 2023; Schwartz, 2023).

In States with Restrictions, the Influence of Limitations on Teachers’ Curriculum Choices and Instructional Practices Grew Between 2022 and 2023

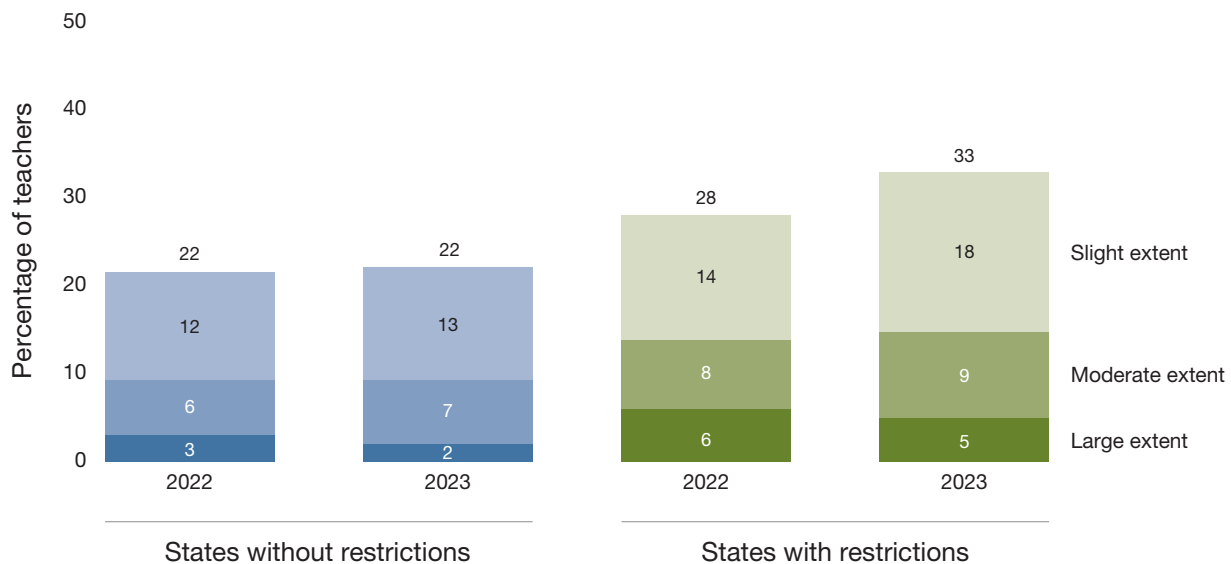
Next, we examined teachers’ perceptions of the influence of limitations on their curriculum choices and instructional practices by state policy context and local political climate. As noted previously, we asked teachers about the influence of limitations but did not specify the source of those limitations because prior research has shown that the sources of limitations go beyond state policies; limitations can also arise from local policies or pressure from families and community members (Woo et al., 2023; Woo, Diliberti, and Steiner, 2024). Through these additional avenues, the influence of state restrictions has spread to states that lack formal restrictions (Woo, Diliberti, and Steiner, 2024). Thus, it is possible that even teachers in states without restrictions might

report that limitations have impacted their instruction. When presenting teachers' reports on the extent to which limitations have influenced their instruction, we are unable to distinguish whether teachers are referring to limitations from their states, districts, schools, or communities.

Moreover, we asked teachers whether and the extent to which limitations have influenced their instruction, but we lack specific information on *how* limitations have influenced their instruction. Prior research suggests that, in the face of limitations, some teachers have complied with limitations and avoided instructional content related to race or gender, while other teachers have continued to address race or gender in the classroom despite potential repercussions (Woo et al, 2023; Woo, Diliberti, and Steiner, 2024). However, this research suggests that greater hesitation and wariness of race- or gender-related topics in the classroom tends to be more common than resistance against limitations.

In 2023, 26 percent of teachers nationally reported that limitations influenced their curriculum choices and instructional practices to a slight, moderate, or large extent. In both 2022 and 2023, teachers in states *with* restrictions were more likely to report that limitations influenced their instruction compared with teachers in states *without* restrictions (see Figure 2). For example, in spring 2023, 33 percent of teachers subject to state restrictions reported that limitations influenced their instruction compared with 22 percent of teachers who were not subject to state restrictions. Furthermore, between 2022 and 2023, the percentage of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction substantially increased in states with restrictions (from 28 percent to 33 percent), while remaining unchanged in states without restrictions (at 22 percent).

FIGURE 2
Teachers Who Indicated That Limitations Placed on What Topics Teachers Can Address Influenced Their Choice of Curriculum Materials or Instructional Practices, by Year and State Policy Context



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "To what extent have the limitations placed on what topics teachers can address influenced your choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices, regardless of where you teach?" ($n = 8,049$ in 2023; $n = 7,764$ in 2022). Respondents were given the following response options: "Not at all," "To a slight extent," "To a moderate extent," "To a large extent," or "N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems."

Teachers in Florida, Arkansas, and Tennessee Were More Likely Than Teachers in Other States to Report That Limitations Have Influenced Their Instruction

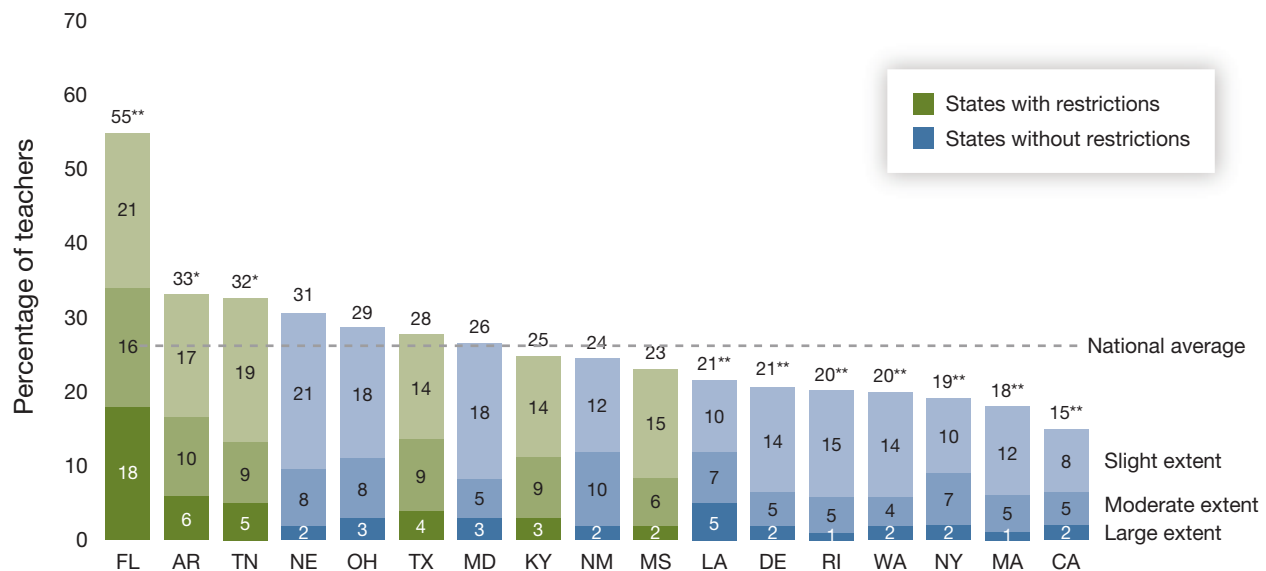
We examined the percentage of teachers who reported that limitations have influenced their instruction in the 17 states for which we have teacher oversamples. Six of these states have limitations. Although we are unable to present state-representative results for all states, these states represent a wide variety of political and policy contexts.

The share of teachers who said limitations influenced their choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices ranged from 15 percent in California to 55 percent in Florida. As shown in Figure 3, Florida is somewhat of an outlier. Fifty-five percent of Florida teachers reported that limitations influenced their instruction, including 18 percent who said limitations

influenced their instruction to a great extent. Arkansas had the second-highest share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction. Still, only 33 percent of teachers in Arkansas reported that limitations influenced their instruction—22 percentage points lower than that of Florida. Notably, governors in both Florida and Arkansas have been vocal advocates of these policies (Meckler, 2023; Office of the Governor of Florida, 2022).

As shown in Figure 3, states with restrictions (Florida, Arkansas, Tennessee, Texas, Kentucky, and Mississippi) tend to have higher shares of teachers who reported that limitations have influenced their instruction. However, there are also a few states without restrictions—such as Nebraska, Ohio, and Maryland—in which the share of teachers who reported that limitations have influenced their instruction is on par or even higher than that of some states with restrictions. Meanwhile, California, Massachusetts, New York, and Washington

FIGURE 3
Teachers Who Indicated That Limitations Placed on What Topics Teachers Can Address Have Influenced Their Choice of Curriculum Materials or Instructional Practices, by State and State Policy Context



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: “To what extent have the limitations placed on what topics teachers can address influenced your choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices, regardless of where you teach?” ($n = 6,620$). Respondents were given the following response options: “Not at all,” “To a slight extent,” “To a moderate extent,” “To a large extent,” or “N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems.” One asterisk indicates that the percentage of teachers in the state who reported that limitations influenced their choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices to any extent was statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) than the percentage of teachers not in that state who responded similarly (e.g., Florida teachers compared with non-Florida teachers). Two asterisks indicate that state differences remained statistically significantly different after controlling for teacher- and school-level demographics.

have the lowest share of teachers who reported that limitations have influenced their instruction. Instead of enacting limitations on how teachers can discuss contentious topics, these states have enacted policies to support the discussion of these topics or the inclusion of diverse identities in instruction or schools' learning environments (see the box below for examples of such state policies).

Additionally, it is also possible that a state's political leaning plays a role in the influence of limitations: Democrats are more likely than Republicans to support instruction around a wide range of social and political topics, such as racial inequality, transgender rights, and immigrant rights (Hatfield, 2023; Polikoff et al., 2022). For instance, California and Nebraska both lack formal state policies that limit instruction on race- or gender related topics, but 31 percent of Nebraska teachers reported that limitations influenced their instruction in comparison with 15 percent of California teachers. As shown in Table A.1 in the appendix, very few California teachers—about 2 percent—live in conservative counties, and more than one-half of Nebraska teachers live in conservative counties.

The Share of Teachers Who Said That Limitations Influenced Their Instruction Grew by 22 Percentage Points in Florida—the Largest Change Observed in Any State

In addition to examining variation across states, we also investigated whether there was an increase between 2022 and 2023 in the share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction within states.

As shown in Figure 4, in most states, the share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction in 2023 was unchanged from the previous school year. However, there were two notable exceptions. In Florida, the percentage of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction grew from 33 percent in 2022 to 55 percent in 2023. In Arkansas, the share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction grew from 22 percent in 2022 to 33 percent in 2023.

Some States Have Enacted Policies to Support the Inclusion of Diverse Identities in Instruction and Learning Environments

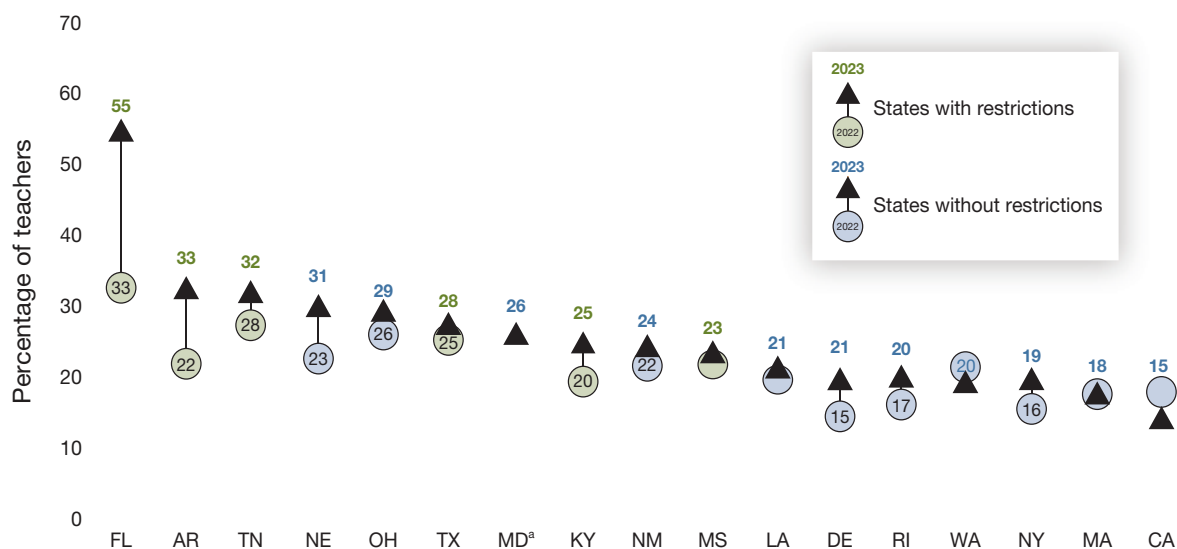
Some states have not restricted discussions on race- or gender-related topics and have instead enacted policies or issued guidance to support teachers' inclusion of diverse identities in their instruction and in school learning environments. The following are examples of these policies:

- In 2012, Massachusetts passed legislation that prohibits discrimination against students on the basis of their gender identity. The state educational agency has since provided guidance to school and district administrators on how to “create a culture in which transgender and gender nonconforming students feel safe, supported, and fully included” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021).
- In 2021, Washington enacted legislation that directed school staff to engage in professional learning on topics related to “cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion” (Washington State Legislature, 2021).
- For the 2021–2022 school year, California allocated part of its budget to train teachers on “[creating] a positive school climate” that “values diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds” (California Department of Education, 2023).
- In 2021, the New York State Board of Regents adopted a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Framework to support efforts to encourage culturally responsive teaching and learning (New York State United Teachers, undated). In 2023, the New York State Education Department also provided guidance for educators on how to create a “safe, supportive, and affirming school environment for transgender and gender expansive students” (New York State Education Department, 2023, p. 3).

