

RESOURCES AGAINST COMMON FALSE NARRATIVES AND MISINFORMATION

September 2022

GET THE FACTS

Our Public Schools, Boards of Education, and educators are on the receiving end of agenda-fueled attacks. Many of the attacks are rooted in unfounded online rumors or originate with hyper-partisan think tanks who have a vested interest in advancing an agenda, such as Parents Defending Education, Courage is a Habit, Turning Point USA, or Moms for Liberty to name a small handful.

Enough is enough. Proud public school supporters created this resource to help explain why school districts are under attack and what you REALLY need to know about the revolving door of claims against public education.

In most cases, the topics raised by attackers follow a national narrative that ties back to the effort to paint public or “government” schools as “failing” to [rally greater community support for active private school voucher petitions](#) that pull billions of dollars of Michigan’s public-school funding from our kids.

In fact, Michigan is “ground zero” for a monumental court case that soon decides whether families can use public funds or pre-tax dollars for private, religious institutions that are known to discriminate against applicants ([See Hile v. Michigan](#)). Public education supporters hope to keep public funding reserved for the 90% of school-aged students who rely on Michigan’s public schools, which welcome all kids.

Between this court case, the HEAVILY funded petition effort to pass “student opportunity scholarships,” and a contentious gubernatorial election (featuring an anti-public school and anti-public educator candidate in Tudor Dixon), it’s no surprise that this “noise” against our schools will likely continue through the November 2022 mid-term elections.

Providing clarity and correcting misinformation are important parts of what we do to help protect the integrity of our public schools

Find below articles that provide helpful context and a potential response to misinformation you hear or see, whether online or at district business meetings.

Imagine how much more productive our administrators could be if the community re-focused on truly relevant, local issues that we can discuss and collaborate through together.

COMMON FALSE NARRATIVES AND MISINFORMATION

INDOCTRINATION

Claim: Broadly, schools are “indoctrinating” kids

Fact: False. Public schools are not centers for political organization. They serve 90% of school-aged children from all backgrounds. School Boards are non-partisan and elected officials run without any partisan affiliation.

- [Why School Board Elections Should Stay Nonpartisan](#) (Governing.com)

Claim: There’s a new documentary called “Whose Children Are They?” that says schools are indoctrinating kids. It must be true.

Fact: A hyper-partisan activist group called Parents United launched a documentary in March 2022 that weaves in harmful narratives about every topic contained within this sheet. Conveniently timed to mid-term election season and key court cases, the documentary group says, “it’s time to drag this documentary into the light” and unsurprisingly, they’re helping to promote private school vouchers. Its trailer quotes the headmaster of a private school – who is a former politician. (Newsmax)

Additionally, it’s far-right groups like Turning Point USA that are trying to infiltrate schools to indoctrinate kids by identifying and “sponsoring” students to launch clubs from within the school building walls. This highly controversial practice has generated backlash in neighboring states.

- [Tensions rise as parents appeal for removal of Turning Point USA](#)

CRITICAL RACE THEORY (CRT)

Claim: All public schools have begun to indoctrinate students with a divisive curriculum that only came to light through virtual schooling.

Fact: Society’s “perfect storm” of virtual schooling and civil unrest inspired a pro-voucher advocate to pounce on the opportunity to launch a misinformation campaign against public schools. The goal? Create partisan divide and anger that propels parents to pull their kids from public schools to make a stronger case for active voucher petitions and critical court cases behind them. Pro-voucher groups even published tool kits and tip sheets with talking points on how to launch attack groups and create disruption at the “grassroots” level. Before turning himself in and being handcuffed for fraud, Steve Bannon reinforced the school board takeover strategy, encouraging suburban moms to rebuild America from the schools on upward.

- [How a Conservative Activist Invented the Conflict Over Critical Race Theory](#) (The New Yorker)
- [The School Privatization Brigade’s Latest Scheme: Vouchers to Escape “Critical Race Theory”](#) (Americans United)
- [The Aristocrats Funding the Critical Race Theory Backlash](#) (The Daily Beast)

It’s also worth noting that *The Heritage Foundation* has played a large role in encouraging local attack groups. Back in 2002 after another voucher program failed to pass in Michigan, they pivoted to a “stealth,” “grassroots group” strategy at the school level.

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Do educators sometimes address real-time, breaking news and incidents in response to student questions or concerns, such as offering a worksheet on what it might feel like to hurl an insult at another student (instead of a suspension)? Here's one educator's take.

- [Concerned Parents and Lawmakers: Here's what you'll really see in my classroom](#) (EdSurge)

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

Claim: Even though data shows students are suffering greater levels of anxiety and depression than ever before, mental health programming is a gateway to more divisive topics and creates a “victim mentality” and therefore Social Emotional Learning (SEL) should be banned.

Fact: Anti public-school entities are leveraging this talking point to encourage families to leave public school. In fact, one public school attack group specifically encouraged parents take the incredibly harmful stance to not let their kids be served by counselors. What we know is that students are facing the greatest mental health crisis of a generation and that the “life skills” extended through social emotional learning are the proven strongest indicator of future success, including finishing college (according to the [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#)).

- [Parents protesting 'critical race theory' identify another target: Mental health programs](#) (MSNBC)
- [Beyond CRT: Protesting parents now targeting mental health and suicide prevention programs](#) (The Hill)
- [Social Emotional Learning Should Not Be the Next Target in America's Culture Wars](#) (EdSurge)
- [Teenagers are struggling and it's not just lockdown](#) (The New York Times)
- [The SEL skills that matter most for academic success: curiosity and persistence](#) (Ed Week)

“INAPPROPRIATE” BOOKS

Claim: Public schools are housing and peddling pornography in their libraries.

