



To: House Education Committee  
From: Nancy Willard, M.S., J.D.  
Re: HB 3032 (and HB 2342 and HB 3050) (continuing)  
Date: April 2, 2019

A new story was just published by the Southern Poverty Law Clinic's Teaching Tolerance program. As this relates to these bills, I thought I would share. The URL is: <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/hate-at-school-february-2019>.

It is news like this that is so frustrating for those of us who strive to inform schools about more positive practices they could implement--but who are frequently disregarded because school leaders are overwhelmed because schools are not sufficiently funded, the myopic focus of educators is on high stakes testing, and school leaders are doing what they have been directed by state anti-bullying statutes to do.

### **Hate at School: February 2019**

Instead of lessons about black history and culture, February brought slurs, blackface, threats and even violence at some U.S. schools.

March 27, 2019  
Coshandra Dillard

While we encourage teaching black history year-round, we also recognize the significance of capitalizing on February—a time when teachers can take intentional steps to broaden students' knowledge about black history and how it shapes their world today.

If our most recent report on hate at school is any indication, many educators and schools have a long way to go in teaching this history right.

Media reports in February show harmful simulations, Black History Month programs gone wrong and non-black students and adults pushing back against the notions of acknowledging blackness or social justice.

These incidents, along with others this month, brought our total to 91—the highest we've recorded since we began tracking news media reports of hate in school in October 2017.

Here's what else we found in February:

- Hate incidents made news in 34 states, with eight in New York and six each in Minnesota and California.
- Most of the incidents (63) were racist.
- There were 13 anti-Semitic incidents, all of which involved slurs or the drawing or carving of swastikas on school property.
- Four incidents targeted LGBTQ students, two targeted Muslim students, two were sexist, one was general hate speech, one targeted immigrants and one incident targeted a student with a disability.
- Three incidents included multiple types of hate. In Oregon, for example, anti-immigrant slurs and comments were combined with racism at one sporting event and with sexism and white supremacist symbols at another.
- Five incidents featured white supremacist themes, such as Confederate or white nationalist symbols or flags or references to the Ku Klux Klan and “race purity.”

### **A Month of Mis-Teachable Moments**

Black History Month ended badly in Port Charlotte, Florida, when a black teacher was forced to remove a door covering that showed former National Football League [player Colin Kaepernick kneeling](#). When students at the school posted a picture of the Black History Month decoration on social media, it garnered attention—including community members who asked that it be removed. Instead of leading a discussion with students and the community about Kaepernick and the American tradition of nonviolent protest, the district ordered the decoration removed. A [spokesperson said](#) it was because the teacher’s poster was “causing a disruption at the school.”

And in Birmingham, Alabama, a school-wide Black History Month program went very wrong after teachers gave middle school students gold or purple bands to wear. Students were separated and offered privileges based on their band color. A handout specified that “[Gold Band=Privilege/White](#)” while “[Purple Band=Oppressed/Black.](#)” Modeled after the infamous [blue eyes/brown eyes exercise](#), the lesson had unintended consequences: Students began mistreating one another, with some even calling others the n-word. The school’s principal stands by the program but told local news media that he won’t do the exercise again because of backlash from parents.

For some, Black History Month was a time to bemoan its existence. A school board member in Centerville, Tennessee, shared a post on Facebook with an image that read, “February is national Stop Blaming White People Month! Accept responsibility for your own bad choices. Hug a white person.”

And during a Black History Month assembly at a Philadelphia school, a white student reportedly shouted racial slurs. According to [an Instagram post](#) by a member of the student group Minorities Silenced, the offending student said black people “don’t deserve an African American assembly, they only use it as a reason to tear whites down.” The post notes, “He also say [n-words] are a bane of his existence,” and that the student wrote on paper that “[n-words] are oogily boogily banana eating monkeys.” In a separate incident, the student wrote a slur on a desk.

Students experienced racism beyond discourse focused on Black History Month. Blackface, nooses and the n-word showed up again in reports this month. In Des Moines, Iowa, basketball fans directed racist chants—including monkey, gorilla and dog noises—at players of the opposing team, who were predominantly people of color.

And in four separate incidents—at a high school in Potomac, Maryland, a high school in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, and two schools in Charles Town, West Virginia—students shared “n-word passes.” The passes—created by students or found on the internet and offering “permission” to use the n-word—were copied and distributed across the schools.

## **LGBTQ Students Lack Support**

Only four hate incidents targeting LGBTQ students made the news in February, on par with what we see each month. Two of these incidents involved violent attacks.

In a video taken in a Miami, Florida, school, a large group of students attacked a 10th-grader. The targeted student says that what began as a one-on-one fight quickly got out of control when a number of other students piled on. He reports being called a homophobic slur, and [his grandmother characterizes the attack](#) as a “hate crime.” School officials suspended the targeted student along with the others, saying they considered the attack a “mutual combatant situation.”

In Las Cruces, New Mexico, a gay sixth-grader was attacked after she was threatened with violence. The threats came in the form of social media posts [calling the student](#) a “little lesbian” and saying, “This little girl is about to get jumped Monday again so get your phones out.” When the student was assaulted at school, video of her attack was filmed and posted on Facebook.

Other incidents targeted transgender or nonbinary students, emphasizing the need for schools to [create policies](#) that protect all students. Two male students in New Berlin, Wisconsin were recorded wearing shirts with the phrase “There’s Only” above the symbols for male and female bathrooms. In the video, one of the students yells a homophobic slur. And in Coon Rapids, Iowa, parents of a transgender student are filing a lawsuit against their school board after it ruled that their child could no longer use the boys’ locker room.

## **When Educators Cause Harm**

Educators played a significant role in February’s hate in schools. School officials in the predominantly white district in Madison, Wisconsin are investigating a violent confrontation in which a white, male educator allegedly tackled, punched and pulled out the braids of an 11-year-old black female student.

“She was crying, and her lip was cracked, bleeding, and she handed me three of her braids that were pulled out from her scalp,” the student’s mother [told local news media](#).

In Garner, North Carolina, a substitute teacher reportedly told 10-year-olds that their athletic apparel was “[prison attire](#).” The teacher claimed that Martin Luther King Jr. died by suicide. According to students, she also [told them](#), “If y’all keep doing what you’re doing, you’re going to go to jail.”

Some educators may not have intended to inflict damage but did so nonetheless. In Madison, Virginia, elementary students in a P.E. class were instructed to pretend they were part of the Underground Railroad, working together to overcome obstacles (which included hula hoops and scooter challenges) to escape slavery or help others escape. A local NAACP chapter president [protested to the county school board](#), “Slavery was not a joke. You didn’t get to choose.” She pointed out that at least one black child was designated to act as a fugitive from slavery for the activity.

And in Rock Hill, South Carolina, fifth-grade students were recorded picking cotton and singing “slave songs” as their teachers supervised. The students traveled to The Carroll School, a teaching center for African-American history focused on the effects of the Great Depression on the black community.

One song included the lyrics, “I like it when you fill your sack. I like it when you don’t talk back. Make money for me.”

[A parent said](#), “I’m African-American, and my ancestors picked cotton. Why would I want my son to pick cotton and think it’s fun?”

When teachers harm students or exhibit behavior that contradicts their duty to care for and support all students and families in their communities, it disrupts a school’s learning environment. It’s imperative that we diligently work to address implicit bias and confront hate incidents as they arise—no matter the intent behind them and no matter the month.