These four examples illustrate the types of state policies or guidance that might support—rather than restrict—classroom conversations about race- or gender-related topics.

FIGURE 4

Teachers Who Indicated That Limitations Placed on What Topics Teachers Can Address Influenced Their Choice of Curriculum Materials or Instructional Practices to Any Extent, by State and State Policy Context, in 2022 Versus 2023



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: “To what extent have the limitations placed on what topics teachers can address influenced your choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices, regardless of where you teach?” ($n = 6,620$ in 2023; $n = 6,428$ in 2022). Respondents were given the following response options: “Not at all,” “To a slight extent,” “To a moderate extent,” “To a large extent,” or “N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems.” Numbers in blue or green represent the percentage of teachers in 2023. Some value labels for 2022 data points have been removed from the figure for readability.

^aMaryland was not an oversampled state in 2022.

Teachers in Conservative-Leaning Counties Appeared to Be Most Influenced by Limitations

Prior research suggests that beliefs about whether and how teachers should address contentious topics in their classrooms varies by political party (Polikoff et al., 2022; Hatfield, 2023). Thus, the local political climate of the community in which a teacher’s school is located—particularly in combination with the state policy context—might also influence the extent to which limitations influence that teacher’s instruction. In this section, we explore the extent to which the political leaning (i.e., conservative versus liberal) of the county in which a teacher’s school is located is associated with their reported perceptions of the influence of limitations.

In States With and Without Restrictions, Teachers in Conservative-Leaning Counties Were the Most Likely to Report That Limitations Influenced Their Instruction

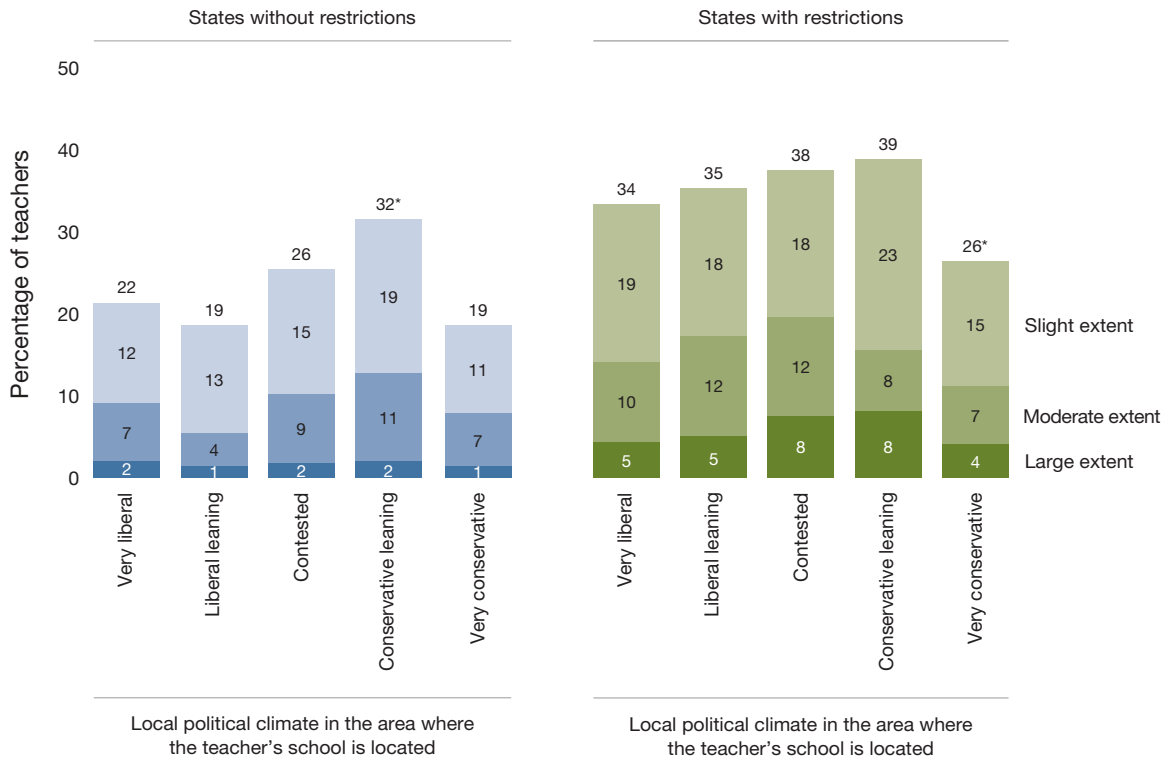
Regardless of whether teachers worked in more-conservative or more-liberal communities, teachers in states with restrictions were more likely than their counterparts working in similar local political climates in states without restrictions to report that limitations influenced their instruction. For example, 34 percent of teachers who were subject to state restrictions but teaching in very liberal counties reported that limitations influenced their instruction, compared with 22 percent of teachers who were not subject to state restrictions and teaching in very liberal counties. These results suggest that, even when teaching in environments in which more people might be receptive to instruction about race, gender, and other social and political issues, a teacher’s state

policy context still matters for the decisions they make about their instruction.

At the same time, we observed a general increase in the share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction as the local political climate shifted from very liberal to conservative leaning (as shown in Figure 5). Among teachers in states with restrictions, this increase (5 percentage points) is relatively small and not statistically significant. Among teachers in states without restrictions, the increase (10 percentage points) is more dramatic and statistically significant. That more teachers perceived the influence of limitations on their instruction as the local political climate becomes more conservative aligns with findings in Woo, Diliberti, and Steiner (2024). That analysis—which, similar to this report, used a

nationally representative teacher survey and disaggregated responses by the local political climate—also found that teachers’ likelihood of deciding to restrict discussions of social and political topics increased as the local political climate became more conservative. Additionally, in alignment with findings reported in Woo, Diliberti and Steiner (2024), this pattern suggests that the local political climate might be even more influential on teachers’ instructional choices in states with no restrictions. These findings are also supported by Rogers et al. (2022), which found that principals in liberal communities were far more likely than their counterparts in conservative and contested communities to report that they or their school districts promoted learning about race and racism, while principals in conservative communities became

FIGURE 5
Teachers Who Indicated That Limitations Placed on What Topics Teachers Can Address Influenced Their Choice of Curriculum Materials or Instructional Practices, by Local Political Climate and State Policy Context



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: “To what extent have the limitations placed on what topics teachers can address influenced your choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices, regardless of where you teach?” ($n = 7,977$). Respondents were given the following response options: “Not at all,” “To a slight extent,” “To a moderate extent,” “To a large extent,” or “N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems.” An asterisk indicates the percentage of teachers in a given political climate who indicated that limitations placed on what topics teachers can address influenced their choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices to any extent was statistically significantly different ($p < 0.05$) than the percentage of teachers in very liberal areas who responded similarly.

increasingly less likely to provide teachers with supports to discuss diverse groups.

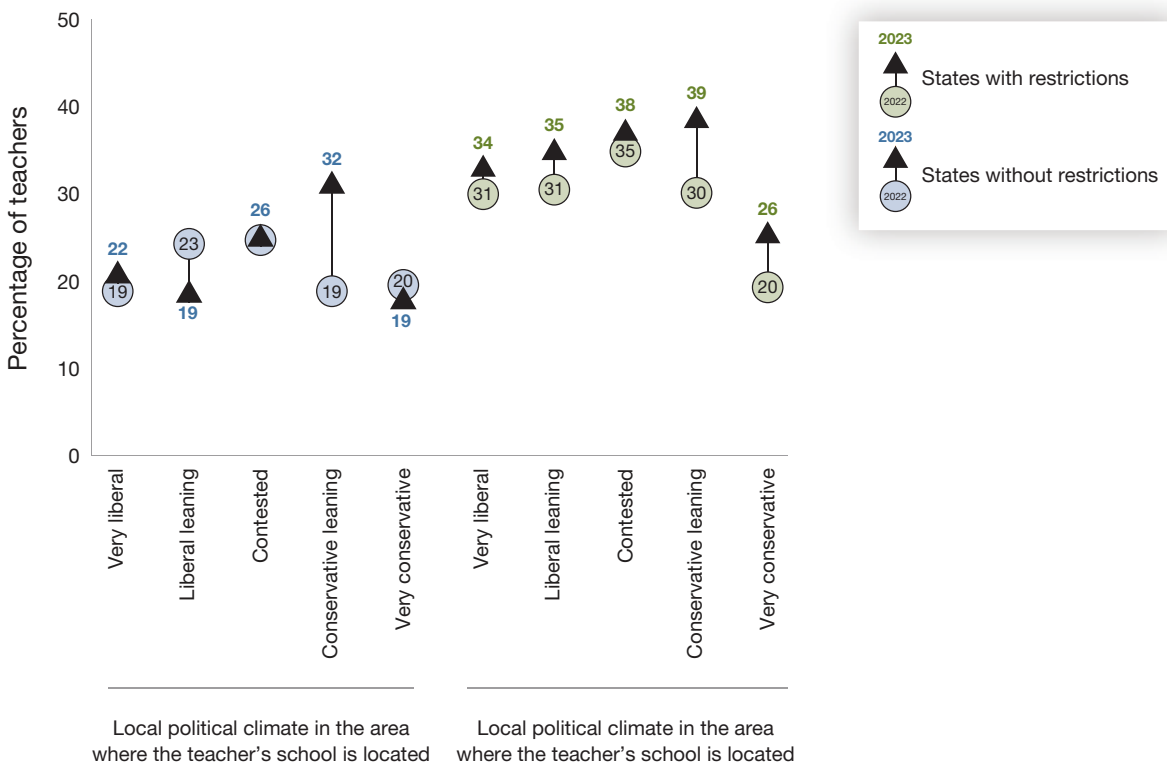
Although, in general, more teachers reported that limitations influenced their instruction as their local political climate became more conservative, in *very* conservative counties, the influence of limitations on instruction appeared to be the lowest. We might expect the share of teachers reporting that limitations have influenced their instruction to be highest in these areas because support for limitations is likely highest in these areas as well. We hypothesize that we observed the lowest share of teachers reporting that limitations have influenced their instruction in these very conservative counties because these teachers might have been less likely to

use curriculum materials or instructional practices that would require modification to comply with these limitations in the first place.

Between 2022 and 2023, the Share of Teachers Who Reported Influence on Their Instruction Grew Most in Conservative-Leaning Counties

When we examined teachers' responses in different local political climates in 2022 and 2023, we found that the share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction grew the most in conservative-leaning counties (see Figure 6). In

FIGURE 6
Teachers Who Indicated That Limitations Placed on What Topics Teachers Can Address Influenced Their Choice of Curriculum Materials or Instructional Practices, by Local Political Climate and State Policy Context, in 2022 Versus 2023



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "To what extent have the limitations placed on what topics teachers can address influenced your choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices, regardless of where you teach?" (*n* = 7,977 in 2023; *n* = 7,645 in 2022). Respondents were given the following response options: "Not at all," "To a slight extent," "To a moderate extent," "To a large extent," or "N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems." Numbers in blue or green represent the percentage of teachers in 2023. Some value labels for 2022 data points have been removed from the figure for readability.

A Greater Share of Principals Than Teachers Were Aware of State Restrictions and Perceived Limitations as Influencing Instruction

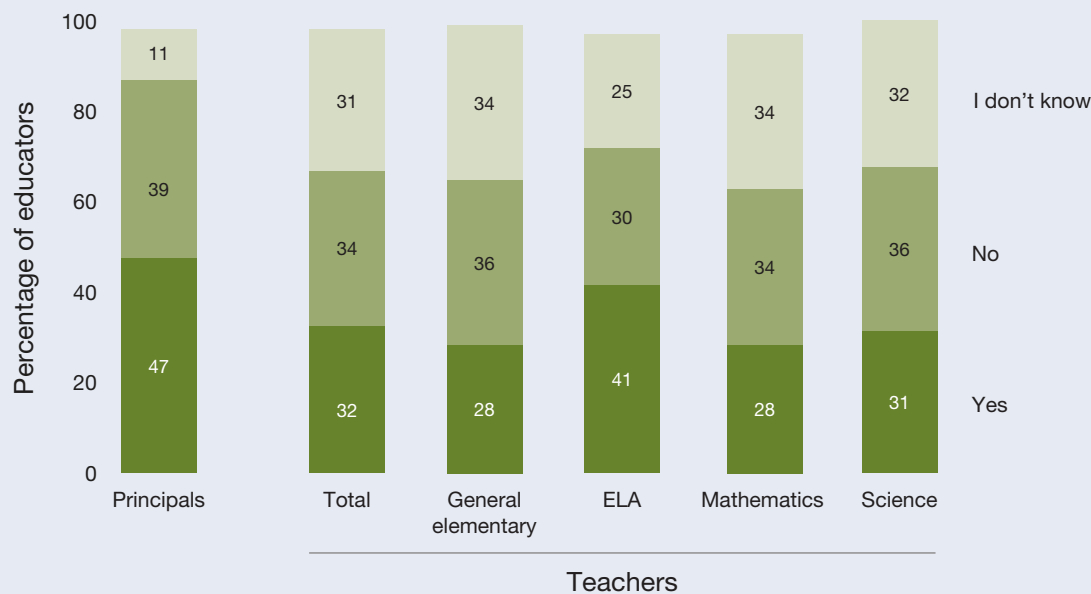
Although only 32 percent of teachers in states with restrictions were aware that they were subject to state restrictions, a higher share of principals (47 percent) knew about these restrictions (see Figure S.1). This difference in awareness is partially explained by the sizeable share of teachers (31 percent) who were uncertain whether they were subject to any limitations, whether at the state or school system level. In comparison, few principals (only 11 percent) were uncertain as to whether teachers were subject to any limitations.