Fact: Once again, this is a topic being abused by pro-voucher and other partisan agenda groups or Moms for Liberty. Parents always have a say about what their children read and can submit opt-out forms about banned books for their household. Most of the books in question are optional reading in a library. Public schools are a window and a mirror to the communities they serve.

Additionally, the definition of pornography is material created for the purpose of titillation that an objective and broad community would agree meets that criterion. Michigan parents gather in private Facebook groups called “Mary in the Library” to exchange ideas on books to ban.

Book banners like to stretch the goal posts by claiming that making books available at public libraries or private bookstores means they are not in favor of book burning. Efforts by residents of the Jamestown Public Library in Michigan prove that argument false, when the public recently opted not to vote for the

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millage that would keep it operating, simply because they house a couple of LGBTQ-themed books.

Unfortunately, extreme groups like Moms 4 Liberty are sneakily trying to ban books they don't like while sponsoring and slipping in books that advance their own propaganda. Be alert.

- [Book Ban Efforts Spread Across the U.S. Challenges aren't new, but the tactics and politicization are](#) (The New York Times)
- [High schools could lose AP classes if they ban 'required topics' from being taught](#) (TODAY)
- [Moms for Libraries is propaganda](#) (Book Riot)
- [Missouri district rescinds decision to ban Toni Morrison Book](#) (NBC)
- [Moms for Liberty is placing right-wing propaganda in public school libraries while continuing its censorship crusade](#) (Media Matters)

“FURRIES” AND BATHROOMS

Claim: Public school districts encourage “furries” and allow litter boxes in the bathrooms.

Fact: This is a Facebook rumor – confirmed false – that inspired panic but serves as yet another talking point for attackers perpetuating political or privatization agendas and who are trying to smear public schools as “failing.”

- [Furry Panic Is the Latest Dumb Attack on Public Schools](#) (The Daily Beast)
- [Fear of “furries” in school grips parents fooled by absurd Facebook rumors](#) (Raw Story)
- [Midland superintendent disappointed people believed rumors of litter boxes for students](#) (Detroit News)

LGBTQ AND GENDER IDEOLOGY

Claim: Public schools and teachers are “grooming” kids to encourage them to pursue LGBTQ lifestyles and change genders with secret curriculum.

Fact: These far-right groups coined the term “gender ideology.” It's presently difficult (September 2022) to find articles from legitimate news sources that explain what this claim is about since it is a manufactured crisis. What we know is that standard sex education in school can help children distinguish abuse.

LGBTQ youth are experiencing the highest suicide rate and are not predisposed to feeling this way. It's the lack of acceptance and instances of bullying. There is a national (and global) attack on LGBTQ individuals with a larger goal of trampling their rights.

- [Why is the idea of “gender” provoking backlash the world over?](#) (The Guardian)
- [How can we protect kids? By knowing that sex education and grooming are not the same](#) (NBC News)
- [The Trevor Project](#)

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PARENTAL CONTROL IN EDUCATION

Claim: Public schools have suddenly eliminated parental control over their children's education (often pointing to the pandemic as the catalyst).

Fact: The overwhelming majority of parents are [pleased with their public schools](#) (NPR) and consider all of this just "noise." Parents have had and always will maintain control and choice when it comes to their child's education. Some areas of control and choice – from the MANY available – include:

- The ability to review curriculum, which is posted online or shared during curriculum nights. When it comes to "family life or sex ed" education, parents are sent a reminder with an opt-out form for any topics they do not want their child to engage with. Even as students begin school, a waiver form for all topics is provided with kindergarten registration.
- The ability to opt students out of books that use particular words, phrases or subject matter.
- Schools of choice – when it comes to attending other schools within the county that offer programs, curriculum or athletics that better meet a parent's needs
- There have never been mandated Covid-19 vaccines. Many families asked to obtain exemptions from masks, which were granted. Parents always remain the decision-maker when it comes to medical decisions.
- The ability to volunteer, including inside the schools, or volunteering as a paraprofessional or recess monitor
- Choosing clubs and organizations
- [Opinion: Parental control is a smoke screen for hyper partisan activists](#) (CNN)

BUDGETS AND TRANSPARENCY

Claim: Our school district is not clear about matters like curriculum, budget transparency and how decisions are made.

Fact: Unlike private schools and BECAUSE they are public schools, public school districts go above and beyond mandated guidelines for transparently reporting. It's actually the charter schools that are not being transparent.

- [State board wants to know how Michigan charter schools spend money.](#) (Chalkbeat)

Inquire with your child's principal, teacher or the respective contact at the administration building.

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IN CONCLUSION

It's important to remember that while these common issues circulate in and out of focus across the country, they all are working toward the end goal of helping to privatize education – whether all waging these arguments are on board with that agenda or not. This topic is not new to Michigan, nor our country. But it has become louder and more divisive than ever. Sadly, these tactics were intended to sow division to stir up anger and hopefully achieve wins in this arena.

The fact is, [public schools and private schools can – and should – co-exist](#). But, that argument does not need to involve distracting our children. We ask for the community to restore decorum and let our kids get back to their studies, unthreatened and uninterrupted.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

There is hope. According to The Hill, [the country is now on to this school board takeover strategy, and these candidates are failing](#). For every attack group that pops up, there are others stepping forward to fight back. Read [Culture wars divide Michigan schools. How many rights should parents have?](#) (Bridge Michigan)

Continue to rely on data and facts. Team up with fellow pro-public education groups in Michigan. Gather like-minded parents and create a group to celebrate all that your school district does.

Support FHPS is an example of one parent-led political action committee that launched in response to ongoing attacks against Forest Hills Public Schools near Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Visit them online at www.SupportFHPS.org