SDG REPORT CARD

Education, Gender Equality, and Democracy in the United States

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US GRADE

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Regression

Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 requires governments to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, peace, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Indicator 4.7.1 measures whether these commitments are built into education policies, curricula, teacher education, and student assessment (UN DESA 2026).

The United States is moving backward on this target. Federal and state actions are restricting education, equality research, gender data, and public SDG accountability. Regression on SDG 4.7 threatens to reverse hard-won gains in gender equality and undermine progress toward SDG 5, gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls.

Students' freedom to learn is being eroded.

- **No national curriculum.** With education authority largely in state and local hands, SDG 4.7 must be judged through state standards, local curricula, teacher education, higher education policy, and school-library access (US Department of Education 2026).
- **School-library access is shrinking:** In 2024–25, PEN America recorded 6,870 school-based book bans across 23 states and 87 public school districts, affecting nearly 4,000 unique titles. Since July 2021, PEN America has recorded 22,810 book-ban cases across 45 states and 451 districts (PEN America 2025).
- **Teacher preparation and training are being targeted:** Florida restricts teacher-preparation and school-leader programs; Alabama restricts race- and sex-related training or coursework in public K–12 and higher education; Mississippi bars required DEI training in public schools and postsecondary institutions (PEN America 2024).

With restrictions on studying gender equality and human rights, students do not learn to recognize discrimination, challenge harmful stereotypes, or understand their rights.

Faculty freedom to teach and research is being curtailed.

- **Higher education is being censored.** In 2025, 93 higher-education censorship bills were introduced in 32 states; 21 became law in 15 states. Since 2021, 23 states have enacted higher-education censorship laws or policies, affecting states where more than half of U.S. college students are enrolled (PEN America 2026).
- **Political control now reaches core university functions.** Laws and policies target classroom teaching, required courses, faculty governance, accreditation, program review, tenure, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives, and research on inequality. 2026 examples include North Carolina Kansas, Alabama, and Tennessee (PEN America 2026).
- **Federal research funding is being pulled from equality-related work:** NIH terminated over 1,800 grants between February and June 2025 and obligated almost $8 billion less for awards than in the same period in FY2024 (US Government Accountability Office 2025). NIH terminated 41 of 64 identified gender-affirming-care research grants (Miller et al. 2026).

Academic freedom is essential to research on gender disparities, providing evidence for equitable government action and contributing to SDG Target 5.1 (end gender discrimination) and SDG Target 5.c (adopt gender equality policies and legislation).

21 states

restrict school curricula addressing gender, race, and sexual orientation.

National Education Policy Center 2026

22,810 book bans

were enacted across 45 states and 451 public school districts from 2021-2025, with 6,870 book bans in one year alone

PEN America 2025

93 censorship bills

were introduced for higher education in 32 states in 2025. 21 became law.

More than half of US college students are enrolled in states with higher-ed censorship.

PEN America 2026

1,574 projects

canceled totaling $1.1 billion by the National Science Foundation; nearly 90% included terms related to diversity, education, and inclusion.

Urban Institute 2025

Public access to critical data is being undermined.

- **U.S. SDG tracking has lapsed.** *USA for SDGs* now states that it is "no longer being updated" and remains available only for reference (USA for SDGs 2026).
- **Federal gender-oriented and gender-identity data are being removed.** From January 2025 to January 2026, approximately 360 federal data collections removed at least one sexual orientation or gender identity measure; 338 removed gender identity measures; 60 removed sexual orientation measures. Most removals, 83%, were made through non-substantive change requests to the Office of Management and Budget rather than the Federal Register notice-and-comment process (Williams Institute 2026.)
- **The impact remains uncounted.** No systematic public data track how censorship, research restrictions, program closures, and grant cancellations affect women, girls, LGBTQ+ students, students of color, faculty, and civil society organizations.

Reliable, disaggregated data help identify inequalities, evaluate policies, and hold institutions accountable. The removal of disaggregated makes discrimination more difficult to document, particularly for LGBTQ+ populations, undermining SDG 5 gender equality targets.

360 federal data collections
removed a measure of sexual orientation or gender identity
in 2025,
the first year of the second Trump administration.

Williams Institute 2026

No Gender Equality Without the Freedom to Know

The United States cannot achieve SDG Target 4.7 while restricting what students learn, what faculty teach, and what the public can know. Women and girls cannot claim rights they cannot see or challenge inequalities that are not measured.

US Women's Caucus Recommendations

Protect the Freedom to Learn
Reject gag orders, book bans, and curriculum restrictions. Adopt inclusive curriculum standards and freedom-to-read protections.

Protect Academic Freedom
Defend tenure, shared governance, peer review, and programs that study inequality.

Restore Public Data
Reinstate gender, sexuality, civil-rights, equity, and SDG data. Preserve and disaggregate public datasets.

Support SDG 4.7 Champions
Equip and defend school boards, libraries, universities, women's commissions, civil rights offices, and community organizations.

Fund Equality Knowledge
Invest in public-interest research, teacher education, libraries, community-engaged scholarship, and gender-responsive budgeting.

References

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US feminists collaborating to advance human rights and gender equity for women and girls worldwide
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