

# 2024 anti-union groups

## Groups working against Education Minnesota and its values

Education Minnesota, like other unions in public education, faces more organized opposition than ever. However, the two main sources of opposition have remained remarkably consistent. First, a small group of multi-millionaires and billionaires fund a national network of groups tasked with dismantling the labor movement because it threatens to raise wages for working people and because it would force the richest Americans and wealthiest corporations to pay what they truly owe in taxes. Because educators' unions are among the nation's largest unions, they receive special attention. Second, some groups say their Christian nationalist faith conflicts with educators' commitment to teaching honestly about science and U.S. history, and to educators' commitment to making their schools safe and welcoming for LGBTQ+ students.

The following is a summary of the key opposition groups operating in Minnesota as of the summer of 2024. This list will be amended as new opposition groups are formed or current groups are rebranded.

### Media

#### Alpha News

A right-wing advocacy organization that poses as a legitimate news media outlet. It has a similar agenda and methods to national MAGA media programs, including Breitbart, The Daily Caller, The Daily Signal, InfoWars, The National Desk and certain programs on Fox News. Alpha News has connections to The Freedom Club of Minnesota via shared officers. Fundraising appeals from The Freedom Club have linked to the Alpha News' donation page, suggesting a close relationship between the groups.

### Think Tanks

#### Center of the American Experiment


The Center of the American Experiment is the most important Minnesota node of the sprawling State Policy Network of advocacy groups. SPN receives significant funding from a small number of right-wing billionaire families including the Kochs, Waltons and DeVos's, according to news reports. It also receives individual donations. CAE is by far the most influential right-wing organization in Minnesota because it communicates in a tone that's acceptable to the mainstream media. Its work is regularly published in newspapers and its advocates give frequent interviews. Recently, the organization's education work has focused on Minnesota's new licensing requirements for teachers and the upcoming revision to the social studies standards. The group is vehemently anti-union but friendly to corporate interests. It has been instrumental in creating [IlluminEd](#), the Minnesota Parents Alliance and Educated Teachers.

#### Minnesota Family Council/ Minnesota Family Institute

The Minnesota Family Council and the Minnesota Family Institute are closely interconnected faith-based organizations based in Minnesota that have consistently taken conservative positions on cultural issues. The groups support vouchers for private schools and increased state support for homeschooling. Within education, its most recent focus has been opposing sexual education and LGBTQ+ policies. In August 2023, the group worked with The Daily Signal and [Parents Defending Education](#) to research the gender policies of Minnesota school districts. [PDE was created](#) in Virginia in 2021 as part of the right's national "critical race theory" campaign. The project was part of a national effort to pressure

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[www.educationminnesota.org](http://www.educationminnesota.org)

Education Minnesota is an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association and AFL-CIO.  4869



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school boards to adopt policies requiring teachers and other school employees to inform parents any time a student indicates a gender identity, name, or pronoun different from those on their school records or those given to them at birth. A fundraising email from the Minnesota group announcing the results of the project began: "It's a parent's worst nightmare. You learn that your school district has been willfully hiding the fact that your son or daughter has changed his or her "gender identity."

## Membership Drop Campaigns

### Opt-Out Today (Freedom Foundation)

The [Freedom Foundation](#) is one of the most high-profile anti-union groups in the United States with a focus on persuading unionists to abandon their unions. Its flagship brand is [Opt-Out Today](#). The group's modes of communication typically include multiple postcards and digital ads. Its approach changes from year-to-year from attempts to exploit culture war issues to preying on educators' economic insecurities. The foundation's communications are noteworthy for their name calling of union leaders as "thugs" and "bullies." Originally focused on its home state of Washington, the foundation now works throughout the United States. Like many other anti-union groups, it receives funding from the Koch political network, the Walton family and the DeVos family. Although it has a similar name to the Minnesota-based Freedom Club of Minnesota, the two organizations do not have any other obvious connections.

### Educated Teachers (Center of the American Experiment)

A project of the Center of the American Experiment, [Educated Teachers](#) is dedicated to persuading Minnesota teachers to leave Education Minnesota. It provides links to alternate sources of insurance through Christian Educators and Association of American Educators. Although the line of attack changes from year-to-year, typically Educated Teachers tries to use social issues and the union's support for pro-education candidates as a wedge. Another favored tactic has been to spread disinformation about nonbinding resolutions passed at the annual conventions of the NEA or AFT. Also, see Christian Educators and Americans for Fair Treatment in the "union alternatives" section below.

## Litigation

### FAIR: Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism, Minnesota

The [Foundation Against Intolerance and Racism](#), or FAIR, is a national, nonprofit organization founded in 2021. It campaigns against diversity and inclusion programs, ethnic studies curricula, and antiracism initiatives rooted in its own definition of critical race theory. Unlike some other groups that came out against diversity programs in schools, FAIR approaches the issue through a race-blind lens that has been compared to the "all lives matter" movement. In Minnesota, the group is best known for sending legal-sounding demand letters to school boards threatening to sue if the board members don't rescind various LGBTQ+- or BIPOC-supporting policies. [Representatives of FAIR Twin Cities](#) have opposed Minnesota's revised social studies standards and a new human rights training requirement for obtaining a state license to teach.

