

Center of the American Experiment and Educated Teachers MN backgrounder

Don't be fooled. The Center of the American Experiment, its secretive funders and its allies don't care about workers or public education.

CAE disguises itself as a think tank, but in reality pushes the agenda of its anti-union, corporate donors. This Minnesota organization promotes school privatization and dismantling public pensions and vehemently opposes programs that protect the LGBTQ+ community or advocate for people of color.

The Center of the American Experiment is also actively trying to get Education Minnesota members to leave the union. The drop campaign is called Educated Teachers MN, which started in 2018. CAE and its front group only care about education around September of each year when members can revoke their union dues. They unsuccessfully send educators up to a dozen misleading mailings about their union each year.

They don't want us to come together to fight for quality public schools, strong communities, racial justice or better pay and working conditions. Here's where CAE really stands on issues that are important to educators and working families.

Unions and working families

CAE has a long track record of attacking public employees, their unions and the benefits they earn.

Even as teacher burnout is at an all-time high and a record number are leaving the profession, CAE continues to beat up on public pensions and push for defined contribution plans. That means less money for educators when they retire.

The center also brings in and touts anti-union speakers for events. CAE had Fox News host Laura Ingraham as its featured speaker at its 2021 annual dinner. Ingraham continually bashed educator unions during the COVID-19 pandemic and falsely blamed them for keeping students out of school and being the "super spreaders of panic."

"The message to parents – your kids are disposable but the teachers unions are forever," Ingraham said March 26, 2021, at a Fox News town hall. "The entire exercise has been nothing more than a shakedown for money and more political power – and what they've done to our kids—I've said this repeatedly and I'm going to say it again tonight—is its own form of child abuse. When the history of this pandemic is written, among the many villains exposed will be the unions and school board members who put their own interests first and those of the children's last."

Rebecca Friedrichs, a former California public school teacher who sued her union over the collection of fair-share fees, was a featured speaker at a high-profile event in 2018. Friedrichs wrote an op-ed in the Washington Times accusing U.S. public schools of grooming children to be sexualized.

School privatization and vouchers

The center loves to bash public education and advocate for school privatization and vouchers.

Kim Crockett, CAE's former vice president and general counsel who is now running for Minnesota's Secretary of State, praised a plan provide federal money for private school vouchers.

"We have generations of students who've attended failing public schools. That's unacceptable," Crockett said in the St. Paul Pioneer Press, Feb. 10, 2017. "The more government gets involved, the less impressive the product has become."

Racial justice and immigration

CAE is attacking Minnesota's new social studies standards and using the term "critical race theory" to mislead the public about the lessons educators teach about history, culture, gender and politics.

They are part of a well-coordinated, multi-state attack on racial equity in public education.

CAE started hosted listening sessions across the state on these issues and "boot camps" for school board candidates who align with their agenda in 2021. The intent is to distract and divide us so we don't come together and demand the richest 1 percent and largest corporations pay what they owe for what our communities need. And CAE definitely doesn't want our students to have an honest look at our history or learn to understand and respect other people.

Usually CAE uses subtle dog whistles, but sometimes the unvarnished truth comes out. Crockett made racist remarks about Somali-American refugees in a June 20, 2019, New York Times article.

"I think of America, the great assimilator, as a rubber band, but with this — we're at the breaking point," Crockett said. "These aren't people coming from Norway, let's put it that way. These people are very visible."

The center and its subsidiaries deliberately distract us with fearmongering to protect the powerful few who write the rules against us. But Minnesota educators are better than that. No matter what we look like or where we come from, we can come together to rewrite the rules and ensure every one of us can care for our families and earn a fair return for our work.