See No Evil, Hear No Evil, Speak No Evil; Stemming the Tide of No Promo Homo Laws in American Schools

By: Madelyn Rodriguez

“When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.”

I. Introduction

The average primary school student spends the majority of his or her waking hours in school. The school experience plays a monumental role in determining a child’s world view. It is no surprise, then, that the issue of what to teach in schools is a perennial conflict, especially when it relates to homosexuality. Several states and many more local governments have implemented policies prohibiting any instruction given to students that could be interpreted as portraying homosexuality in a positive light. These policies, often referred to as No Promo Homo policies, have been accused of contributing to what is an already toxic environment for

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3 Sandra L. Hofferth & John F. Sandberg, How American Children Spend Their Time, 62 J. OF MARRIAGE AND FAM. 295, 300 (2001) (reporting that children between the ages of six and twelve spent over thirty hours per week in school, more than double the next most common activities of playing and television, which consumed no more than twelve and thirteen hours per week, respectively).
4 See KATHY BICKMORE, QUEERING ELEMENTARY EDUCATION: ADVANCING THE DIALOGUE ABOUT SEXUALITIES AND SCHOOLING 15 (William J. Letts IV & James T Sears eds., 1999) (expounding upon the impact of school curriculum and teacher involvement on students’ social development and arguing for the inclusion of sexuality curriculum in elementary schools).
5 See id. at 18 (“Reading about or discussing any belief or culture has never been shown to cause a child to adopt that way of life [citation omitted]. However, it is precisely these kinds of deeply held identities, including values and practices involving homosexuality, that are most often censored.”).
6 See infra Part III.
many students. To illustrate the possible effects of these laws, consider the following hypothetical:

John is a middle school student in Arizona. He has two gay dads. John’s science teacher, Ms. Smith, spends a class teaching the required Arizona sex education and AIDS curriculum. In order to comply with the law she is required to promote abstinence and dispel myths about the transmission of HIV. Further, she is not permitted to promote the homosexual life-style, promote homosexuality as a positive alternative or suggest that some methods of homosexual sex are safe. During the class, some students begin to taunt John because of his two gay dads. The other students ridicule John with taunts that he is gay too and his dads surely must have AIDS. Ms. Smith has never received any training on how to teach these subjects or how to handle students bullying other students. She is unsure of whether to step in and stop the taunts because she is afraid anything she says to defend John and his family could be construed as a promotion of homosexuality. As a result, she ignores the taunts and continues her lesson. After class, Ms. Smith sees students still ridiculing and harassing John in the hallways. She looks on, but does not step in to stop it, still unsure of what doing so would mean for her employment. This is not the first time John has been subjected to harassment at school, but John does not report it because he does not believe anything will be done.

The above hypothetical illustrates some of the questions raised by state and local laws prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality. Teachers are left to ask what they are and are not permitted to do. Specifically, they are left to determine whether interceding and stopping anti-gay bullying might be construed as promoting homosexuality as an acceptable alternative. Is a teacher like Ms. Smith even permitted to tell students that having two parents of the same gender

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7 See infra Part II.
is not something to harass someone for, or could this too be considered promoting homosexuality?

The issue of maintaining an open and safe environment for all children in school should be of serious concern to parents, educators, society, and the law. Given that teachers will inevitably leave an immeasurable impression on the values, morals, and opinions of the children whom they teach, the question becomes one of which values should be taught. By and large, there have been two separate views in the debate over student instruction. The traditional view believes that the school is tasked with inculcating students with a prescribed set of norms and values, usually the status quo. The more liberal view believes that schools should act as a sort of “marketplace of ideas.” This view tends to eschew the inculcation of traditional values and instead seeks to allow individual teachers freedom to introduce differing perspectives and allow for debate within the classroom. Logically then, it is clear that the traditional view endorses more limitations on teachers and other school officials, while the modern, liberal view tends to endorse the right of the teachers to present differing perspectives.

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8 See David C. Anderson, *Curriculum, Culture, and Community: The Challenge of School Violence*, 24 CRIME & JUST. 317, 328–29 (1998) (compiling extensive collections of statistics regarding school violence, and stating that while not always evident in the statistics, there is “broad agreement among educators” that school violence has become more severe in recent years).

9 Susan H. Bitensky, *A Contemporary Proposal for Reconciling the Free Speech Clause with Curricular Values Inculcation in the Public Schools*, 70 NOTRE DAME L. REV. 769, 779 (1995) (noting the difficulty in determining which values should be taught, because “virtually every value is objectionable to someone.”).


11 Id.

12 Id.

13 Tyll van Geer, *The Search for Constitutional Limits on Governmental Authority to Inculcate Youth*, 62 TEX. L. REV. 197, 253 (1983) (“Therefore, an educational effort consistent with respect for the autonomy of students must be one that exposes them to controversy; it must avoid seeking to imbue students with beliefs, but must instead encourage them to think critically about the goals and values they choose to pursue through life.”).

14 See Weiner, *supra* note 10, at 966 (contrasting the approaches of both perspectives with regards to teacher autonomy).
Generally the courts, while recognizing the need for the free exchange of ideas, have found that the political body should be given the authority to decide what values should be taught and which should not.\textsuperscript{15} While this is a reasonable view, a problem arises when the government, through its schools, is permitted to dictate a set of right and wrong values.\textsuperscript{16} The imposition of a set system of beliefs and values prescribed by government officials from above is naturally susceptible to abuse.\textsuperscript{17} This comment will argue that the imposition of No Promo Homo laws in schools violates the Equal Protection Clause and further encourages the bullying and harassment of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (“LGBT”)\textsuperscript{18} students, resulting in even more egregious violations of the Equal Protection Clause. Part II explores the origins and implications of No Promo Homo laws.\textsuperscript{19} Part III then provides an overview of select No Promo Homo Laws.\textsuperscript{20} Part IV outlines current jurisprudence under the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution and argues that No Promo Homo policies in schools violate the Equal Protection Clause.\textsuperscript{21} Lastly, Part V proposes several possible responses available to mitigate the

\textsuperscript{16} See Keyishian v. Bd. of Regents, 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967) (forbidding educators from casting a “pall of orthodoxy” over the classroom); West Virginia State Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette, 319 U.S. 624, 642 (1943) (“If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion. . . .”).
\textsuperscript{17} See Stanley Ingber, Socialization, Indoctrination, or the “Pall of Orthodoxy': Value Training in the Public Schools, 1987 U. ILL. L. REV. 15, 20–23 (1987) (discussing the public and judicial system’s general ambivalence towards the potential for abuse of power inherent in the right of schools to inculcate values).
\textsuperscript{18} See The Handbook of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Public Health: A Practitioner’s Guide to Service 3 (Michael D. Shankle ed., 2006) (explaining the variety and importance of terminologies used to describe non-heterosexual persons). “LGBT” stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender. Id. For the purposes of this comment the term LGBT will be used in the interest of brevity. It should be read to include all other related terms, including but not limited to, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, confused supportive and intersexed.
\textsuperscript{19} See infra Part II.
\textsuperscript{20} See infra Part III.
\textsuperscript{21} See infra Part IV.
effect of No Promo Homo educational policies, and alleviate their long lasting and damaging effects on students.\textsuperscript{22}

II. Background

A. No Promo Homo: Origins

The gay rights movement has been a catalyst for controversy and social change since its inception.\textsuperscript{23} Traditionally, anti-gay arguments have emerged from religious doctrine, medical opinions, or social stigmatization.\textsuperscript{24} More recently however, a new anti-gay rhetoric has enjoyed tremendous success.\textsuperscript{25} These arguments are broadly referred to as “no promotion of homosexuals” or “no promo homo.”\textsuperscript{26} Professor William N. Eskridge, Jr., has written extensively on the topic\textsuperscript{27} and describes the following underlying logic behind No Promo Homo: if the state adopts a law giving rights to homosexuals or protecting homosexuality it is thereby promoting homosexuality.\textsuperscript{28} It should be the state’s purpose to promote good conduct and discourage conduct which is not as good.\textsuperscript{29} Because homosexuality is not as good as

\textsuperscript{22} See infra Part V.


