

Summer of Woke, The Sequel

*By Angela Morabito and Paul Zimmerman
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In 2022, DFI [profiled](#) the extremist ideology reflected in resolutions adopted at the summer meetings of the nation’s largest teacher unions, the National Education Association (“NEA”) and the American Federation of Teachers (“AFT”). One year later, the commitment of these interest groups to radical progressive ideology has not abated. This report profiles the latest outrageous policies discussed at this year’s NEA Representative Assembly and AFT “Together Educating America’s Children” ([TEACH Conference](#))—neither of which is truly “representative” or focused on giving students the kind of education parents want and students deserve. By promoting measures that would embed radical gender ideology in our schools, require school systems to obsess over race-based preferences, remove school employees’ ability to discipline students effectively, and enlist teachers in efforts to indoctrinate students, the NEA and AFT have shown, yet again, that they do not represent the interests of the average teacher and will never serve as responsible stewards of an effective public K–12 education system.

Due to the negative publicity generated by our 2022 report and other media coverage in recent years, the NEA took steps to conduct its “New Business Items” in secret at its annual assembly in July. This shameful commitment to secrecy reveals that the NEA is out of step with the public regarding its policy goals, as well as the organization’s hypersensitivity to criticism of its stances. It is wholly inappropriate for an organization that receives the benefits of a congressionally granted federal charter to hide from the public its activities at what it [deems](#) is “[t]he world’s largest democratic, deliberative body.” The NEA receives substantial [perks](#) from its federal charter, including no limitations on its political activity and even some property tax exemptions. Congress confers these benefits on the NEA without imposing on the union any meaningful responsibilities to the public good. Just as Americans have the right to demand transparency from Congress and presidents, we have every right to know what the NEA decides at its annual meetings and in other settings. In addition to the following information, DFI will publish the key actions taken by the NEA at its annual meeting as they become publicly available.

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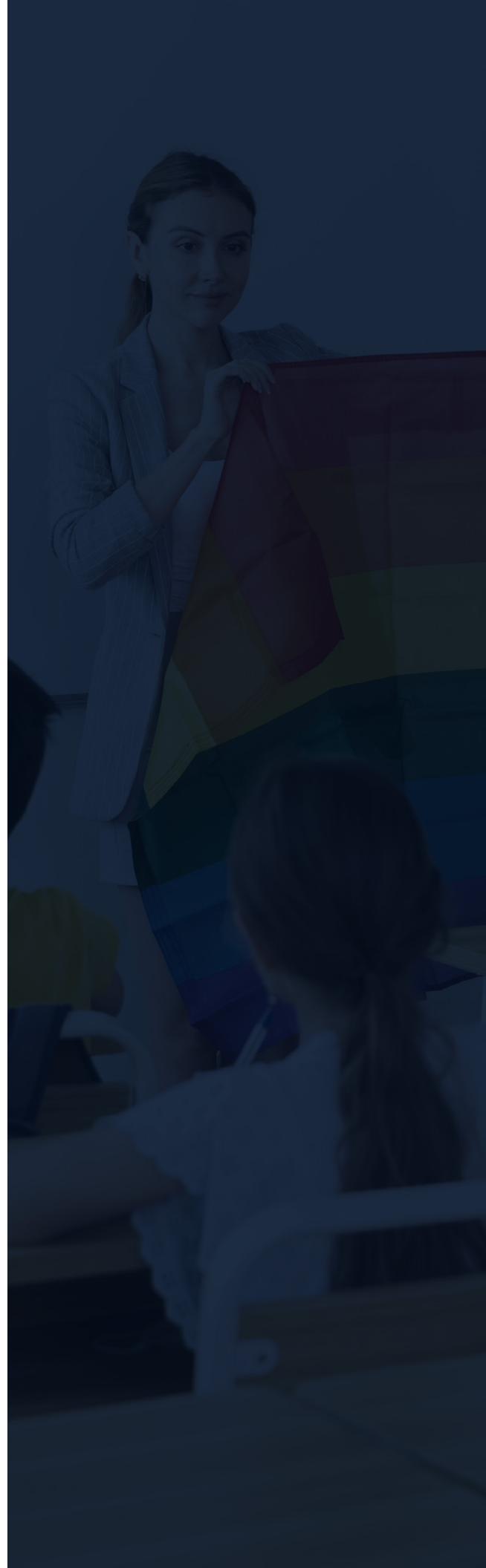
I. Gender

