

# Combating Disinformation at Local School Board Meetings

February 8, 2022

Indivisible Illinois Social Justice Alliance (IISJA)

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# Misinformation Vs Disinformation

## From Wikipedia

- **Misinformation** is incorrect or misleading [information](#) **unintentionally** presented as fact.
- This is contrasted with [disinformation](#) in that disinformation is ***deliberately*** deceptive.
- Misinformation is different from [rumor](#), which is speculative.
- Even if later retracted, misinformation can continue to influence actions and memory

# What Are the Issues?

- Masks
- Vaccines
- Critical Race Theory (CRT)
- Illinois SB818 – Health Education
- LGBTQ
- Social Distancing
- Covid Quarantines
- Parental Rights and Control

**Actually,  
These are just “dog whistle” trojan horse issues  
to get the base involved.**



## So, What Is It Really About?

- It's about taking control of the school board followed by control of the school curriculum
- It's about getting candidates elected to the board who can then run for higher offices
- It's about getting parents to remove kids from public schools to enroll them in private schools and defunding public schools with vouchers
- There are well funded national organizations that have the above as their stated goals.

## More Background Information

- A loose network of conservative groups with ties to major Republican donors and party-aligned think tanks is quietly lending firepower to local activists engaged in [culture war fights in schools](#) across the country.
- While they are drawn by the anger of parents opposed to school policies on racial history or COVID-19 protocols like mask mandates, the groups are often run by political operatives and lawyers standing ready to amplify local disputes.

<https://apnews.com/article/business-health-coronavirus-pandemic-3157002e9d011e5283f55886b1c7078a>

# IASB-Illinois Association of School Boards

## What is a school board and what does it do?

From the IASB website

- ...to provide local citizen control over education at a point as close to the parent and child as possible
- Perhaps the most important job of a school board is to hire a superintendent
- (Board members must) know the difference between governance (which is its job) and management (which is the administration's job).
- The Illinois Constitution grants boards of education wide latitude in governing their school districts, subject to numerous state laws and regulations.

<https://www.iasb.com/about-us/publications/pamphlets-and-tools/about-school-boards/>

# Local Disruptions: Yes, It's Happening Here in IL

- [Shouting Match Derails Elmhurst D-205 Meeting](#) (Dec 2021) A foe of mask mandates was heckled and his microphone was taken away. The board recessed for five minutes.
- [Anti-Mask Speakers Defy LTHS Board Rules](#) (Aug 2021) Resident accuses the school board of "trying to shut us up."
- [Disruption at Unity School Board Meeting](#) (Sept 2021) Mendon man arrested
- [LTHS Mask Foes Fear Onset Of Marxism](#) (Aug 2021) One speaker said Black Lives Matter was a Marxist movement. The audience cheered her.
- [Parents fed up with anti-mask protesters targeting Glen Ellyn elementary school students](#) ((Sept 2021) Former GOP state representative and gubernatorial candidate Jeanne Ives was at the school again Tuesday.
- [Fireworks In Barrington As More Than 60 People Sound Off About School Mask Rules At Board Meeting](#) (July 2021) It is a debate happening at almost every school district in the state and around the country
- [Right-wing group's attempt to open at Chicago high school rejected](#) (Dec 2021) After talk of starting a Turning Point USA chapter at Taft High School emerged, the school's principal said they will "never tolerate" student groups that go against the school's values.
- Indian Prairie School District 204 Board of Education Meeting (Feb 7, 2022) Meeting disrupted by anti-maskers. Board adjourned after 5 minutes <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6gggGGYtml>



# Where It All Started

- [Christopher Rufo](#), a senior analyst at the Manhattan Institute, is widely credited with being the ideological picador behind Trump's executive order banning critical race theory and diversity training in all federal programs.
- ... last March (2020), Rufo stated that his goal was to **“run a public persuasion campaign”** [that would conflate any number of topics and deposit them into a new bucket called critical race theory.](#)
- **“We have successfully frozen their brand—‘critical race theory’—into the public conversation and are steadily driving up negative perceptions,”** he wrote. **“We will eventually turn it toxic, as we put all of the various cultural insanities under that brand category”** Christopher Rufo

From the article *“How Not to Talk About Race”*

The right wants to convince America that critical race theory is a sinister program of indoctrination.