\textsuperscript{24} See William N. Eskridge, Jr., \textit{No Promo Homo: The Sedimentation of Antigay Discourse and the Channeling Effect of Judicial Review}, 75 N.Y.U. L. REV. 1327, 1339 (2000) (discussing the evolving nature of anti-gay policies, and arguing that the traditional anti-gay discourse has been supplanted by No Promo Homo” reasoning).

\textsuperscript{25} Id. at 1338 (contending that No Promo Homo arguments have been more successful in defeating gay marriage rights due to the sedimentary nature of the argument, and its appeal to diverse groups of society).

\textsuperscript{26} See David M. Skover & Kellye Y Testy, \textit{Lesbigay Identity as Commodity}, 90 CAL. L. REV. 223, 226 n. 13 (citing Dan Beyers, \textit{Montgomery Students Push for Discussion of Gay Issues}, WASH. POST., Dec. 8, 1966, at B1) (explaining that the origin of “no promo homo” is uncertain; however the phrase first appeared in a newspaper article reporting on a Virginia school board's refusal to endorse homosexual activity).


\textsuperscript{28} No Promo Homo: The Sedimentation of Antigay Discourse and the Channeling Effect of Judicial Review, supra note 24, at 1329.

\textsuperscript{29} Id.
heterosexuality, laws should not be adopted giving rights to homosexuals or protecting homosexuality.\textsuperscript{30}

These sorts of arguments and policies are especially pervasive in education.\textsuperscript{31} No Promo Homo educational policies are “local or state educational policies which restrict or eliminate any school based instruction or activity that could be interpreted as positive about homosexuality.”\textsuperscript{32}

These policies may be worded in a manner so as to prohibit promotion of homosexuality or go further and ban all discussion of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{33} These policies help to further reinforce many of the myths and misconceptions about homosexuality that still persist in society at large.\textsuperscript{34}

Some supporters of these laws argue that the purpose of not promoting homosexuality is to protect children who are wavering in their sexual identity, who may be swayed towards homosexuality if it were to be promoted or discussed in school.\textsuperscript{35} Proponents maintain that if teachers or schools are allowed to discuss homosexuality, it will signal to children that such behavior is acceptable; thereby serving to “indoctrinate” children into believing non-heterosexuality is acceptable.\textsuperscript{36} However, forcing schools and teachers not to promote, or even

\begin{itemize}
  \item[30] \textit{Id.}
  \item[33] \textit{Id.}
  \item[34] See AMY D. RONNER, HOMOPHOBIA AND THE LAW 95–98 (2005) (discussing continued prevalence of irrational beliefs regarding homosexuality); Suzanne B. Goldberg, \textit{Sticky Intuitions and the Future of Sexual Orientation Discrimination}, 57 UCLA L. REV. 1375, 1401 (2010) (explaining that much of the opposition to equal rights for homosexuals has been premised on the idea that homosexuality is in some way contagious and that children are especially susceptible to homosexual suggestion).
  \item[36] Compare Tina Fetner, \textit{Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claim}, 48 SOC. PROBS. 411 (2001) (quoting Anita Bryant, “I don’t hate the homosexuals! But as a mother, I must protect my children from their evil influence. . . . They want to recruit your children and teach them the virtues of becoming a homosexual.”), with KENJI YOSHINO, \textit{COVERING: THE HIDDEN ASSAULT ON OUR CIVIL
acknowledge, that homosexuality exists as an alternative ignores the reality of society at large.\textsuperscript{37} Although many No Promo Homo policies claim to be grounded in the idea that children should not be taught about sex at school,\textsuperscript{38} sexual identity has become a major issue, even for younger children.\textsuperscript{39} Children may already be aware of their own homosexuality,\textsuperscript{40} and increasing visibility of openly gay individuals in the media and within many families ensures that homosexuality will not merely go away if it is ignored in schools.\textsuperscript{41} California seems to be the leader in understanding the importance of acknowledging the LGBT community in schools, recently passing the FAIR Education Act which will require LGBT inclusive curriculum.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{37} See Bickmore, \textit{supra} note 4, at 15 (discussing an informal study where students at six different elementary schools were asked to describe what the words “gay,” “lesbian, and “bisexual” meant; the students provided substantial lists of information, most of which was learned from the media or peers).

\textsuperscript{38} See Emma Renold, \textit{Coming Out}: Gender, (hetero)sexuality and the primary school, 12 GENDER AND EDUC. 309–326 (2000) (challenging the idea that primary school children are free of pressures to conform to expectations of societal sexual norms).

\textsuperscript{39} See \textsc{GLSEN Research Brief, GAY LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK}, \url{http://www.glsen.org/binary-data/GLSEN_ATTACHMENT/file/000/001/1475-1.pdf-middle schools students (last visited Sept. 1, 2011) (analyzing the experiences of LGBT youth in middle schools around the United States); see also Bickmore, \textit{supra} note 4, at 15–18 (discussing the need for instruction on human sexuality even for children as young as elementary school aged); Teemu Ruskola, \textit{Minor Disregard: The Legal Construction of the Fantasy That Gay and Lesbian Youth Do Not Exist}, 8 Yale J.L. & Feminism 269, 270 (1996) (deconstructing the seemingly perpetual social and legal fiction that gay children do not naturally exist).

\textsuperscript{40} See Jason Cianciotto & Sean Cahill, \textit{Education Policy: Issues Affecting Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth}, The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute 11–12 (2003), \url{http://thetaskforce.org/reports_and_research/education_policy}. Various research studies indicate that around five percent of students in grades nine through twelve identify as LGBT. \textit{Id.} To illustrate, this would have meant that in 2002, almost 689,000 students of the total 13.8 million in the United States in that age bracket, identified as LGBT or had same-sex attraction/experiences. \textit{Id.}

\textsuperscript{41} See A. Damien Martin & Emery S. Hetrick, Psychopathology and Psychotherapy in Homosexuality 166–175 (Michael W. Ross ed., 1988) (analyzing the cognitive, social and emotional effects of stigmatization on homosexual youth).

\textsuperscript{42} See CAL. EDUC. CODE § 51204.5. The California law requires instruction in social sciences including “a study of the role and contributions” of various ethnic and minority groups including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people with a “particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society.” \textit{Id.} Conservative groups mounted a drive to repeal the law, but the effort ultimately failed when organizers were unable to collect enough signatures to meet ballot initiative requirements. Wyatt Buchanan, \textit{Group Fighting LGBT Teachings Fails Petition Drive}, SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, Oct. 13, 2011, at C1. However, further challenges to the law are anticipated. \textit{Id.} Much of the opposition to the FAIR Education Act is premised on religious opposition and claims that the law acts as a tool for indoctrination of children. See David Badash, \textit{SB 48: California’s FAIR
B. Effects of Stigmatization on LGBT Students

Homosexuality continues to be a divisive issue in American politics.\textsuperscript{43} Although approval of homosexuality by the American public has followed an upward trend, there remains a very substantial segment of the public that continues to disprove of homosexuality.\textsuperscript{44} Further, although homosexuality has been accepted by more Americans as a whole, many LGBT people continue to keep their sexuality a secret due to fears of retribution and rejection.\textsuperscript{45} These fears and continued disapproval of homosexuality are likely bolstered by what some commenters have termed “heterosexism” or “heterocentrism.”\textsuperscript{46} The terms refer to a system of bias which regards heterosexuality as the “normative form of human sexuality and thereby connotes prejudice against anyone who falls outside of that form.”\textsuperscript{47} Although heterosexism is a pervasive part of virtually every facet of society, schools may play an exceptionally important part in either continuing to foster heterosexism or limiting its continued viability, due to the role of schools as an agent for socialization.\textsuperscript{48} A teacher in a school district which adopted a No Promo Homo


\textsuperscript{43} See Lydia Saad, \textit{Four Moral Issues Sharply Divide Americans}, GALLUP POLITICS (May 26, 2010), http://www.gallup.com/poll/137357/four-moral-issues-sharply-divide-americans.aspx (finding that fifty-two percent of Americans believe gay and lesbian relations are “morally acceptable” while forty-three percent believe they are “morally wrong”).