The nature of the principal position could contribute to this difference in awareness. As the public faces of their schools, principals are often in the position of responding to families' concerns. Prior research has found that principals are far more likely than teachers to report that they have experienced hostility or aggression related to school policies regarding politicized issues, especially from students' families (Woo, Wolfe, et al.,

2022). As a result, principals might be particularly aware of restrictions because they are likely to bear the brunt of political conflict in their school communities.

Furthermore, as shown in Figure S.1, teachers' awareness of state restrictions varied by the subject they taught; consistent with our reporting on the results from the 2022 AIRS (Woo et al., 2023), ELA teachers reported higher levels of awareness of state restrictions than mathematics and science teachers, possibly because race- or gender-related topics might be more likely to arise in ELA classes. Notably, the higher rates of awareness among ELA teachers were about on par with those among principals. Thus, principals—a position that requires an understanding of the teaching environment of all teachers in a school—might have greater awareness of these restrictions than the typical teacher does because they are reflecting the views of those teachers who are most cognizant of or affected by restrictions.

FIGURE S.1
Principals and Teachers Who Were Aware of State Restrictions, in States With Restrictions



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "Some states and school systems have recently placed limitations on how K-12 public school teachers address topics related to race or gender. Has your state or school system recently placed limitations on how K-12 public school teachers address topics related to race or gender?" We display the percentage of principals and teachers who responded, "Yes – my state has," "No," or "I don't know." This figure shows data from principals and teachers working in states with restrictions. ($n = 2,821$ for teachers; $n = 527$ for principals). Bars do not sum to 100 percent because we excluded a small number of principals and teachers who responded about limitations in their local school system.

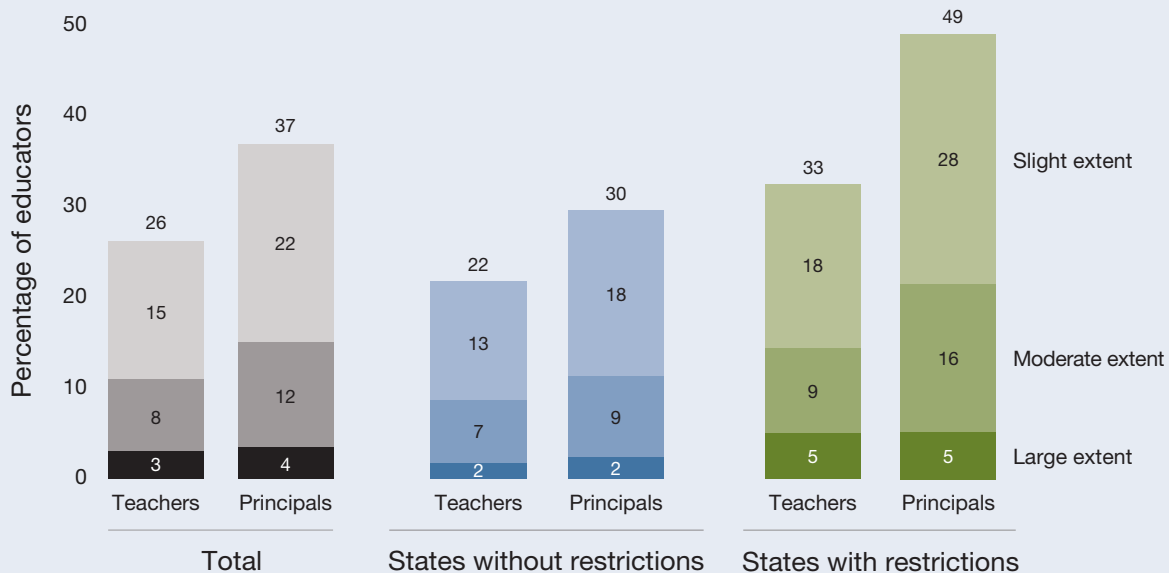
Principals were also more likely than the typical teacher to perceive that limitations influenced teachers' instruction. Nationally, 26 percent of teachers said that limitations influenced their instruction, while 37 percent of principals said that limitations influenced teachers' instruction (see Figure S.2). Unsurprisingly, principals in states with restrictions were more likely than their counterparts in states without restrictions to report that limitations have influenced teachers' instruction—the same pattern that we observed among teachers. However, principals in states with restrictions were even more likely than teachers in states with restrictions to report that limitations influenced teachers' instruction: 33 percent of teachers in these states reported that limitations influenced their instruction compared with about half of principals (49 percent).

Again, we hypothesize that principals' heightened perception that limitations influenced teachers' instruction is explained by an aggregation effect. In their

responses, principals were likely considering the influence of limitations on all of their teachers—including their ELA and social studies teachers, who were most likely to be impacted by limitations (Woo et al., 2023) and other types of educators in their school communities for whom we lack data, such as health education teachers or school librarians. In states with restrictions, 47 percent of ELA teachers said that limitations influenced their instruction—far more than the 32 percent of general elementary teachers, 28 percent of science teachers, and 21 percent of mathematics teachers who gave the same response. Thus, principals' responses—which are similar to ELA teachers' responses—might simply reflect the fact that limitations are likely influencing some classrooms to a greater degree than they are others.

FIGURE S.2

Teachers and Principals Who Indicated That Limitations Placed on What Topics Teachers Can Address Influenced Teachers' Choice of Curriculum Materials or Instructional Practices, by State Policy Context



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: "To what extent have the limitations placed on what topics teachers can address influenced [your choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices, regardless of where you teach / teachers' choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices in your school, regardless of where your school is located]?" ($n = 8,049$ for teachers; $n = 1,468$ for principals). Respondents were given the following response options: "Not at all," "To a slight extent," "To a moderate extent," "To a large extent," or "N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems."

conservative-leaning counties in states with restrictions, there was a 9-percentage-point increase between 2022 and 2023 in the share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction. In conservative-leaning counties in states without restrictions, there was a 13-percentage-point increase. Although these changes between 2022 and 2023 were the largest among teachers in different local political climates, we note that—because the 95-percent confidence intervals for these estimates in 2022 and 2023 overlap—we cannot be confident that this change over time is not driven by survey measurement error or differences in survey samples.

Importantly, we did not observe substantial changes between 2022 and 2023 among teachers in counties with other political climates. In fact, in 2022, teachers in conservative-leaning counties reported that limitations influenced their instruction at similar rates to their peers in the most-liberal areas. For example, in states without restrictions in 2022, 19 percent of teachers in very liberal counties and 19 percent of teachers in conservative-leaning counties reported that limitations influenced their instruction. In 2023, however, teachers in conservative-leaning counties were more likely than their counterparts in very liberal counties to report such influence on their instruction; the gap between teachers in very liberal counties and teachers in conservative-leaning counties grew from 0 percentage points to 10 percentage points. This pattern—although observed to a greater degree in states without restrictions than in states with restrictions—suggests the beginning of a divergence between teachers in liberal communities compared with teachers in conservative communities. As the influence of limitations on teachers’ instruction grows in conservative communities while remaining relatively unchanged in liberal communities, the nature of teachers’ instructional practices could become increasingly dependent on where they teach. Over time, teachers’ practices in conservative communities might look increasingly different from teachers’ practices in liberal communities.

Teachers’ Perceptions of Whether Limitations Have a Positive or Negative Impact on Student Learning

Very Few Teachers—Only 3 Percent—Indicated That Race- or Gender-Related Limitations Positively Impact Student Learning; Teachers Were About Ten Times More Likely to Consider Limitations to Be Negative for Student Learning

Nationally, more teachers (35 percent) believed that limitations negatively impact student learning than believed that limitations positively impact student learning (3 percent). A relatively small share of teachers (13 percent) fell in the middle, reporting that they characterized the impact on student learning as neither positive nor negative. Meanwhile, a relatively large proportion of teachers (50 percent) did not provide an opinion on whether limitations have a positive or negative impact on student learning because they reported that they were not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics that would impact their students’ learning (see Figure 7).

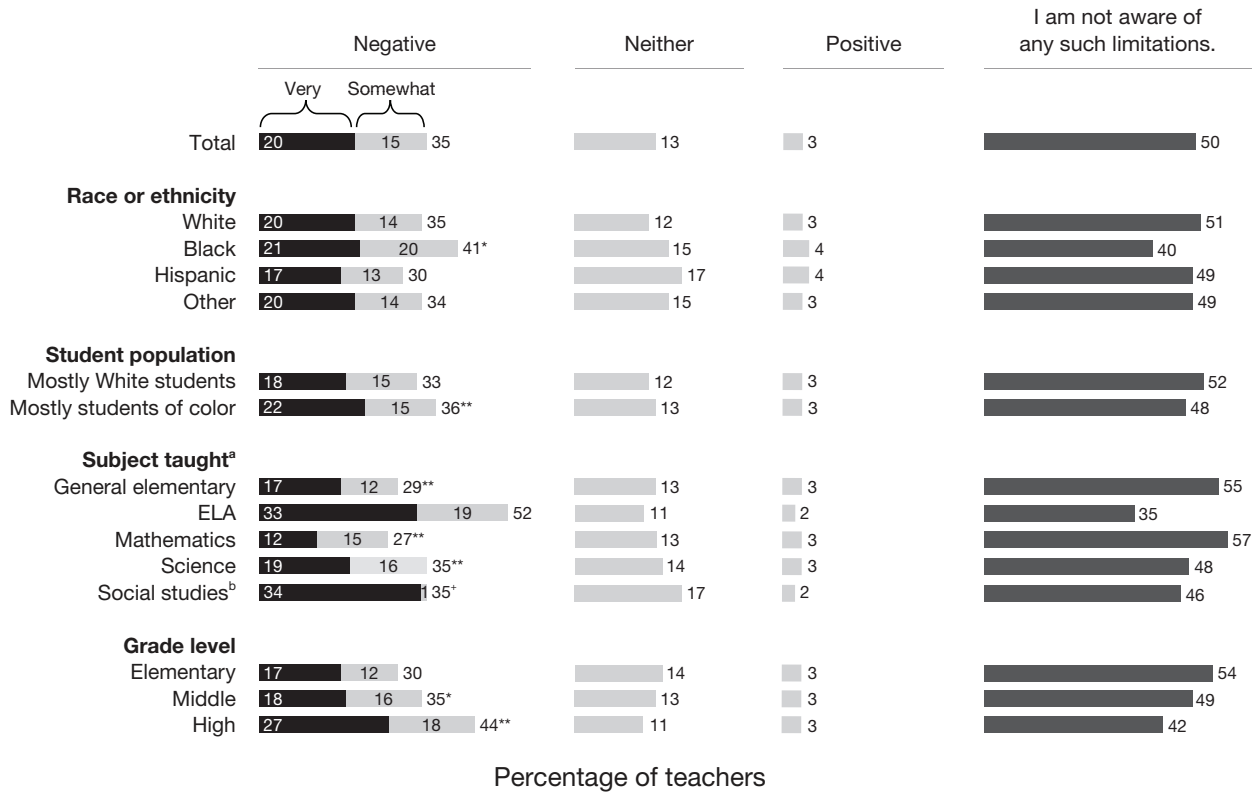
When we consider the responses of only those teachers who reported that they were aware of limitations that would impact their students’ learning, 69 percent of teachers responded that limitations have a negative impact on students, and 6 percent of teachers responded that limitations have a positive impact on students.

Black Teachers, ELA Teachers, and Secondary Teachers Were the Most Likely to Consider Limitations to Be Negative for Student Learning

Teachers who were most likely to be aware of and influenced by limitations were also most likely to consider these limitations negative. Our reporting in 2022 found that Black teachers, ELA teachers, and secondary teachers were more likely than their counterparts to be aware of the restrictions in their states and to report that limitations have influenced

FIGURE 7

Teachers Who Characterized the Impact of Limitations on Race- or Gender-Related Topics as Negative, Positive, or Neither, by Teacher Subgroup



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: “How would you characterize the impact such limitations on race- or gender-related topics have on your students’ learning?” (n = 8,227). Respondents were given the following response options: “Very negative impact,” “Somewhat negative impact,” “Neither negative or positive impact,” “Somewhat positive impact,” “Very positive impact”, or “N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems that would impact my students’ learning.” An asterisk indicates that the subgroup percentage of teachers who indicated that classroom limitations on race- or gender-related topics have a negative impact on student learning was statistically significantly different (p < 0.05) than the percentage of teachers in the reference group (White teachers, teachers in schools with mostly White students, ELA teachers, and elementary teachers). Two asterisks indicate that subgroup differences remained statistically significantly different after controlling for other teacher- and school-level demographics. A plus sign indicates that subgroup difference was only statistically significantly different after controlling for other teacher- and school-level demographics. Bars might not sum to 100 because of rounding.

^aWe sorted teachers into categories based on the main subject that they taught during the 2022–2023 school year. Although subject-specific teachers (i.e., those who teach ELA, mathematics, science, or social studies) tend to be secondary teachers, some of these teachers teach students in elementary grades.

^bThe AIRS sample targets K–12 ELA, mathematics, and science teachers. A small portion of our survey respondents indicated that the primary subject that they taught is social studies. Despite the small sample size, we include teachers who primarily teach social studies in this figure (n = 51) because we might expect discussions involving race- or gender-related topics to commonly arise in the context of social studies instruction. However, because of the small sample size, we encourage caution when reviewing results for this subgroup.

their instruction (Woo et al., 2023). When examining teachers’ opinions about the impact of limitations on student learning, we observe similar patterns in responses from the 2023 AIRS.