By [Patricia J. Williams](#) [Twitter](#)

October 18, 2021



## More from Christopher Rufo

- School districts have added diversity and equity training for years to foster a more tolerant environment and to better position marginalized people for success.
- Trump's presidential election in 2016 changed the dynamics around racial equity and tolerance in America.
- In September 2020, Trump [ordered an end to diversity and equity training for federal contractors](#).
- That came after Christopher Rufo of the conservative Manhattan Institute [appeared repeatedly on Tucker Carlson's Fox News](#) talk show to equate equity and social justice with critical race theory.

# Critical race theory turning school boards into GOP proving grounds

- Frustrations over how kids are taught about systemic racism have turned once-sleepy school board elections into hyperlocal skirmishes with the power to polarize how a new generation learns about U.S. history — **and grow the ranks of Republican politicians.**
- But it's the local races — outside the spotlight, in elections that attract just a few hundred voters — that may define what students learn in the classroom for years to come.
- While such elections are often (supposed to be) nonpartisan, the **Republican Party sees a rich opportunity to build a pipeline of new political candidates.**

<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/09/08/critical-race-theory-school-boards-510381>

# Right-wing groups are training activists to take over school boards as part of ‘critical race theory’ campaign strategy

- Wealthy Republican-affiliated groups are raising money to “train” candidates to run for office as the GOP seeks a second Tea Party movement
- The right-wing [campaign](#) to [stifle](#) teaching and discussion about racism in U.S. history and institutions is fear-mongering about critical race theory to mobilize right-wing activists and conservative voters **to take over local school boards.**
- “The left has spent many years and vast funding to stack local school boards,” the Leadership Institute’s website claims. “America’s children suffer the effects of this liberal domination every day.” The group adds, “**Patriotic** Americans must take back the schools.”

<https://flux.community/peter-montgomery/2021/08/right-wing-groups-training-activists-take-over-school-boards-part-critical>

# GOP Operative Says It Hurts White Kids When 'Kids of Color Feel They Belong'

[Allison Quinn](#)

[News Editor](#)

Published Oct. 07, 2021 5:54AM ET

- Mary Beeman, a Republican campaign manager for school board candidates in a Connecticut town, has sparked controversy by telling participants of a virtual education forum that **“helping kids of color to feel they belong has a negative effect on white, Christian, or conservative kids.”**
- Mary Beeman put forth that bizarre argument during a virtual education forum where the right-wing boogeyman known as **“critical race theory”** was discussed, according to local news outlet WFSB. She later sought to clarify her statement, which she admitted was “poorly worded,” and claimed it had been shown “out of context.”
- In trying to mop up the mess, Beeman said she’d been referring to “students who may have staunch Judeo-Christian values, or simply are conservative thinkers,” and are now being “bullied into submission by their teachers and fellow students with left-leaning ideologies.”
- Bill Bloss, the Guilford school board chairman, made clear he wasn’t buying Beeman’s excuses for the racist remark, questioning **“exactly what context would that comment be positive in.”**

[https://www.wfsb.com/news/guilford-gop-school-board-campaign-manager-says-helping-children-of-color-feel-like-they-belong/article\\_61cef1bo-26eb-11ec-aa85-bf2eco443b85.html](https://www.wfsb.com/news/guilford-gop-school-board-campaign-manager-says-helping-children-of-color-feel-like-they-belong/article_61cef1bo-26eb-11ec-aa85-bf2eco443b85.html)