\textsuperscript{44} See Eric K.M. Yatar, \textit{Defamation, Privacy, and the Changing Social Status of Homosexuality: Re-Thinking Supreme Court Gay Rights Jurisprudence}, 12 LAW & SEXUALITY 119, 135–36 (2003) (explaining that nationwide polls reveal that in 2001, fifty-two percent of Americans believed that homosexuality was an acceptable alternative lifestyle, as compared to forty-four percent in 1996, thirty-eight percent in 1992, and thirty-four percent in 1982); cf. Frank Newport, \textit{For First Time, Majority of Americans Favor Legal Gay Marriage}, GALLUP POLITICS (May 20, 2011), http://www.gallup.com/poll/147662/first-time-majority-americans-favor-legal-gay-marriage.aspx (explaining that a 2011 poll reveals that a majority of Americans favor legal same-sex marriages, claiming support from fifty-three percent of Americans, a major increase from only twenty-seven percent support in 1996).

\textsuperscript{45} See Yatar, supra note 44, at 141 (noting reasons why some LGBT people remain “in the closet”).

\textsuperscript{46} Id. at 141–142.

\textsuperscript{47} Id.

\textsuperscript{48} See Schools: A Petri Dish for Heterosexism LGBT\textsc{E}ACH (Nov. 17, 2010), http://lgteach.org/?p=162 (discussing several aspects of heterosexism in schools and suggesting solutions for making the school environment more inclusive of LGBT students).
policy stated that “[i]f you can't talk about it in any context, which is how teachers interpret district policies, kids internalize that to mean that being gay must be so shameful and wrong, and that has created a climate of fear and repression and harassment.”

Although researchers have studied the links between heterosexism in schools and its effect on students, it was not until a rash of suicides by LGBT students in recent years that the issue received any significant media attention. The issue has gained such attention that the United States Department of Education has begun to take a more proactive role in ensuring that schools protect LGBT students to the full extent required by the law.

A 2009 survey of middle and high school students found that eighty-four percent of LGBT youth experienced harassment at school the previous year. LGBT young adults who reported high levels of bullying during middle and high school are 5.6 times more likely to attempt suicide, and 2.6 times more likely to have clinical levels of depression. A study of the higher rate of suicides in LGBT youth identified several related factors such as stigma and

53 GLSEN 2009 National Climate Survey, GAY LESBIAN AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK, http://www.glsen.org/cgi-bin/iowa/all/research/index.html. (last visited Sept. 1, 2011) The study also found that seventy-two percent of students reported hearing frequent homophobic remarks at school, sixty-one percent reported feeling unsafe at school, forty percent of students reported being physically harassed, and eighteen percent reported being physically assaulted. Id. Sixty-two percent of students who reported being harassed or assaulted stated they did not report the incidents to school staff either because they believed nothing would be done or the situation would become worse if reported. Id. Further, thirty-three percent of students who did report the harassment or assault stated that school staff did nothing. Id.
54 Steven T. Russell et al., Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adolescent School Victimization: Implications for Young Adult Health and Adjustment, J. OF SCH. HEALTH 223, 228 (2011). The study showed that students who identify or are perceived to be LGBT face consistent and dramatically higher risks for health concerns such as substance abuse, suicide and suicidal ideation and depression as compared to their heterosexual peers. Id.
discrimination, especially acts such as rejection or abuse by peers, bullying, harassment, and denunciation from religious communities.\textsuperscript{55} The report also presented “evidence that discriminatory laws and public policies have a profound negative impact on the mental health of gay adults.”\textsuperscript{56} When questioned as to their experiences in school, LGBT students in states with No Promo Homo policies reported much less support from teachers and administrators as compared to student support in states without No Promo Homo policies.\textsuperscript{57} Additionally, students from states with No Promo Homo laws were less likely to report having LGBT-related resources in school, such as comprehensive school harassment/assault policies, school personnel supportive of LGBT students, and Gay-Straight Alliances.\textsuperscript{58}

LGBT youth already face substantial adversity in schools.\textsuperscript{59} Denying teachers and school administrators the ability to present homosexuality as an acceptable alternative to students only serves to further exacerbate the problems already faced by LGBT students.\textsuperscript{60} The inability to maintain an open environment for students to explore themselves and learn about diversity among their peers will further perpetuate school atmospheres tinged with homophobia.\textsuperscript{61}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{55}See Ann P. Haas et al., \textit{Suicide and Suicide Risk in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Populations: Review and Recommendations}, \textit{J. of Homosexuality} 10 (2010).
\bibitem{56}Id.
\bibitem{57}GLSEN 2009 \textit{National Climate Survey}, supra note 53.
\bibitem{58}Id. Although no more likely to hear homophobic remarks from their peers, students in No Promo Homo states were more likely to hear homophobic remarks from school staff. \textit{Id.} Staff who were informed of student harassment and assault were also far less effective in handling those problems as they arose. \textit{Id.}
\bibitem{59}See Cianciotto, \textit{supra} note 40, at 6 (explaining that students who identify as LGBT may face backlash at home and at school, which creates a greater need for guidance and support from accepting adults).
\bibitem{60}Theresa J. Bryant, \textit{May We Teach Tolerance? Establishing the Parameters of Academic Freedom in Public Schools}, 60 \textit{U. Pitt. L.Rev.} 579, 587 (1999). The schools’ denial of homosexuality as an alternative results in a vacuum of positive information that may have otherwise improved students’ self-esteem. \textit{Id.}
\bibitem{61}See \textit{id.} at 586 (noting that the absence of information regarding homosexuality in the curriculum may perpetuate myths and stereotypes about homosexuality and provide tacit support for homophobic attitudes and conduct).
\end{thebibliography}
III.  State of the Law

A. Current State Laws

States have almost exclusive power to run their schools, and are thus entitled to almost unfettered discretion with regard to selection and implementation of school policies and curriculum.62  Several states and local districts have implemented some variation of No Promo Homo policies.  Among these are Alabama, Arizona, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah.63  Each effectively mandates that heterosexuality be emphasized as the only lifestyle which is acceptable.64  Acknowledgment of the possibility of a healthy homosexual lifestyle would be a violation of the policies.65  Generally, the statutes can be divided into two categories, with the first66 explicitly barring positive discussion of homosexuality and the second67 employing a more subtle approach.  The Arizona statute, for

62 Carolyn Depoian, Homosexuality, the Public School Curriculum and the First Amendment: Issues of Religion and Speech, 18 LAW & SEXUALITY 163, 166 (2009).
63 See ALA. CODE § 16-40A-2 (1992) (requiring that teachers emphasize that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense); ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-716(C) (2009) (forbidding instruction that promotes homosexual life-style, portrays homosexual life-style as an alternative, or suggests some methods of homosexual sex are safe); LA. CODE tit. 17 § 281 (2006) (barring use of sexually explicit materials portraying homosexual activity, but not barring sexually explicit materials displaying heterosexual activity); MISS. CODE ANN. § 37-13-171 (2011) (requiring teaching of state law relating to sexual conduct, including homosexual activity and requiring teaching that the only appropriate setting for sexual intercourse is in a monogamous relationship in the context of marriage); OKLA. STAT. §70-11-103.3 (2006) (requiring instruction in AIDS prevention that teaches students that engaging in “homosexual activity, promiscuous sexual activity, intravenous drug use or contact with contaminated blood products is primarily responsible for contact with the AIDS virus); S.C. CODE § 59-32-30 (2010) (barring discussion of homosexuality in health education classes, except in the context of sexually transmitted diseases); TEX. HEALTH & SAFETY CODE ANN. § 163.002 (2005) (requiring teachers to emphasize that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense); UTAH CODE § 53A-13-101 (2004) (prohibiting the advocacy of homosexuality).
example, proscribes instruction that “promotes” a homosexual life-style, “portrays” homosexuality as an alternative life-style, or “suggests” that some methods of homosexual sex are safe. Conversely, the South Carolina statute, for example, mandates that students only receive instruction regarding homosexuality in the context of sexually transmitted diseases. This prohibition essentially forecloses any possibility that homosexuality be portrayed as an acceptable alternative to heterosexuality. Further, the vast majority of these policies emphasize that abstinence before marriage is the only viable option. One commentator added:

[A]s ineffective as abstinence-only-until-marriage education is in protecting adolescents in general, it is wholly inapplicable to gay and lesbian adolescents . . . . [S]tudents are told they must remain abstinent until they are married. This seems somewhat cruel, as there is a certain percentage of these students who may have no legal opportunity to engage in marriage: students who are lesbian or gay. In effect, these students are being told that they should never have sex.

