

Culture wars hurt classrooms

We have a worsening teacher shortage, not a 'woke' teacher epidemic



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Your Turn
Emilie McKiernan
Blanton
Guest columnist

We don't have a "woke" teacher epidemic. What we actually have is a real and terrifying teacher shortage. The teacher shortage will only get worse as the dangerous, anti-teacher rhetoric continues. • A flurry of bills have been filed aimed at tackling "woke" curriculum. With legislation coming from both the House and the Senate, these bills are targeting everything from books to pronouns. I have been teaching for fifteen years and am a certified English teacher. Prior to switching to a new content area, I taught English. My own English classroom library was robust and diverse and entirely funded by me.

Every year I sent home multiple permission slips. Some books were kept put away and only allowed with explicit parent permission in written form that I kept on file. Any books read as a class were listed in my class syllabus which also included a letter to parents and a signature page that they returned to indicate that they had seen the book list.

I offered the ability to skip texts at parent discretion and let parents block any book from their child for any reason. Teachers are not hiding anything from

parents. I know I'm not alone in this because this level of parent-teacher collaboration is considered best practice for all educators. In fact, Kentucky Teacher Standard 8 specifically calls for collaboration with parents, family members and the community in order to show proficiency and effectiveness as an educator.

Hiding curriculum from parents is virtually impossible. Our students get

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Teacher

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the work in their hands and can take it home. After time as virtual educators, most teachers keep their Google Classrooms updated where parents can easily see what we are covering and how it is scored.

Speaking of virtual learning, we spent months livestreaming our classes straight into our students' homes. If we were attempting to "indoctrinate" students, you'd have heard it there. If we were behaving in unethical ways, most of our older students are walking around with cellphones in their pockets that could easily record if teachers were telling kids to change their pronouns and their names.

It's just not happening.

I don't have an alarming number of students in my room wanting to change genders or names or pronouns. What I actually have is an alarming number of students who are arriving to school late because they don't have a bus driver. What I actually have is my own two children who have been victims of the ongoing and pervasive teacher shortage. What I actually have is to sub for my colleagues because the shortage is so bad that we are often giving up our planning periods just to keep school running.

According to EdWeek, an alarming 53% of teachers say that legislation like SB 150, SB 102, HB 173 and others make them less likely to stay in the profession. Legislation aimed at attacking teachers and their students is actively worsening the teacher shortage, which is an actual real and valid cause for crisis and alarm across our commonwealth.

These bills will continue to cause strife in parent-teacher relationships. If parents feel like they can't trust us because of things politicians are telling them, then that is going to harm their child's relationship with their teachers too, further contributing to respect issues in the classroom. When families watch the news and hear anti-teacher rhetoric, little ears can hear that and it's



An United States flag hangs in the corner of a first grade classroom Sept. 28, 2021, at an elementary school in Louisville.

PAT MCDONOGH/COURIER JOURNAL

confusing for students. It's also confusing for parents to be told not to trust their children's teachers.

It's important to remember that most teachers are parents, too, or will be in the future. We're not anti-parent. We're just like you. We go to church with you. We go to the same grocery as you. We're just people. We're people in a profession that is being targeted on the national stage and our children are the ones who will suffer the most.

In a time when the teacher shortage, and indeed entire school staff shortage, is reaching crisis levels, legislation based on wedge issues will lead to more teachers leaving the profession as well as fewer college students pursuing the career.

It's time to work together and help Kentucky become an education leader. That means teachers, parents and the community working together to provide opportunity. There's no reason we can-

not work together to create a brighter Kentucky for our kids. Our kids deserve it. Our kids deserve to know that the adults in their lives are working together for them.

Emilie McKiernan Blanton is a fifteen year teacher veteran and elected member of the JCTA Board of Directors. She teaches at Southern High School and is the mother of two JCPS students who have been personally affected by the teacher shortage even before COVID.

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