### Upper Midwest Law Center

The Upper Midwest Law Center is a law firm affiliated with the Minnetonka-based Center of the American Experiment. The law center has a record of opposing organized labor and its values in Minnesota, including a six-year lawsuit against a provision in the Anoka Hennepin Education Minnesota contract providing union leave and a legal challenge to inclusive signs and symbols in Lakeville Public Schools.

### True North Legal

[True North Legal](#) is a law firm affiliated with the Minnesota Family Council. The law firm's general counsel, Renee Carlson, often testifies at the Legislature. True North Legal has partnered with the Upper Midwest Law firm on cases alleging the religious freedom of Christians was infringed by governmental or private employers.

## Union Alternatives

### Christian Educators

Christian Educators, formerly known as Christian Educators Association International, is a nonprofit group based in Yorba Linda, Calif. It is committed to recruiting and supporting educators to serve as “thriving ambassadors for Christ in our schools,” according to the group’s public tax filings. It often approaches educators in Minnesota and other states with arguments to leave their unions with deceptive descriptions of those unions’ political operations and with offers of \$2 million in liability insurance. It is affiliated with two of the most politically active groups on the right in the United States, the State Policy Network and Alliance Defending Freedom.

In the summer of 2024, Christian Educators was encouraging educators to leave their union [in partnership with Americans for Fair Treatment](#), an Oklahoma-based nonprofit which is an associate member of the State Policy Network. The SPN runs a national campaign to destabilize the labor movement on behalf of its wealthy donors. The Center of the American experiment in Minnesota is also a member of the SPN. [AFFT has received funding](#) from the Donor’s Trust, Bradley Family Foundation, Searle Freedom Trust and other foundations associated with right-wing billionaires.

In 2024, Christian Educators touted on its website that it joined a lawsuit with the Arizona-based legal advocacy group [Alliance Defending Freedom](#) that sought to prevent the Biden administration from implementing a planned update of Title IX guidance on LGBTQ+ policies in U.S. schools. ADF has been active in more than a dozen Supreme Court cases to expand the role of fundamentalist Christianity in the public sphere. Most notably, ADF was [instrumental in overturning](#) *Roe v. Wade* at the U.S. Supreme Court. The Southern Poverty Law Center [considers the ADF an anti-LGBTQ + hate group](#).

## Grassroots Advocacy

### Child Protection League/ Child Protection League Action

While the Center of the American Experiment presents a polished, rational image, the Minnesota Child Protection League covers many of the same topics in a hotter, weirder, more conspiratorial way. The group has opposed vaccines, masks, “cultural Marxism” and its own definitions of social-emotional learning, critical race theory and racial equity. The group’s past homophobic stances have earned it the label of “hate group” from the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#). In 2023, the group hosted [James Lindsay](#), PhD, who spoke on “Social Emotional Learning, CRT, CSE as fronts in the same war: The Culture War in Education.” In 2021, Lindsay [wrote on X](#) (formerly Twitter) that “there will be” a [genocide](#) of [whites](#) if [critical race theory](#) “isn’t stopped.” The political wing of the CPL endorsed candidates for school board in 2023.

### Mass Resistance

Mass Resistance is an anti-LGBTQ+ group based in Massachusetts that was active in Minnesota school board politics in 2023. Leaders of the group worked with Restore Minnesota for training. That year, Arthur Schaper, the field director for Mass Resistance, [filed an open records request](#) with the Roseville Public Schools for a catalog of books in its library. Coincidentally or not, there was an outbreak of “grassroots” activism around removing LGBTQ+ books in the school libraries in the spring. The Southern Poverty Law Center lists Mass Resistance as an [anti-LGBTQ+ hate group](#).

### Minnesota Parents Alliance

The most prominent organization in Minnesota working against racial and gender equity in schools is the Minnesota Parents Alliance, [which was created](#) in early 2022 by the Center of the American Experiment. The MPA calls itself a “parent-powered” organization that encourages parents to engage with their school community, but its close ties with the CAE raise questions about its commitment to public schools.

The group has actively recruited candidates for school boards since 2022 and had limited success in electing them that year. In 2023, the group had high hopes for a more successful showing in the suburban school board elections.

However, the group took strange public stances that turned off voters, including dismissing concerns that a Holocaust-denying school board candidate was on the ballot in Roseville. MPA wrote on X (formerly Twitter) on Sept. 27, 2023:

"MN voters need to tune out this noise and vote for achievement-focused candidates who believe that our schools need to focus on academics and safety, not distracting personal or political views on race, ethnicity and gender." [MPA also promoted](#) the Child Protection League, Moms for Liberty and other extremist groups on its website. Many of those groups listed the MPA-endorsed candidates on their own websites.

Despite increased publicity and resources, the voters rejected the overwhelming majority of MPA candidates, with the group only posting important wins with two seats in Anoka Hennepin and three seats in Hastings. Union-endorsed candidates won 80% of head-to-head contests.