Black teachers were more likely than White and Hispanic teachers to believe that limitations have a negative impact on students (see Figure 7). This finding is perhaps unsurprising because prior research has found that Black teachers are also especially

likely to report that they engage in instruction that supports the development of students’ positive social identities and fosters students’ respect for diverse identities (Woo, Lawrence, et al., 2022); Black teachers might, more often than their counterparts, prioritize the kind of instruction that would be hampered by limitations.

Teachers who served in schools with mostly students of color (i.e., the majority of students did not

identify as White) were also slightly more likely than teachers who served in schools with mostly White students to report that they believed limitations were negative, although the 3-percentage-point difference was relatively small.

Teachers of subjects and grade levels in which race- or gender-related topics might be most likely to arise were also most likely to consider limitations negative for student learning. For instance, ELA teachers were more likely than teachers of other core subjects—such as general elementary, science, and mathematics—to believe that limitations have negative impacts on student learning. Science teachers were also more likely than mathematics and general elementary teachers to report that they perceived limitations as having a negative impact. The percentage of social studies teachers who believed limitations were negative for student learning appeared to be on par with the percentage of science teachers who responded similarly. However, there were no statistically significant differences between social studies teachers and teachers of other core subjects, possibly because of the small number of social studies teachers in our sample. Similarly, high school teachers were more likely than middle school and elementary teachers to consider limitations negative for student learning, and middle school teachers were more likely than elementary teachers to consider limitations negative. These results align with other research that suggests most Americans support teaching about a wide variety of social and political topics—including slavery, racial inequality, and LGBTQ+ rights—particularly at the high school level (Polikoff et al., 2022).

In States with Restrictions and in Conservative Counties, More Teachers Expressed That Limitations Were Negative for Student Learning Than Positive

Teachers in states with and without restrictions were equally likely to report that they believed limitations have a negative impact on student learning (see Figure 8). Among teachers in states with restrictions, only a very small percentage of teachers (3 percent)

felt that limitations have a positive impact on student learning. This finding is noteworthy because it suggests that, even in states with restrictions, those restrictions do not have broad support from teachers. Instead, one-third of teachers are put in a position to carry out policies that they believe are negative for student learning.

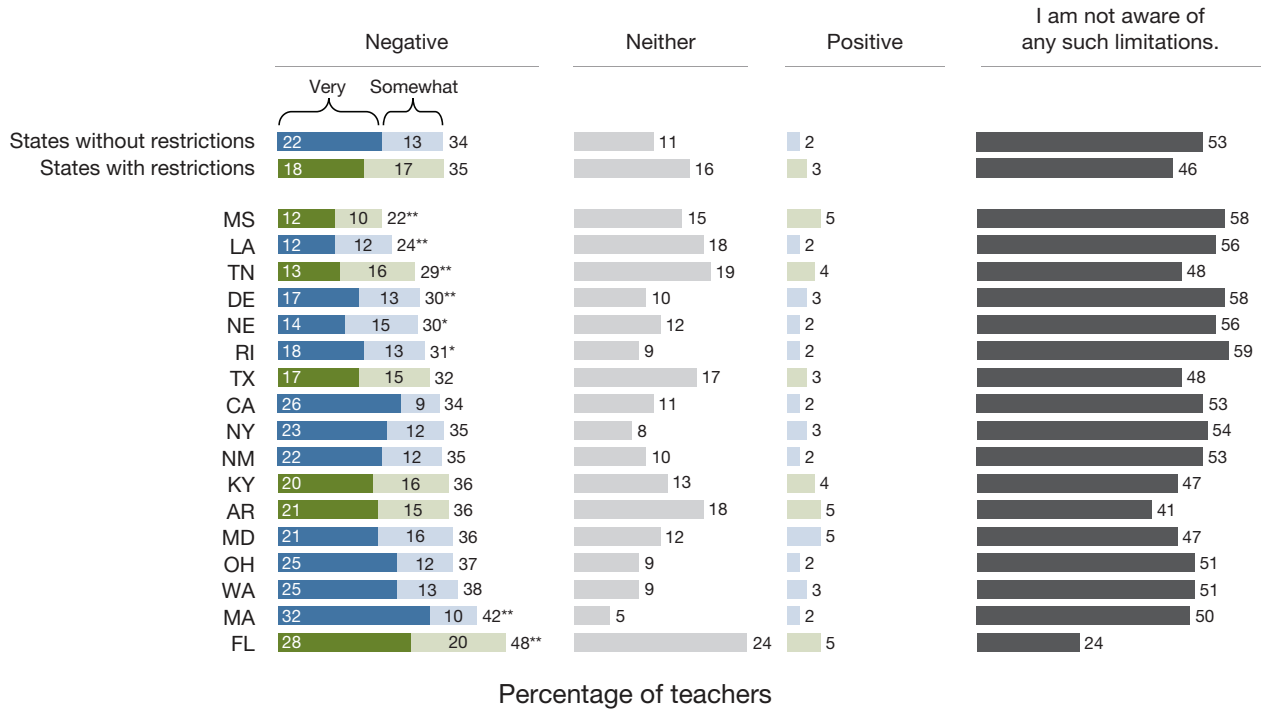
When we dive further into the responses of teachers in individual states, we again find that more teachers believe that limitations are negative for student learning than believe limitations are positive for student learning. Notably, among all the states for which we have teacher oversamples, Florida had the highest share of teachers who reported that limitations have a negative impact on their students' learning. Nearly half of Florida teachers (48 percent) expressed the belief that limitations were negative, and only 5 percent of Florida teachers expressed the belief that limitations were positive.

Finally, we explored teachers' perceptions of whether limitations had a positive or negative impact on student learning by local political climate (see Figure 9). In states with and without restrictions, teachers in very liberal counties were more likely than teachers in very conservative counties to consider limitations to be negative. This finding is unsurprising: Democrats are generally more likely to support classroom instruction around a variety of social and political issues (Hatfield, 2023; Polikoff et al., 2022). Thus, we might observe these patterns in our data because teachers in liberal areas are likely to identify as liberal themselves, or they might work in school communities that are more likely to support instruction about political and social issues. Importantly, teachers in liberal, liberal-leaning, and contested counties in states with restrictions were among the teachers *most* likely to consider limitations negative: 39 to 44 percent of teachers in contested, liberal-leaning, and very liberal counties in states with restrictions considered such limitations negative for student learning.

Although there is some variation across communities with different local political climates in the percentage of teachers who considered limitations to be negative, more teachers across all local political climates considered limitations to be negative than considered them to be positive. Even in very conser-

FIGURE 8

Teachers Who Indicated That Classroom Limitations on Race- or Gender-Related Topics Have a Negative or Positive Impact on Their Students’ Learning, by State and State Policy Context



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: “How would you characterize the impact such limitations on race- or gender-related topics have on your students’ learning?” (n = 8,046). Respondents were given the following response options: “Very negative impact,” “Somewhat negative impact,” “Neither negative or positive impact,” “Somewhat positive impact,” “Very positive impact”, or “N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems that would impact my students’ learning.” An asterisk indicates that the percentage of teachers in the state who indicated that classroom limitations on race- or gender-related topics have a negative impact on student learning was statistically significantly different (p < 0.05) than the percentage of teachers not in that state who said similarly. Two asterisks indicate that state differences remained statistically significantly different after controlling for teacher- and school-level demographics. Bars might not sum to 100 because of rounding.

vative and conservative-leaning communities, very few teachers (1 to 4 percent) considered limitations to be positive.

In Open-Ended Responses, Teachers Explained Why They Considered Limitations to Be Negative or Positive for Student Learning

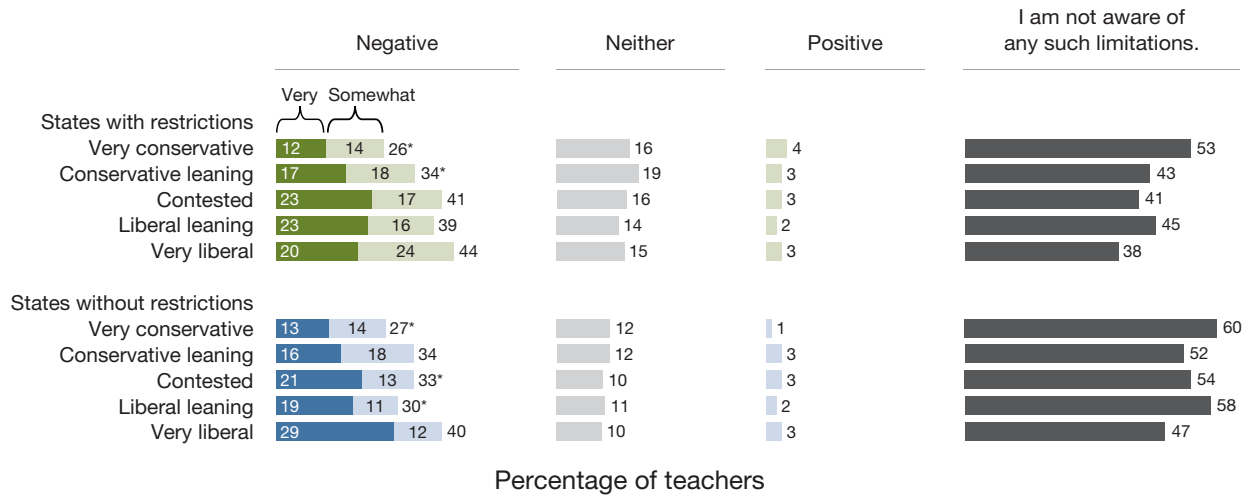
The quantitative survey results provide us with a broad sense of how many teachers perceived limitations as negative or positive for student learning. Through their open-ended responses, teachers shed light on *how* they felt limitations impacted their

students’ learning and *why* they felt limitations were either negative or positive. In response to the open-ended survey item—“Briefly describe how you think limitations on race- or gender-related topics impact your students’ learning”—3,707 teachers provided an interpretable response: 2,605 of those teachers reported in the earlier close-ended survey item that limitations have a very or somewhat negative impact on their students’ learning, 884 teachers reported that limitations have neither a positive or a negative impact, and 218 teachers reported that limitations have a very or somewhat positive impact.

We first discuss teachers’ perceptions of how and why limitations negatively impact student learning, followed by their perceptions of how and why limitations positively impact student learning. Throughout

FIGURE 9

Teachers Who Indicated That Classroom Limitations on Race- or Gender-Related Topics Have a Negative or Positive Impact on Their Students’ Learning, by Local Political Climate and State Policy Context



NOTE: This figure depicts response data from the following survey question: “How would you characterize the impact such limitations on race- or gender-related topics have on your students’ learning?” (n = 7,974). Respondents were given the following response options: “Very negative impact,” “Somewhat negative impact,” “Neither negative or positive impact,” “Somewhat positive impact,” “Very positive impact,” or “N/A: I am not aware of limitations placed on race- or gender-related topics by states or school systems that would impact my students’ learning.” An asterisk indicates that the percentage of teachers in a given local political climate who indicated that classroom limitations on race- or gender-related topics have a negative impact on student learning was statistically significantly different (p < 0.05) than the percentage of teachers in very liberal areas who responded similarly. Bars might not sum to 100 because of rounding.

this section, we have integrated teachers’ own words. In the following subsections, words or phrases in quotation marks originate directly from teachers’ responses to the open-ended survey item.

Teachers Who Opposed Limitations Worried That Limitations Constrain Students’ Learning Opportunities by Diminishing Their Access to Knowledge and Perspectives

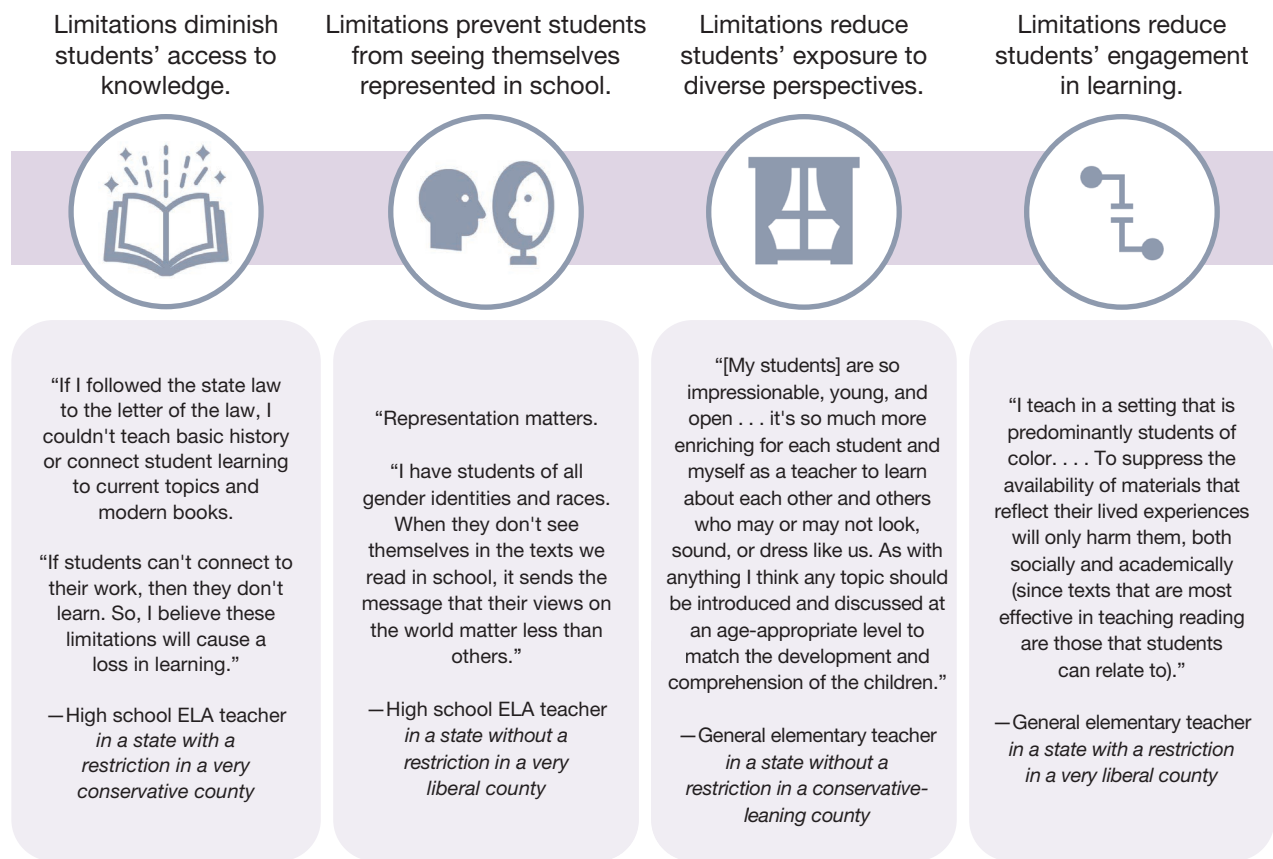
According to teachers who expressed that limitations were negative for student learning, limitations curtail students’ learning opportunities through various avenues (see Figure 10). One of teachers’ most common concerns—cited by about 600 teachers out of 3,707 teachers—was that limitations reduced students’ access to knowledge and diminished the quality of their learning opportunities. These teachers felt that limitations restrict students’ access to knowledge by constraining the facts, information, and perspectives that teachers are able to present, as well as the educa-