The state policies are as follows:

a. Alabama: “Any program or curriculum in the public schools in Alabama that includes sex education or the human reproductive process shall, as a minimum, include and emphasize the following: [a]bstinence from sexual intercourse outside of lawful marriage is the expected social standard for unmarried school-age persons. . . . Course materials and

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68 See ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-716(C) (2009).
70 See, e.g., L.A. CODE tit. 17 § 281 (2006) (requiring that instruction emphasize abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children).
71 James McGrath, Abstinence-Only Adolescent Education: Ineffective, Unpopular, and Unconstitutional, 38 U.S.F. L. REV. 665, 681 (2004); see also Jennifer S. Hendricks & Dawn Marie Howerton, Teaching Values, Teaching Stereotypes: Sex Education and Indoctrination in Public Schools, 13 U. PA. J. CONST. L. 587, 601 (2011) (“Many curricula overwhelmingly emphasize marriage as the only acceptable context for sex without even acknowledging that gay and lesbian students are legally barred from marrying in most states. Same-sex relationships are ignored or, if mentioned, plainly disapproved.”).
instruction that relate to sexual education or sexually transmitted diseases should include all of the following elements: an emphasis, in a factual manner and from a public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under the laws of the state.” 

b. Arizona: “No district shall include in its course of study instruction which: 1. Promotes a homosexual life-style; 2. Portrays homosexuality as a positive alternative life-style; 3. Suggests that some methods of sex are safe methods of homosexual sex.”

c. Louisiana: “No sex education course offered in the public schools of the state shall utilize any sexually explicit materials depicting male or female homosexual activity . . . Emphasize abstinence from sexual activity outside of marriage as the expected standard for all school-age children.”

d. Mississippi: “Abstinence education shall be the state standard for any sex-related education taught in the public schools. For purposes of this section, abstinence education includes any type of instruction or program which, at an appropriate age . . . [t]eaches the current state law related to sexual conduct, including forcible rape, statutory rape, paternity establishment, child support and homosexual activity . . . and teaches that a mutually faithful, monogamous relationship in the context of marriage is the only appropriate setting for sexual intercourse.”

e. Oklahoma: “AIDS prevention education shall specifically teach students that: 1. engaging in homosexual activity, promiscuous sexual activity, intravenous drug use or contact with

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73 ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-716(C) (2009).
contaminated blood products is now known to be primarily responsible for contact with
the AIDS virus; 2. avoiding the activities specified in paragraph 1 of this subsection is the
only method of preventing the spread of the virus.”

f. South Carolina: “The program of instruction provided for in this section may not include
a discussion of alternative sexual lifestyles from heterosexual relationships including, but
not limited to, homosexual relationships except in the context of instruction concerning
sexually transmitted diseases.”

g. Texas: “Course materials and instruction relating to sexual education or sexually
transmitted diseases should include: emphasis, provided in a factual manner and from a
public health perspective, that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general
public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense under Section 21.06, Penal
Code.”

h. Utah: “[T]he materials adopted by a local school board. . . shall be based upon
recommendations of the school district's Curriculum Materials Review Committee that
comply with state law and state board rules emphasizing abstinence before marriage and
fidelity after marriage, and prohibiting instruction in: the advocacy of homosexuality. . .
the advocacy of sexual activity outside of marriage.”

B. Vagueness

76 OKLA. STAT. §70-11-103.3 (2006).
One of the striking aspects of some of the more blatant No Promo Homo policies is just how vague they really are. The Arizona law states that teachers may not “promote,” “portray,” or “suggest” certain aspects relating to the homosexual “life-style.” The school staff charged with abiding by these policies must then determine exactly what conduct or instruction would constitute promotion, portrayal, or suggestion. The term “life-style” is just as ineffective, in that it has no accepted meaning. Thus, the meaning of the term, and by extension the policy, becomes susceptible to a wide array of interpretations that can be manipulated in kind with desired outcomes. It may in fact be another example of the conflation between sexual identity and sexual behavior, a distortion that is common in society and the legal realm. Compounding all of this is the fact that no guidance is normally provided to help teachers determine acceptable standards of instruction or responses.

C. Most Recent Policies

Recently, two policies were thrust into the media spotlight. The first was a local policy in effect in Annoka-Hennepin, Minnesota. The Sexual Orientation Curriculum Policy (“SOCP”) stated in part:

80 See Bonauto, supra note 32 (arguing that these policies are unconstitutionally vague).
81 ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-716(C) (2009).
83 See id. The vagueness of the term “life-style” has made it an effective tool for opponents of gay rights by allowing them to fill in the term with inaccurate and negative stereotypes. Id. These inaccurate characterizations have played an important role in developing public perceptions of the LGBT community and have found their way into the “ideology of right-wing legislators, executives, and judges.” Id.
84 Toni M. Massaro, Gay Rights, Thick and Thin, 49 STAN. L. REV. 45, 48 (1996) (explaining that the terms sexual identity, homosexuality, sexual conduct, and sexual orientation all have important but highly contested, and often contradictory, meanings).
85 See Erdely, supra note 49 (discussing the fact that although some training was given to some teachers in one school district regarding their No Promo Homo policy, the teachers and school district officials themselves remained confused about how the policy was to be implemented).
86 See Andy Birkey, Anoka-Hennepin Schools Dig in on Anti-LGBT Policy as Lawsuit, Federal Investigation Start, THE MINNESOTA INDEPENDENT (Aug. 21, 2011), http://minnesotaindependent.com/84891/anoka-hennepin-schools-dig-in-on-anti-lgbt-policy-as-lawsuit-federal-investigation-start (acknowledging that this case has garnered extensive attention due in part to the fact that the district falls within Republican presidential candidate Michelle Bachman’s
Teaching about sexual orientation is not a part of the District adopted curriculum; rather, such matters are best addressed within individual family homes, churches, or community organizations. Anoka-Hennepin staff, in the course of their professional duties, shall remain neutral on matters regarding sexual orientation including but not limited to student led discussions.  

The SOCP was predated by an official memo promulgated by the District which declared that “homosexuality [is] not to be taught/addressed as a normal, valid lifestyle.” Written guidance from the Anoka-Hennepin School District made clear that the term “sexual orientation” in the SOCP was intended to bar discussion of homosexuality, but not heterosexuality. In a lawsuit on behalf of five former and current students of the Anoka-Hennepin School District, the Southern Poverty Law Center and National Center for Lesbian Rights alleged that the SOCP violated student rights under the Equal Protection Clause, the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution, Title IX, and the Minnesota Human Rights Act. The plaintiffs pointed to evidence of bullying and harassment that went unchecked by teachers and administrators, who were inadequately trained to deal with anti-gay bullying due to the “neutrality” policy. The plaintiffs alleged that one administrator told parents that the School District handles issues of racial harassment differently from harassment based on sexual orientation. For an extensive discussion of the origins and devastating effects of the SOCP. See Erdely, supra note 49.

