

Parents Protest Pride Event at Los Angeles Elementary School



Police officers had to separate protesters and counterprotesters outside a Los Angeles elementary school that has become a flashpoint for LGBTQ+ issues involving children in California during Pride month.

Police officers separated groups of protesters and counterprotesters Friday outside a Los Angeles elementary school that has become a flashpoint for Pride month events across California.

People protesting a planned Pride assembly outside the Los Angeles Unified School District's Saticoy Elementary School wore T-shirts emblazoned with "Leave our kids alone" — and carried signs with slogans such as "Parental Choice Matters" and "No Pride in Grooming."

Tensions at the school have been rising since last month, when a social media page was created to urge parents to keep their children home Friday, the day of the planned assembly.

Across the nation, Pride month celebrations are kicking off amid rising backlash in some places against

LGBTQ+ rights. Community parade organizers, school districts and even professional sports teams have faced protests for flying rainbow flags and honoring drag performers.

While some Republican-led states are limiting classroom conversations about gender and sexuality and banning gender-affirming care, some Democratic cities and states are seeking to expand LGBTQ+ rights and to honor the community's contributions.

Los Angeles Unified School District Board Member Kelly Gonez said the assembly went on without issue. It included a reading of "The Great Big Book of Families," which includes details about different family structures including single parents, LGBTQ+ parents, grandparents and foster parents, she said.

Gonez said the school board wants to "listen and to have these tough conversations" with parents who don't support the assembly.

"At the same time I think it's really important to be factual about what content was shared today, the fact that it is age-appropriate and that it's simply about providing inclusive, welcoming environments to all of our students and families," she said.

Outside the school, protesters against the assembly outnumbered those who were there in support. Some protesters identified themselves as parents of students in the district but would not give their full names during interviews, saying they had agreed not to, as a group, citing safety concerns. Broadly, they said they felt elementary school was too young to discuss LGBTQ+ issues.

Arielle Aldana, whose 6-year-old son attends Saticoy, said she didn't know about the assembly until she dropped him off at school Friday morning. She joined the protest against the assembly and said it was "frustrating" that the school didn't tell parents about the topic ahead of time.

Aldana said she doesn't feel it's age-appropriate for elementary school, but added that she thought it would be fine for when her son is in middle school. "It has to do with where he is in development," she said.

Ray Jones, who uses the pronoun they, said they are a drag queen in North Hollywood and do not have children in the school but thought it was important to show up. Jones said they believe LGBTQ+ topics are appropriate to teach at elementary school. The demonstrators who feel otherwise, they said, are sending the wrong message to students who have LGBTQ+ parents.

"I just don't stand for that in my community," Jones said. Hector Flores and his husband picked up their 6-year-old daughter after school on Friday wearing pride T-shirts. He said their family felt supported by the counter-protesters.

"All families are different and we need to respect them," Flores said. "It all starts with a conversation and kids these days, they're growing up so quick. That's probably a topic that we should have at an early age."

An Instagram page called Saticoy Elementary Parents called Pride "an inappropriate topic for our kids!" In one post, the page says that Christian families and those who "share conservative values don't feel this material is appropriate to teach to the children and believe it's a parents' right to choose." It's not clear who started the page, which also includes phone numbers and email addresses for district and school officials, urging parents to call them to protest the event.

In May, a transgender teacher's small Pride flag displayed outdoors was found burned. The school notified parents, saying it was being investigated as hate-motivated.

District Superintendent Alberto M. Carvalho watched the protest outside the school. "The sad reality is that over the past two weeks, individuals who work at this school have been threatened and insulted just for being who they are," he told Fox 11.

"A flag that represents many members of our community was burned. That's just unacceptable. Over what? A reference of a book that represents families in our communities." Carvalho said there's no sex education in the book at issue.

"There's nothing but a fair representation of the reality of families in our community," he said. "When you exclude some, you are demonizing or dehumanizing some in our community. We are a diverse community, and we have to accept that."

Several other California elementary schools have found themselves at the center of debates over Pride Month celebrations.

In San Diego County, a proposal to fly the Pride flag at the headquarters of the Chula Vista Elementary School District initially died on a 2-2 vote with one member absent. But Francisco Tamayo, a board member who had originally voted no, later revived the proposal, saying he was concerned about hate speech directed at teachers, parents and students. The proposal passed 4-1 on Wednesday.

Elsewhere, city officials in Davis, California, last week removed a rainbow crosswalk created by elementary school students with chalk paint to celebrate Pride month. The parent of a former student complained about the project, employee Mara Seaton told the Sacramento Bee.

But the decoration was removed because crosswalk decorations are not allowed without prior approval and because it covered others lines on the crosswalk that were needed for visibility, Davis Police Chief Darren Pytel said. Rainbow crosswalks will still be allowed, as they typically are, in a local park for the city's Pride

celebrations this weekend, he said.

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