The NEA and AFT are continuing their efforts to push radical ideology in schools by vehemently opposing legislation that protects students from sexually graphic content and gender ideology. Both major teacher unions have falsely ascribed homophobia and transphobia to the parental rights movement, which they recognize as an existential threat to their power over public education, in an effort to keep sexually explicit books in school libraries and classrooms and block legislation to prohibit teachers from discussing gender identity issues and sexuality with elementary school students.

At its Representative Assembly, the NEA held a “[Freedom to Learn](#)” rally against Governor Ron DeSantis’s education policies, which the union called “extremist.” Such “extremist” policies include Florida’s Parental Rights in Education Act, a modest, reasonable law that prohibits teachers from discussing sexual orientation and gender identity with students *in the third grade and below*.

The union, through its major publication *NEA Today*, propagated the misleading “Don’t Say Gay” misnomer for the law and even [claimed](#) that prohibiting teachers from discussing sexuality with kindergarteners and primary school age children would harm their mental health. In doing so, the NEA makes two assumptions: first, that teachers, not parents, should have these very sensitive conversations with students; and second, that such discussions benefit students’ mental health. Science suggests otherwise: A [long-range study](#) of Gender Identity Disorder in children showed that affirming a child’s claimed “gender identity,” as the union recommends, is likely not what is best for the child—at least 80% of children with gender identity disorder grow out of it by the time they reach adulthood.

In addition to its misleading commentary on Florida’s law, the NEA also [mischaracterized legislation](#) in Missouri that would prohibit instruction on gender identity and sexuality as being “anti-LGBTQ+.” These parental rights laws are not anti-anyone; they are simply an acknowledgement that government schools are not the appropriate place to teach children about moral issues that directly intersect with many families’ values and religious beliefs. Parents, not teachers, have the right to have these conversations with children and are best positioned to decide when and how it is appropriate to talk about these issues. Hardly spontaneous expressions of malice, these laws are a response to public education bureaucrats exposing young children to books about sexual orientation and gender identity that parents find objectionable. Nor do the laws single out LGBTQ+ identities; they prohibit discussion of any sexual matters, whatever the orientation or identity.



In addition to working to change American society by advancing its radical gender ideology in the classroom, the NEA is also trying to micromanage how its members interact with one another. In June, the union [released](#) an “LGBTQ Toolkit,” including a [Pronoun Guide](#) that encourages members to volunteer their own pronouns and to ask others to share their pronouns, too. It names “Ze, Zim, and Zir” on a list of “most common” pronouns. The guide notes that such pronoun policies may not be welcome in schools based on state and local policies, but it advises NEA members to follow the guide in intra-union communications.

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Days before its TEACH Conference in July, the AFT adopted a [resolution](#) on LGBTQ+ issues which favors “age-appropriate and inclusive” bathroom and locker room policies. Far from truly being

inclusive, these policies force teenage girls to share restrooms and locker rooms with biological men and offer little to no recourse should one of the women feel uncomfortable. The resolution also commits the AFT to working with activist groups, including GLSEN, which advises school districts, through a [model policy](#), to use a student’s preferred name and pronouns at school without notifying parents.

The AFT also coached its members on how to inject gender identity politics into classroom teaching. Sessions at the TEACH Conference included “Affirming LGBTQIA+ Identities in and out of the Classroom” and “The TGNCNB [transgender, gender nonconforming, nonbinary] Inclusive School and Classroom.” The former session’s description alleged the same false narrative of oppression propagated by the NEA: “Local and state policies often prevent the wider acceptance and celebration of all individuals, especially those in the LGBTQIA+ community.” The latter session’s description argues that “[c]isnormativity,” the assumption that people’s gender identity matches their biological sex, “can be limiting for TGNCNB...and cisgender folks alike.” The AFT seemingly believes that “cisnormativity” is a societal ill and that its members are responsible for dismantling it in their classrooms. Both session descriptions offered attendees ideas and action items to take back to their schools. The unions’ mission is clear: train teachers to affirm every gender identity that conflicts with a student’s sex, ignore basic biological facts, hide the training from parents, and shape school policies to force others to do the same.