87 Anoka Hennepin School District, School Board Policies, 601.11 Sexual Orientation Curriculum Policy, www.anoka.k12.mn.us (follow “School Board” hyperlink; then select “Education Programs” hyperlink from “School Board Policies” menu; then select “Instructional Curriculum” hyperlink; then select “Sexual Orientation Curriculum Policy” hyperlink).
88 Erdely, supra note 49.
90 Id.
91 Id. The five students alleged similar experiences. Id. One student, an eighteen year old lesbian, alleged that she was forced to drop out of school as a result of harassment that began in her sophomore year of high school, when a picture of her and her girlfriend were distributed around the school. Id. Although she was verbally and physically abused, teachers did not take serious action. Id. After dropping out she admitted to attempting suicide. Another student, a fourteen year old boy, was subjected to verbal and physical harassment because he was perceived as gay by other students because his adoptive fathers were gay and he participated in gymnastics. Complaint, Doe v. Anoka-Hennepin School District No. 11. He also reported the abuse, but it continued. Id. Another student, a fourteen year old bisexual student, alleged that she reported incidents of harassment and abuse to school staff over thirty times, but nothing substantial changed. Id.
 Plaintiffs also pointed out that during the nine month period between November 2009 and July 2010, at least four LGBT or perceived LGBT students in the Anoka-Hennepin School District committed suicide. After several months, the School District and the Plaintiffs entered into a consent decree. Under the decree, the School Board agreed to implement a program with significant protections for LGBT students, with the aim of preventing bullying and creating a more accepting environment. Of particular importance, the School District specifically agreed to repeal its SOCP, and made clear that school officials may affirm the self-worth of students, including their status as LGBT.

Another policy that garnered substantial attention was Tennessee’s proposed law, dubbed the “Don’t Say Gay” bill. The original bill would have banned teachers from “provid[ing] any instruction or material that discusses sexual orientation other than heterosexuality.” The bill was later amended and would have required curriculum to be “limited exclusively to age-appropriate natural human reproduction science.” The bill’s Senate sponsor, Senator Stacey

92 Id. The facts as alleged indicate that many teachers and school staff were unsure of what exactly was proscribed by the neutrality policy, leaving them unsure of how to deal with anti-gay bullying, in fear that any actions taken could be construed as a violation of the policy. Id.
93 Id.
95 Id.
96 Id.
99 See S.B. 0049.
Campfield, made it clear that the change in the language of the bill was merely a way to get the bill passed by assuaging fellow Senators uneasy with viability of the original language.\textsuperscript{100} He was confident that the altered language would be just as effective in barring discussion of homosexuality, stating, “There's more than one way to skin a cat. This skins the cat, but doesn't scare [other legislators] so much.”\textsuperscript{101} The bill’s House sponsor, Representative Jon Hensley stated, “I have two children — in the third- and fourth-grade — and [I] don’t want them to be exposed to things I don’t agree with . . . .”\textsuperscript{102} The Tennessee Senate approved the bill in late 2011, but the bill died in May 2012 when the House of Representatives failed to vote on it before the end of the legislative session.\textsuperscript{103}

Although it did not garner nearly as much media attention, legislators in Missouri, taking the lead from Tennessee, introduced a similar Don’t Say Gay bill.\textsuperscript{104} The law would have banned teachers from talking about any sexuality other than heterosexuality and would have also banned any extracurricular activities that would do the same.\textsuperscript{105} It stated, “Notwithstanding any other law to the contrary, no instruction, material, or extracurricular activity sponsored by a public school that discusses sexual orientation other than in scientific instruction concerning human reproduction shall be provided in any public school.”\textsuperscript{106}

\textsuperscript{101} Id.
\textsuperscript{103} Senate OK’s Bill to Ban Teaching of Homosexuality, supra note 100; Tennessee ‘Don’t Say Gay’ Bill To Get Axed, THE HUFFINGTON POST (May 1, 2012), http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/01/tennessee-dont-say-gay-bill_n_1467396.html.
\textsuperscript{104} See H.B.2051, 96th Gen. Assemb. (Mo. 2012)
\textsuperscript{105} Id.
\textsuperscript{106} Id. The bill later died when the legislative session ended while the bill remained stuck in committee. Id.
Tennessee and Missouri’s Don’t Say Gay bills illustrate that No Promo Homo school policies are not just a vestige of past anti-gay rhetoric, but instead continue to find support from certain sizeable segments of legislators and citizens alike.

IV. Equal Protection Clause

A. Constitutional Standard

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution requires that “No state shall . . . deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”107 The Equal Protection Clause gives Congress the power to enforce this right, “but absent controlling congressional direction, the courts have themselves devised standards for determining the validity of state legislation or other official action that is challenged as denying equal protection.”108 Under this framework, the basic constitutional question is whether the challenged government action is justified by a sufficient purpose.109

When a government action is challenged under the Equal Protection Clause, three inquiries should be made: First, what is the classification? Second, what is the appropriate level of scrutiny? Third, does the government action meet the level of scrutiny?110

The U.S. Supreme Court has interpreted the Equal Protection Clause to afford differing levels of protection to various groups.111 Classifications such as race, alienage, and national

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107 U.S. CONST. amend. XIV, § 1.
108 City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr., Inc., 473 U.S. 432, 439–40 (1985) (setting out Court’s ability to enforce the Equal Protection Clause even where there is no binding federal law).
109 See ERWIN CHEMERINSKY, CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 717 (3d ed. 2009) (providing a framework for analysis applicable to all cases arising under the Equal Protection Clause).
110 Id.
111 Id. at 719.
origin are entitled to strict scrutiny.\textsuperscript{112} Laws found to be discriminatory against a classification subject to strict scrutiny will be “sustained only if they are suitably tailored to serve a compelling state interest.”\textsuperscript{113} Strict scrutiny is usually fatal to the challenged law because the government must have a truly significant reason for the discrimination.\textsuperscript{114} Classifications such as gender and illegitimacy are entitled to intermediate scrutiny.\textsuperscript{115} Intermediate scrutiny will result in the law being upheld if the government can establish that the discrimination is substantially related to an important government purpose.\textsuperscript{116}

All other classifications, including sexual orientation, are reviewed based on a rational basis standard.\textsuperscript{117} A classification “must be upheld against equal protection challenge if there is any reasonably conceivable state of facts that could provide a rational basis for the classification.”\textsuperscript{118} This imposes on a plaintiff the burden of refuting any and all possible justifications for the challenged law.\textsuperscript{119} As a result, rational basis review is a very difficult standard for a challenger to meet. This is especially evident when looking at the outcomes of equal protection clause claims; between 1973 and 1999, the United States Supreme Court upheld over a hundred classifications on rational review basis, while invalidating less than a dozen classifications under this review.\textsuperscript{120}

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\textsuperscript{112} Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 440.  \\
\textsuperscript{113} Id.  \\
\textsuperscript{114} Id.  \\
\textsuperscript{115} Id.  \\
\textsuperscript{116} Id.  \\
\textsuperscript{119} See Robert C. Farrell, Successful Rational Basis Claims in the Supreme Court from the 1971 Term through Romer v. Evans, 32 IND. L. REV. 357, 359 (1999).  \\
\textsuperscript{120} Id. at 416–19.  \
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It is undeniable that the level of scrutiny a group is entitled to will be extremely influential in the outcome of any particular legal classification. Although the factors involved in determining the level of scrutiny a classification is entitled to have not been clearly established, some general patterns have emerged. Thus, a court will likely consider whether the involved group is a “discrete and insular” minority, whether the group is defined by an immutable characteristic, whether the group has been subjected to a history of discrimination, whether the group is “politically powerless,” and whether the government classification is related to the group’s functioning in society. Groups who meet these criteria may then be entitled to suspect or quasi-suspect classification.