tional resources and texts that they can use in class. By making it more difficult for students to understand all perspectives on an issue or by encouraging teachers to shy away from uncomfortable, “unflattering” topics, limitations make it more difficult for students to develop an understanding of history that is “real,” “true,” or “complete.” One teacher explained, “When certain parts of our history are left out of the academic setting, it leaves a gap in what students are taught.” Teachers expressed concerns that by limiting the information and perspectives that students can be taught, students would develop a “skewed,” “inaccurate,” or “whitewashed” version of real-world topics or historical events. These teachers also discussed the ways in which limitations diminish the quality of students’ learning experiences by rendering their learning less “authentic” or by reducing students’ access to “high quality” or “rich” texts, such as books that students might find engaging.

Some of teachers’ other most common concerns were that limitations impact students’ access to “mirrors” and “windows”—that is, students’ opportunities

FIGURE 10

Teachers' Perceptions of How Limitations Diminish Students' Access to Knowledge and Diverse Perspectives, as Well as Students' Engagement in Learning



to see themselves and their own experiences represented and reflected in their learning and to learn about the experiences and perspectives of people different from themselves. Nearly 500 teachers noted the importance of ensuring that students' identities are represented in the classroom or how limitations hamper students' opportunities to see themselves represented. These teachers felt that providing students with the opportunity to see characters or experiences that they relate to can help them feel more connected to literature and their learning. Moreover, teachers felt that representation of students' identities in the classroom would communicate to students that they are respected and validated. These teachers also expressed that representation was especially important for students from diverse backgrounds, such as students of color, students with diverse family structures, students with diverse genders, and students who identify as LGBTQ+. These teachers felt

that limitations impede students' opportunities to explore their identities or learn about their cultures or histories.

About 500 teachers also discussed how limitations diminish students' opportunities to learn about an array of perspectives that might differ from their own. These teachers stressed the importance of exposing students to different views, which can help students develop their understanding and awareness of and appreciation for such views and diverse groups of people. These teachers also expressed that limitations would render students' perspectives more narrow or "one-sided." As one teacher explained, "Limiting exposure to different ideas and topics makes the student's world smaller." Roughly one-fifth of these teachers (about 100 teachers) also drew connections between students' exposure to diverse perspectives and the capacity to develop compassion and empathy for others.

Teachers expressed concerns about how limitations would affect students' motivation to learn, in addition to how they would reduce students' opportunities to gain knowledge and exposure to diverse perspectives. About 180 teachers—roughly 80 percent of whom were secondary teachers—expressed this sentiment. Teachers contended that students would be more engaged and interested in learning if they connected to classroom texts and curriculum materials. Indeed, about half of these teachers spoke about how representation of students' identities was connected to students' engagement in learning. These teachers felt that students might be more reluctant or uninterested in learning if they did not see their own experiences reflected. They also said that limitations constrain students' choices of literature to books that are less interesting to students. For instance, one teacher lamented that they were subject to a mandate that removed the use of certain novels and short stories, thus “[turning] the [literature] curriculum into texts that are flat, banal, and completely unengaging for students.”

Teachers Felt That Limitations Reduced Students' Access to Safe Spaces for Open Discourse, Diminishing Opportunities to Learn Important Skills

Teachers expressed concerns that, by constraining students' access to safe spaces for open discourse and the full exchange of ideas, limitations hamper students' development of crucial skills, such as critical thinking and appropriate engagement in discourse about complex topics (see Figure 11).

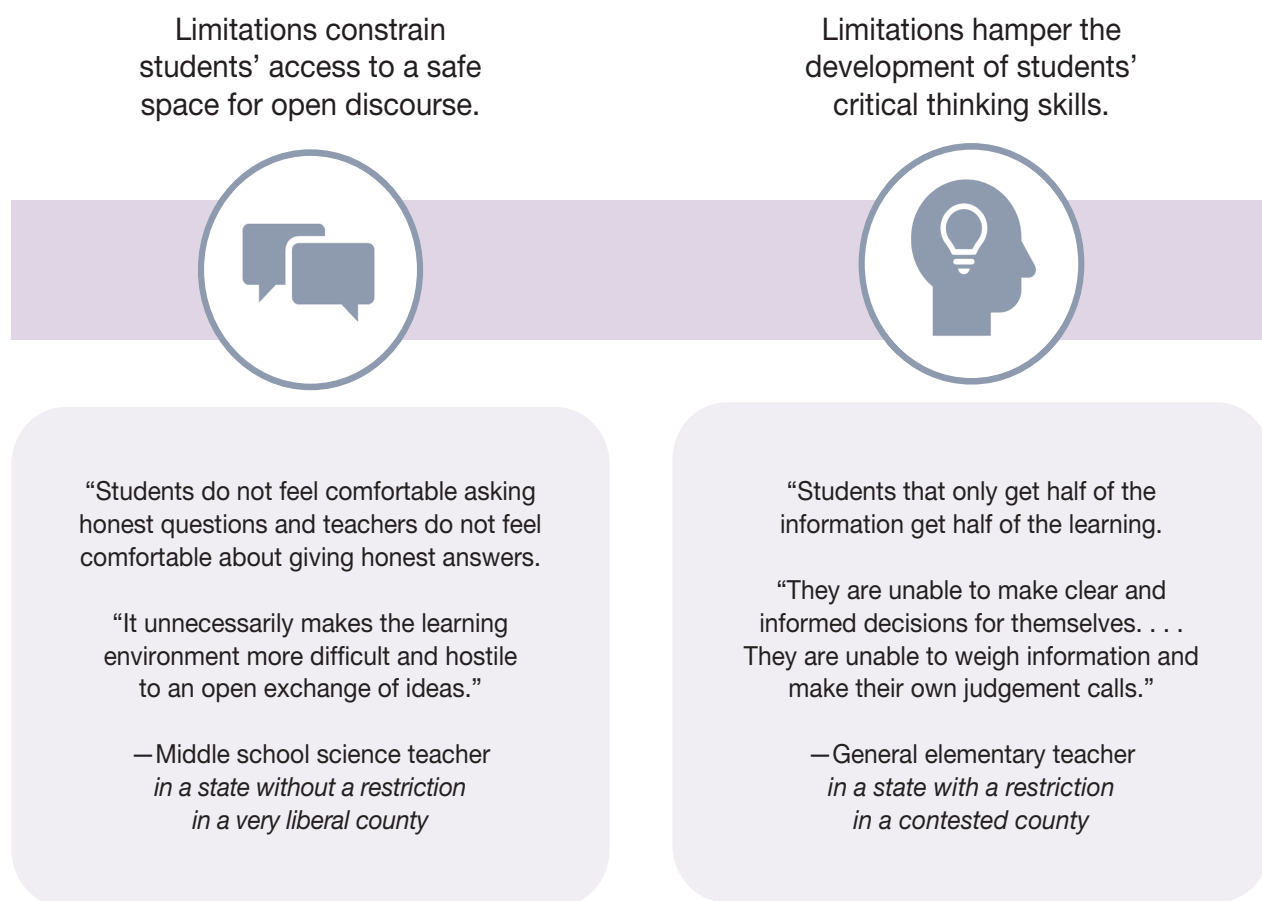
Out of the 3,707 teachers who provided an interpretable response to our open-ended survey item, about 250 teachers—nearly three-quarters of whom were secondary teachers—described how limitations constrained students' access to safe spaces in which they could discuss contentious topics. These teachers worried that students were no longer able to

engage in open, honest, and authentic conversations with their peers and trusted adults about topics that they might encounter in their daily lives. Teachers stressed the importance of providing students with safe spaces to ask questions, reflect on their opinions, explore new ideas, freely express their thoughts, and learn how to engage in discussions and debates about difficult topics in “measured, civil discourse.” Not only did teachers worry about students' ability to freely express their thoughts and ideas, but they felt constrained in how honestly they could answer students' questions. Teachers noted that they might feel compelled to “shut it down” when these topics arise in the classroom. These teachers felt that classrooms provided a suitable space for such discourse because schools and classrooms represent “controlled and safe environment[s]” that are “protected and “monitored.” Providing students with safe spaces for discussion might be especially important if students lack these opportunities at home. In a few cases, teachers perceived themselves as being able to act as a “neutral” facilitator of discourse, particularly if families hold strong beliefs or students might feel too intimidated to approach their parents for such discussions. A few teachers worried that students who are unable to discuss these topics in school might instead turn to less reliable sources of information, such as social media or the internet.

Roughly 200 teachers—nearly three-quarters of whom were secondary teachers—also described how limitations hampered students' ability to further their critical thinking skills. These teachers felt that limiting students' full access to information or providing students with an incomplete understanding of contentious topics prevents students from becoming independent thinkers who are able to arrive at their own opinions and beliefs or critically evaluate ideas and information sources. According to these teachers, providing students with access to incomplete information could lead students to become less open-minded and develop skewed or biased perspectives.

FIGURE 11

Teachers' Perceptions of How Limitations Hamper Development of Students' Ability to Engage in Discourse About Complex Issues and Students' Critical Thinking Skills



Teachers Worried That Limitations Cause Students of Color and LGBTQ+ Students to Feel Unwelcome, Reduce Students' Capacity to Develop Empathy for Others, and Erode Their Relationships with Students

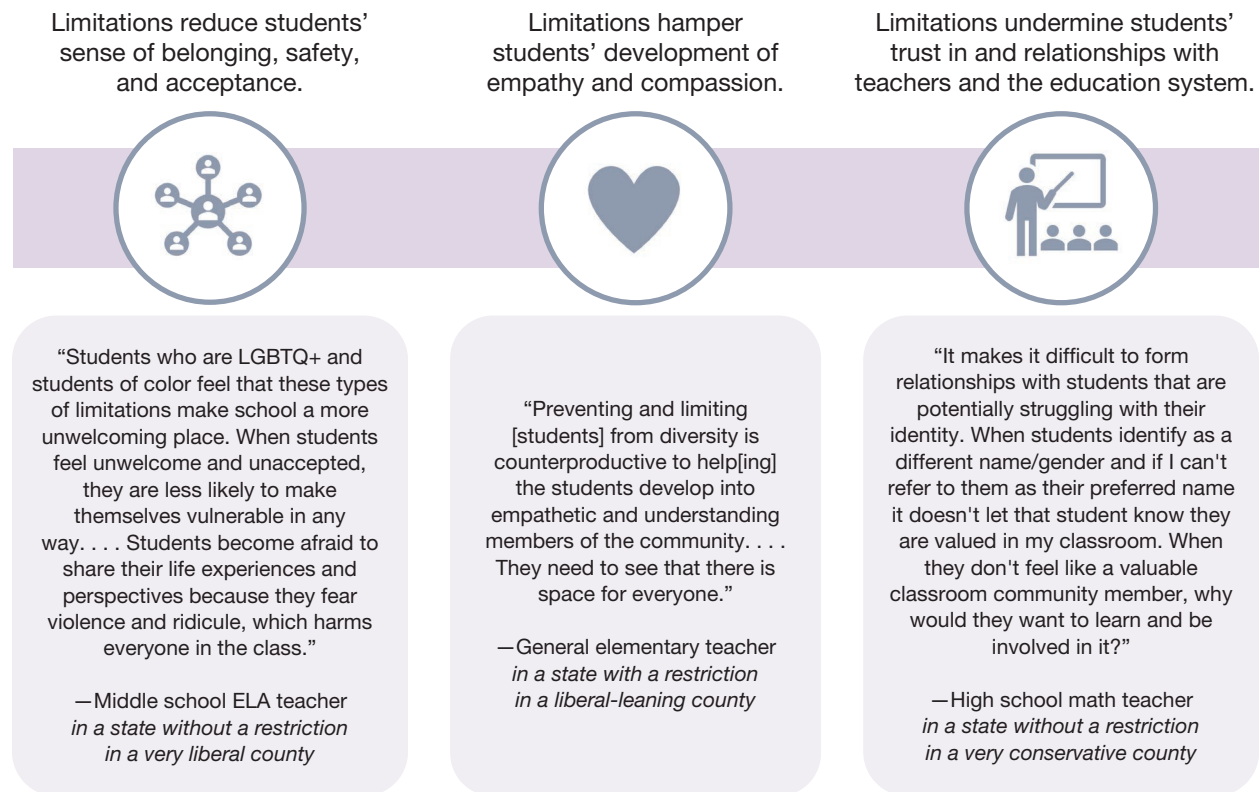
Teachers described the ways in which they felt limitations might impact students' well-being, social and emotional development, and perceptions of school climate (see Figure 12).