# Religious Right Pushes Effort To Whitewash History and Restrict Teaching About Systemic Racism

- Under the guise of protecting children from the supposed threat of “**critical race theory**”, the campaign against teaching about racism has taken form in incendiary right-wing media segments, attacks on teachers and school officials, and [state](#) and [federal](#) legislation.
- In the hands of right-wing activists—pushed by Fox News personality Tucker Carlson, former President Donald Trump, and other Republican officials, “**critical race theory**” as a term has lost all meaning. Instead, it has become an all-purpose label with which to smear teachers and liberal politicians as anti-white, Marxist, or America-haters—and to [justify](#) the whitewashing of U.S. [history](#).

<https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/religious-right-pushes-effort-to-whitewash-history-and-restrict-teaching-about-systemic-racism/>

# Stephen Miller Defines CRT

- AFL (America First Legal) President (and former Trump aid) Stephen Miller issued the following statement:
  - “AFL is committed to defeating the **illegal** equity agenda and the poisonous ideology driving it: **Critical Race Theory**. In that mission, AFL is standing up for parents who are trying to save their children from racist CRT **indoctrination**.”
- Critical race theory as applied to education holds that in the United States the education system is inherently racist and exists to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between whites and nonwhites, especially African Americans.

<https://www.aflegal.org/news/afl-demands-materials-from-pennsylvania-school-district-that-refuses-to-disclose-ties-to-radical-education-consultants-pushing-critical-race-theory-in-the-classroom>



# Family Research Council Raises Money for Right-Wing School Board Takeover Campaign

- **Family Research Council (FRC)** President Tony Perkins is raising money to promote right-wing takeovers of local school boards, which he claims is necessary to “protect the hearts and minds of the next generation from the left-wing agenda.”
- Perkins, ignoring the national right-wing groups (already) heavily involved in the right-wing school board takeover effort, portrayed the campaign as a **grassroots uprising**
- FRC Action, Perkins said, is “focusing our national expertise on key local elections by providing, at no charge, much needed resources to help **replace radical school board members** with Christian and conservative parents and other qualified candidates.”

<https://www.rightwingwatch.org/post/family-research-council-raises-money-for-right-wing-school-board-takeover-campaign/>



# Koch-backed group fuels opposition to school mask mandates, leaked letter shows

- *Washington Post* October 1, 2021
- A template letter circulated by **Independent Women's Forum** offers a glimpse into a well resourced campaign against public health regulations
- It is motivated, the author explains, by a desire to “**speak up for what is best for my kids.**” And it fervently conveys the author's feelings to school leaders: “I do not believe little kids should be forced to wear masks, and I urge you to adopt a policy that allows **parental choice** on this matter for the upcoming school year.”
- But the heartfelt appeal is **not the product of a grass roots groundswell**. Rather, it is a template drafted and circulated this week within a conservative network built on the scaffolding of the Koch fortune and the largesse of other GOP megadonors.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/01/masks-schools-koch-money/>

# Independent Women's Network



- From their homepage <https://iwnetwork.com/>
- Do you worry about the country? Do you want to engage with fellow **patriotic** women (men too!) who aren't triggered by honest debate? Do you want to bring back civility, free speech, and economic **liberty**
- We are a home for the independent, civically engaged, truth seekers, **freedom** fighters, game changers, and policy makers who want a secure platform for honest conversations about everything from politics and culture to education and family. It's a place where you can get tools to be an effective leader, learn about issues, advocate for your family and country, engage with great people, and have lots of fun while doing it.