It has been the aim of many minority groups who are only entitled to rational review to attempt to convince the court to afford their classification an upgrade to require heightened scrutiny via a suspect or quasi-suspect classification. However, these classifications have remained relatively unaltered over time, and are likely to remain so, due to the Supreme Court’s reluctance to acknowledge new suspect or quasi-suspect classifications even where the group

121 See Marcy Strauss, Reevaluating Suspect Classifications, 35 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 135, 138 (2011) (noting that the outcome of Equal Protection Clause claims is highly dependent on whether the group involved is classified as a suspect, quasi suspect, or non-suspect class).
122 See id. at 147–167 (providing an in-depth analysis of the development and implementation of the various relevant factors).
123 Id. Much disagreement has emerged due to the lack of any clear precedent delineating whether certain elements are required, and what the scope and importance of such factors should be. Compare Kari Balog, Note, Equal Protection for Homosexuals: Why the Immutability Argument Is Necessary and How It Is Met, 53 CLEV. ST. L. REV. 545, 557 (2006) (arguing that immutability is required and important aspect of Equal Protection claim), with Janet E. Halley, Sexual Orientation and the Politics of Biology: A Critique of the Argument from Immutability, 46 STAN. L. REV. 503, 507 (1994) (arguing that immutability is relevant but not a requirement), and Susan R. Schmeiser, Changing the Immutable, 41 CONN. L. REV. 1495, 1506 (2009) (arguing that immutability should be completely eliminated from equal rights analysis).
124 See Strauss, supra note 121, at 138–39 (explaining that the definition and application of these factors has been inconsistent, ambiguous, and perhaps arbitrary).
125 See Yoshino, supra note 117, at 756–57 (emphasizing the desirability of heightened scrutiny classifications from the prospective of a challenging minority).
appears to have fulfilled the factors that would ostensibly entitle them to such treatment. Additionally, the Court has been reluctant to recognize new fundamental Constitutional rights, which would likely lead to a blitz of challenges to state and local laws. Recent cases, however, indicate that the rational basis review has been given “a bite” resulting in a sort of quasi-heightened scrutiny for classifications such as sexual orientation. Thus, it is my contention that this shift in analysis, if applied to No Promo Homo laws in schools, would be more likely to result in a finding that these laws are unconstitutional.

**B. Rational Review With a Bite**

Much has been said about the consistency of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decisions regarding rational review in the context of the Equal Protection Clause. The standard two-step test requires that: 1) the legislature pursue a legitimate goal; and 2) the means chosen to attain that goal are not arbitrary or irrational. Thus, if a court finds any plausible government interests and can conceive of reasons to support the government’s methods for achieving those interests, the law will survive Constitutional scrutiny.

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126 See id. (arguing that the heightened scrutiny classifications have been closed off but other avenues for “heightened review” have emerged elsewhere in constitutional jurisprudence); see also Suzanne B. Goldberg, *Equality Without Tiers*, 77 S. CAL. L. REV. 481, 485 (2004) (discussing how the set of groups entitled to heightened review closed almost immediately after they were first enunciated).


129 See supra Part IV.C.


132 Wadhwani, supra note 130.
While this test is fairly straightforward, the rational review standard has become increasingly difficult for the Court to implement in a consistent manner. Under what has been termed “second order” rational review or “rational review with a bite,” the Court does not defer to the judgment of the legislature, but instead conducts an “inquiry into whether given the benefits of the statute, the statute reflects a rational accommodation of interests.” In implementing a more equitable, balancing-type approach, the Court is effectively eschewing the dictates of rational review, and instead, applying some formulation of the more stringent heightened review. In his concurring opinion in City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center Justice Marshall chastised the majority’s reasoning, stating:

The Court's heightened-scrutiny discussion is even more puzzling given that Cleburne's ordinance is invalidated only after being subjected to precisely the sort of probing inquiry associated with heightened scrutiny. To be sure, the Court does not label its handiwork heightened scrutiny, and perhaps the method employed must hereafter be called “second order” rational-basis review rather than “heightened scrutiny.” But however labeled, the rational basis test invoked today is most assuredly not the rational-basis test of [precedent].

Almost two decades later, in another concurring opinion, Justice O’Conner seemed to echo Justice Marshall’s observations, albeit in a more approving manner. In Lawrence v. Texas, the Court declared a Texas statute criminalizing same-sex sodomy was unconstitutional under the Due Process Clause. While the majority refused to strike down the law based on the

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133 See Yoshino, supra note 117, at 760–61 (noting changing patterns of analysis in Equal Protection Clause cases).
134 Kelso, supra note 130.
137 Id. Many commentators view Lawrence as an important step in the way of increasing legal and social equality for LGBT people. Joseph J. Wardenski, A Minor Exception?: The Impact of Lawrence v. Texas on LGBT Youth, 95 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 1363, 1365–66 (2005) (noting that the Supreme Court in Lawrence “effectively legitimized the status of being gay”).
Equal Protection Clause, the Court acknowledged that it was a “tenable” argument.\textsuperscript{138} In her concurring opinion, Justice O’Connor argued that “[w]hen a law exhibits such a desire to harm a politically unpopular group, [the Court has] applied a more searching form of rational basis review to strike down such laws under the Equal Protection Clause.”\textsuperscript{139} Although the \textit{Lawrence} statute was invalidated under the Due Process Clause, the Court’s reasoning echoes the reasoning found in several critical “rational review with a bite” cases.\textsuperscript{140} Three cases, discussed in detail below, are especially poignant in the analysis of modern Equal Protection Clause jurisprudence under rational review: \textit{United States Department of Agriculture v. Moreno}, \textit{Cleburn v. Cleburn Living Center}, and \textit{Romer v. Evans}.\textsuperscript{141}

1. \textit{United States Dep’t of Agric v. Moreno}

\textit{Moreno} involved an Equal Protection Clause challenge to a provision of the Food Stamp Act of 1964, which excluded distribution of food stamps to any household containing an unrelated individual.\textsuperscript{142} A class of plaintiffs barred from receiving benefits because of their household make-up filed suit, alleging the requirement was discriminatory and contrary to the Equal Protection Clause.\textsuperscript{143} Because the plaintiffs were not one of the classifications entitled to heightened scrutiny, the Court evaluated the challenged law under rational basis review.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{138} See \textit{Lawrence}, 539 U.S. at 574–75 (“Were we to hold the [sodomy] statute invalid under the Equal Protection Clause some might question whether a prohibition would be valid if drawn differently, say, to prohibit the conduct both between same-sex and different-sex participants.”).

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Lawrence v. Texas}, 539 U.S. at 584 (O’Connor, J., concurring) (asserting that the Texas Statute constituted a violation of the Equal Protection Clause when analyzed under the rational review with a bite test).

\textsuperscript{140} See \textit{Romer v. Evans}, 517 U.S. 620, 625 (1996) (invalidating Colorado constitutional amendment barring protections for homosexuals); \textit{Cleburne}, 473 U.S. at 450 (invalidating ordinance requiring special permitting for construction of group home for the mentally retarded); \textit{United States Dep’t of Agric. v. Moreno}, 413 U.S. 528, 534–35 (1973) (invalidating provision of Food Stamp Act requiring household members be related).


\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Moreno}, 413 U.S. at 529–30.

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Id.} at 531–33.

\textsuperscript{144} See \textit{id.} at 533 (providing that the legislative classification must be sustained if it is rationally related to a legitimate government interest).
Of particular importance in the case was the legislative history of the Food Stamp Act of 1964.\textsuperscript{145} A House report indicated that the intent behind the relation requirement was to prevent “hippies” and “hippie communes” from receiving benefits.\textsuperscript{146} The Court rejected the government’s argument that the exclusionary classification was an effort to curb fraud, instead finding that the classification did not bear enough relation with the stated intent for the reasoning to be credible.\textsuperscript{147} The Court held that absent any other justification, the Food Stamp Act’s relation requirement could not be upheld based on this purpose.\textsuperscript{148} Writing for the majority, Justice Brennan declared that “if the constitutional conception of ‘equal protection of the laws’ means anything, it must at the very least mean that a bare congressional desire to harm a politically unpopular group cannot constitute a legitimate governmental interest.”\textsuperscript{149} Moreno establishes that while rational review is a very relaxed standard, there are some instances where there is really no rational basis for the government action.\textsuperscript{150}

2. \textit{Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Center}

\textit{Cleburne} involved a city ordinance requiring a special use permit for the construction of hospitals for the insane, feeble minded, alcoholics or drug addicts, or penal or correctional institutions.\textsuperscript{151} The Cleburne Living Center sought a permit to build a home for the mentally retarded.\textsuperscript{152} When the city council denied the permit, the Cleburne Living Center filed suit, challenging the validity of the ordinance, and arguing that it discriminated against the mentally retarded.