MPA Executive Director Cristine Trooien has spoken about her plan to remove equity-supporting superintendents and administrators and use their high salaries to attract school leaders more in line with her ideology. "I'm a free-market person. I really believe that if the demand is there, it will be met in some way," Trooien told [The National Review](#) in November 2022.

The MPA continued to recruit candidates for school boards in 2024.

## Moms for Liberty

Moms for Liberty, or MFL, was created in Florida in January 2021 to bring the culture war to America's school boards. It has grown rapidly through large but anonymous contributions. Its leaders now claim 115,000 members across 285 chapters in 45 states, including six chapters in Minnesota. The group has criticized efforts to make LGBTQ+ students feel safe and welcome in their schools and moved to ban books about racism in America.

Co-founders include Marie Rogerson, a successful Republican Party strategist, and Bridget Ziegler, a school-board member in Sarasota County. Ziegler is married to a former chair of the Florida GOP. Ziegler was [caught up in a sex scandal](#) in 2024 involving threesomes with other women and her husband. She has now left Moms for Liberty.

Although the group has claimed to be parent-led and focused on local school board races, in May 2024, Moms for Liberty [announced that](#) "investors" had provided it with \$3 million for an advertising campaign to target swing voters in the presidential battleground states of Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina and Wisconsin. Moms for Liberty does not disclose donations, but the organization's affiliated political action committee received \$160,000 from October 2023 to May 2024 from conservative billionaire Richard Uihlein. Richard Uihlein and his wife, Liz, have contributed more than \$5 million to organizations supporting former President Donald Trump, making the couple one of [his most generous donors](#). It was unclear if the Uihleins paid for the ad campaign.

The MFL's projects include [work on](#) Florida's "Don't Say Gay" bill and a [campaign to ban books](#) in Tennessee, including "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the March on Washington," and "Ruby Bridges Goes to School." Nationally, the MFL is associated with moves to restrict access to books about the civil rights movement and coming-of-age fiction for teens, especially novels with characters that question their sexuality or religion.

MFL claims chapters in Dakota, Olmstead, Otter Tail, St. Louis, Scott and Wright counties. The Dakota County chapter has been the most active in local politics.

## Political Action

### Freedom Club of Minnesota

One of the voices of Minnesota's wealthiest conservative residents, including megadonor Bob Cumins, the Freedom Club provides funds for various MAGA projects in the Minnesota and has close connections through its board members to Alpha News. Among its more high-profile projects were "Walz Failed" signs flown by airplanes over the Minnesota State Fair in 2022. Notably, the sign gimmick itself failed and Gov. Tim Walz won re-election easily. In 2023, the organization

was involved in school board races, calling them a dress rehearsal for the 2024 House contests. As in 2022, the club's programs failed, and union-endorsed candidates won 85% of their races overall and 80% of head-to-head races with Minnesota Parents Alliance-endorsed candidates.

## **Restore Minnesota**

Restore Minnesota is a right-wing, faith-based nonprofit group that expresses nostalgia for the racial and gender hierarchies of the late 1700s. It has become more overtly political with the creation of a related nonprofit, [Restore Minnesota Action](#), in 2023. With "community action teams" throughout the state, the organization provides grassroots support for its preferred candidates. The group also trains volunteers in grassroots activism. The leader of Restore Minnesota, Rev. Dale Witherington, is known for making [provocative statements](#) about the culture war. In November 2023, he told Minnesota Public Radio that Restore Minnesota promotes the idea of "biblical citizenship," which he defined as "spiritual and civic transformation based on the gospel of Jesus Christ." The [group's website](#) claims the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution were derived from the Mayflower Compact and that "our nation, the nation the rest of the world has looked to as the shining city on a hill, the beacon of hope and freedom, is on the verge of moral, spiritual, educational and economic collapse. We cannot allow that to happen."

## **Turning Point USA**

Turning Point USA is primarily a right-wing youth and student group, with a mission to "identify, educate, train, and organize students to promote the principles of freedom, free markets, and limited government," according to [www.sourcewatch.org](#). It has been active in pressuring progressive faculty in higher education for many years, but in recent years expanded to include local school boards through its "[School Board Watchlist](#)" program. The website provides users with information about their local school boards, including equity statements and negative news stories. It also includes contact information for school board members.

When Minnesota school board members receive harassing emails from out of state, it is often via the Turning Point portal. The organization has not endorsed school board candidates in Minnesota. Most recently, the organization has been training its get-out-the-vote volunteers to tone down their rhetoric of grievance and aggression and appear [like "Ned Flanders"](#) from the Simpsons.

## **1776 PAC**

An organization with a political mission to whitewash the history American students learn in schools, the 1776 PAC endorses school board candidates around the country that support using curriculum "promoting patriotism and pride in American history." [On its website](#), it said it is "committed to abolishing critical race theory and 'The 1619 Project' from the public-school curriculum." The 1776 PAC endorsed three school board candidates in Minnesota in 2021 – with wins in Alexandria and Anoka-Hennepin – but was not active in Minnesota in 2022, perhaps in response to the Minnesota Parents Alliance performing a similar mission. It is unclear if the 1776 PAC will endorse and underwrite candidates in the 2024 school board races.