



THE AFT'S AND THE NEA'S SUMMER OF WOKE

By Robert S. Eitel and Paul Zimmerman

The two largest public education unions, the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), claim to be mainstream because they represent the interests of most [teachers in America](#), but the policy statements and resolutions adopted by their leadership at national meetings last month demonstrate how little they care for the average student or teacher and classroom learning. It is time for all NEA and AFT members to consider whether they wish to let these groups continue to use a portion of their hard-earned paychecks to fund the extreme ideology of their union leaders.

Promoting Racialized School Policies

At its representative assembly in Chicago on July 3–6, the NEA adopted a [policy statement](#) asserting that schools must be made more racially “equitable” by banning metal detectors, ending random searches, and halting the general “policing of students on school campuses”—no matter the safety

Rather than take responsibility for learning loss stemming from union-led school closures, the NEA convention focused instead on issues such as “social and educational strategies to eradicate institutional racism and white privilege perpetuated by white supremacy culture.”

consequences of this woke agenda for teachers and students. As part of this statement, the NEA adopted a strategy set out in a task force [report](#) it commissioned earlier this year calling for public school teachers to view every decision they make through the lens of how it can “help counteract dominant patterns of white supremacy.” The report also denigrates “colorblind”

decision-making at schools for “Marginaliz[ing] People of Color.” Even diversity-focused strategies are not enough for the task force because these efforts fail to place “racial justice” at their center. The NEA likewise adopted new business item (NBI) 47, which pushes for the inclusion of critical race theory (CRT) in curricula by promoting the concept that “systemic racism” is the primary driver of wealth gaps across races in America.

NEA Policy Statement: Schools cannot make decisions on a colorblind or diversity-inclusive basis. They must put “racial justice” at the center of all decisions.

The AFT followed the NEA’s lead at its biennial convention in Boston on July 14–17, putting its (members’) money where its mouth is in promoting leftist views on racial equity by adopting a [resolution](#) committing the national union to consider “diversity, equity, and inclusion” (DEI) factors in decisions affecting its members’ pension funds and to “integrate racial justice into investment decision-making.” In other words, when it comes to investment priorities, the woke agenda of the union bosses comes first; maximizing returns for teachers’ retirement funds comes last.

Promoting Gender Ideology in the Classroom and in Sports

In NBIs 29 and 41, the NEA devoted its resources to opposing legislation, like Florida’s Parental Rights in Education Act, that shields children younger than eight years old from sex-oriented classroom teaching and discussions and indoctrination in gender ideology—for example, lessons teaching first graders that boys can become girls and girls can become boys. Union leaders might

think such lessons are appropriate. Ask the first-grade teachers and parents at your local school if they agree.

A resolution adopted by the AFT focuses the union’s ire on what it labels “mean-spirited” legislation protecting women’s and girls’ sports. The resolution called on states and schools to adopt “nondiscrimination policies” that would destroy equal

NEA and AFT Resolutions on Gender Identity:

- **Laws that shield young children from teaching of sexualized concepts and gender ideology are bigoted and must be repealed.**
- **Laws that do not allow men who identify as women to play in women’s and girls’ sports are transphobic and must be destroyed.**

opportunities for women and girls in athletics by forcing them to compete against biological men who identify as women.

Lobbying for Abortion and Attacking the Rule of Law

The recent decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, overturning *Roe v. Wade* and leaving abortion policymaking to the states, provoked outrage from

both unions. The AFT unanimously passed a [resolution](#) committing the union to lobby for federal and state legislation to overturn the *Dobbs* decision so that “all women, girls and *others who can become pregnant*” can obtain abortions. Similarly, the NEA adopted NBI 34, which devotes the national union’s resources to encouraging rallies, lobbying, and other activities in support of the right to an abortion. The dues of all AFT and NEA members—opponents and supporters of *Dobbs* alike—will go toward efforts to roll back the ruling.

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Not content with the call to protect the abortion rights of “women, girls, and *others who can become pregnant*,” the unions gathering in Chicago and Boston also attacked the rule of law and the Supreme Court of the United States. For instance, the NEA’s Legislative Amendment 4 calls for court packing as a strategy to overturn Supreme Court decisions that they don’t like. The AFT [adopted](#) a resolution attacking the recent decisions of “the current extremist majority” of the Supreme Court that promote school choice, solidify the right to bear arms, and put limits on the sweeping actions of

the regulatory state. These resolutions, overflowing with outrage, offer no credence to the sincere beliefs of the many teachers who support these judicial decisions. In the eyes of the union bosses, the views of these teachers do not matter.

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Other Votes – From Climate Obsession to Keeping Tabs on “Enemies”

The AFT and NEA outdid themselves in other ways at their conventions, as their leaders adopted the following measures that disregarded the interests of teachers and students.

- The NEA’s paranoia-induced NBI 15, which approves the use of \$140,000 in member dues to fund the creation of a list of 25 organizations “actively working to diminish a student’s right to honesty in education, freedom of sexual and gender identity, and teacher autonomy” and providing for the compilation of opposition research on these groups. (During debate, one delegate justified the expenditure as follows: “You cannot put a price tag on truth. We have to know our enemies.”)

During debate, one delegate favored spending union dues on a plan to investigate critics of the NEA, justifying as follows: “You cannot put a price tag on truth. We have to know our enemies.”

- An AFT [resolution](#) pushing for the end of education freedom by eliminating state programs that empower students to attend private or home schools.
- An AFT [resolution](#) committing the union to figuring out how it can remove all of its investments from fossil fuel companies and pressuring its members' retirement funds to do the same (another example of the woke agenda taking precedence over the funding of teachers' retirement plans).
- An AFT [resolution](#) that obfuscates performance of public schools by altering standardized testing to make it more subjective and "culturally responsive." (Read: Each teacher gets to rate her or his own job performance based on whether he or she has focused instruction on social justice, systemic racism, and gender ideology.)

Conclusion

The NEA and AFT want you to believe that they defend the interests of the majority of classroom teachers and students, but their conventions instead reveal that union bosses are obsessed with what they deem "systemic" racism, gender ideology, abortion rights, and fossil fuels issues. They are not interested in fixing what is broken in America's public schools for the sake of students. The massive

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learning loss stemming from union-led school closures has proved to be a disaster for a generation of young Americans. During their recent conventions, the AFT and the NEA exhibited for the world that they are cruelly uninterested in taking responsibility for the suffering faced by students during the pandemic. Teachers who care more about the success of their students

than the success of union ideological priorities have a decision to make: Continue to allow radical union bosses to use teacher union dues for their extreme agendas and pet projects or exercise the constitutional right to resign from the union and turn off the money flow.



About the Authors

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