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Ideology shouldn't displace education in our K-12 classrooms



A view of the California State Capitol in Sacramento, Calif., Aug. 5, 2024. (AP Photo/Juliana Yamada, File)

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California's [Assembly Bill 715](#), which passed unanimously in the state Legislature, would create reasonable and appropriate guardrails against antisemitism in the state's public K-12 classrooms – an important step in fighting the ongoing crisis that has made Jews the most-targeted religious group in America for hate crimes.

The bill is the product of remarkable consensus. The California Jewish, Latino, Black, and Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) caucuses all collaborated to draft it, along with considerable input over months from the 310,000-member California Teachers Association (CTA).

Now, however, CTA is vehemently opposing the bill it helped write, claiming that, as a result of guidelines for instructional accuracy and objectivity, “teachers might feel constrained.”

The ferocity of CTA's opposition exposes the union's underlying belief that teachers should have unchecked autonomy to impose their own political ideology – all at taxpayers' expense.

Such radicalism and obstructionism from teachers' unions and activists in K-12 education are evident at the national and local levels as well.

Delegates of the National Education Association (NEA), the U.S.'s largest teachers' union of which CTA is the largest state affiliate, recently [voted](#) to sever ties with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), the respected 112-year-old institution dedicated to fighting antisemitism and other prejudices.

Thankfully, the NEA's executive committee [rejected](#) the vote – but the fact that thousands of delegates supported it speaks volumes.

This is just one symptom of a deeper problem: too many educators and unions are beholden to the worldview that underlies so-called “liberated” ethnic studies (LES).

LES proponents teach kids that they're either privileged oppressors or disempowered victims, based on immutable characteristics like skin color and ethnicity. In a warped zero-sum game, the “oppressors” are devalued and deplatformed for the sake of uplifting the “oppressed.” No one wants to identify as an oppressor, or feel devalued, so students find ways to qualify as a victim.

LES ideologues reject meritocracy, asserting that all disparities are due to discrimination. Unable to account for the success of non-white minorities, their solution is to categorize members of such groups, including Jewish, Hindu, and some Asian Americans, as “white adjacent” – similarly privileged and easily ignored, or worse, disparaged.

This is not a discipline; it's a dogma, which many students discern.

Most parents oppose the LES worldview. A nationwide THINC Foundation [survey](#) of nearly 1,500 parents of school-aged children found that more than 80% consider it important for their children to be taught the value of a colorblind society, where individual merit counts for more than skin color — the direct opposite of what LES preaches.

Maybe that's why activist teachers often operate in secrecy. The Palo Alto Unified School District [approved](#) a high school ethnic studies graduation requirement behind closed doors, misleading and stonewalling parents all the while. In another instance, under pressure from activist teachers, the San Francisco Unified School District is [moving forward](#) with a one-year ethnic studies requirement, with a curriculum that has never been properly vetted, reviewed, or approved by the board.

Because transparency is LES's greatest vulnerability, it is also its opponents' most powerful tool.

Like colorblind equality, transparency is important to parents: THINC's [survey](#) also found that nine in ten want curricula to be publicly available.

Transparency puts radical teachers and the unions that support them on the defensive, because why hide something unless it is inappropriate? Activist teachers are allergic to guardrails and supervision because their ideology claims a monopoly on virtue.

If one disagrees, or even questions LES advocates, one should expect ad hominem attacks like “racist” or “white supremacist.” Because, to them, oversight is a hindrance to propagating their ideology.

The opportunity cost is staggering. Ethnic studies is a useful subject that, properly taught, appreciates and acknowledges how a variety of groups have contributed to the American story, as well as how they have met with and sometimes overcome various forms of racism and discrimination.

Too many teachers, and teachers' unions, prioritize ideological agendas over teaching. We must restore integrity to the classroom and re-center students by reversing this harmful trend, district by district, thereby rebuilding trust in our public school system.

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