



**Testimony of Nicole Neily
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Before the House Committee on Education & the Workforce
February 5, 2025**

“The State of American Education”

Chairman Walberg, Ranking Member Scott, and distinguished members of the Committee: thank you for inviting me today.

My name is Nicole Neily, and I’m the president and founder of Parents Defending Education. I’m also the executive director of PDE Action.

American education is in crisis. For far too long, US schools have focused on everything BUT educating children – and as last week’s NAEP scores have shown, our children are the ones bearing the brunt of these bad decisions.

Schools are focused on the wrong priorities.

Identity politics permeate districts across America in word and deed. Children are regularly treated differently based on race. Color-conscious pedagogy (which considers colorblindness to be negative) is omnipresent in America’s colleges of education¹. Eighty years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, segregated activities persist in the guise of “affinity groups,” where students and teachers are included – or excluded – because of skin color.

The diversity-industrial complex promotes programs like this, conducting “equity audits” and hosting professional development trainings. Districts pay DEI consultants millions per year – incentivized by the \$1 billion in education grants awarded by the Biden administration, as well as other state and federal agencies.

In the wake of October 7th, antisemitism spiked in both colleges and K-12 schools. From lesson plans about settler-colonialism² to swastikas on mirrors dismissed as “Buddhist religious

¹ Parents Defending Education, “CorruptED,” August 8, 2024. <https://defendinged.org/investigations/corrupted/>

² Luke Rosiak, “Virginia Teacher Who Makes Kids Criticize Israel Is Daughter Of Imam At Al Qaeda-Linked Mosque,” Daily Wire, October 1, 2024. <https://www.dailywire.com/news/daughter-of-imam-at-al-qaeda-linked-mosque-is-a-teacher-who-makes-students-criticize-israel>

symbols,”³ districts’ lackadaisical response to Jew-hatred bore a sharp contrast to the antiracism fervor following George Floyd’s murder.

Foreign funding remains problematic; a PDE investigation into Confucius Classrooms⁴ found districts around the country with ties to CCP-linked entities, and similar programming by the Qatar Foundation⁵ also exists. The full scope of foreign influence in K-12 merits investigation and is also a significant problem in higher education, which the DETERRENT Act tackles head-on.

Over the past several years, merit has been sacrificed on the altar of “equity.” Rather than challenging talented students to strive for greatness, schools are eliminating gifted and talented programs and AP classes so that all students remain at the same level. We are witnessing the soviet-ification of American schools in real time.

Finally, schools are unsafe. Under the guise of “breaking the school to prison pipeline,” districts have removed school resource officers and moved towards non-punitive “restorative justice”⁶ – making classroom management impossible.⁷

Families are treated as the enemy.

Trust between families and districts is fractured. Rather than partnering *with* parents, schools now work *against* them.

Families are being shut out of their children’s lives. PDE has identified over 1,100 districts around the country (impacting more than 12 million children) with “parental exclusion policies,” which state that parents don’t have a right to know their child’s gender at school.

Districts should not keep secrets from families. As a country, we spend billions on mental health interventions for students – so why are schools telling kids that their parents’ love is conditional, and that it might be time to lead a double life?

Over the past four years, parental rights were routinely disrespected from the federal government down to the local level. When parents spoke up, they were attacked by the media

³ Sue Dremann, “Sequoia Union High School District responds to criticism over swastika drawings,” RWC Pulse, November 9, 2023. <https://www.rwcpulse.com/express-newsletter-content/2023/11/09/sequoia-union-high-school-district-responds-to-criticism-over-swastika-drawings/>

⁴ Parents Defending Education, “Little Red Classrooms,” July 26, 2023.

<https://defendinged.org/investigations/little-red-classrooms-china-infiltration-of-american-k-12-schools/>

⁵ Frannie Block, “NYC Public School Wipes Israel from the Map,” The Free Press, January 11, 2024.

<https://www.thefp.com/p/nyc-public-school-wipes-israel-from-the-map>

⁶ Parents Defending Education, “List of School Districts using Restorative Practices,” May 13, 2024.

<https://defendinged.org/investigations/list-of-school-districts-using-restorative-practices/>

⁷ Daniel Buck, “Don’t Spare the Rod,” First Things, June 1, 2023. <https://firstthings.com/dont-spare-the-rod/>

and the Department of Justice. Through our FOIAs, PDE discovered that the National School Boards Association worked with Department of Education officials to smear American families.

As George Washington Carver said, "Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom." The country's equity experiment has been an unequivocal failure, and it's time to move on. Let's refocus American schools on core subjects, prioritizing excellence and creating opportunities for those who work hard. Although battered, the American education system is not beyond repair – but to get things back on track, it's going to take a genuine partnership between families and schools.