# Sinclair Broadcasting

## When Local News Is Not Local

What we know about the conservative media giant Sinclair

- The Company owns and/or operates 21 RSN brands; owns, operates and/or provides services to **185 television stations** in 86 markets; is a leading local news provider in the country; owns multiple national networks; and has TV stations affiliated with all the major broadcast networks.
- Sinclair owns or operates 59 Fox affiliates, 41 ABC affiliates, 30 CBS affiliates, 25 NBC affiliates, nine Univision affiliates, and others, and also has its own network, Comet, according to its website

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-who-is-sinclair-broadcast-group-20180403-story.html>

# Let's Name Some Names

- **State Policy Network (SPN)** - the policy, communications, and litigation arm of the [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) (ALEC)
- **Illinois Policy Institute (IPI)** – Led by John Tillman, working to “retake control” of schools. Has spun off many separate efforts: <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/>
  - Think Freely Media, Crowdsout LLC, Illinois Opportunity Project, Government Accountability Office, Justice Liberty, Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity, Leadership Consulting LLC : Waldo Group/Waldo Holdings LLC – all owned and run by Mr. Tillman.
- **Awake Illinois**, working on the existential threat of Critical Race Theory
  - 28 Local Awake Chapters Across Illinois <https://www.awakeil.com/>
- **Illinois Parents Union (IPU)** <https://www.facebook.com/groups/ReopenIllinoisSchools/> ...the balance of power in Illinois is destructively skewed to favor powerful teachers unions and administrators...
- **Leadership Institute** - training the next generation of conservative candidates for the nation's school boards. <https://www.leadershipinstitute.org/>
- **Turning Point USA (TPUSA)** - advocates for conservative values on high school, college, and university campuses <https://www.tpusa.com/>
- **No Left Turn In Education** - fighting against lessons on systemic racism <https://www.noleftturn.us/>
- **Family Research Council** - Right-Wing School Board Takeover Campaign <https://www.frc.org/>
- **FAIR - Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism** – not what they purport to be <https://www.fairforall.org/about/#whatwestandfor>
- **Independent Women's Network** Do you want to engage with fellow **patriotic** women <https://iwnetwork.com/>
- **Moms for Liberty** fighting for the survival of America... under a rallying cry of **parental rights** <https://www.momsforliberty.org/>
- **Parents Defending Education** working to reclaim our schools from activists promoting harmful agendas ... fighting **indoctrination** in the classroom <https://defendinged.org/>

# DEMOLISHING PUBLIC LIBRARIES FROM THE INSIDE: NILES PUBLIC LIBRARY IS A WARNING

- Who sits on the board of your local library can mean the difference between a thriving library ecosystem or a community resource being pulled apart brick by brick.
- The latter is what's happening at Niles Public Library in Niles, Illinois, a community roughly 30 minutes from the heart of Chicago.
- The April 2021 election in Niles-Maine Township had low turnout. Turnout for the election was 8.4%, and numerous roles on the ballot were uncontested.
- But the election in April 2021 changed everything. Over the course of the next few months and the installation of a new Board of Directors, the library's funding has been deeply slashed, hours reduced to below-state-standard levels, the library director quit, and essential services to the community shuttered.
- Unfortunately, Niles-Maine Public Library isn't the only public library seeing this kind of destruction from the inside. They're running for small boards and destroying beloved public institutions from the inside in the name of **white supremacy**.

<https://bookriot.com/niles-public-library/>

# Could this Happen Here?

- "Y'all paying attention to Indiana and HB 1134?"
- Educators won't be able to teach "divisive concepts" without permission from parents.
- Parents have to approve teacher lesson plans before the school year starts. Lesson plans for the entire school year are due by June 30th prior to school year beginning.
- Teachers cannot talk to students who are having any sort of mental health crisis, or personal issues without permission from the parents.
- There's a lot more highly concerning pieces to this bill but the TLDR version is that this is a bill that seeks to protect white supremacy and bury parts of history and science that don't fall in line with the white Christian extremist ideology.
- This extremist agenda goes beyond curriculum and seeks to completely dismantle our PUBLIC education system by forcing droves of teachers out of the profession which would cause religious based private schools to emerge as the only option for education.
- The entire public education system is under attack, and if you think it can't happen in Illinois you're wrong. We all must stand up and fight back.