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145 Id. at 534.
146 Id.
148 \textit{Moreno}, 413 U.S. at 534.
149 Id. (rejecting the idea that any government interest will satisfy rational review).
150 See id. at 538 (“Traditional equal protection analysis does not require that every classification be drawn with precise mathematical nicety . . . But the classification here in issue is not only ‘imprecise’, it is wholly without any rational basis.”).
152 Id. at 437.
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retarded and violated the Equal Protection Clause. The district court found that mental retardation was neither a suspect class nor a quasi suspect class, and was instead subject to rational review. Applying rational review, the district court found that the ordinance was rationally related to the city’s legitimate interests in protecting the community and the mentally retarded and thus found the ordinance to be constitutional. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals determined that mental retardation was a quasi suspect classification and thus subject to an intermediate level of scrutiny.

The Supreme Court of the United States held that mental retardation was only entitled to rational basis review, not heightened scrutiny. The Court was hesitant to set out a standard that would expand the classifications entitled to strict scrutiny, due to the difficulty that could arise in where to draw to the line. Even subject to only rational review, the Supreme Court was unwilling to accept the City’s reasoning for the law. The Court found that the city’s reasoning was based on “mere negative attitudes or fear” which was not a rational basis for the

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153 Id.
154 Id. at 437–38.
155 Id. at 448. The district court seems to accept the City’s argument that it was acting in the interests of the protecting the mentally retarded. Id. The City argued that the proposed living center would have been located across from a school, which would have led children to mock the residents. Id. Additionally, the City argued the proposed center was located in a flood plain area which could be especially dangerous to the residents in the event of a flood. Id. The U.S. Supreme Court rejected these arguments. Id.
156 Id. at 437–38.
157 Id. at 442–43. See also Gunther, supra note 127 (providing further discussion of the Court’s unwillingness to expand heightened scrutiny). The Court reasoned that while mental retardation was an immutable characteristic, the mentally retarded classification is made up of people with very diverse characteristics and conditions. Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 442. Thus, the legislation affecting the classification is something better left to expertise of legislature and not the judiciary. Id. The Court also discusses the fact that that there has been a good amount of legislation aimed at protecting the handicapped, and this would seem to suggest that there should be some leeway so as to not impose or impede on “remedial efforts.” Id at 445.
158 Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 445–46.
159 See Richard B. Saphire, Equal Protection, Rational Basis Review, and the Impact of Cleburne Living Center, Inc., 88 Ky. L.J. 591, 598 (2000) (arguing that although the Court claimed to have applied rational basis review, its reasoning was consistent with a more stringent review frame).
legislative action. The Court found that where the permit requirement rested on “irrational prejudice,” the ordinance was plainly contrary to the requirements of the Equal Protection Clause.

3. Romer v. Evans

In 1992, Colorado voters approved Amendment 2, a constitutional provision prohibiting any state action designed to protect homosexuals from discrimination. A suit was filed by several government employees and private citizens challenged the amendment on the basis of the Equal Protection Clause. The district court ruled that the amendment was subject to strict scrutiny because of its infringement on the rights of gays and lesbians from participating in the political process. The state attempted to make the argument that Amendment 2 was designed to serve compelling interests; however, the court was not persuaded. The Supreme Court of Colorado affirmed the ruling and the United States Supreme Court granted certiorari.

In its ruling striking the amendment, the Court rejected Colorado’s argument that by prohibiting protections for gays and lesbians, the State was merely ensuring that everyone was placed on equal ground. Emphasizing the fact that the law specifically singled out only homosexuals, and had an extensive effect upon the legal rights of homosexuals, the Court found that even if the amendment was only subject to rational review, the law was still violative of

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160 Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 448 (“Private biases may be outside the reach of the law, but the law cannot, directly or indirectly, give them effect.”) (citing Palmore v. Sidoti, 466 U.S. 429, 433 (1984)).
161 Cleburne, 473 U.S. at 446 (“The State may not rely on a classification whose relationship to an asserted goal is so attenuated as to render the distinction arbitrary or irrational.”) (citing Zobel v. Williams, 457 U.S. 55, 61–63 (1982)); United States Dept. of Agric. v. Moreno, 413 U.S. 528, 535 (1973).
163 Id. at 625.
164 Id.
165 Id. at 625–26.
166 Id. at 626.
167 Id. at 631. The State made the argument that the protection of gay rights was akin to giving them special rights above and beyond those of the ordinary citizen. Id.
even this lenient standard.\textsuperscript{168} Amendment 2 was found to be unconstitutional because it “imposed a ‘broad and undifferentiated disability’ on a single group and harbored ‘animus’ toward a class of people.”\textsuperscript{169} The \textit{Romer} Court’s finding of a violation of the Equal Protection Clause even under rational review was a significant development in Equal Protection jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{170}

\textbf{C. Rational Review With A Bite as Applied to No Promo Homo Laws}

In determining the level of scrutiny afforded to various classifications, the Court has pointed to several important considerations, such as whether the group is a discrete and insular minority, whether the group is defined by an immutable characteristic, and whether the group has been subjected to a history of discrimination.\textsuperscript{171} Although LGBT people are likely to fulfill most of these factors, it is unlikely that LGBT people will be afforded strict scrutiny, due to a general reluctance to accept new strict scrutiny classifications.\textsuperscript{172} However, because the Supreme Court has effectively closed off this avenue, the Court seems more willing to afford classifications entitled to rational review a more probing analysis.\textsuperscript{173} This rational review with a bite standard, would likely be the standard applied to No Homo Promo policies challenged under the Equal Protection Clause.\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Id}. at 631–32. This finding represents a rejection of the idea of rational review as a completely toothless standard. \textit{See id}. In effect, not every government interest is legitimate. \textit{See id}.\textsuperscript{169} Amy D. Ronner, \textit{When Court Let Insane Delusions Pass the Rational Basis Test}, 21 U. FLA. J. L. & PUB. POL’Y 1, 30 (2010).\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Id}. at 30–31 (asserting that \textit{Romer} “forged a foundation for future equal protection challenges . . .”).\textsuperscript{171} \textit{See Strauss, supra} note 121.\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Id}.\textsuperscript{173} \textit{See Yoshino, supra} note 117, at 756–57.\textsuperscript{174} \textit{See generally} Jeremy B. Smith, \textit{The Flaws of Rational Basis with Bite: Why the Supreme Court Should Acknowledge Its Application of Heightened Scrutiny to Classifications Based on Sexual Orientation}, 73 FORDHAM L. REV. 2769, 2770 (2005) (arguing that while rational review with a bite does afford more critical analysis, it causes inconsistency in the lower courts and makes the Court’s decisions susceptible to criticism as intellectually dishonest); Robert C. Farrell, \textit{The Two Versions of Rational-Basis Review and Same-Sex Relationships}, 86 WASH. L. REV. 281 (2011) (discussing lower court cases evidencing the inconsistency that has resulted from rational review with a bite).
Rational review with a bite cases such as *Moreno, Cleburne*, and *Romer* establish that even where the Court ostensibly defers to the judgment of the government, not every justification will be sufficient. In each case, the Court found evidence of some ulterior basis for the classification, essentially some sort of bias or animus against the group.

In the case of Tennessee’s proposed “Don’t Say Gay Bill,” the words of one of the bill’s sponsors, Senator Stacey Campfield, were especially telling. In a radio interview discussing his proposed bill, responding to a question concerning the prevalence of bullying of LGBT students in schools, he stated “[t]he bullying thing is the biggest lark out there.” Regarding homosexuality, he stated, “[i]t happens in nature, but so does beastiality, that does not make it right or something we should be teaching in school.” Further he asserted that “it is virtually, not completely, but virtually, impossible to contract AIDS through heterosexual sex . . . very rarely [transmitted].” As the sponsor of law which was supposedly intended to protect children from the dangers of sexual activity and sexually transmitted diseases, Senator Campfield’s statements are not only false, they are downright dangerous.

