

In recent years, we've seen concerted attacks on school boards, with protests erupting across Arizona (and the country). Though press coverage often suggests that the phenomenon is a "grassroots" movement, these attacks are actually a coordinated, national "astroturf" operation, orchestrated and facilitated through a web of deep-pocketed donors and strategists via the religious right.

This manufactured outrage — based on a toxic brew of disinformation, religious dogma, and racist culture war propaganda — endangers educators, harms students and staff, and erodes support for public schools... thus clearing the way for the ultimate goal of school privatization. Attacks often take the form of bullying, harassment, and intimidation of board members, teachers, and administrators who take a stand against racism, bigotry, and hate.

- ➔ **What do school boards do?** Many who attack school board members lack understanding of board roles and responsibilities, as defined by Arizona School Boards Association (ASBA):
  - Hiring and evaluating the district superintendent
  - Providing guidance in the development of the budget to ensure funding needed to meet board established goals
  - Approving and monitoring the budget
  - Setting employee salaries
  - Approving purchases
  - Establishing and approving policies
  - Approving curriculum materials
  - Adopting the school calendar
  - Reviewing regulations for compliance with policy
  - Approving personnel actions based on the superintendent's recommendation
  - Closing or constructing schools
  - Assessing board effectiveness
  - Monitoring progress toward goals
  
- ➔ **What do school boards not do?** Many protestors have unrealistic expectations of what school board members can do. Board duties do not include the following:
  - Implementing policy; school boards make policy and superintendents carry it out
  - Managing the day-to-day operations of the school district; school boards see to it that the district is managed by professionals
  - Evaluating staff, other than the superintendent
  - Involvement in employment interviews, other than those for superintendent
  
- ➔ **Hot button issues for religious right protestors include firing superintendents.**
  - This is fiscally irresponsible; forced resignations end up costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars in severance packages
  - Volatile boards that fire without cause struggle to attract solid candidates (though this may be intentional so they can hire ideologues to replace actual educators)
  - Now there's not only a teacher retention crisis, but a principal and superintendent retention crisis
  - Firing without cause opens school districts to potential wrongful termination lawsuits, ESPECIALLY when it seems administrators are being targeted because of their race/ethnicity
  - Board members should let professionals do the work they've trained for at postgraduate levels
  
- ➔ **Hot button issues for religious right protestors include Critical Race Theory/CRT.**
  - CRT is not taught in Arizona's K-12 schools; CRT is graduate course-level material taught only in university programs
  - Ask protestors to define CRT
  
- ➔ **Hot button issues for religious right protestors include the use of pronouns and bathrooms.**
  - Medical experts agree that gender-affirming care is medically necessary and life-saving for transgender youth (for instance, access to puberty blockers during adolescence is associated with lower odds of suicide.) Such decisions should be between youth, their parents, and their doctors... not politicians
  - Denying young people access to educational activities such as school sports deprives them of the social, emotional, and health benefits these activities bring
  - The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, American Medical Association, American Psychological Association, American Psychiatric Association, Endocrine Society and World Professional Association for Transgender Health all oppose anti-trans bills
  - Trans people face extraordinarily high levels of risk for physical and sexual violence, at school, work, home, in public spaces, and at the hands of government officials
  - More than one in four trans people has faced a bias-driven assault; rates are higher for trans women and trans people of color
  - Bills targeting transgender people — and the political rhetoric surrounding anti-trans bills — send a message that transgender people are not worthy of equal treatment, contributing to dangerous stigma that drives an epidemic of violence
  - Trans individuals are four times more likely to experience violent victimization including murder, rape, sexual assault, and aggravated assault
  
- ➔ **Hot button issues for religious right protestors include Socio-Emotional Learning/SEL**
  - The five pillars of SEL are Self-awareness, Self-management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Making Responsible Decisions... **are these are important skills for children/people to have?**
  - SEL initiatives provide tangible benefits. A meta-study of more than 270,000 students shows that SEL interventions that address the five core competencies increased students' academic performance by 11 percentile points, compared to students who did not participate
  - Students participating in SEL programs showed improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school
  - A 2021 systematic review found that universal SEL interventions enhance young people's social and emotional skills and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety in the short term
  
- ➔ **Hot button issues for religious right protestors include Comprehensive Sex Education/CSE**
  - Studies show that CSE keeps kids safe(r) from abuse
  - Fighting against CSE is just another example of not letting professionals to do their jobs
  - "Purity culture" creates and protects pedophiles
  - Studies show that more comprehensive sex ed reduces teen birth rates

**All students—regardless of race, sexual identity or orientation, ethnicity, religious beliefs or lack thereof—deserve a safe, well-resourced public school where they can learn and grow. We must let defenders of reason on school boards know they are supported.**