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## Opinion: Love your own family, stop hating families of LGBTQ+ kids

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It is once again June. For the LGBTQ+ community, it's officially recognized as Pride Month — an opportunity for us to reflect on our history of tribulations, celebrate our triumphs and unite around the experience of existing as we are, in a world that often tells us we should not.

But for parents of LGBTQ+ students, increasingly engaged allies in our civil rights movement, June offers additional significance — the end of the school year and the beginning of summer. A season that should be focused on creating memories with their kids. There should be s'mores and reunions, camping trips and swimming pools. What there should not be is a continued assault on their children's identities.

Turn the calendar back just nine months, and you'll remember that last fall offered a grueling marathon of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric being spewed by politicians and media figures across the country. Unsurprisingly, Michigan was not spared. In late September 2022, then Republican gubernatorial candidate, Tudor Dixon trumpeted her own version of Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill, to restrict LGBTQ+ expression and First Amendment rights in schools. Outrage over a Metro Detroit school district's available library books shortly followed.

Eventually, Dixon and her anti-LGBTQ+ platform lost decisively in the gubernatorial race to incumbent Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, a documented champion of pro-LGBTQ+ policies.

The electoral defeat could have highlighted that a growing majority of Americans support the community's civil rights, but it instead led to a doubling down of efforts to infringe on LGBTQ+ peoples' freedom of expression and identity. A new non-profit was formed, targeting LGBTQ+ liberties and creating administrative headaches for teachers and officials. National activist groups leveraged community messengers across the country to sow division and create a hostile existence for LGBTQ+ people and families.

The result of these actions in other states, like Florida, led to half of surveyed parents of LGBTQ+ kids saying they are considering relocation. In South Carolina, a school board member allegedly stated that if any of his kid's teachers came out as transgender, he'd show up at their doorstep with a gun.

The same escalation of anti-LGBTQ+ efforts and rhetoric in Michigan has made 2023 an exhausting year, with school board meetings across the state turning into reenactments of the Army-McCarthy hearings.

In Fenton, we saw groups come after schoolteachers for wearing inclusion badges that featured an LGBTQ+ logo, among others. While most community members spoke in support of the badges, one of the five in opposition expressed his belief that there is subliminal messaging involved. The supporters of the badges rebutted with sentiments that they have positive impacts on students.

According to the CDC's Youth Risk Behavioral Surveillance Survey (YRBS), they are correct. The YRBS found that having at least one accepting adult can reduce the risk of a suicide attempt among LGBTQ+ young people by 40%.

In Clarkson, the uncovering of messages from a private Facebook group of anti-LGBTQ+ activists revealed expressions of anger and hostility towards a transgender woman simply for being a substitute teacher in the school district. One group-member called the woman "mentally ill." Another called her a predator.

Even if these efforts don't result in policy impacts or electoral gains for anti-LGBTQ+ activists, the harms of their actions and words are still incredibly consequential.

The Trevor Project's 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health revealed startling findings about how Michigan's LGBTQ+ youth live and interact with the environment in our state. Eighty-nine percent of them reported that recent politics negatively impacted their well-being either sometimes or a lot of the time. By contrast, only 13% of youth found their communities to be very accepting.

Left to pick up the pieces of this offensive and related fallout are underfunded LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations, and of course, the parents of LGBTQ+ students.

On top of all the things parents do for their children, from daily tasks like laundry and soccer practice to the more arduous challenges of navigating adolescence and forays into relationships, parents of LGBTQ+ students have carried the additional onus of protecting their kids from the

hate. Their lives are a calendar increasingly filled with mandatory advocacy at school board meetings, in Lansing, and even at family functions. It should not have to be that way.

So, this month, as the covers come off swimming pools, the grills get fired up, and stories get told over backyard firepits, those espousing and evangelizing anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments are strongly encouraged to spend a little more time loving their own families, and a little less time harming the families of others. Parents of LGBTQ+ kids are your neighbors and fellow human beings. They have more than earned the dignity of a summer break. You are implored to let them have it.

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