Roughly 400 out of 3,707 teachers expressed concerns that limitations on classroom instruction around race or gender signal to students that these topics and differences are “negative or unimportant,” therefore alienating students, harming their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, and making them feel “inferior” and that they “aren't appreciated or

accepted for who they are.” These teachers felt that these challenges are especially acute for students from historically minoritized backgrounds—such as students of color and students who identify as LGBTQ+—because limitations constrain how much teachers can talk about these students' cultures, sexual orientations, or gender identities at school. One teacher said, “By limiting race- and gender-related topics, politicians are basically telling our BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, and people of color] and trans/queer gender communities that they don't matter . . . that they don't belong.” A few teachers also argued that, by making students feel unwelcomed and unaccepted, these student groups would be at higher risk for mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and self-harm. These teachers felt that students should have access to school envi-

FIGURE 12

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Limitations on Students' Well-Being, Social and Emotional Development, and Perceptions of School Climate



ronments in which they feel comfortable to be themselves and that affirm and celebrate their identities.

Teachers not only described how limitations impact how students might feel about themselves but also how students relate to others and connect to their learning environment. About 300 teachers contended that, by reducing students' exposure to diverse groups of people, perspectives, and ideas, limitations would constrain students' capacity for empathy, tolerance, and understanding of people different from themselves. Teachers especially worried that students from dominant groups might not have the opportunity to be exposed to the struggles and perspectives of people from historically minoritized groups, therefore hindering their ability to demonstrate respect and compassion for the experiences of members of these groups.

About 100 teachers, roughly 80 percent of whom were secondary teachers, also described how limitations erode the quality of their relationships with students and between students, as well as stu-

dent trust in the education system. These teachers expressed that being able to discuss such issues as race or gender, which are core to many students' identities, allowed them to show empathy toward students and ensure that students felt understood, safe, and heard. This feeling of safety and understanding then helped teachers lay the foundation for connection and rapport with their students. As one teacher said, “Respecting students' genders and race is a big deal in relationship building.” In the absence of these relationships and the freedom to discuss race- or gender-related topics, teachers felt that they were less able to provide students with advice, help, or support with their “real-life concerns” or any “questions or concerns” that students might have about “different aspects of race or gender.” Teachers also felt that limitations constrained students' capacity to build community with fellow students because limitations made it more difficult for students to accept or relate to those who are different from them. Finally, a few of these teachers also expressed concerns that limita-

tions undermined students’ trust in the education system as a whole. As one teacher said, “I believe not being able to address issues that are core to a student’s sense of self devalues that student and their trust in the system that is supposed to be elevating them.”

Finally, although we have discussed how teachers described limitations as impacting students’ learning opportunities and their perceptions of their learning environment in turn, teachers described many of these student impacts as interconnected. For instance, among teachers who spoke of how limitations could hamper students’ capacity for empathy, about half also connected the notion of developing empathy with exposure to diverse perspectives. Teachers also viewed representation of students’ identities in their learning as important for bolstering students’ feelings of safety, belonging, and acceptance in the classroom. Meanwhile, teachers saw students’ feelings of safety in the classroom, as well as their cultivation of strong relationships with students, as important for students’ engagement in learning. One teacher in a state with a restriction explained these various connections, saying, “Belonging is crucial to

a student’s desire to learn. Feeling safe and understood helps to build a rapport with a student. Once that is established, a student is more willing to learn content, put forth effort, [and] ask questions.”

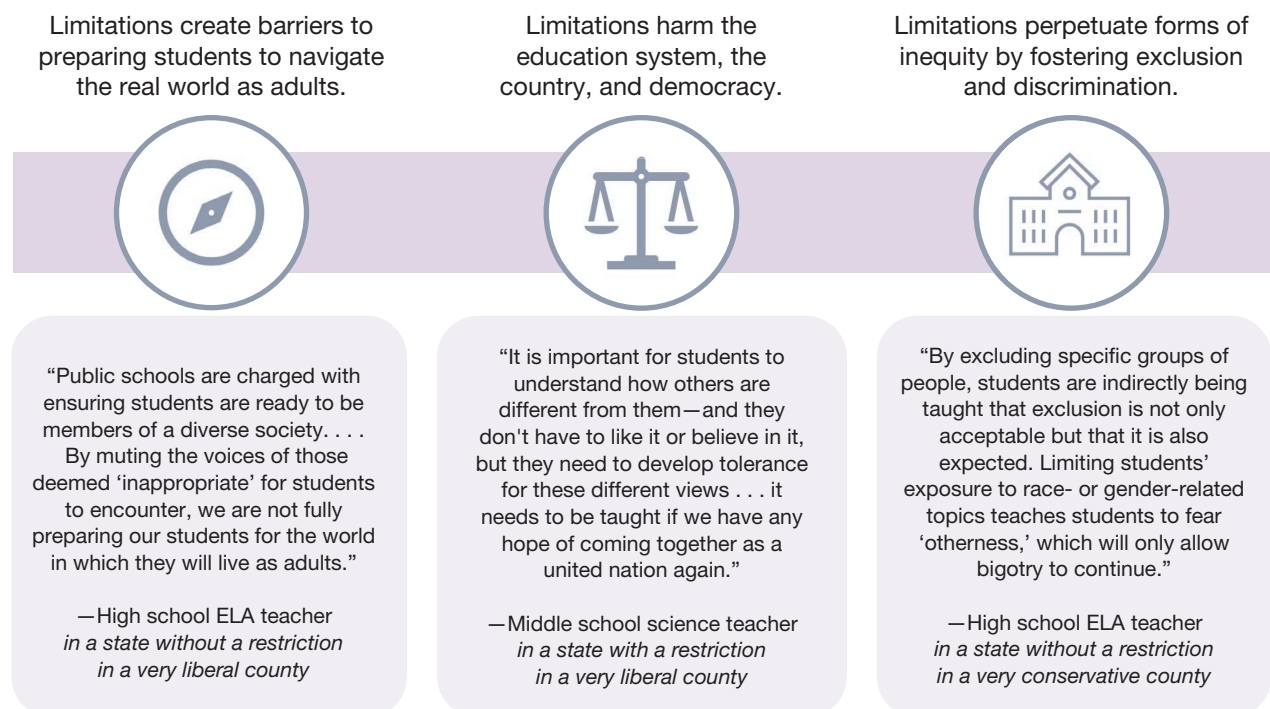
Teachers Expressed Concerns About the Long-Term Ramifications of Limitations

Teachers expressed concern that the effects of limitations could have long-term consequences for students’ futures and for the future of the education system, democracy, society, and country as a whole (see Figure 13).

About 150 teachers out of 3,707 teachers were concerned that limitations would prevent students from learning how to navigate the “real world,” particularly once they entered college, the workplace, and adulthood. Nearly three-quarters of these teachers were secondary teachers. These teachers noted that students will inevitably encounter diverse groups of people and cultures in the “real world” and that

FIGURE 13

Teachers’ Perceptions of the Long-Term Impacts of Classroom Limitations on Race- or Gender-Related Topics



omitting race- or gender-related topics from instruction “sets [students] up for ignorance in the future.” One teacher who experienced limitations at both the state and district levels stated, “The world my students see in their classroom does not reflect the world they will live in as adults.” These teachers expressed concerns that restricting students’ access to diverse ideas and experiences reduces students’ opportunities to develop the “necessary tools to navigate life” as an informed citizen and in a diverse and multicultural society. These tools include working with people who are different from them, engaging in public discourse about race- or gender-related topics, having difficult conversations about complex topics, and understanding how they might be perceived by others around them. A few of these teachers also noted that students from less diverse school communities might be at a particular disadvantage if they are not prepared to navigate these topics or social issues when they enter other settings (e.g., college, the workplace) in which they might instead experience “culture shock.”

Roughly 250 teachers worried about the large-scale, long-term consequences of limitations for the education system, the country, and democracy. About 50 of these teachers felt that limitations were emblematic of the undue influence of politics on education. Teachers expressed frustration that content in schools was being directed by a small group of people who prioritized their political agendas and points of view above student learning. One teacher in a state

Teachers worried about the large-scale, long-term consequences of limitations for the education system, the country, and democracy.

with a restriction contended, “Our state is more interested in political theater than student success.”

About 80 of these 250 teachers also worried about the impacts of limitations on society more broadly. These teachers felt that restricting students’ ability to learn from the lessons and mistakes of history would forestall society’s ability to ensure that those mistakes are not repeated in the future. They also expressed worry that many of the impacts of limitations described previously—such as the narrowing of students’ world views and the erosion of students’ capacity for empathy and ability to engage in civil discourse—would ultimately have a detrimental impact on society and the country as a whole because these impacts on students would eventually result in a society that is more divided and less inclusive, knowledgeable, and cooperative. One teacher in a state with a restriction explained, “Understanding people of all cultures and belief systems is critical to create a society capable of intelligent and rational discourse. Placing limitations on learning only weakens us as a nation.” Additionally, a few of these teachers expressed concerns about the consequences of limitations for democracy. These teachers felt that “free and open discourse” was foundational to a strong democracy and that limitations eroded democracy by promoting “censorship” and “taking away individual rights and freedoms,” including those protected by the First Amendment.

Finally, about 120 of these 250 teachers felt that the limitations perpetuated societal inequities. These teachers felt that the limitations themselves exemplified “racism” and “bigotry” and fostered “exclusion,” “discrimination,” and “negativity and judgement towards others” because they perpetuated the notion that the voices of people from minoritized groups “don’t matter.” By restricting students’ access to the experiences of people from historically minoritized groups, these teachers also felt that limitations could lead to misunderstandings between different groups of people, thereby reinforcing stereotypes. These teachers felt that limitations hampered students’ capacity to work against existing inequities and instead “[deepened] social and cultural divides” by encouraging the “status quo.”

Teachers Who Supported Classroom Limitations on Race- or Gender-Related Topics Felt That These Topics Were More Appropriate for the Home Than for School

Although most of the teachers who provided a response to our open-ended survey item described the ways in which they felt limitations would negatively impact student learning, a small proportion of teachers felt that limitations positively impact student learning. As shown in Figure 7, only 3 percent of teachers believed that limitations positively impact student learning; furthermore, when we considered the responses of those teachers who were aware of limitations, this percentage only rose to 6 percent.

In the following section, we present the perspectives of teachers who supported limitations or who expressed concerns about having conversations about race or gender in the classroom. However, we caution readers to remember that these findings capture the perspectives of only a very small proportion of our whole sample of interpretable responses from teachers. In Figure 14, we provide readers with a depiction of the relative proportion of teachers who expressed sentiments—both supporting and opposing limitations—related to the various themes that we present in this report.

Among teachers who expressed support for limitations, one of the most common reasons—cited by about 50 teachers out of 3,707 teachers—was that race- or gender-related topics should be addressed at home with families and parents rather than at school with teachers (see Figure 15). These teachers stressed that it is the parent’s role to help students understand how they should think about such topics as race or gender, not the role of the teacher or school system. They expressed the opinion that schools and teachers should not be in the position of teaching “opinions and beliefs,” which, according to one teacher, would be akin to teaching about “religion and politics” and should therefore be reserved for families. Accordingly, these teachers felt that limitations were positive because they “[prevent] the schools from taking on the role that a parent/home should have.” These teachers articulated a clear delineation between the roles of schools and families: Race- or gender-related

topics are the purview of families, and academic learning is the purview of teachers. One teacher explained, “I think that this is a topic that the parents need to have the strongest voice in. . . . I am not their parent and the scope of my job is not to teach race or gender but to teach science.” Notably, nearly half of these teachers (about 20) explicitly singled out gender-related topics as ones that should be reserved for families, although about ten of those 20 expressed support for classroom conversations about race to some extent. These teachers mentioned that they felt conversations about gender were a “private family matter” that should remain between students and their families.

