

Education Underground: The Rise of Education Vigilantism in a Conservative Midwestern State

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Abstract

The years since schools re-opened their doors to students after the COVID-19 pandemic has reflected a large swing in social attitudes towards schools in a conservative Midwestern state in the United States. In 2023 Iowa passed legislation that banned the teaching of critical race theory, mandated students use bathrooms assigned at birth, removed discussion of gender identity and sexual orientation from schools before 7th grade, mandates parents must screen and approve mental health screeners for students, and requires the removal of any books that depict or describe a sex act from school shelves. In this study, 31 educators and school board members from across the state of Iowa participated in semi-structured interviews to gain a better understanding of how these types of legislation have influenced their practice. The findings of the study reflect a rise in the vigilantism of education, increased societal mistrust of public education, and policy aimed at dismantling public education in K-12 schools in Iowa. These findings reflect similar policy efforts in other states yet do not accurately reflect the attitude of the majority. Recommendations for educators best-practices in a politicized climate addressed and.

Keywords: equity, education policy, educator practice, K-12 schools, public perception of education