



ILLINOIS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP PROTECTION CENTER

FACT SHEET | AWAKE ILLINOIS

Awake Illinois, was founded by Shannon Adcock, a mother of three in the Indian Prairie school district who wanted her kids to return to in-person learning last fall and fought the school board to try to get it to happen. When the school board wouldn't do it, [she tried to run for a position on the school board](#), but failed.

REAL AGENDA

Main purpose of Awake Illinois was to combat "Critical Race Theory." In her blog on her Awake Illinois site, Adcock followers to sign on with her "partner" organizations: [Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism](#), [Parents Defending Education](#), [Moms For Liberty](#) where "we will provide resources on the dangers of the race vs. race worldview, CRT practices, and this regressive philosophy."

All of these organizations have ties to people and institutions that want to privatize public education and ["defund and defang"](#) unions.

ACTUAL MOTIVATION

It's important to understand that "Critical Race Theory" is a misnomer and the campaign against it is no accident. [See this article](#) from Sept. 8.

"Critical race theory is a framework for analysis developed by legal scholars in the 1980s that examines how race and racism have been ingrained in American law and institutions since slavery and Jim Crow.

The study is essentially nonexistent in K-12 schools, but this year, the term has been used to describe diversity trainings and a cadre of classroom lessons on slavery, sexism and other acts of discrimination.

Many conservative candidates stand against critical race theory, but also concede that the graduate-level legal framework isn't being taught in K-12 schools. Still, the concern that similar philosophies are influencing public schools is widespread, and candidates use opposition to critical race theory to signal their animus to curriculum that further focuses on racism or oppression."

USUAL SUSPECTS

One of the top campaigners against CRT has been the [Heritage Foundation](#), along with the Manhattan Institute. Christopher Rufo, a documentary filmmaker, has served as a visiting fellow at Heritage and is the leading spokesperson against CRT on television and Twitter. He has been appointed to a new position at the [Manhattan Institute](#), too, on the same topic.

[The same Guardian article](#) cites a number of new organizations that have popped up to spread the anti-CRT message, including the Foundation Against Intolerance & Racism and Parents Defending Education, both organizations Awake Illinois founder Adcock encouraged her followers to associate themselves with. In January, at a Heritage Foundation panel discussion, the director of the foundation's center for education policy told those attending that the best way to fight "critical race theory" was to [support educational choice](#) (57:20).

And, school choice is also being touted in Illinois, as made clear by [this flier being circulated on parent group pages](#) around the state, advertising an event discussion of "School Choice Options: Homeschool and launch of 12 new mask-optional in-person learning private schools Pre-K through 12th Grade."

[The Heritage Foundation is linked to the State Policy Network](#)

[The Illinois Policy Institute](#) is part of the State Policy Network and is also the organization that has been working for more than a decade to destroy the Illinois Education Association. It is also the organization that sends IEA members emails and snail mail urging members to leave the union and give up their collective bargaining rights and legal right to representation.

Awake Illinois also pushed supporters to follow Parents Defending Education. Its president, Nicole Neily, has worked for multiple Koch Brothers' organizations, including Speech First, Independent Women's Forum, the Cato Institute, served as president of the Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity, president of the [Franklin News Foundation](#) and others. The Franklin News Foundation is the parent company of the [Center Square](#), an Illinois-based organization that provides free content to media outlets around the state. It's also an offshoot of the Illinois Policy Institute.

Parents Defending Education recently added another staffer, [Elizabeth Schultz of Virginia](#). Schultz was a Betsy DeVos appointee at the U.S. Department of Education.

WHAT WE BELIEVE IN

Almost all of us want our kids to have an education that encourages them to understand who we are, where we came from and what we're capable of being, no matter our skin color, background or ZIP code. But the same lawmakers and think tanks that want to defund our classrooms and spend public money on private-school vouchers are now trying to turn us against our own schools.

They're misleading Illinoisans about the lessons our educators teach about history, culture and politics. Instead of supporting a more honest and complete education about race in America, they hope to divide us, so we don't join together to demand all that our students and their families need.

As educators, we know our students deserve the freedom to see a fuller picture of our state and nation — the good and the bad, the noble and the cruel — because we're educating the leaders of tomorrow. We can't let the prejudices of a few billionaires, and the politics they pay for, deny the next generation the education they will need to bring Illinoisans together to make a state where everyone can thrive, no exceptions.