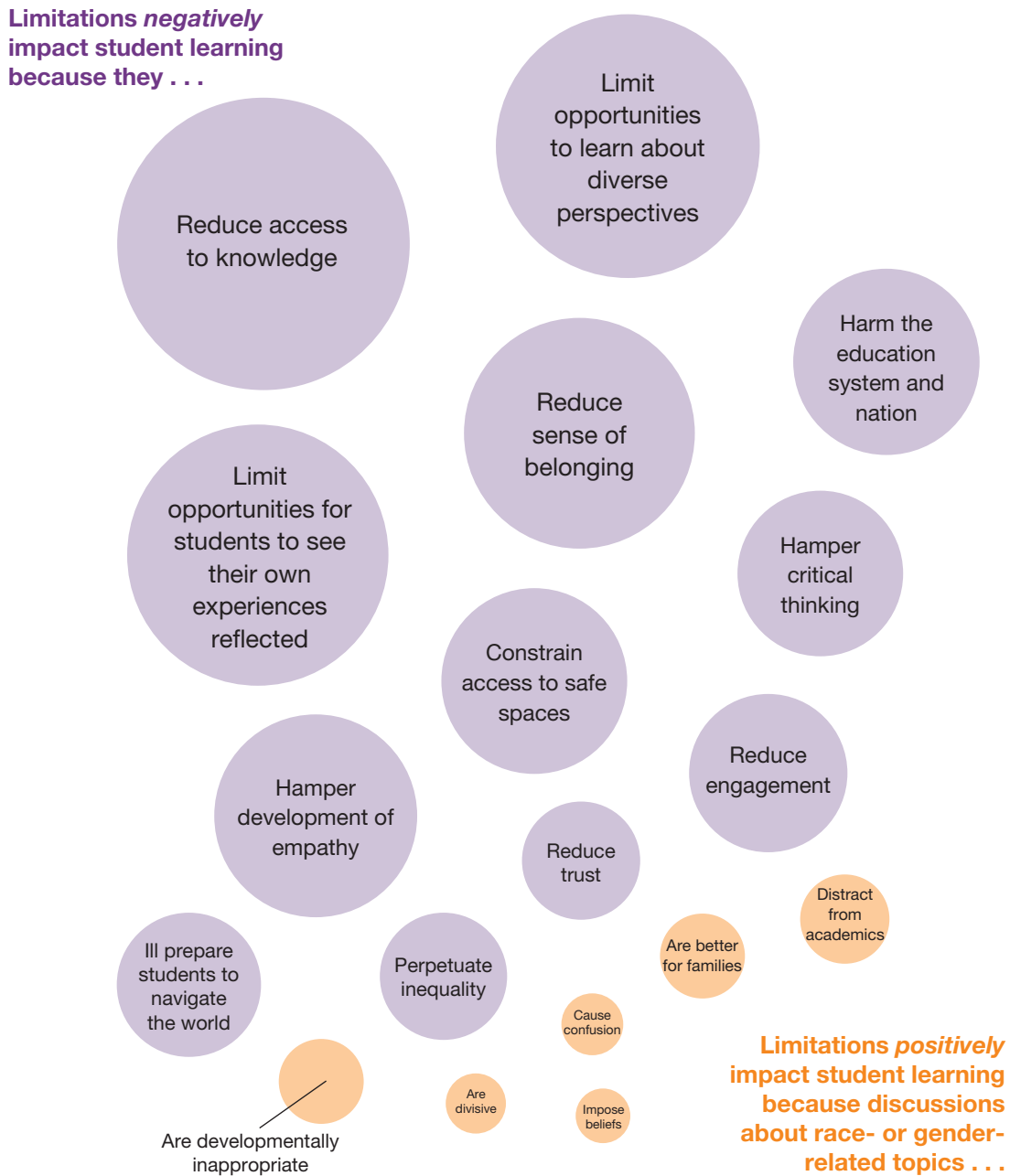
Teachers were also wary of impressing their own beliefs on students and violating families’ beliefs. About 20 teachers expressed that teachers should not be presenting their own personal beliefs or opinions on race- or gender-related topics to students or trying to “influence” students’ thinking on these topics because teachers could have “subjective” or “biased” opinions. These teachers were, in part, worried about imposing beliefs on students because they felt it was the role of the family rather than the teacher to address these topics with students. About one-fifth of these teachers were also wary of addressing these topics in the classroom because they did not want to contradict families’ beliefs or values. One teacher said, “Personal beliefs about whether or not something is racist or if a boy can be a girl is NOT what should be talked about at school where parents don’t know what is being pushed on their child.”

Teachers Felt That Race or Gender Were Inappropriate Topics for School Because They Were Too Mature for Young Children, Divisive, Confusing, and Distracting

Teachers who supported limitations articulated numerous reasons why they felt that conversations about race- or gender-related topics are not appropriate for school (see Figure 16). One of the most common reasons that teachers supported limitations was because they felt instruction on race- or gender-related topics was inappropriate or not necessary for young students. About 50 teachers—roughly 40 of whom were elementary teachers—expressed

FIGURE 14

Relative Proportion of Teachers Who Expressed Sentiments Associated with Qualitative Themes Regarding the Positive and Negative Impacts of Limitations on Student Learning



NOTE: This figure depicts the relative proportion of teachers who expressed sentiments associated with the qualitative themes presented in this report. Larger circles indicate that the themes were more common among our full sample of interpretable responses ($n = 3,707$); smaller circles indicate that the themes were less common.

FIGURE 15

Teachers' Reasons Why Race- or Gender-Related Topics Should Be Discussed at Home Rather Than at School

Race or gender should be discussed with parents and families.



"I think children's exposure to gender-related topics in school should be limited because it oversteps the conversations parents should decide to have with their children. Many teachers and schools are projecting a certain tolerance on children with no respect for their religious or family values."

—High school ELA teacher
*in a state with a restriction
in a very liberal county*

It is inappropriate for teachers to impose personal beliefs on students.



"Each human being has the right to believe whatever they choose, but I will not influence nor go against what their families teach them in the home in my classroom."

—Middle school ELA teacher
*in a state without a restriction
in a very liberal county*

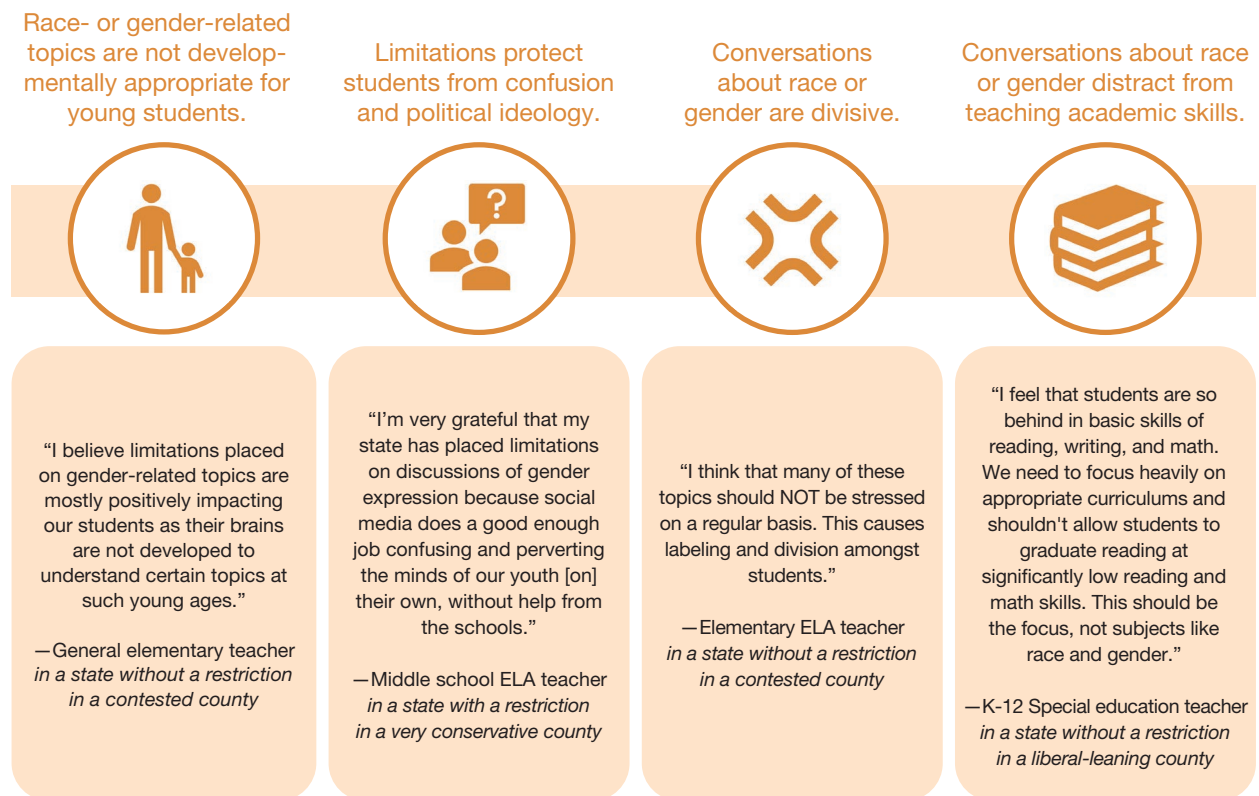
this sentiment. These teachers felt that younger students, particularly elementary-aged students, are not yet mature enough to fully comprehend complex, abstract topics, such as race or gender. Instead, these teachers worried that exposing young students to these topics too early might confuse them. Notably, about one-fifth these teachers—nearly all of whom were elementary teachers—held different opinions about gender-related instruction than about race-related instruction. They felt that, although learning about different cultures or discussing race was acceptable for younger students, discussing gender was not. One teacher said, "Race is fine to discuss with second grade and it helps them connect to one another. Gender-related topics (ones that have been brought up lately) have no place in the classroom of second graders."

Another reason (cited by about 25 teachers) that teachers felt that race- or gender-related topics were inappropriate for school was that these topics might confuse students or that limitations on race- or

gender-related topics protected students from confusion. Specifically, nearly one-third of these teachers worried that conversations about gender and gender fluidity were "uncomfortable" and would "force children to explore gender too early" and cause "gender confusion" when students "otherwise would not have experienced it." These teachers also worried that the complexity of conversations about race- or gender-related topics would cause confusion, particularly among younger students, because the topics are "beyond what [students] can understand." A small number of these teachers also expressed that they did not agree with the notion of gender fluidity, stating that allowing students to consider genders outside the gender binary would cause "great psychological damage to kids" and encourage students to "develop mental health issues." Finally, about 15 teachers also expressed that limitations protected students from ideological or political agendas. As one teacher said, "children are to be protect[ed] . . . not a political chess piece."

FIGURE 16

Teachers' Reasons for Why Race- or Gender-Related Topics Were Not Appropriate for School



Teachers also worried about the divisive nature of race- or gender-related topics. About 25 teachers expressed concerns that conversations about race or gender were divisive because they too heavily emphasize differences and inequities between groups rather than unity. A few teachers also worried that students might have strong opinions on these topics and that highlighting differences in opinion might create conflict or “issues between students.” Although a few of these teachers expressed that they felt it was important to provide instruction around race- or gender-related topics and to teach students to respect people of different backgrounds, they worried that a focus on these topics and historical inequities might lead students from minoritized backgrounds to adopt a “victim mentality” while also teaching students to label members of the dominant group as “inherently evil” or “the enemy.” A few teachers also worried that these impacts would be especially acute among young students because such conversations might

cause them to notice differences between people that they would not otherwise notice.

Finally, about 50 teachers contended that schools should focus on core academic skills or that a focus on race- or gender-related topics detracted from or was unrelated to the goal of educating students. These teachers felt that race- or gender-related discussions were “off topic” and did not relate to the academic content or skills contained within their academic standards, such as reading, writing, mathematics, or science. These teachers felt that focusing on social issues “[made] learning a second priority” because they shifted attention away from core academic skills and curricula. Instead, these teachers expressed that they could teach academic standards and complex texts without addressing topics that might “infringe on anyone’s beliefs.” Accordingly, these teachers expressed that limitations on race- or gender-related topics allowed students and teachers alike to place their focus on academic learning. By

Teachers’ reported awareness and perceptions of the influence of limitations grew in some states—such as Florida and Arkansas—while remaining relatively unchanged from 2022 to 2023 in states without restrictions.

focusing their attention on academics rather than on divisive topics, these teachers also felt that limitations protected students from teachers’ own beliefs and “political agendas.” One teacher explained, “My focus is upon teaching reading, writing, grammar, not upon indoctrinating the students that are required to be in my class.”

Summary and Implications

In spring 2021, states began passing policies that limit how teachers can discuss race- or gender-related topics in their classrooms. At the time our survey was administered two years later in spring 2023, 18 states had passed such a restriction. Our first investigation into the impacts of these limitations, which was conducted in spring 2022, revealed that teachers’ awareness of state restrictions was low and that one-quarter of teachers nationally reported that limitations were influencing their instructional practices and curriculum choices (Woo et al., 2023). We hypothesized that one year later—in spring 2023—teachers’ awareness about such state policies would have increased and, accordingly, a greater share of teachers would report that limitations influenced their instructional decisions. To our surprise, we did not find this to be the case, at least at the national level. Nationally, both teachers’ awareness of these state restrictions and perceptions about the influence of limitations on their instruction increased only marginally between 2022 and 2023.

Instead, we observed a divergence across states. Teachers’ reported awareness and perceptions of the influence of limitations grew in some states—such

as Florida and Arkansas—while remaining relatively unchanged from 2022 to 2023 in states without restrictions. This finding suggests that limitations increasingly have different levels of influence in different places. For example, the percentage of teachers in Florida who reported that limitations influenced their instruction grew by 22 percentage points between 2022 and 2023, from 33 percent to 55 percent. By spring 2023, the share of teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instruction (55 percent) was nearly 40 percentage points higher in Florida than in the states that had the smallest shares of teachers reporting that limitations influenced their instruction, such as California, Massachusetts, and New York.

In many ways, it is unsurprising that the teaching experiences of teachers in these different states are becoming increasingly dissimilar. Arkansas enacted two new restrictions prior to the administration of our survey, and policies in Florida, such as the banning of AP African American Studies, generated significant controversy and media coverage (Meckler, 2023; Pendharkar, 2023). Additionally, elected officials in these states have been vocal advocates of these limitations. In contrast, such states as California, New York, and Washington have moved in the opposite direction by passing policies that encourage the types of teaching practices that these restrictions might seek to reduce.

We observed a similar story of divergence between teachers in different local political climates. In spring 2022, in states with and without restrictions, teachers working in conservative-leaning counties were about as likely as their counterparts

in very liberal counties to report that limitations influenced their instruction. By spring 2023, in conservative-leaning communities in states with and without restrictions, we observed the greatest growth in the share of teachers reporting that limitations influenced their instruction; teachers in conservative-leaning counties were more likely than their counterparts in very liberal counties to report that limitations influenced their instruction, at least in states without restrictions.