With regards to No Promo Homo policies in general, it will be difficult for the government to provide any justification beyond that of moral opposition to homosexuality. Even though some of the policies are proffered in the context of sex education or AIDS education, the

175 See Part IV.B.
177 Id.
178 Id. He continued on saying “[m]ost people realize that AIDS came from the homosexual community -- it was one guy screwing a monkey, if I recall correctly, and then having sex with men. It was an airline pilot, if I recall.” Id. In fact, the widely accepted view is that AIDS originated in Africa when a hunter was exposed to infected blood from a chimpanzee he had killed for food. *Basic Information about HIV and AIDS*, CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL (Apr. 11, 2012) http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/basic/index.htm.
http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6031a1.htm (explaining that in the United States one in three new cases of HIV infections are transmitted through heterosexual contact).
central policies do not seem to have an interest in actually preventing the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases.\textsuperscript{180} It is completely implausible to assert that no method of homosexual sex is safe. If the state was truly interested in preventing the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, as would be the likely justification for the law should it be challenged, they might actually provide instruction on methods of safe homosexual sex, just as they would do for heterosexual sex. Furthermore, the language of the policies evidences an animus against LGBT people.\textsuperscript{181} These laws make it clear that the aim of the policy is to deter homosexuality by stigmatizing and demeaning it. It is striking that the policies require that teachers emphasize that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense,\textsuperscript{182} in spite of the fact that the United States Supreme Court struck down Texas’s own law banning same-sex sodomy in \textit{Lawrence v. Texas}.\textsuperscript{183} As a result, these policies violate the Equal Protection Clause because they do not have any viable rational justifications as written.

\textbf{V. Challenging No Promo Homo}

The aim of those fighting to eliminate No Promo Homo policies in schools is not to recruit young children into a homosexual “lifestyle,” as some have argued.\textsuperscript{184} Instead, the aim is to remove just one of the many legal and social barriers to equality. Because the school plays such an influential role in children’s lives, No Promo Homo policies can be especially destructive to children who identify or are perceived as LGBT.\textsuperscript{185} The recent media attention on

\textsuperscript{180} See id.; e.g., ARIZ. REV. STAT. ANN. § 15-716(C) (2009) (forbidding instruction that promotes homosexual lifestyle, portrays homosexual life-style as an alternative, or suggests some methods of homosexual sex are safe).
\textsuperscript{181} See, e.g., ALA. CODE § 16-40A-2 (1992) (requiring that teachers emphasize that homosexuality is not a lifestyle acceptable to the general public and that homosexual conduct is a criminal offense); TEX. HEALTH & SAFETY CODE ANN. § 163.002 (2005) (same).
\textsuperscript{182} Id.
\textsuperscript{183} Lawrence v. Texas, 539 U.S. 559 (2003).
\textsuperscript{184} See supra note 36.
\textsuperscript{185} See infra Part II.B.
two No Promo Homo policies indicates the time is ripe to bring further challenges to the laws. The Annoka-Hennepin School District lawsuit and subsequent settlement, which agreed to repeal its policy regarding LGBT students, and allow for the affirmation of students’ LGBT status, could be instrumental in spurring similar challenges to other No Promo Homo policies around the United States, or even encourage some states or districts to reconsider and repeal their No Promo Homo policies. The threat of possible negative media attention and litigation costs involved in defending such a policy might also help to prevent No Promo Homo policies from being adopted by other schools and legislators. It is also important to note that some of the statewide No Promo Homo policies have been challenged by subsequent legislators. Media coverage of these efforts could help increase support for these repeal measures.

In addition, another promising response to local and state level No Promo Homo educational policies is federal intervention. Although, education has traditionally been within the purview of state and local government, recent federal legislation, such as the No Child Left Behind Act and the Race to the Top Fund, indicates a possible trend towards standardization of educational programs across the United States. Continued pressure from the Department of Education could help lead to a change in policy. Alternatively, the Department could issue

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186 See infra Part III.
187 See Civil Rights Organizations Announce Agreement to Resolve Anoka-Hennepin School District Bullying Lawsuits, supra note 94. Sam Wolfe, an attorney with the Southern Poverty Law Center, stated that the consent decree entered into by the Anoka-Hennepin School District “sets the stage for Anoka-Hennepin to become a model for other school districts to follow in creating more respectful learning environments for all students in a thoughtful, systemic, and proactive way.” Id.
189 See Depoian, supra note 62, at 166.
guidance on the topic of how teachers can abide by these policies while still ensuring the safety and well-being of students.

Moreover, the Department of Education can continue to lobby for federal anti-bullying legislation that specifically covers sexual orientation and gender identity. Two such bills, The Student Non-Discrimination Act and the Safe Schools Improvement Act, have been introduced and met with approval from LGBT activists and educators.\textsuperscript{191} Although similar legislation\textsuperscript{192} has failed in the past, the hope is that eventually there will be enough political support to have such a law passed. These protections would send the signal that even if No Promo Homo laws remain on the books, this will not excuse ignoring the destructive results they may have on students. This would also force school officials to evaluate their programs to ensure compliance with the law. Ultimately the best anti-bullying policies prevent bullying rather than punish it severely after the fact.\textsuperscript{193}

\textbf{VI. Conclusion}

No Promo Homo policies continue to enjoy prevalence in classrooms around the country.\textsuperscript{194} Those who support these policies applaud them for presumably protecting children from homosexuality. Those who oppose the policies argue that these laws unfairly target a vulnerable group, and that children should be entitled to accurate information. Accordingly, it is unsurprising that battles over what students are exposed to in the classroom, especially with regard to homosexuality, engender strong opinions on both sides of the aisle. Complicating the issue, or perhaps resulting from it, the incidence of bullying and stigmatization of students who

\textsuperscript{192} \textit{See, e.g.,} S. 3739, 111th Cong. (2010); H.R. 2262, 111th Cong. (2010); H.R. 3132, 110th Cong. (2007).
\textsuperscript{194} \textit{See supra} Part II.A.
are LGBT or are perceived to be LGBT demonstrates the urgency required in dealing with this issue. The failure of schools to address or support students who are LGBT or may come from an LGBT family likely contributes to the stigmatization of those students.

Ultimately, however, those states and local governments who continue to enforce curricular requirements banning the discussion or promotion of homosexuality, are likely violating the rights of students themselves. These policies stigmatize one class of people, based on nothing more than political and social animus against them. Although sexual orientation has not been acknowledged as a strict scrutiny classification under the relevant Equal Protection Clause jurisprudence, it appears that sexual orientation fits squarely within the enumerated requirements for strict scrutiny, and should be classified as such. However, even if the Court continues its reluctance to grant strict scrutiny review to new classifications, it would appear that No Promo Homo policies still violate the Equal Protection Clause, even when only entitled to rational basis review. Although rational basis review is a very deferential standard, the Supreme Court has shown that although it may be applying rational review, there does seem to be a willingness to give it a bite, thus requiring a more compelling reason for the classification.

There is no doubt that challenging these policies in court will likely prove a long and difficult process, but taking into account the immense impact they have on students, it is an important cause. In addition to courtroom challenges, educators, parents and legislators should work together to come up with a solution that would be both appropriate for school children but also present a fair portrayal of homosexuality, so as to protect vulnerable children. Ultimately,

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195 See supra Part II.B.
196 See supra Part IV.C.
197 See supra Part IV.A.
198 See supra Part IV.B.
199 See supra Part V.
those who support these policies, and those who are fighting to change them, have the same goal in mind. Indisputably, the goal is to protect our children. The only question is whether both groups will be able to put aside their ideological differences in order to prevent further damage to children across the country.