Comment posted in a Metro East Progressive Group



# From the Anti-Public School Playbook

## Step 1

Use the media to drum up a "culture war" around race or gender issues

## Step 2

Win elections by stoking voter fears around these issues

## Step 3

Frame attempts to update curricula as a radical attack on "American" values

## Step 4

Demand vouchers for privately managed charter schools to defund public schools

## Step 5

Support politicians at every level who push for education cuts, unaccountable charter schools and voucher schemes

*"These dangerous attempts to stoke fears and rewrite history not only diminish the injustices experienced by generations of Americans, they prevent educators from challenging our students to achieve a more equitable future"*

**NEA President Becky Pringle**

Published in "NEA Today" magazine, December issue, by Amanda Litvinov



# Don't Despair



# Action Opportunities

If your voice isn't there, what voice fills the void?

- **Contact School Board** by email (Google/Bing search district and Board of Education, e.g. "D211 Board of Education"; Be short and professional)
- **Attend School Board meetings**
- **Sign up to speak** or show support; Google the Board of Education to know the policies for Public Comments and where they fit into the agenda. Includes time limits and how to sign up to speak
- **View Board meeting videos** livestreamed or after the fact. Many district meetings are now live streamed and saved
- **Recognize the groups** showing up. Are they organized and with particular organizations. Network after meetings with like minded individuals and groups
- **Join local progressive groups** (school board specific or community); Indivisible, NWSOFA, Democrats. There are a lot of Facebook pages for these groups and also specifically for school district. I've seen a trend toward these FB groups being private
- **Sign Witness Slips** protecting schools and education – Witness Slip Project (Illinois)  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/390967114607888>
- **Know your School Board members**
- **Find medical professionals, mental professionals and lawyers to be partners to speak at meetings.** They are usually the people interviewed for newspaper articles
- **Letters to the Editor.** Great example:  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bTYiQV\\_82xIsCBVhymqtcxQWT3uabDxb/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bTYiQV_82xIsCBVhymqtcxQWT3uabDxb/view?usp=sharing)
- **Create a group** to attend Board meetings together; wear similar colors, masks to support; cheer; carry signs (#HonestyInEducation)
- **Online petitions** in favor of our issues or to provide support; Pro science petition has 2100+ signatures
- Find out about **School Board curriculum** policies. CRT is NOT taught in lower education. It's only taught in higher education
- **Find out about your district's Equity or Wellness** programs
- **Run for office**
- **Find progressive people to run for office**
- **Sign up for webinars** on the topic even if you can't make the event
- **Find allies at Board meetings**
- **FOIA Requests**
- **Be a troll**
- **Share; Collaborate; Network** (meeting notes, screen grabs)
- **VOTE!**

# Messaging

- **Be inclusive:** “We should all want an honest and accurate education for our children” or “All children benefit from our equity program.”
- **Flip the script.** Reclaim “freedom” and “choice”. “We want freedom to pursue honest and accurate education”.
- **Say What You Are For**
- **Repeat, Repeat, Repeat**
- **Use Active Voice**
- **Don’t Amplify the Opposition.** Focus on equity, social justice and honest curriculum rather than CRT.
- **It’s all about the kids**
- **Liar, liar pants on fire.** Call them out
- History and sex ed is taught based on **age appropriate information.**