Although we observed increasing dissimilarity across states and localities in teachers' reports of awareness of state restrictions and the influence of limitations, teachers across different state policy contexts and localities shared largely similar impressions of the impacts of these limitations on student learning. Many teachers were not aware of any limitations that would impact student learning or had a neutral opinion about their effects. However, among those who were aware and had an opinion of these limitations, teachers overwhelmingly agreed that limitations negatively impact student learning. Notably, this predominately negative opinion was reflected among teachers in all states that had passed restrictions—including Florida and Arkansas—and among teachers in conservative-leaning and very conservative areas in which we might expect public support for these laws to be greatest. In open-ended responses, teachers identified numerous reasons why they perceived these limitations to be negative for student learning; they expressed concerns that limitations reduced students' opportunities to learn important knowledge and skills, such as critical thinking and engagement in discourse about complex, difficult issues. They also worried that limitations made students feel unwelcome and less empathetic toward others and that limitations eroded trust between students and their peers and teachers. Ultimately, they felt that these negative impacts on students would snowball into negative impacts on society in general.

In our prior reporting, we have shared several recommendations that state and local leaders might consider when crafting policies or guidance about how to talk about race- or gender-related topics in the classroom. For instance, we have suggested that state and local leaders consider the perspectives and

concerns of teachers in their communities when crafting such policies and guidance to alleviate strains on the teacher workforce and to stave off any negative consequences for student learning (Woo et al., 2023). We have also continually emphasized the importance of engaging and establishing trust with families to create opportunities for teachers to have civil, productive conversations with families about race, gender, and other social and political issues about which they might disagree. Such conversations might include clarifying the purpose behind classroom instruction about social and political issues and tying that instructional purpose to students' academic and social and emotional development (Woo, Wolfe, et al., 2022; Woo et al., 2023; Woo and Diliberti, 2023). The findings of this report reinforce these prior recommendations.

In addition, because this report is the first to examine how teachers' perceptions about limitations have shifted over time in the context of an evolving policy landscape, in the following sections we offer two considerations about what our findings might imply for state and local policy trends and the future of our education system.

Students' Opportunities to Learn About Topics Related to Race or Gender Increasingly Depend on Where They Live

Our survey found that most teachers who reported that limitations influenced their instructional practices and curriculum choices tended to be concentrated in certain states (such as Florida and Arkansas) and in conservative-leaning communities. Relatively fewer teachers in other states (such as California, Massachusetts, and New York) and in more-liberal communities reported that limitations influenced their instruction. This increasing dissimilarity between the experiences of teachers in different states and localities suggests that instruction about race- or gender-related topics—through classroom discussions of current or historical events or the selection of classroom texts—might increasingly look different across states and local communities. As a result,

where students live might increasingly predict their access to instruction that covers these topics.

In some ways, this divergence is not new. States have historically made different decisions about what content students are exposed to through the development of state academic standards or selection of curricula. However, teachers expressed concerns that limitations would render students uneducated about important historical facts or perspectives. Additionally, learning how to discuss current and contentious topics is a critical aspect of students' civic development (Levine and Kawashima-Ginsberg, 2017). Similarly, learning how to empathize and work collaboratively with peers across lines of difference are important skills for students' social and emotional development (Weissberg et al., 2015). If students in some states increasingly do not have the opportunities to develop these skills, this divergence raises concerns about whether students across U.S. public schools are equitably receiving opportunities to learn.

Furthermore, there are potential inequities in the *types* of students who are receiving or not receiving these opportunities. For example, nationally, Black students comprise 15 percent of all public-school enrollments. But in Florida, Arkansas, and Tennessee—three states in which teachers were more likely than other teachers nationally to report that limitations have influenced their instruction—Black students represent about 20 percent of public-school enrollments in each state. In other states that have enacted restrictions—e.g., Mississippi, Georgia—Black students represent 47 percent and 36 percent of all public-school enrollments, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022b). This example highlights how historically minoritized student populations could be disproportionately affected by reduced access to instruction that is likely to be important for their civic, academic, and social and emotional development.

Teachers have expressed concerns about how these limitations could diminish students' feelings of safety and belonging at school, particularly for students of color and students who identify as LGBTQ+. Thus, minoritized student populations might not only disproportionately bear inadequate access to robust instruction about race- or gender-related

If students in some states increasingly do not have the opportunities to develop these skills, this divergence raises concerns about whether students across U.S. public schools are equitably receiving opportunities to learn.

topics but also are likely to be disproportionately harmed by these limitations.

Teachers' Perceptions of the Impact of Limitations Suggest a Dissonance Between State Policy Trends and Teachers' Opinions

Since 2021, elected state officials have continued their efforts to limit instruction about race- or gender-related topics in classrooms. At the same time, our data suggest that very few teachers perceive these policies as having a positive impact on student learning. Taken together, these findings suggest an increasing dissonance between trends in state policy and what teachers think is good for teaching and learning.

At first blush, it might appear that these recent state policies simply reflect public opinion or perhaps the preferences of parents. But recent polling suggests that these policies do not reflect public prefer-

ences: About two-thirds of K–12 parents (and U.S. residents) oppose such state restrictions (Jackson, Newall, and Rollason, 2023). Although Republicans are more likely than Democrats to favor such policies, about half of Republicans oppose them (Jackson, Newall, and Rollason, 2023). Most Americans support instruction on a variety of social and political topics, especially at the high school level (Polikoff, 2022).

Furthermore, national polls show that K–12 parents and Americans overall most commonly identified teachers, followed very closely by parents, as the group that should be primarily responsible for determining what content is taught in public schools (Turner, 2023). In contrast, only 6 percent of Americans and 8 percent of K–12 parents said that state legislators should be the primary decisionmakers for schools’ instructional content (Turner, 2023).

In sum, our findings suggest that, as state policies limiting discussions of race- or gender-related topics in classrooms continue to be passed, schools’ instructional content might be moving further away from what teachers, parents, and the public want. This dissonance or mismatch between what teachers and the public desire and the efforts of some state policymakers could reverberate across the education system. For example, teachers who are most likely to experience the pressure of these policies might feel that they are tasked to engage in instruction in a way that is detrimental for students, which could cause additional job-related stress or even lead teachers to consider leaving their schools or the teaching profession altogether (Woo, Wolfe, et al., 2022; Woo et al., 2023).

Research Limitations

This report provides an in-depth look at teachers’ perceptions about the influence of classroom limitations on race- or gender-related topics on teachers’ instruction and student learning. We remind readers of several caveats to consider when interpreting the results presented in this report.

First, because AIRS focuses on the experiences of ELA, math, and science teachers (including general elementary teachers), only a small number ($n = 55$) of teachers in the sample teach social studies as their

main subject. Because of the sample construction, we are also unable to speak to the perceptions of other types of educators who are likely impacted by state restrictions and limitations, such as health education teachers or school librarians.

Second, survey responses consist of self-reported information, which is a limitation present in all survey research. Thus, when we asked about the influence of limitations on teachers’ choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices, we relied on teachers’ self-reports about the extent to which these limitations have influenced their instruction. We have no way to verify the accuracy of teachers’ reports. When presenting results on this survey item, we also lack specific information on *how* limitations have influenced their instruction. Our prior reporting suggests that teachers’ responses to limitations run the gamut from compliance with limitations to resistance against limitations, although avoidance or hesitation to address race- or gender-related topics appeared to be more common than resistance against limitations (Woo et al., 2023). Moreover, when we asked teachers about the influence of limitations on their instruction or student learning, we were unable to determine which types of limitations they referred to—state policies, directives from their school or district leaders, or pressures from families and community members.

We are unable to verify whether teachers interpreted the survey items consistently or correctly in their self-reports. We asked teachers for their opinion of whether limitations were negatively or positively impacting their students’ learning. When comparing teachers’ quantitative survey responses with their qualitative survey responses, we observed some dissonance between the two. For instance, some teachers reported on the quantitative survey item that they felt limitations positively impacted student learning but, in their qualitative response, described only negative impacts to student learning, and vice versa. However, we estimated that this misalignment affected only a small share of teachers’ responses—about 1 percent of our total sample of teachers.

Third, it is possible that numerous other factors unmeasured by this survey could have contributed to the differences that we observe, such as teachers’ opinions of state restrictions, teachers’ political

affiliations or attitudes, or the political affiliations or attitudes of others in their schools. We lack information on these additional factors, and we believe that these are potential areas for future research.

Fourth, our analysis is driven primarily by interpretations of sample means, without controlling for potential confounders. These findings therefore represent purely descriptive characterizations of teacher responses and should not be interpreted as causal relationships.

Fifth, although we applied survey weights so that our estimates can be interpreted as representative of the national population of educators in the year the data were collected, we did not conduct formal tests of statistical significance to compare estimates between spring 2022 and spring 2023. We did not have longitudinal survey weights that properly accounted for changes and similarities in the survey samples across survey administrations. Only some of our 2023 survey respondents also participated in the 2022 survey; thus, there is partial, but not complete, overlap in our survey respondents.

Similar to Woo et al. (2023), there are also several caveats to our analysis of teachers' responses to the open-ended survey item that limit its generalizability to teachers nationally. Teachers self-selected into our sample of open-ended responses by providing a response to the question; not all teachers who were presented the question opted to provide a response. Additionally, our findings based on teachers' responses to the open-ended question might not be representative because our analysis was limited to responses that were clear enough for us to interpret and code. Although we drew on the responses of a large number of teachers, teachers provided a single response to the open-ended question, rendering the nature of our qualitative data broad but relatively shallow. Because teachers provided us with

a one-time response, we were unable to probe on how contextual or demographic factors, such as the demographics of teachers' schools or teachers' race or gender, might have influenced teachers' responses as we might have been able to do during an interview.

However, we also note that one of the primary goals of our qualitative analysis was to understand the many ways that teachers believed limitations impacted their students' learning rather than to determine the prevalence of different kinds of responses. We stress that because of the broad nature of both the open-ended question and the non-representativeness of our qualitative sample, the perspectives expressed by the teachers in our sample might be more or less prevalent in the general population of teachers than our data currently suggest. Altogether, these caveats might limit the generalizability of findings drawn from teachers' open-ended responses.

APPENDIX

Information About States with Teacher Oversamples

Table A.1 provides more information about each of the states in which we have teacher oversamples, which allow us to present state-representative data. In Table A.1, we provide information on whether each oversampled state had enacted a restriction by the time survey administration for the 2023 AIRS began in April 2023 and the number of survey respondents for the 2022 and 2023 AIRS. In addition, to provide context to the state-specific findings that we present throughout the report, we present data on the percentage of teacher respondents who worked in each of the five local political climates that we examined in this report.

TABLE A.1
 Characteristics of States with Oversamples

Locale	Passed a Restriction	Number of Survey Respondents		Percentage Distribution of Teacher Respondents by Local Political Climate of the County in Which Their School Is Located ^a				
		2022	2023	Very Liberal	Liberal Leaning	Contested	Conservative Leaning	Very Conservative
Nation (population) ^b	N/A	N/A	N/A	33.5	14.7	19.2	7.5	25.0
Nation (sample)	N/A	N/A	N/A	36.2	16.9	18.5	7.0	21.4
Arkansas	Yes	387	388	8.1	1.7	10.9	2.6	76.8
California	No	437	421	60.4	17.9	19.7	1.3	0.7
Delaware	No	393	367	55.7	0.0	22.0	22.3	0.0
Florida	Yes	411	439	15.1	11.3	37.9	21.4	14.3
Kentucky	Yes	405	388	21.2	0.0	1.4	9.7	67.8
Louisiana	No	439	415	3.5	9.0	14.1	2.9	70.5
Massachusetts	No	441	425	92.4	7.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Maryland	No	N/A	303	60.6	14.9	8.0	7.3	9.3
Mississippi	Yes	428	364	12.8	0.8	14.2	13.3	58.8
Nebraska	No	396	406	0.0	37.3	11.6	0.5	50.6
New Mexico	No	444	422	52.5	9.0	11.3	1.8	25.5
New York	No	431	422	53.5	15.8	19.0	8.1	3.6
Ohio	No	320	436	18.3	17.7	12.4	11.3	40.3
Rhode Island	No	440	443	83.3	0.0	16.7	0.0	0.0
Tennessee	Yes	426	416	19.6	0.2	7.9	16.3	56.0
Texas	Yes	428	397	19.6	30.4	19.9	2.9	27.2
Washington	No	446	412	40.7	15.4	30.2	8.8	4.9

NOTE: N/A = not applicable. The data in this table exclude a small percentage of respondents (about 2 percent) who moved states during the 2022–2023 school year.

^a We defined teachers' local political climate using a measure of the share of votes received by President Trump in the 2020 presidential election in the county where a teacher's school is located. We use a five-category measure of vote share as follows: very liberal (Trump vote share was less than 40 percent), liberal leaning (Trump vote share was between 40 and 45 percent), contested (Trump vote share was between 45 and 55 percent), conservative leaning (Trump vote share was between 55 and 60 percent), and very conservative (Trump vote share was 60 percent or greater).

^b This row presents the distribution for the national population of K–12 public school teachers. We obtained population counts from the National Center for Education Statistics' Common Core of Data and data on the local political climate from MIT's Election Data + Science Lab (National Center for Education Statistics, 2022a; Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2022). We distributed teachers across schools and then used the local political climate in the area in which teachers' schools are located to determine how teachers are distributed across political climates.

Notes

¹ The AIRS has oversamples in states that participate in the Council of Chief State School Officers High Quality Instructional Materials and Professional Development Network, as well as in other states that are of interest to funders (e.g., California, Florida, New York) (Doan et al., 2023).

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Using the spring 2022 and spring 2023 administrations of the American Instructional Resources Survey, we examine teachers' awareness and perceptions of the influence of classroom limitations on race- or gender-related topics on their instruction and student learning. The American Educator Panels are nationally representative samples of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders across the country. The panels are a proud member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research's Transparency Initiative.

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