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Both teacher unions ignore the reality that most teachers want to teach, not affirm a student’s gender identity, either due to their personal values or their beliefs that doing so oversteps their authority and encroaches on the role of parents. When school districts force teachers to spend their time

affirming each student's gender identity, they trample on the constitutional and civil rights of those teachers to freely express their beliefs and freely exercise their religion by forcing them to use names and pronouns for students they may not want to use. The unions are never concerned about the rights of those teachers who disagree with their radical politics.

A New York middle school teacher discussed with an undercover reporter the supposed benefits of “breaking down the gender binary” as early as elementary school. She claimed that children as young as two and three years old were coming out as LGBTQ+.

The AFT's recent elevation of a radical teacher as an expert on how teachers should think about gender issues in schools underscores this point. The session about creating an inclusive classroom for “transgender, nonbinary, and gender nonconforming” students was taught by a New York middle school teacher with a history of proudly forcing her extremist views about sex and gender onto students. In March 2023, this

teacher was [caught](#) on video explaining how she leans on tenured teachers to drive gender politics at school because they have more job security than their non-tenured peers. She also discussed with the undercover reporter the supposed benefits of “breaking down the gender binary” as early as elementary school and “getting rid of girls and boys.” Touting her “plethora of pride flags,” she claimed that children as young as two and three years old were coming out as LGBTQ+.

The NEA and AFT believe teachers have the authority and responsibility to indoctrinate students with gender identity theory, whatever parents may think or want.

II. Race

In defiance of the Constitution and recent Supreme Court rulings, the NEA and AFT continue to argue that schools should use racial preferences and demand that their members do the same.

Both unions slammed the Supreme Court's decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*, which ends the use of race in college admissions. The AFT [called](#) the ruling “draconian” and “catastrophic”; the NEA [called](#) the Court “out-of-touch” and “hyper-conservative.” It is the unions, however, that are out of touch with public opinion. A [YouGov](#) poll in the aftermath of the Supreme Court's ruling found that 57% of adult U.S. citizens approved of the Court's decision, and only 27% disapproved. Most Americans honor the idea of a colorblind America and want to move past the use of race in college admissions, but the teacher unions maintain that the only way to correct our country's past sins is by discriminating based on race in the present day. This preference for “equity” rather than true equality is a core tenet of Critical Race Theory.

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The NEA is so perturbed by this ruling that one of the “New Business Items” at its Representative Assembly [called](#) for court packing, stating that the union will “call on President Biden to expand the Supreme Court” and calling the Court in its present form “an illegitimate Court, shaped by Trump.” The legitimacy of a Court does not hinge on who appointed its members, but the NEA does not care about the Constitution, the rule of law, and democratic norms when they mandate court decisions that run contrary to the union’s preferred policy goals.

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The NEA displays this same stubbornness regarding the use of race in ways that violate the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In its [Policy Document](#), the union expresses strong support for race- and sex-based preferences in hiring decisions. It states that “utilizing employment practices that treat people equally regardless of ethnicity or gender” is not enough to correct systemic ills. With this statement, the union specifically advocates treating job applicants

unequally on the basis of race. Because Title VI makes it illegal for any program or activity receiving federal funding to discriminate on the basis of race, and as Title VII of the same law prohibits racial discrimination in employment, following the NEA’s recommendations would require public schools and other employers to violate the law (not to mention the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution for public employers).

The AFT, too, embraces the false narrative of oppression. A session at its [TEACH Conference](#) titled “Education for Liberation: The Role of the Racially Conscious Educator in Combating Oppression” was designed to help participants “improve their racial-equity leadership.” Another session implored teachers to undo their own “unconscious racial bias,” assuming that the union’s own members are unintentionally racist.

It is a sad irony that, for all the unions’ supposed concern about systemic racism, they are the chief sponsors of an educational status quo that causes harm to millions of minority students that lasts for generations. Students from low-income and minority households are the most likely to be trapped in failing government schools. Unions lobby relentlessly against school choice, keeping these students stuck in schools that fail to deliver an academically rigorous education.

