



NEW REPORT DETAILS THE SCHOOL-LEVEL IMPACT OF THE ANTI-CRT CONFLICT CAMPAIGN



A superintendent advised teachers to tell students inquiring about Holocaust-denial to ‘ask your parent’ rather than insist the Holocaust was real.

A principal advised that a *government* class should not include any materials that were political in nature.

A teacher was so cowed by parent anger over critical race theory that she is afraid to teach about the Bill of Rights.

A chief equity officer received death threats on Twitter and started parking near cameras so that they could capture an attack.

These are just some of the incidents detailed a new report about how local school districts have been impacted by the ongoing conservative campaign against teaching, supposedly about **Critical Race Theory** but actually about other issues related to gender, ethnicity, and race.

Entitled *The Conflict Campaign: Exploring Local Experiences of the Campaign to Ban “Critical Race Theory” in Public K-12 Education in the U.S., 2020-2021*, the report was written by Mica Pollock, a professor at the University of California, San Diego, and by NEPC Fellow John Rogers, a professor at UCLA.

The researchers found that, to date, anti-“Critical Race Theory” efforts have impacted at least 894 school districts enrolling 35 percent of K-12 students in the United States. “Critic-

cal Race Theory” appears in quotes throughout the report because, the authors explain, “the conflict campaign thrives on caricature—on often distorting altogether both scholarship and K-12 educators’ efforts at accurate and inclusive education.”

One interesting finding of the report is that students with the highest likelihood of encountering diversity are those most likely to be restricted from learning about it in school. Districts where the percentage of white students had declined by at least 18 percent since 2000 were three times more likely to be impacted by campaign conflict. In addition, the campaign has been most likely to zero in on racially diverse districts and those that are neither staunchly Democratic nor staunchly Republican.

As of November 2021, PEN America had identified 48 bills, nine of which became laws, that sought to restrict teaching and learning about race, racism, and diversity in K-12 schools. In addition, state boards of education in other states have taken non-legislative action or have considered passing laws or policy changes related to “CRT.”

Yet the study found that even in states that had not approved bills or approved formal policies, the campaign has had a chilling effect on instruction, especially in districts where leaders did not push back against the campaign. This campaign was aided by conservative news media outlets, which produced seven times more coverage about the issue than did their liberal counterparts. The focus of the campaign went well beyond legislators to school districts and to individual educators, with students and parents threatening educators and screen-shotting and recording lessons in schools then circulating them online.

In districts where higher-ups did not offer protection, even vocal minorities or individuals were permitted to have a major impact on what was taught in schools. Many of the teachers surveyed reported that their districts pulled back on prior commitments to implement culturally responsive instruction and social-emotional learning (a term that has also been caught up in the campaign). Some said it had become challenging to accurately portray history. These teachers expressed confusion about what they were not permitted to teach as well as fear that something they said or did could get them in trouble. As a result, many are choosing simply to remain silent on a broad array of issues touching on diversity.

Asked for recommendations on addressing the campaign, equity officers advised educators and administrators to respond to critics rather than ignore them and to do so with factual descriptions of the instruction and support necessary to prepare diverse students for an increasingly diverse nation. They said education leaders needed to protect students’ right to learn by supporting teachers in their efforts to share information about the realities of gender and of race. And they urged leaders to avoid folding under pressure from “CRT” critics who may only represent only a small minority of district parents.

The study authors conclude:

Refusing the conflict campaign’s efforts to divide them, educators, students, and parents will need to unite the majority of Americans around a clear vision of public schools where everyone is treated like they belong and matter, and where historical facts and real experiences of opportunity barriers in our actual country are discussed accurately and with nuance so we can together create a country

that works for everyone.

Pollock and Rogers were assisted by graduate students Alexander Kwako, Andrew Matschiner, Reed Kendall, Cicely Bingener, Erika Reece, Benjamin Kennedy, and Jaleel Howard. Funded by a Spencer Foundation grant that supports “rapid response” studies on emerging issues in education, the report draws upon documents and news accounts. It also included a survey of 275 educators involved with six national organizations that assist educators with addressing equity in schools, as well as interviews with 21 district central office equity officers in 17 states.

Further Reading

The Conflict Campaign: Exploring Local Experiences of the Campaign to Ban “Critical Race Theory” in Public K-12 Education in the U.S., 2020-2021 can be downloaded [here](#).

Click [here](#) to download NEPC’s 2021 report, *Understanding the Attacks on Critical Race Theory*.

NEPC Resources on Politics, Policy and School Practices

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