# Messaging Resources

- Honesty in Education <sup>1</sup>  
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sx80hc-tL7enAuvQp\\_urmrADNvL1aKnBJ5C6NPEO6o/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sx80hc-tL7enAuvQp_urmrADNvL1aKnBJ5C6NPEO6o/edit)
- Race Forward Guide to Counter-Narrating Attacks on CRT <sup>2</sup>  
[https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/Guide%20to%20Counter-Narrating%20the%20Attacks%20on%20Critical%20Race%20Theory%20-%20Race%20Forward\\_2021-06-14.pdf](https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/Guide%20to%20Counter-Narrating%20the%20Attacks%20on%20Critical%20Race%20Theory%20-%20Race%20Forward_2021-06-14.pdf)
- Winning Racial Justice in Our Schools: Resisting The Right Wing Attacks on Critical Race Theory <sup>3</sup>  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc5da7c3560c36b7dab1922/t/6126241c56874d4314876f6a/1629889575567/CRT+Toolkit+FINAL+August+2021.pdf>
- Top Talking Points for Racial Equity. <sup>4</sup>  
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-L159e4-7yu9LICbbQ26JFgi6HZvEL1OBNG35kKISKU/edit>
- Honesty in Education: CRT Debunked for Next Gen Educators <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/honesty-education-crt-debunked-next-gen-educators>
- Words That Win <https://wordsthatwin.org/>
- Division Through Deception: Dark Money's Attempt to Influence Public Education  
<https://vimeo.com/652729052?ref=em-share>
- #HonestyInEducation <https://neaedjustice.org/honesty-in-education/>
- Support Our Schools  
<https://www.supportourschools.com/become-an-advocate>



# Public Comment Samples

- Children deserve an honest education about race and racism in this country. Attempts to squash these conversations are attacks on a multiracial democracy, justice, and community.
- We cannot allow public officials to dumb down public school curricula because they are not comfortable with the truth of this country's past and present
- The United States' diversity is a strength. Learning about diverse histories, races, and cultures helps students build connections across differences, and gives students mirrors that reflect their own identity as well as windows into the world to connect with others. <sup>4</sup>
- No matter our color, background, or zip code, we want our children to have an education that imparts honesty about who we are, integrity in how we treat others, and courage to do what's right.

# Writing LTE -byTerry Maher

Indivisible Illinois Social Justice Alliance - Weekly... - Shared screen with speaker view

Who can see your viewing activity? X



## The Formula for a Great LTE

**Paragraph 1:** If you had to tell a stranger on the street corner in 35 words or less what your letter is about, what would you say?

**Paragraphs 2 & 3:** Explain in unemotional terms what the problem is.

**Paragraph 4:** Provide factual information that can be easily found with a simple Google search.

**Final Paragraph:** This should be a non-emotional, fact-based argument that anyone can check for being truthful.

# Run for Office

- Guide to Running for School Board<sup>2</sup>

<https://npeaction.org/grassroots-school-board-member-network/>

- How to Run a School Board Campaign

<https://xqsuperschool.org/rethinktogether/how-to-run-a-school-board-campaign/>

- Run For Something <https://runforsomething.net/>
- Red Wine and Blue Trouble Maker Training
- Talk to local progressive groups
- Talk to current Board Members



# Groups to Join

- <https://www.indivisibleillinois.org/chapters/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/IndivisibleSJA/>
- <http://nwsofa.org/>



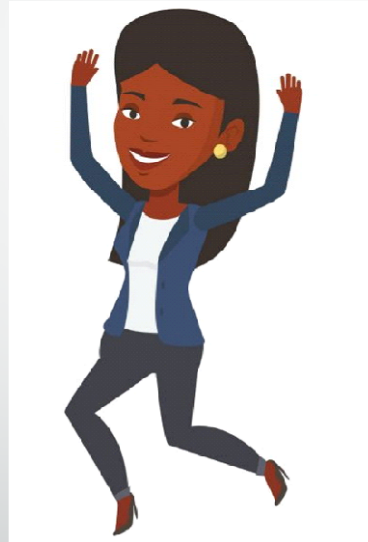
# Focus on Local Elections


- County boards
- Village boards
- School boards
- Library boards
- Who does the background checks on candidates for these boards?

**If enough of us start running for school board and showing up at meetings and pushing back, we can beat the book bannings. it requires organizing, but it can be done.**



You're the one we're waiting for!





Thank You for Attending  
Time for Q&A