III. Discipline

The NEA and AFT campaigns for disciplinary policies that threaten teacher safety and impede classroom learning spotlight how the ideological agenda of these unions diverge sharply from the interests of the teachers they claim to represent.

The NEA’s [Policy Document](#) simply pretends that the ongoing, nationwide K–12 school disciplinary and violence [crisis](#) that threatens the safety of teachers and students alike does not exist, expressing

the union’s opposition to “zero-tolerance” disciplinary policies and demanding an end to “policing” of students in schools. The document rails against “exclusionary discipline,” ignoring that this kind of discipline is necessary in some cases to remove disruptive students from classrooms and allow students who wish to learn to do so.

The AFT [TEACH Conference](#) includes a session on “Youth Justice in Practice: Moving from Restorative Circles to Restorative Systems,” touting “restorative justice” practices that emphasize dialogue and understanding over traditional disciplinary principles that are necessary to prevent misbehavior and violence in the classrooms and hallways of K–12 schools. A separate session on lobbying for gun control ignores the fact that the unions’ prioritization of ideology over safety measures makes it more difficult for teachers, administrators, and school resource officers to keep students and teachers safe. Rather than advocate for the safety of their members by promoting common-sense measures like metal detectors, the unions instead condemn these tools as “prison-like” and train teachers how to lobby for gun control writ large. This is a nonsensical response to the problem of violence on K–12 school campuses, and it completely ignores the fact, documented in recent [research](#) from the American Psychological Association, that unsafe schools are a key reason why so many teachers desire to change their profession. Removing the only tools they and school administrators possess to maintain order in the classroom and safety on campus will only exacerbate this problem.

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IV. Indoctrination

Both the NEA and AFT conferences featured content designed to instruct teachers on how to indoctrinate students with radical progressive ideology.

The NEA prefaced its Representative Assembly and Annual Meeting with its [Conference on Racial and Social Justice](#), held in the days prior to the larger events. Though the union did not publicly release a conference agenda, the NEA describes the event as teaching “[h]ow to respond to the attacks on equity and honest education” and “[t]echniques to lead anti-racism engagements in schools and communities.” The union is not serving its members; it is using its members to serve its own political goals.

The AFT conference included several sessions to teach educators how to infuse politics into their work with students. One session, titled “Action Civics in the Elementary Classroom,” coached educators on how to involve children as young as kindergarten in civic activism. This relatively new method of teaching pushes students to engage in progressive social and political causes with the desired outcome of raising awareness or affecting societal change. It turns students into activists,



forcing them to confront issues that may not be age-appropriate, and it calls on teachers to push a politicized agenda onto students.

The AFT is not shy about its goal of pushing its warped worldview on students. The session description for “Help Students Understand and Process Cultural Diversity Through Student Texts” contends that “educators need to engage students with texts that create social action.”

Another session at the AFT conference instructed union members on “Strategies for Integrating Climate Change into Your Teaching.” This session description said that attendees would “[l]earn how and why climate change belongs in every subject area” and “walk away with a renewed commitment to discussing the pressing climate issues of our time.” Nothing in this session description was about scientific inquiry or evaluating competing viewpoints based on data. The AFT is encouraging teachers to cast aside the scientific method in favor of preaching the union’s environmental politics to the next generation.

Conclusion

The nation’s largest teacher unions want to have it both ways. On the one hand, they want Americans to believe that they are simply an organization of teachers, dedicated—like the average classroom teacher—to helping students learn and proceed to a successful career and life. On the other hand, they want to be the champions of radical causes—such as gender ideology, an education system in which every consequential decision is made based on its racial impacts, and transforming children as young as five years old into warriors for racial and environmental “justice.” For the sake of the children in our public schools, we cannot afford to let the NEA and AFT continue to play this game. Teachers, who fund their local unions and, by extension, the national unions with which they are affiliated with dues from their hard-earned paychecks, must consider whether the progressive ideology advanced by the NEA and AFT really aligns with their best interests. If not, they would be better off spending their money elsewhere and reducing the malign influence of these unions over our local schools—as well as state and federal politics—in the process.

About the Authors

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